

THE QUESTION OF LOVE'S POSSIBILITY EXPLORED THROUGH THE POETRY OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

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ABSTRACT: This paper addresses the poetry of William Wordsworth as a significant expression of literary romanticism. It argues for a more comprehensive understanding of the tenets of romantic poetry, and consequently for a greater acknowledgement of its contribution to human knowledge, human understanding and human development than has hitherto been recognized. In particular, the paper explores Wordsworth's reflections on the role of love in human living, the obstacles to the experience of love and the essential necessity of love in human flourishing. The concentration on the concept of love enables the promotion of a strong argument in favour of a broader interpretation of romanticism than has been previously been accepted.

KEYWORDS: Attachment; Buber; Connection; Emotion; Freud; Heart; Imagination; Interpretation; Lacan; Language; Loss; Love; Mourning; Nietzsche; Philosophy; Psychoanalysis; Reason; Ricoeur; Science; Solitude

INTRODUCTION

The centrality of language to human experience, its expression, its communication, and its analysis, and the limitations of this phenomenon in fully realising the symbolization of being in the world, provides a link between the disciplines of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and poetry. While all three attempt to express, question, and reflect upon the human condition, the superiority of the poetic word as a medium with a greater potential to disclose and articulate the truth of being human, is asserted by many philosophers and psychoanalysts. Martha Nussbaum, asking 'if it is love one is trying to understand, that strange unmanageable phenomenon or form of life', states that while 'literary form is not separable from philosophical content', the language of literature may enable a greater understanding:

there may be some views of the world and how one should live in it – views, especially, that emphasize the world's surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty – that cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose...but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars' (Nussbaum, 1992: 3).

Nietzsche, although somewhat critical of poets in some ways, himself adopted a poetic form in his use of aphorisms, his *Zarathustra* reads like a confessional lyric poem, and he admits that 'there are so many things between heaven and earth which only the poets have let themselves dream!' (Nietzsche, 2003: 150). Freud speaks enviously of the relative ease with which poets discovered and expressed truths of the human condition; 'Everywhere I go I find that a poet has been there before me,'¹ and goes on to explain: 'We laymen have always been intensely curious to know...from what sources that strange creature, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable' (Freud, 1995: 436). In his study of love 'as an experience common to all human beings', the contemporary psychoanalyst, Andre Green, echoes the sentiments of Freud as he humbly asserts that 'the creation of poets goes far beyond the psychoanalytic interpretation of love':

I think that art, mainly literature, and especially poetry, undoubtedly gives a better introduction to the knowledge of love, which we grasp by intuition...the detour through imaginative and poetic language of a very general human experience has proved to be more efficient than the ideas born from an experiment which has undeniably committed itself to the most constant and careful investigation of love relationships (Green and Kohun, 2005: 5).

Martin Buber sees in lyric poetry 'the tremendous refusal of the soul to be satisfied with self-commerce', and a manifestation of relation as essential to human being: 'Poetry is the soul's announcement that even when it is alone with itself on the narrowest ridge it is thinking not of itself but of the Being which is not itself' (Buber, 2004: 213). In an interview with Richard Kearney, Paul Ricoeur offers his reflections on the

'prejudice and bias' of ordinary language, and concludes that 'we need a third dimension of language which is directed...towards the disclosure of possible worlds...this third dimension of language I call the mytho-poetic. The adequate self-understanding of man is dependent on this third dimension of language as a disclosure of possibility' (Ricoeur, 1991: 490).

Ricoeur states that 'the philosopher relies on this capacity of poetry to enlarge, to increase, to augment the capacity of meaning of our language' (Ricoeur, 1991: 450). The power of poetry to disclose truth, to lift the veil of accustomed modes of seeing, and to express new visions of possibility and reality, is aptly described by Guillaume Apollinaire as he gives his definition of the poet:

Poets are not simply men devoted to the beautiful. They are also and especially devoted to truth, insofar as the unknown can be penetrated, so much that the unexpected, the surprising, is one of the principal sources of poetry...since men must live in the end by truths in spite of the falsehoods with which they pad them, the poet alone sustains the life whereby humanity finds these truths.²

1. This is a caption on a wall of the Freud Museum in Vienna.

2. This quotation is taken from an excerpt from "The New Spirit and the Poets", chapter 9, in *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000*, ed. Jon Cook.

The quest for understanding, of the subject and the world, which is explored through philosophy and psychoanalysis, is also central to the poetic act, its creation and its reception. Adrienne Rich, in a reflection on her developing attraction to poetry, points to its potential revelation and interpretation of human understanding:

Poetry soon became more than music and images; it was also revelation, information, a kind of teaching...I thought it could offer clues, intimations, keys to questions...*What is possible in this life? What does "love" mean, this thing that is so important? What is this other thing called "freedom" or "liberty" – is it like love, a feeling? What have human beings lived and suffered in the past? How am I going to live my life?* (Rich, 2004: 505).

Thus poetry is another mode whereby the human being seeks understanding, of the self, the other, and the world, and it addresses and explores the questions which inspire philosophy and psychoanalysis in all aspects of inquiry, albeit in its own unique way.

William Wordsworth is a poet who radicalized the poetic experience in its content, method and purpose, and who, anticipating philosophers and theorists of later eras, posited truth as the ultimate *raison d'être* of thought and of the poetic act: 'poetry is the most philosophical of all writing...its object is truth...not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony' (Wordsworth, 1984: 605). Here, the boundaries which sometimes impose an artificial segregation between the disciplines of philosophy and poetry are sufficiently dissolved to acknowledge the centrality of the search for truth and knowledge underlying both. The world of the late eighteenth century which formed the background of Wordsworth's poetic work was the scene of turbulent change, violence and upheaval. The late eighteenth century saw the questioning of European thought in philosophy, politics, and literature, as revolutionary ideals of individual freedom and social change propelled revolt against established orders. Revolutions in America and France hinted at a possible new and bright socio-political future. A revolutionary spirit permeated the political and social realm, with a commitment to replace long-accepted traditions of government, society and individuality with the radical embrace of the ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity. Enthusiasm for change expressed itself in revolutionary action which was often ambiguous in its methods, and the ensuing devastation and brutality of the reign of terror across Europe led to disillusionment among many who had supported the revolutionary dream. For those, the idealistic dreams of this period were followed by uncertainty and incomprehension in the face of the violence and bloodshed which seemed to mock the very concepts which inspired them; words like liberty, equality, and fraternity sounded hollow in the aftermath of war and terror.

The life of Wordsworth spanned this period of transition from unfettered hope and determined optimism to acknowledgement of the human cost of revolt and industrialisation, and many Wordsworthian commentators situate their analysis of his work within this framework. Thus, explorations and interpretations have dealt with his poetry as a portrayal of his shifting political views, his embrace of solitude as a gradual detachment from the complexities of a changing civilized world, and the personal conflicts and fail-

ures which are variously attributed to the writer of the poems.³ The reading of Wordsworth's poetry for the purposes of this article does not pursue this analysis, and concurs with the poet's claim that 'All men ought to be judged with charity and forbearance after death has put it out of their power to explain the motives of their actions' (Wordsworth, 2002: 126). Suffice to suggest that the poet, faced with concrete examples of the failure of theoretical ideals of equality and fraternity, sublimated these values into a love of the world and its inhabitants which confronted him in reality. In the words of David Bromwich, 'he began as a moral thinker about society, and ended as a moral thinker about personal experience' (Bromwich, 2000: 74). Like Freud later, he rejected the doctrine of 'universal love' while concentrating on his personal reaction to the flesh and blood characters of his actual experience. This resounds with Buber's positing of genuine relationship and experience of love in the practical, concrete situations of lived experience. While Wordsworth's poetry is radically personal, exploring questions of humanity through a persistent examination of his own psychological and emotional development, the emphasis here is on the poetic word rather than the character of the writer.

