Wordsworth’s ‘Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’: An Anthropoetic Analysis

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Part I – A key

In this first part of the article the aim is to provide the reader with an anthropoetic key to Wordsworth’s poem. Whether the attempt to unlock opens it up to a justifiable interpretation your assessment of the value of the key must decide. It has already been tested on works of Geoffrey Chaucer and Jorge Luis Borges (Wright, 2005, 2007).

There is a common habit of referring to the poem as Wordsworth’s ‘great ode.’ Take Emerson’s characterization of it as ‘The high water-mark of intellect in this age’ (Emerson, 1983, 928) and Thomas Noon Talfourd’s declaration that it is ‘the noblest piece of lyric poetry in the world,’ ‘a rainbow linking infancy with the realms of blessedness beyond the grave’ (Talfourd, in his essay ‘The Genius and Writings of Wordsworth,’ 1820). For Coleridge the task of the poet was ‘to combine the child’s sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances which every day for perhaps forty years has rendered familiar’ (Coleridge, 1816, 86). For Gerard Manley Hopkins, after his reading of the ode, concluded that Wordsworth was ‘one of the very few men, who have *seen something* that made him tremble’ (Hopkins in one of his letters). There are other people who take a more openly religious line: Mary Wedd, for example, in a recent article, says that the ode resonates with us because ‘we are still in touch with the fountain light’; the child may only have had ‘a fleeting vision,’ she adds, but ‘there is a greater power that is everlasting’ (Wedd, 1996, 156). And from Father J. Robert Barth, of the society of Jesus, we get the expected assertion that the ode bears witness to ‘the existence of a reality that is ideal, eternal, and the true dwelling-place of the human spirit’ (Barth, 2002, 119).

It is the aim of this article to propose an construal of the ode, not made before, that provides a key to how it can be read with good warrant without in any way acceding

to a belief in pre-existence, or, for that matter, to post-existence. This would seen to run counter to the poet's own use of the word 'immortality' in the title. One seems to be put in the position of asking the absurd question 'How can a poem about immortality, not be about it?' The venture appear doomed to contradict itself! But a principled answer can be given: whether the theory behind that answer is acceptable is what the forthcoming argument will try to establish.

I. The Idealization of Reciprocity

The interpretation is based upon the theory developed from an insight of the sociologist Alfred Schutz, one of those Jews who fled from the Nazis, finding an intellectual home at the School of Social Research in New York. At the core of his theory is the claim that a specific mutual idealization is what launches all linguistic statements. In talk, he suggests, we reach across the differences in understanding between us (differences that Wilhelm von Humboldt, together with many others, insisted upon, Humboldt, 1999 [1836], 63) by performing what he called an 'Idealization of Reciprocity' (Schutz, 1962: 11-12). Given the lack of fit between our own sensory and conceptual selections from the flows of the real around and within us and the selections of others, Schutz concluded that the first mutual move in a linguistic act was to get a rough-and-ready convergence of our perspectives in order that the speaker, who believes that he or she has an improving update to offer the hearer on the portion of the real in question, may bring it about. We couldn't update the other in our dialogue unless there was a measure of overlap in the process; we would otherwise be talking, as we say, at cross purposes. After all, we are trying to tweak the other's perspective so that our purposes come closer into line as regards future action together. If we value, even love the other, we must ideally aim—to use phrases of Ian Dennis's—at 'a fulfilment of all promises,' at 'managing and refining' our desire, to get it impossibly as near as to being the same desire. As Dennis says, there is joy to be had if we can 'break down the boundaries between self and other, humanity and nature' (Dennis, 2010).

It is worth noting that Humboldt's insistence on differences of understanding between persons has been given some current empirical support by the neuroscientist Blair Armstrong of the Basque Centre on Cognition, Brain and Language, who has been able to show that brains respond uniquely to words, such that identification of persons via such brain events is precise enough to provide a substitute for fingerprinting (Armstrong 2015).

II. The imagined singularity of 'the Referent'

So how, according to Schutz's analysis, do we arrive at this partial convergence? Why, by acting in imagination as if we have already agreed on the 'referent,' as the

linguists call it. Knowing perfectly well that we do not perfectly match in our referential selections, we collaborate in assuming for the nonce that we have *already* picked out what we call 'the same thing' or 'the same person' or 'the same self.' To put it more simply, of a portion of the real we are homing in on, we take for granted that we are confronting 'the same entity.' We are both counting an ill-defined region of the real up to one. You can say that we are digitalizing it. Nothing seems more natural than to believe in the universal application of the linguistic trick, that is, that what lies about us is, as familiarly say, every*thing*. But because of the Humboldtian differences we have—note the first verb in this phrase—we *take for* granted that 'the same entity,' the 'subject 'of our statement, lies before us in a pure and timeless logical singularity. We are misled by the presence of the so-far-existing mutual identifications that we habitually make, and have to make to speak at all, and so move on in an unnoticed slide, to equating to believing that all can be *counted*. We do not notice that the word 'count' curiously has two meanings, to *enumerate* ('one, two, three. . .) and to *matter* ("That doesn't count for me"), as if there was nothing dubious about thus blurring the logical and the motivational.