The political and social upheaval that characterized the end of the eighteenth century was paralleled by major changes in European thought, particularly articulated in philosophy and literature, and combining to epitomize the period defined as romanticism. Stuart Curran, in the preface to *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, describes this period as 'a crucial transition between an Enlightenment world view and the values of modern, industrial society' (Curran, 2005: xi). The disillusionment which followed the revolutionary attempts at political democracy and individual freedom did not diminish the impact of the new vision of the subject, and the subject's place in the world. The concept of subjectivity took on new meanings which suggested an interweaving of freedom and responsibility, the acknowledgement of the powers of the imagination, and the prominence of feeling and passion as a major factor in the acquisition of knowledge about the human being in the world, over the one-sided adherence to reason as the sole repository of truth and knowledge. Irving Singer considers the new importance given to the emotions to be central to the romantic vision: 'What distinguished Romanticism from earlier forms of idealism...[was] the extraordinary importance that was given to feeling rather than reason', and he continues to explain that this did not translate into a negation of reason altogether: 'It is not the case that the Romantics believed that "feeling is all", as some commentators have suggested, but only that feeling is primary, both in morals and in the acquisition of knowledge about the world' (Singer, 1984: 285-6). These sentiments resound with more recent assessments of romanticism which reject the dualism through which this period has been hitherto understood. The understanding of romanticism as a movement which rejected reason, logic and science, and which focused on subjectivity to the exclusion of objectivity and relation to the world, has had the effect of over-simplifying the divide between romanticism and the

3. The concentration on the personality of the poet is evident in the following works: Paul Hamilton's *Wordsworth, 1986*; David Bromwich's *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s, 2000*. Such psychobiographical readings are contested by critics as diverse as T.S. Eliot and Roland Barthes.

Enlightenment, and has served to diminish the significance of this period as a crucial development within the tradition of philosophical, scientific and artistic thought and analysis. The revisionary view of romanticism, which is supported in this paper, defends the role of romantic poetry in advancing knowledge and in revealing truths regarding the human condition.

The elevation of the imagination is seen by P.M.S. Dawson as also crucial to the romantic achievement: 'The Romantics' faith in the power of imaginative vision to transform the world is the source of some of their greatest achievements', and he suggests that this was a political as well as a poetic ideal of romanticism: 'In a society whose practices and beliefs constituted a denial of the human imagination and creativity it was the poet's role to keep open a sense of alternative possibility' (Dawson, 2005: 71,73). Rather than promoting easy dualities, an attempt to reunite what had previously been dissected, heart and mind, body and soul, passion and reason, human being and nature, inspired the philosophy and literature of this period, and Wordsworth, as the 'historian of the heart', sought, through autobiographical narration, self-analysis, and the development of a personal poetic and linguistic vision, to give expression to the tenets of the romantic period. Focusing upon personal experience and an increase in self-consciousness, Wordsworth's poetry is an analysis of the past by the present, 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' (Wordsworth, 1984: 611); an accommodation of unconscious influences and motivations on mood and behaviour, and a narration of dreams and memories as a route to self-discovery. The deepening insights into the psychological development of the human being which are enabled by this poetic endeavour is paralleled by a similarly increasing uncertainty of self-definition which foreshadows Nietzsche's introspective analysis and rejection of traditional understanding of selfhood and subjectivity: Harold Bloom comments on 'a very complex nineteenth century questioning of the notion of a single, separate self, a questioning that culminated in the analytics of Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, but which may be stronger in the poets even than it was in the great speculators' (Bloom, 1976: 135).

Anticipating Freud and the psychoanalytic techniques of free-association and interpretation, Wordsworth's poetry is a searching and a poised act of self-examination. The similarities between Wordsworth, and Freud and Nietzsche, are highlighted by Bloom when he seeks to define his understanding of 'strong poets'; he states that 'strong poets present themselves as looking for truth 'in the world'... two of the strongest poets in the European Romantic tradition [were] Nietzsche and Freud' (Bloom, 1976: 2). The urgency of the search for truth is proclaimed by Wordsworth: 'Intelligent lovers of freedom are from necessity bold and hardy lovers of truth' (Wordsworth, 1984: 668). The commitment to self-analysis and introspection evident in Nietzsche and Freud is foreshadowed by Wordsworth's intense preoccupation with personal reflection and autobiographical reference as a source of his poetic truth. He asserts the value of humility and honesty in a questioning of the inner self as prerequisite to truth and love:

*...true knowledge leads to love,
True dignity abides with him alone*

*Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart (Wordsworth, 1984: 31).*

The inner quest which the poet undertakes involves both mind and heart, as Wordsworth professes his conviction that the soul arrives at truth through both emotion and reason, and that knowing accompanied by feeling enables the experience of empathy that underlies caring and love.

NEGLECT OF THE HEART

*The differences, the outside marks by which,
Society has parted man from man,
Neglectful of the universal heart (Wordsworth, 1984: 574).*

Reacting against classicism and the Enlightenment, with its exclusive emphasis on rationality, order, and inevitable social progress, romanticism promoted the hitherto neglected potential of subjectivity, unfettered imagination, and emotional spontaneity. As the acknowledged standard-bearer of Romanticism in English literature, Wordsworth sought a new definition of the poet, his/her work, and his/her method. In *The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (1802), co-authored with Coleridge, Wordsworth provided a manifesto in defence of his art which differed radically from the measured ornamentation and rigid conventions implicitly accepted by the prevailing literary canon. He championed a more realistic and naturalistic type of writing and argued that the exposition of the heart of man was central to the process of poetry: 'my theme/No other than the very heart of man' (Wordsworth, 1984: 575). The acknowledgement of feeling and passion as integral to human experience, (co-existing with reason and logic), led Wordsworth to examine the hitherto neglected possibilities implicit in a recognition of the heart as the seat of a different level of knowledge, and he defined his vision of poetry accordingly: 'Poetry is passion: it is the history or science of feelings' (Wordsworth, 1984: 594), and he proposed an expansion of philosophy to integrate this hitherto neglected source of truth: 'philosophy enlightened by the affections' (Wordsworth, 1984: 668). In his role as a teacher and trainer of psychoanalysts, Jacques Lacan makes a similar plea: 'I urge you...at the heart of your own search for the truth, to renounce quite radically...the use of an opposition like that of the affective and the intellectual...by using it one gets into a series of blind alleys' (Lacan, 1991: 274).⁴ The enlightenment and understanding ensuing from 'the affections' is shown by Wordsworth to be primarily sourced in the

4. Lacan's work might more commonly be quoted in support of a repudiation of romanticism; his insistence on our necessary separation from the real through our immersion in the symbolic order, and the ensuing difficulties pertaining to the achievement of authenticity which the romantics strive for, may suggest a cynical dismissal of the romantic vision. However, I argue that such a reading is not comprehensive enough, that it overlooks Lacan's acknowledgement of passion and feeling in the constitution of the human subject, that it over-simplifies the apparently contradictory and ambiguous nature of many of his pronouncements, and ultimately, that it negates the underlying impetus of his life's work, 'to make the unconscious conscious', and to enable the emergence of 'real speech'. (However, this is an argument for another day/paper!).

capacity to love; his poetry centres on the essential necessity of a willingness and a commitment to feel a sense of love of life in all its manifestations, resounding with Nietzsche's *amor fati*, and it therefore examines the phenomena, personal and cultural, which hinder this possibility. In an implicit critique of 'what is now called science', Wordsworth argued that it needed 'to put on...a form of flesh and blood' in order to address the complexities and diversities of its subject' (Wordsworth, 1984: 607). In contrasting 'the knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of Science' Wordsworth puts forward his conception of the poet and his work:

The Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science...the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society...Poetry is first and last of all Knowledge – it is as immortal as the heart of man (Wordsworth, 1984: 606).

Here, Wordsworth is calling for a science which is enhanced by the contribution of the poetic vision. Wordsworth's insistence on the heart as the essence of the poetic act is later echoed by Jacques Derrida in his response to the question "What is poetry?" in 1998; he questions the possibility of an answer, but insists that any attempt involves knowing 'how to renounce knowledge'; thenceforth he offers his response: 'I call a poem that very thing that teaches the heart, invents the heart, that which, finally, the word heart seems to mean and which, in my language, I cannot easily discern from the word itself' (Derrida, 2004: 536).⁵ Wordsworth's admonishment against the one-sided emphasis of science is based on its neglect of the heart, and he sees this bias as detrimental to human knowledge and truth:

*Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things;
We murder to dissect.
Enough of science and of art;
Close up these barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives (Wordsworth, 1984: 131).*

His plea for recognition of the heart's knowledge resounds with the ideas of the seventeenth century philosopher, Blaise Pascal, whose writings exerted a significant influence on romanticism, and particularly on the work of Rousseau. Pascal asserted the dominating faculty of the imagination in the complex quest for truth, and he posited the intuitive mind as a necessary correlation to rational thought: 'the heart has its reasons which reason itself does not know' (Pascal, 1999: 150-158); the paradoxical inter-twinning of pas-

5. Again, these supporting sentiments of Derrida may appear to run counter to his general philosophy; they are used here to contribute to the argument that Wordsworth, and many of the early romantics, were precursors to developments in philosophy and psychoanalysis, as explored by thinkers up to the present day.

sion and reason is echoed later by Nietzsche in his attack upon the degradation of passion and the misunderstanding of reason: 'As if every passion did not have its quantum of reason' (Nietzsche, 1968: 208). Wordsworth elevates the imagination to a position of power and revelation which enhances awareness, of self, of others, and of the natural world: 'the power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous' (Wordsworth, 1984: 611). Here, the poetic word enables an articulation of the complex basis of psychoanalysis as outlined by Freud; that imaginative and creative understanding and interpretation could enable the alleviation of psychic and psychosomatic symptoms.

Wordsworth's embrace of the truth of emotional experience is a consistent commitment throughout his work: In his essay, "Wordsworth's Poetry to 1798", Duncan Wu refers to this pervasive concern: 'From his earliest writings to his last...he was endowed with an intuitive understanding of the human mind, and from the first attempted to describe the inner truth of the emotions' (Wu, 2003: 26). In embracing the world of emotion and imagination, the poet inevitably focuses on internal experience⁶, resulting in a self-examination that necessitates an exploration of his personal past through the power of memory and interpretation. Through memory the adult mind contends with its childhood origins. In this way, an integration of the self is attempted, where earlier experiences, events and encounters are revisited with the objectivity which distance, temporal and spatial, facilitates. Simultaneously, the present circumstances of the poet are opened to inquiry and understanding when viewed against the background of the past. The resulting narrative of the self, which is expanded to accommodate on-going interpretation and understanding, resounds with Ricoeur's thesis on narrative identity and the importance of memory in formulating that identity. Inevitably, the concept of childhood and the significance of early experience, took on a different meaning and importance than had hitherto been contemplated, and the psychological and emotional significance of this period of life became a subject of study across diverse disciplines. This later became a cornerstone of Freud's psychoanalysis with its emphasis on explaining mental and emotional distress through a re-narration of past experiences in a therapeutic setting, its insights into the phenomena of memory, forgetting, and repetition, and its recognition of the unconscious as a powerful factor in human experience. For Wordsworth, the child embodied all the possibilities for freedom, creativity and enthusiastic curiosity, which were later diminished to varying degrees by the gradual immersion in civilization; the child was an earlier self unburdened by the consciousness of adult cares. Buber sees the development of the child as being impacted by both nature and society: 'He is educated by the elements, by air and light and the life of plants and animals, and he is educated by relationships' (Buber, 2004: 107). Arguing for the intelligence of the body as a source wisdom, Nietzsche looks to the truth of the child: 'I am

6. The focus on 'internal experience', on subjectivity, on 'the self', is sometimes viewed with disparagement by opponents of romanticism. However, later in the paper, I argue that this focus is the first, and necessary, step towards approaching the world and the 'other'. I argue that Wordsworth transcends the apparent oppositions between the solitary thinker and the world, between idealism and realism, and between spirituality and materialism.

body and soul' – so speaks the child. And why should one not speak like children?' (Nietzsche, 2003: 61). While Freud did not idealize childhood in this way, his analysis of the influence of earlier life-events and trauma, and the conflict between the individual and civilization, resounds with Wordsworth's thesis. For Freud, the process of socialization involves the internalization of injunctions and expectations which restrict the unbounded freedom and curiosity of the child's initial experience of the world; there is a gradual awareness that certain experiences, feelings, and desires are at variance with social mores, and hence the repression of certain aspects of the self. Wordsworth's glorification of childhood appears to refer to the innocence and creativity which precedes the demands of socialization, a phase which might be seen to be lost as the child enters the Lacanian realms of the imaginary and the symbolic. Both Wordsworth and Freud discern a loss of self, to varying degrees, in the social adaptation of the human being, and a diminished self lacks the integration which enables the experience of love, of oneself and of others. Both writers point to this consequence; Wordsworth confronts it in his analysis of his own development, while Freud encountered it in the distress of his patients as they attempted to express their concerns through the transference of love onto the analyst. Concurring with the thought of both writers, Nietzsche offers his reflections on childhood: 'The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes' (Nietzsche, 2003: 55).⁷

According to Wordsworth, this new orientation of poetic expression necessitated the cultivation of a different poetic language, an articulation of human experiences grounded in the actual lives of ordinary people; he wanted 'a selection of the language really spoken by men' (Wordsworth, 1984: 602). The necessary relationship between understanding and language, developed in the thought of later philosophers, was explored by Wordsworth as he examined 'in what manner language and the human mind re-act on each other'⁸ (Wordsworth, 1984: 596), and he sought a language which reflected and resounded with the lived activity which he observed around him.⁹ This led him to concentrate his attention on the individuals who inhabited the landscape of hills and valleys to which he was consistently drawn. His sources of inspiration therefore differed

7. The references to thinkers mentioned here contributes to the assertion of Wordsworth's contribution to later developments in philosophy and psychoanalysis, and makes the claim that such contribution has not yet been fully explored.