There really isn't *one*, we only *take for* granted that there is 'one' there. So much in the past seems to confirm it. Once the match of 'referent' is *taken to be* mutually achieved, then the Speaker can add the clue to the new adjustment of that match, the so-called 'predicate' of the statement, which effects the transformation (the word 'predicate' incidentally, comes from the Latin 'praedicere' meaning *to proclaim* or *to preach* — in adding a predicate, you are *proclaiming* a change in the language). The presumed 'certainty' of the mutual fix is shown in need of alteration. There was a custom among philosophers of the past to call the Statement a 'proposition'—one can see how appropriate a name this is because the Speaker, in spite of entering into the imagined pure agreement with the Hearer, is really only *proposing* a change in the fit of a word to the real. I have already said elsewhere that, although both Speaker and Hearer from the moment of utterance and acknowledged understanding are content to move the assumed singularity of reference along to the next shared focus of attention, this 'singularity' is really only a kind of catalyst needful for speech to take place. However, in our convenient and optimistic habit, we cannot help believing it has joined all the other 'things' we can count in the world.

Etymology gives us an unexpected insight here. So many of the words that we cannot help using in this process reveal a recurrent theme. There are many words that appear to home in on *countable* elements in our ordinary life which owe their origin to Old Saxon and Old Norse words that involve the two phonemes that our orthography without distinction indicates with 'th': **ð** [the voiced form, using one's vocal cords], as in 'the' and 'that,' and **θ** [the unvoiced form], as in 'moth' and 'thin.' Look at this list: the, they, their, theirs, them, thou, thy, thee, thine, this,

these, that, those, then, thence, there, thither, thing, think, thought, thus, and several derivatives (e.g. thereby). In the meanings of all of them lurks the notion of a mutually identifiable singularity or singular group.

Interesting that where there is really nothing sensory to go on, scientists faced with the blankness of a black hole have to fall back on what the linguistic process demands if a statement is to be informative, for what do they say lies within a black hole? Since the only thing they have left to go on is the blank logical category that has been hiding under the dialogue all the time, they call it 'the Singularity'—a playful sleight-of-hand if there ever was one, right in the middle of their scientific rationality!

That we everyday speakers are sensitive to such distinctions is shown in the way we stress our words: to the implied question 'Where is the cat? we will reply with emphasis on the new knowledge ('The cat *is on the mat*'); to the question 'What is on the mat?, we will reply with emphasis on the linguistic predicate ('*The cat* is on the mat,' an example that makes the grammatical subject the linguistic predicate). Naturally we want to speak louder where the new knowledge is being conveyed.

To clear up a minor point: these are not necessarily the *grammatical* 'subject' and 'predicate.' In 'The cat sat on the mat,' *the cat* is the grammatical subject and *sat on the mat* is the grammatical predicate. But the actual linguistic subject and predicate as regards 'what is to be idealized as mutually agreed' and 'what performs the tweaking, thus updating the hearer' depend on what question is at issue: if the question is 'Where is the cat?,' then the grammatical subject and predicate correspond to the linguistic subject and predicate, but if the implied question is 'What is on the mat?' then the state of the mat is the linguistic subject, the focus of the idealized pre-agreement, and 'the cat' is the linguistic predicate, the new knowledge that changes the Hearer's take on the real. It all depends on what question is deemed to be asked. One could even imagine the unlikely question 'What is the spatial relation of the cat to the mat? (where both the cat and the mat are idealized common identifications, the linguistic subjects) and 'on' thus being the linguistic predicate, what the Hearer didn't know. An early 20th-century logician, John Cook Wilson, was the first to draw attention to this distinction (Wilson, 1926, I, 123-6), and by noting the dependence of meaning *on the implied question*, although he did not use 'linguistic' as his distinguishing adjective, but 'logical.' To have used 'logical' now would have hidden the Schutzian trick inside logic, for the strictures and structures of logic, we can now see, are within the mutually imagined character of the Idealization of Reciprocity (for a thorough discussion of the requirement in pure logic that we never refer to the real, see pp. 171-88 in Wright 2005; pursuing the intricacies of logic is a wonderful and justifiable activity, but to treat it as if any of its symbols actually referred to the structure of the real is to

move into fantasy).