8. An examination of the 'manner language and the human mind react on each other' is surely the cornerstone of later developments in the philosophy of language, and particularly the emergence of hermeneutics as a significant realm of philosophy in general.

9. Many of the tenets of romanticism outlined by Wordsworth were later rejected by the literary leaders within the modernist period. T.S. Eliot dismissed theories such as 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' as a formulation of the poetic act; however, he acknowledged the revolutionary poetic vision of the romantic poet, and he emphatically agreed with Wordsworth's insistence on the use of language reflecting common speech:

While poetry attempts to convey something beyond what can be conveyed in prose rhythms, it remains, all the same, one person talking to another...the immediacy of poetry to conversation is not a matter on which we can lay down exact laws. Every revolution in poetry is apt to be, and sometimes to announce itself to be a return to common speech. That is the revolution which Wordsworth announced in his prefaces, and he was right (Eliot, 1975: 111).

radically from that of his predecessors, but Wordsworth argued against any exclusion from his poetic explorations: 'It is the honourable characteristic of Poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind' (Wordsworth, 1984: 591). The inclusive nature of poetry is also attested by the contemporary Irish poet Laureate, Seamus Heaney, when he says 'Poetry, let us say, whether it belongs to an old political dispensation or aspires to express a new one, has to be a working model of inclusive consciousness' (Heaney, 2004: 572). Creating a new poetic vision, in content and form, Wordsworth combined the narrative style of the ballad with the lyric's emotional content; both forms had been considered inferior to the strict demands of serious poetry, but Wordsworth defended his position while acknowledging the impact of rigid prejudice in depreciating something new and unfamiliar: 'that most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own pre-established codes of decision' (Wordsworth, 1984: 591). The difficulty inherent in a renunciation of the familiar is also noted by Freud: 'Hardly anything is harder for a man than to give up a pleasure which he has once experienced. Actually, we can never give anything up; we only exchange one thing for another' (Freud, 1995: 438). Consequently, what is radically new is often dismissed as untenable; as Nietzsche says 'to hear something new is hard and painful for the ear; we hear the music of foreigners badly' (Nietzsche, 2003: 115). Wordsworth is committed to the embrace of a new poetic vision which involves 'breaking the bonds of custom' whereby one tends 'to dwell upon those points wherein Men differ from each other, to the exclusion of those in which all Men are alike' (Wordsworth, 1984: 658). The acknowledgement of universal experiences of thought and feeling, regardless of social role or status, enables a recognition of one's own needs, desires, fears, strengths and weaknesses reflected in the other, and according to Wordsworth, results in understanding, empathy, compassion, and ultimately love of the other and the self. This resounds with arguments put forward by contemporary theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Derrida and Slavoj Žižek that love is only possible in an acceptance that the other/beloved does not possess the attributes and solutions which are felt lacking in the self. The willingness to recognize the frailty, fallibility, confusion and conflict which may appear in the other, as also definitive of the self, enables the possibility of approaching the other, not as a receptacle of disowned projections, but in an openness and vulnerability to alterity and difference in oneself and others; in the words of Ricoeur, it is the attempted acknowledgement of 'oneself as another'. The revolutionary nature of this poetic vision, its rejection of established criteria and restrictions, inevitably provoked disdain and ridicule. Wordsworth retorted with a psychoanalytic interpretation of projection which often underlies the critic's scorn: 'The lash, which they are aiming at my productions, does, in fact, only fall on phantoms of their own brain' (Wordsworth, 1984: 640). His contemporary, Blake, puts it thus: 'O'er my sins thou sit and moan: / Hast thou no sins of thy own? / O'er my sins thou sit and weep, / And lull thy own sins fast asleep' (Blake, 2004: 90). Acknowledging the attraction of familiarity and repetition, later defined by Freud as the compulsion to repeat, Wordsworth accepted the difficulties inherent in moving beyond habitual pleasure and security: 'we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in

which we have been accustomed to be pleased' (Wordsworth, 1984: 614). Thereby, he acknowledges the obstacles which hinder the growth of understanding, openness, and vulnerability, and which diminish the capacity to love.

The world of nature, its magnificence and power, its turbulence and gentleness, and its particularity and universality, provided the canvas upon which Wordsworth painted the human experience: 'Poetry is the image of man and nature' (Wordsworth, 1984: 605). Through his own love of nature and through an exploration of his own psyche, Wordsworth expressed through his poetry a conviction that love was a powerful, if sometimes elusive, instrument of mediation between self and the universe, between self and others, and between the disparate complexities of the individual psyche. The celebration of love which underlines Wordsworth's poetry was characteristic of Romanticism in general, according to John Jones, in his analysis of the period: 'The work of the Romantics, poets and novelists, celebrates the fact of love, as once marvellously evident and difficult beyond despair, and about which the age immediately preceding them had been less than honest' (Jones, 1970: vii). In an attempt to approach a more honest analysis of love Wordsworth sources his investigations in an encounter with his own inner realities, and his poetry moves across the inner and outer landscapes combining an observation and a translation of the relations between the private individual and the characters which inhabit his/her world, and the interactions between the human being and the natural world. The connection between love of nature and love of man is a persistent theme in his poetry, as stated by John Beer when discussing Wordsworth's faith in the lessons of the heart:

Wordsworth believed that in attending to the motions of his own heart he was making a study that could be of value to all his fellow human beings. He hoped, among other things, to show by this study how the love of nature...must inevitably lead to the love of man (Beer, 1978: 13).

The concept of love is therefore central to Wordsworth's work, and in his poetic study of human nature and his exploration of the mind and heart, he portrays both the possibilities of its experience and the obstacles which sometimes prevent its realization.

LOSS

*Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?* (Wordsworth, 1984: 298).

Impermanence and transience, as inescapable realities of the human condition, propel an equally real desire to transcend the sorrow and limitation which often accompany a realization of finitude and unpredictability; literature abounds with diverse approaches to this perennial conflict: 'The immortal Mind craves objects that endure' (Wordsworth, 1984: 287). Wordsworth's encounter with the vicissitudes characteristic of life in all its forms is explored on one level through his favourite image of the daffodil; contemplation of the beauty and splendour of a daffodil-filled meadow instills a momentary joy, 'A poet could not but be gay / In such a laughing company' (Wordsworth, 1984: 303), and

the memory of this joy retains the power to soothe in times of solitude and reflection. However, the imagery of the daffodil evokes the sentiments of an earlier poet, Robert Herrick, when he immortalized the flower as a symbol of the brevity of life:

*We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or anything (Herrick, 1919: 252).*

The sorrow pertaining to a confrontation with change and death is intensified to unbearable proportions when it involves loss of the beloved. In the sonnet "Surprised by Joy", (Wordsworth, 1984: 334), Wordsworth expresses his personal anguish and inconsolable grief in the face of such loss. The death of his beloved daughter, 'my most grievous loss', is 'the worst pang that sorrow ever bore', and there is no compensation to be found in memory or forgetfulness. The poet realizes that this loss is final, and its pain a constant companion: 'neither present time, nor years unborn / Could to my sight that heavenly face restore'. A momentary relief from this grief, a fleeting encounter with joy, results from an involuntary forgetting of his loss, but only serves to reprimand the poet for his perceived disloyalty, as he admonishes himself for being 'beguiled' and 'blind'. In the wake of such irreparable loss, described in a letter as 'oppressed with sorrow and distracted with anxiety' (Wordsworth, 2002: 110), and in the alternating responses of denial, anger and incomprehension, the experience of love is revealed as potentially fraught with risk, pain, and personal fragmentation.

Wordsworth's exploration of the phenomenon of loss foreshadows psychoanalytic thinking on the subject. Freud describes the human response to loss, whether real or perceived, as having two possibilities; when the loss is experienced as unbearable, the subject/patient refuses to accept its reality, described by Wordsworth as 'unwilling to forego, confess, submit' (Wordsworth, 1984: 448), and adopts as a coping mechanism the introjection of the lost object into the self, and subsequently directs the anger, depreciation and loathing evoked by the loss onto this introjected aspect of the self. The possibility of love, of self and others, is sabotaged as the self becomes the target of attack and condemnation. Wordsworth sees this reaction as understandable and universal; 'Man / As long as he shall be the Child of Earth, / Might almost 'weep to have' what he may lose' (Wordsworth, 1984: 435). Again, the poetic word captures the experience! According to Freud's analysis, the resulting *melancholia* can only be alleviated by a conscious acceptance of the loss, a working through the grief, and a letting go of the loved object: in the words of the poet 'grief will have its course' (Wordsworth, 2002: 83). Herein lies the work of mourning which is essential to psychological recovery. For Freud, the psychoanalytic encounter provides a potential space for such healing, as it offers an exploratory relationship based on acceptance, openness and understanding; similarly, Wordsworth addresses his recollections, confusions and reflections to a beloved friend, usually Coleridge or his sister Dorothy, confident in the power of their love to support his often painful and uncertain explorations.

Through the poems collected in the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth is committed to ac-

knowledging the lives of those who exist beyond the social order of identity and recognition, and through an imaginative sensitivity to human suffering, he attains an emphatic understanding of the experience of loss and the possibility of mourning. Particularly in the narrative poems, we are presented with characters who have experienced separation and loss to varying degrees; “Michael”, who grieves for his lost son, and who endures the heart-breaking sorrow only through the power of love: ‘There is a comfort in the strength of love; / ’Twill make a thing endurable, which else / Would break the heart’ (Wordsworth, 1984: 236), Margaret, of “The Ruined Cottage”, frozen in time and space as she dementedly awaits the return of her long-departed husband, and whose psychological fragmentation and despair is mirrored in the signs of ruin and decay imprinted on her cottage: ‘About the fields I wander, knowing this / Only, that what I seek I cannot find’ (Wordsworth, 1984: 40), and “The Old Cumberland Beggar”, bereft of name and home, who unknowingly elicits the poet’s emphatic feeling and reflection on the universality of human needs and desires:

.....the poorest poor
 Long for some moments in a weary life
 When they can know and feel that they have been
 Themselves the fathers and the dealers out
 Of some small blessings, have been kind to such
 As needed kindness, for this single cause,
 That we have all of us one human heart (Wordsworth, 1984: 53).

These characters portray varying levels of alienation and dislocation, from community, purpose, or self, which accompanied the ‘progress’ and materialism of industrialization, and the estrangement between the subject and the environment is depicted by the poet as an emotional and personal loss. According to David Bromwich, these characters, particularly the Cumberland beggar, portray an image of humanity which exists outside of conventionally assumed categories: ‘what is suspended is the rational conception of a person, a plan of life, a social context with intelligible meanings and obligations’, (Bromwich, 2000: 5), and yet these poems ‘make us know more deeply certain feelings that belong to humankind’ (Bromwich, 2000: 97) The narrative element of these poems gives voice to these otherwise silent and ignored experiences of human sorrow, and manifests the connection between mourning and language which became central to psychoanalytic practice. In “The Idiot Boy” Wordsworth presents the inner world of a boy whose linguistic limitations prevent expression and communication; Johnny’s speech is beyond the reach of the untrained ear. However, the mother’s love for her son gives her access to his thoughts and feelings, and his humanity is dignified by the language through which this understanding is described. The language and subject-matter of these poems resulted in rejection and criticism which Wordsworth answered with his radical philosophy of poetry as ‘a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents’ (Wordsworth, 2002: 50). This is the claim asserted in the preface to the collection, and through the poems this claim is reiterated and justified as the poet argues for the dignity of all human beings regardless of social definition:

.....'Tis Nature's law
 That none, the meanest of created things,
 Of forms created the most vile and brute,
 The dullest or most noxious, should exist
 Divorced from good, a spirit and a pulse of good,
 A life and soul to every mode of being
 Inseparably linked (Wordsworth, 1984: 51).

His aim was to highlight the universality of human experience, and 'to shew that men who do not wear fine cloaths can feel deeply' (Wordsworth, 2002: 65). These thoughts provide a visionary contrast to the technological and utilitarian attitude which became popular in the service of the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath, and the poet's opposition to prevalent thinking is a significant characteristic of romantic poetry. This is the argument proffered by P.M.S. Dawson, in his essay "Poetry in an Age of Revolution":

The real focus of the Romantics' critique of their age is on the moral and social values in whose name both the increase of industry and the rationalization of agriculture took place. These social tendencies implied a redefinition and a reevaluation of human nature and of the human person to which the poets were all finally opposed (Dawson, 2005: 67).

The interdependence of human subjects, the mediation necessary for identity and recognition,¹⁰ and the universal dignity of each human being, underlie Wordsworth's sense of love which opens an alternative path to understanding; 'we have all of us one human heart' (Wordsworth, 1984: 53), and which recalls Buber's vision of the I-Thou relationship as prerequisite to genuine encounter, and other philosophical reflections on love and friendship. He hoped, through his poetry, to enhance the recognition of this intersubjectivity:

I hope...they may...in some small degree enlarge our feelings of reverence for our species, and our knowledge of human nature, by shewing that our best qualities are possessed by men whom we are too apt to consider, not with reference to the points in which they resemble us, but to those in which they manifestly differ from us (Wordsworth, 2002: 66).

The understandable reluctance to expose the self to the vulnerability inherent in love, its potential transience and infirmity, and 'the impotence of grief' (Wordsworth, 1984: 43) in the experience of loss, are obstacles to the repeated embrace of love in its totality. Wordsworth's commitment to the significance of love does not negate the difficulties which this implies, and some of his greatest poems, such as "The Prelude" and the "Immortality Ode", can be seen as an attempt to work through the process of grief pertaining to loss and change, and ultimately to enhance self-understanding.

The autobiographical and confessional nature of Wordsworth's poetic inspiration portrays a commitment to introspective analysis and questioning, and a persistent revisiting of past experiences in order to map the poet's development and elicit greater

10. The complexity pertaining to an understanding of the concept of 'identity' is an issue explored comprehensively by Paul Ricoeur in his work, *The Course of Recognition*

understanding of his emotional and mental constitution. An examination of the different developmental phases of a life inevitably confronts the poet with the reality of loss; every life is marked with little deaths as growth and change imply the necessity to relinquish the familiar in an embrace of the new. When loss is experienced as an involuntary removal of that which is held dear, the human response is to resist the perceived stealth of what is considered essential to the self through whatever means present themselves: flight from reality takes many forms, and Wordsworth acknowledges this human trait: 'And is there one, the wisest and the best / Of all mankind, who does not sometimes wish / For things which cannot be, who would not give, / If so he might, to duty and to truth / The eagerness of infantile desire?' (Wordsworth, 1984: 392).

The joys and sufferings which compose the lived experience of the human being are seen by Wordsworth as being vulnerable to loss and change:

*Unhappy man! Thy sole delightful hour
Flies first; it is thy miserable dower
Only to taste of joy that thou may'st pine
A loss, which rolling suns shall ne'er restore* (Wordsworth, 1984: 20).

The process of growth in the human being as well as in the world of nature, involves a simultaneous shedding of the old in an accommodation of the new, and the ebb and flow which permeates all of life is sometimes reflected in emotional reactions: 'As high as we have mounted in delight / In our dejection do we sink as low' Wordsworth, 1984: 261). Maturation implies a subtle distancing from infancy, childhood and youth, but the changes and losses which are wrought in the human experience do not have the consolation of retrieval or renewal that nature enjoys.¹¹ As Thomas Kinsella reflects in his poem "Mirror in February", facing his middle-aged face in the mirror, 'I read that I have looked my last on youth / And little more; for they are not made whole / That reach the age of Christ', and in contrast to rejuvenation of the trees outside his window, he resigns himself to the reality that he is 'not young, and not renewable, but man' (Kinsella, 1996: 54). The inevitability of loss, and in particular the loss of unconscious and unquestioned union and integration with the natural universe which characterizes the child's experience, 'the radiance which was once so bright', is a central theme explored in the "Immortality Ode" (Wordsworth, 1984: 297): 'But yet I know, where'er I go, / That there hath passed a glory from the earth'. As an adult poet eliciting the power of memory to enhance self-understanding, Wordsworth evokes images, of people, places and events from his earlier self, and from contemplation on this period of life, he develops a conviction that it is a stage of unrepeatable innocence, creativity and freedom. Freud questions this evocation of childhood and refers to the impact of retrospection in the formation of adult memories of earlier experiences: 'This age of childhood, in which

11. The contemporary psychoanalyst, Adam Phillips suggests an interesting analysis of the losses implicit in the inevitable transition from childhood passion and intensity to adult compromise and disillusionment; he suggests that writers such as 'Rousseau...Blake...Wordsworth...and Freud...seemed to retell the biblical story of the Fall...in this tradition...there is a new fall, the fall into adulthood...the fall out of childhood' (Phillips, 2005: 71).

the sense of shame is unknown, seems a paradise when we look back upon it later, and paradise itself is nothing but the mass-fantasy of the childhood of the individual' (Freud, 1997: 139, 140). Yet, echoing Wordsworth's reference to 'the radiance' of the child, Freud also laments the 'influence' of forces such as 'religious education' which results in 'relative atrophy' in the adult subject: 'Think of the depressing contrast between the radiant intelligence of a healthy child and the feeble intellectual powers of the average adult' (Freud, 1995: 715). The attributes of childhood which Wordsworth laments, 'The things which I have seen I now can see no more', precede the development of 'the sense of shame' resulting from the constraining and limiting influences of a gradual adaptation to social life, with its demands for conformity and acquiescence,¹² and convince the poet that the child is the 'best philosopher', (Wordsworth, 1984: 299), having a wisdom which is not distorted by external and conflicting expectations. Buber echoes this sentiment, stating that in attempting an understanding of the human subject, and especially the development of the human relationship to others and to the world, 'We receive fuller knowledge from the child' (Buber, 2004a: 26). Using his personal memories, Wordsworth associates childhood with unfettered imagination, primary feeling, and the possibility of union with the expansive world of nature: 'A child, I held unconscious intercourse / With the eternal Beauty, drinking in / A pure organic pleasure' (Wordsworth, 1984: 390). With the loss of the intensity of instinctual drives and the oceanic feeling of being at one with the universe,¹³ Wordsworth discerns in the transition to adulthood a substitution of learned behaviours, adherence to social norms, and preoccupation with material affairs: 'Shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing boy'. Meanwhile, the urgency of loss is temporarily repressed and denied, 'doomed to sleep' (Wordsworth: 1984: 390), only to surface in dreams and memory, and in a yearning to re-capture some of the magic of this lost time when 'I conversed with things that really are' (Wordsworth, 1984: 402). The reference to 'things that really are' suggests a parallel to Lacan's differentiation of the real from the imaginary and the symbolic, and his exposition of the mirror stage as the developmental moment when the real is distorted and overshadowed by the attraction of the image. Lacan links this development with the growing awareness of loss, a sense of lack, and the birth of desire which is often misinterpreted and directed away from its real target and onto an illusory other who will fulfill this lack. The repression of these early memories, these 'days / Disowned by memory' (Wordsworth, 1984: 391), through being split off from awareness, constitutes a fragmentation of identity and personality, a 'wavering of my mind' (Wordsworth, 1984: 391), and an alienating dejection which thwarts love of self and one's surroundings. A sense of estrangement from parts of the self, from objects of love, and from the harmony of nature, combines with a nostalgia for what is lost, and in Wordsworth this nostalgia is strengthened to become a determined commitment to employ the power of memory as

12. One is reminded here of Lacan's mirror stage when the child loses contact with the real self and enters the imaginary and symbolic realms wherein one's identity is increasingly mirrored through the recognition of others.

13. Freud refers to the narcissism which can be traced to the feeling of omnipotence and self-centeredness which characterizes early childhood.

a method of restoring that which is gone. In his analysis of the poet's work, and in particular "Tintern Abbey" as a poem deemed to be unsurpassable as a poem of memory, Harold Bloom credits Wordsworth, along with Nietzsche and Freud, with radically expanding the concept of memory through addressing the complexities, defenses and repressions which impact on this phenomenon (Bloom, 1976: 52).

The attempted recovery of these early years, through reflection, revisiting, and memory, while never fully achievable; 'We see but darkly / Even when we look behind us' (Wordsworth, 1984: 417), is deemed by Wordsworth to be essential to self-knowledge and integration, 'to understand myself' and 'to know/with better knowledge how the heart was framed' (Wordsworth, 1984: 391). This is the work which he undertakes in his autobiographical poem "The Prelude". He is aware of the difficulty of this project, 'hard task to analyze a soul' (Wordsworth, 1984: 398), and anticipating the environment of a psychoanalytic encounter, he adopts a confessional tone in addressing an understanding listener whose presence, real or imagined, enables understanding and interpretation. As a reading of his own psychic processes, the self-initiated self-exploration undertaken by the poet is a paradigm of the psychoanalytic rule of free-association on which Freud bases the success of the analytic encounter. It is an example of an important shift of focus in Romantic poetry, as the emphasis is changed from its mimetic qualities, its mirroring of the external world, to an illumination of the inner experience, the growth of the poet's mind and the development of the self. A recollection and appreciation of one's past enables an understanding of one's present situation – a central tenet of Freudian psychoanalysis – and the poet 'endeavoured to retrace / My life through its first years' (Wordsworth, 1984: 392) in order to discover 'the individual hour in which / His habits were first sown' (Wordsworth, 1984: 397). "The Prelude" therefore anticipates the general Freudian acceptance of the importance of childhood in the adult psyche, but it also foreshadows Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence, the acceptance and integration of all aspects of one's fate, one's life.

This attempted integration involves a recognition and a re-evaluation of ideals and dreams which are sometimes betrayed or lost through the contingencies of reality, inner and outer experiences. The courage to accept the possibility that one's convictions and hopes are susceptible to correction and revision requires an honest appraisal of one's past and present, in the emotional, spiritual, and physical realms, and in the case of Wordsworth, a determination to transcend and transform loss, failure, and betrayal into a reconciling triumph. In Books IX and X of "The Prelude", the poet describes the youthful search for meaning and purpose within the given circumstances of life, in his case, amid the contradictory ideals and methods of the French Revolution: 'I looked for something that I could not find' (Wordsworth, 1984: 510), and the difficulty in matching one's inmost thought and feelings with those of popular opinion: 'impotent to make my hopes put on / The shape of theirs, my understanding bend / In honour to their honour' (Wordsworth, 1984: 515). The temptation to escape the pain of solitude through immersion in the 'crowd' is explored by Buber as an obstacle to genuine relationship, and results in Nietzsche's 'herd-mentality'. By contrast, the experience of emotional and

intellectual intimacy which accompanies transitory periods of shared commitment and hope has the power to transcend human isolation and mistrust: 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven' (Wordsworth, 1984: 550). The alternation of certainty and doubt, of hope and despair, suggests to the poet that his mind is divided and conflicted: 'Having two natures in me, joy the one, / The other melancholy', and he struggles with 'false imagination' and 'the errors into which I was betrayed / By present objects, and by reasonings false' (Wordsworth, 1984: 554). The reality of psychic conflict and the fragmented multiplicity of the self are key themes later explored in the work of Freud and Ricoeur, and Wordsworth attempts to transcend the potential distortions and limitations which may be unconsciously assumed in the absence of awareness and understanding.

The poetry of Wordsworth confronts the reality of loss and separation in human life, in relationship, in ideals, and in a persistently changing sense of self which is sometimes susceptible to betrayal when 'the pledges interchanged / With our inner being are forgot' (Wordsworth, 1984: 417). Using his personal development and memory as a paradigm, he gives an honest exposition of the anger, confusion and despair which ensue from these experiences: 'Thus strangely did I war against myself' (Wordsworth, 1984: 560), but he searches for a power which can transform such loss into a triumph of restoration. This power he identifies as love, love of nature and love of human persons. His love of nature, as a power and harmony pervading all of life, is a commitment to Nietzsche's *Amor Fati*, as he acknowledges that this life, this world, is the ground of human experience: 'in the very world which is the world / Of all of us, the place in which, in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all' (Wordsworth, 1984: 550).¹⁴ Buber agrees with this assertion: 'human life exists, though brokenly, in the world' (Buber, 2004: 109), while Nietzsche echoes this sentiment stating that human 'happiness should smell of the earth and not of contempt for the earth' (Nietzsche, 2003a: 140), and he claims that 'a good, human thing was the world to me today, this world of which so many evil things are said' (Nietzsche, 2003a: 206). For Wordsworth, it is only in the 'familiar face of life', the ordinary and commonplace, that love can be discovered and experienced, and despite the vulnerability which characterizes human existence, he insists on the power of love to maintain hope and resilience: 'To fear and love / To love as first and chief, for there fear ends' (Wordsworth, 1984: 582).

SOLITUDE AND ATTACHMENT

*Points have we all of us within our souls
Where all stand single (Wordsworth, 1984: 409).*

The gradual repression of instinctual 'appetites', 'glad animal movements', and 'the coarser pleasures' through which the young child apprehends the environment (Wordsworth, 1984: 133), results from internal and external pressures to adjust to the social world; it is

¹⁴ This assertion is a direct refutation of conventional understandings of romanticism as a turning away from the material world.

‘the inevitable yoke’ (Wordsworth, 1984: 300). The above quoted words bring to mind Nietzsche’s later analysis that man had raised himself too much above the animal, and that this distorted view of human nature which denied the often unconscious impact of natural instincts and drives, had diminished the capacity of fully loving and embracing life in its complexity. The artifice of social life, with its attending values and expectations, becomes an unconscious burden which restricts individuality and creativity:

*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* (Wordsworth, 1984: 300).

The negation of certain aspects of humanity, where ‘the true and the false [become] so inseparably interwoven’ results in a ‘thrusting out of sight the plain humanities of nature by a motley masquerade of tricks’ (Wordsworth, 1984: 617). The repression of ‘the plain humanities of nature’ is the demanded price of socialization and civilization, as Freud convincingly argues in *Civilization and its Discontents*. At each developmental stage, the child surrenders something of the ‘bliss’ and ‘glory’ of ‘a time when meadow, grove, and stream, / The earth, and every common sight, / To me did seem / Apparelled in celestial light’ (Wordsworth, 1984: 297), until eventually this vision of life fades from awareness: ‘At length the Man perceives it die away, / And fade into the light of common day’. In Freudian terms, the superego exerts an increasing influence as the child/adult accommodates itself to the demands of civilization, and authenticity is replaced by imitation:¹⁵ ‘As if his whole vocation / Were endless imitation’ (Wordsworth, 1984: 300).

The confining boundaries of socialization, experienced in education, employment and family life, diminishes the subject’s freedom to express and to act on individual feeling and desire, as conformity and popularity take precedence over personal values and original thought. This jeopardizes the possibility of love between unique subjects, as ‘the dreary intercourse of daily life’ (Wordsworth, 1984: 135) overshadows ‘the primal sympathy’ (Wordsworth, 1984: 302) which discerns in nature and humanity a force of beauty and of love:

*‘The insinuated scoff of coward tongues,
And all that silent language which so oft
In conversation betwixt man and man
Blows from the human countenance all trace
Of beauty and of love’* (Wordsworth, 1984: 404).

These lines resound with Buber’s contention that much of human conversation is motivated by utility, promotion of self image, and fear of disclosure of vulnerability and imperfection; it is a pseudo-dialogue which precludes genuine communication between self and other, and it is in Lacanian terms ‘empty speech’ which seeks to hide or disguise personal truth. Thus life can be diminished to a futile struggle to gain acceptance, security, and admiration, through an endless series of performances and projects:

¹⁵ This recalls Lacan’s description of the mirror stage as the moment when the child henceforth seeks identity in and through others.

*Then will he fit his tongue
 To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
 But it will not be long
 Ere this be thrown aside,
 And with new joy and pride
 The little Actor cons another part,
 Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'
 With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
 That Life brings with her in her Equipage; (Wordsworth, 1984: 300).*

The preoccupations and demands of social life, 'Empty noise / And superficial pastimes' (Wordsworth, 1984: 410), are also sought as a protection against the pain of solitude wherein one may be faced with a frightening realization of vulnerability and need, and an awareness that 'every soul is a world of its own' (Nietzsche, 2003: 234). The subject, while inherently alone and separate, physically and psychologically, nevertheless is imbued with the drive to connect with what is exterior to itself. Wordsworth foreshadows Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power when he states that 'there is an active principle alive in all things' which seeks to move beyond itself:

*All beings have their properties which spread
 Beyond themselves, a power by which they make
 Some other being conscious of their life (Wordsworth, 1984: 676).*

This urge to connect, to make an impact on the other, as it is perceived in the natural and the human domain, is intrinsic to human existence: 'for we live by hope / And by desire; they are the very blood / By which we move' (Wordsworth, 1984: 677), and thus the reality of human solitude is constantly resisted and denied. This is the paradoxical nature of the human being, and in acknowledging the apparent contradiction Wordsworth does not negate the validity of either solitude or connection. The conflicting desires for solitude and community, and the simultaneous fears of isolation and engulfment, are explored by the poet in his quest for self-knowledge. According to John Jones, in his interpretation of the poet's work, this dilemma is central to Wordsworth's self-analysis: 'Solitude and attachment, the huge abstractions moving through Wordsworth's life and poetry' (Jones, 1970: 48). The poet confronts the repercussions of this conflict through a persistent attempt at deciphering, through reflection, memory and analysis, his own psychic interiority as it reveals itself in honest contemplation: According to the poet, the only possibility of approaching an understanding of human nature is through self-exploration, 'by stripping our own hearts naked' (Wordsworth, 1984: 622), and succumbing to the perils and insights which solitude can provide: 'Nor star nor needle know the tempests of the soul' (Wordsworth, 1984: 27).

The introspection pursued by Wordsworth in a search for self-understanding, 'we have traced the stream / From darkness, and the very place of birth / In its blind cavern' (Wordsworth, 1984: 583), resounds with the psychoanalytic process of remembering and interpreting, as illusions and repressions give way to expression and integration. Thus Wordsworth addresses his doubts and confusions to an understanding and

attentive observer and listener, he freely explores the multi-faceted nature of his emotional and mental development, and he is rewarded with insights which are difficult to accept but which contain the source of true liberation. In Book XIII of “The Prelude”, he reflects on one such discovery, the realization of personal freedom and responsibility, and anticipating Lacan’s assertion that the patient must eventually relinquish the illusion of ‘the one supposed to know’, and look to his/her own heart and desire, Wordsworth argues that imagination and love are ‘each in each’, and can only be developed in a spirit of individual and personal truth:

*Here must thou be, O Man!
Strength to thyself; no Helper hast thou here;
Here keepest thou thy individual state:
No other can divide with thee this work,
No secondary hand can intervene
To fashion this ability. ‘Tis thine
In the recesses of thy nature, far
From reach of outward fellowship,
Else ‘tis not thine at all (Wordsworth, 1984: 583).*

However, having gained this sense of self-responsibility and self-ownership, the subject is enabled to experience the joy and transformation of love in honest relationship, (honest because it is not masking need or fear). The connection between self-awareness and the embrace of the other underlies the explorations of Wordsworth’s poetry, and is particularly portrayed in “The Prelude”; as Gill explains, ‘Tracing the development of his poetic imagination Wordsworth needs to demonstrate that its growth involved the embrace of other human beings, that its power stemmed not from solipsistic self-communing but from its human centredness’ (Gill, 1991: 74). This interpretation of Wordsworth’s poetic vision argues that its ultimate goal is to enable an approach to and an encounter with the other and with the world. An acceptance and an understanding of the self enables an acceptance and a love of others in their ‘human, all too human’ realities.

Through an imaginative encounter with the inner self and a corresponding openness to the power of the natural world, Wordsworth establishes the possibility of synthesis and reconciliation of apparent opposites; his poetry is essentially a poetry of mediation. Anthony Storr, in his exploration of the joy and pain of solitude, refers to the human desire for ‘wholeness or integration; a condition in which the different elements of the psyche, both conscious and unconscious, become welded together in a new unity’, and he points to Wordsworth’s “Prelude” as an example of this process (Storr, 1997: 193).¹⁶ In this quest for unity and integration, Wordsworth questions the reality of intransigent binaries, and destabilizes the perceived boundaries between human and non-human, small and great, outer and inner, and especially solitude and connection. Echoing the poet’s attempt at synthesis and wholeness, Storr explains the elusiveness of this goal while emphasizing its significance:

¹⁶ Storr’s use of quotation from Wordsworth’s poetry to elucidate his argument is testimony to the power of poetry to provide insight and understanding where other forms of discourse are deemed inadequate.

Man's adaptation to the world is largely governed by the development of the imagination and hence of an inner world of the psyche which is necessarily at variance with the external world. Perfect happiness, the oceanic feeling of complete harmony between inner and outer worlds, is only transiently possible. Man is constantly in search of happiness but, by his very nature, is precluded from finally or permanently achieving it in either interpersonal relations or in creative endeavour... The happiest lives are probably those in which neither interpersonal relationships nor impersonal interests are idealized as the only way to salvation. The desire and pursuit of the whole must comprehend both aspects of human nature (Storr, 1997: 202).

To strengthen his argument, Storr closes his reflection with the following lines from the "Prelude":

*When from our better selves we have too long
Been parted by the hurrying world, and droop,
Sick of its business, of the pleasures tired,
How Gracious, how benign, is Solitude (qtd. in Storr, 1997: 2002).*

In his extensive commentary on *The Nature of Love*, Irving Singer points to the 'Romantic preoccupation with oneness [as] a reaction against the dualism of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', and sees the role of the imagination as that of enabling harmony and unity of phenomena which previous philosophies had dissected: 'Imagination assumed its central importance because it seemed, by its very nature, to unify the categories of sense and intellect, passion and rationality, matter and mind' (Singer, 1987: 288). For Wordsworth, his abiding love of nature encompasses a love of all of life, and thus obliterates the separation of the human and the material world. His love of nature leads him inevitably 'to the love of human Kind' (Wordsworth, 1984: 501), and to an appreciation of love expressed in simplicity and humility, in the 'little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love' (Wordsworth, 1984: 132). An appreciation of the ordinary, the simple, and the often unnoted expressions of kindness and love, is also seen by Nietzsche as crucial to our humanity: 'Goodwill... I mean those expressions of a friendly disposition in interactions, that smile of the eye, those handclasps, that ease which usually envelops nearly all human actions... it is the continual manifestation of our humanity' (Nietzsche, 1984: 48). The belief in the innate goodness of the human being and the capacity for benevolence and love amidst the inevitable frustrations and failures characteristic of human life, is seen by Stephen Gill as a prevailing conviction throughout the poet's work: 'Across his creative lifetime Wordsworth returned repeatedly to meditations on such topics as the relation of human beings to their world, the function of moral development, and the core values which give life its worth' (Gill, 2003: 157). Love of life, in its natural and human manifestations, is one such core value; 'We live by admiration, hope, and love' (Wordsworth, 1858: 345). The reality of pain and suffering, of doubt and uncertainty, 'The still, sad music of humanity' (Wordsworth, 1984: 134), does not preclude the possibility of a 'cheerful faith that all which we behold / Is full of blessings' (Wordsworth, 1984: 135), and this faith is enhanced by momentary feelings of

harmony wherein 'We see into the life of things' (Wordsworth, 1984: 133). What is then seen, realized, and embraced as a vision of life is the centrality and significance of love as the often difficult, elusive, and thwarted experience of human being:

*From love, for here
Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes, all truth and beauty, from
pervading love,
That gone, we are as dust (Wordsworth, 1984: 582).*

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