III. The hidden mismatch and its relation to motivation

What is hidden under counting is the *mutual imagining* of singularity, the convenient temporary forgetting of the rival desires (and fears) involved in it. Consider how odd this is considering that we would not be picking out that portion of the real if we were not interested in it. However, as Aristotle pointed out, what is six apples for the seller may not be for the buyer. Conflict hides in the very process of a linguistic statement. Eric Gans quotes Roy Rappaport on this point: it is a 'formal act . . . *not entirely encoded by the performers*' (Gans's emphasis); this mutual imagining is a sharing,—a 'collective act,' a 'ritual imposing on those taking part' (Gans, 2008, 187, Rappaport, 1999, 24; see also Erving Goffman on the social aspect of language, Fine and Manning, 2003, 55; Alfred Schutz influenced Goffman). Gans, reflecting on whether the sacred and language are coeval, says that, if they are so, they 'are constructed round a sacred center' (188), and, this theory must maintain, *that centre is Schutz's mutual Idealization*. Gans's word 'imposing' is significant here, for the idealized 'ritual' of language is being entered into on the supposition that it will lead to the ultimate happiness of all bodies, and all bodies ought then to adhere to it: yet the purpose of the rule is to achieve the ends of the body's desire, so the ritual is always open to a suggested correction from a body of the rule's criteria of application—each statement thus being an attempt at an ironic updating of the existing 'custom.'

Consider how democratic this view of language is, for any speaker has the right to propose an updating of the shared word, which makes the 'imposing' a far from hierarchical one. Those who are keen to extend surveillance say 'If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear!' but this neatly forgets that the better update may lie with the person being spied upon and not with those spying. It is not just 'privacy' that Big Brother's watchers invade: they may be committing an 'original sin' of not being aware that the other they are watching can surprisingly point out *something about them that they did not know*. Theirs, of course, is an attempt to close down the novelty of the Statement.

The focus of so-called 'common' interest is thus irredeemably ambiguous. What has been counted up to one can become multiple at any time. This is a stubborn problem. To go straight to the central difficulty: Ask 'When two people who are bound to each other by human ties of affection and loyalty discover the failure of the idealization, do the rivalries thus revealed have to be regarded as open to resolution only by sacrifice, by one or both?' The failure can be slight, in which case a comic outcome can be accepted; the ambiguity comes out as amusing, even perhaps for the one who suffers most. On the other hand, the situation can be

tragic, as it was for Charles Dickens's Pip in *Great Expectations* when Magwitch makes his startling revelation. It must be reiterated that all this applies not just to 'two people,' but to the rivalries between the 'individual' and the 'authorities.'

IV. Faith and the 'dark conclusion'

So *faith* can't be left out. Faith brings the dark conclusion with it, the inescapable risk that, however 'sincere' or 'loyal' or 'commonsensical' or 'objective' or 'trusting' or 'truthful' you think you have been, the brute existence that lies behind a familiar word can break through your so-far-comfortable sorting of the world and gave you—and perhaps your hearer, perhaps someone so far treated as 'an authority'—a salutary shock. It is, of course, a shock to one's selfhood, a proof that selfhood is not solely yours to define. Conflict and the ways perhaps to resolve it should become the salient concern for both. It is *faith*ful that both are then challenged to be. Faith is thus a very human quality, not divine at all; this is what gives it its 'sacredness.' It is thus an inescapable consequence of this theory that every-'*thing*' you have objectively identified, including your-'*self*,' not only remains open to change but also owes its 'certainty,' not to some overarching 'truth,' but to *human* faith. All those people who confidently shout about the 'certainty of truth' are not aware that they are really making a hidden appeal, not to some natural, or even supernatural origin, but to whatever faith we human beings have managed to maintain together.

This is all very well, for you may suspect that this argument is really playing a trick on you to get you to accept a *sceptical* argument down the road, and scepticism, many philosophers and theologians will tell you, has been blown out of the water long ago. This is because it brings the horror of 'Relativism' with it, where you are being seduced into believing that there is no such thing as truth or certainty, that the world doesn't consist of recognizable things, that everything is a dream you are having, and that everyone can make up his or her own rules! He may have told you, for example, that the last pope, on taking up his post, said that relativism was the greatest enemy of the church. If it were true, said Pope Benedict, no one could rely on anyone else! And there is a surfeit of philosophical books that set out to prove why scepticism is a self-defeating argument. But the objectors are overlooking an essential consequence of the theory here proposed: that it cannot be egoistic in any way because one's very self is up for updating too! Don't you readily admit that others can tell you something about yourself that is entirely new to you and which, henceforth, you may have uncomfortably to accept? Hardly a tenet of an egoistic ethic! And then it has at its core, not Relativism, but a mutual pledge of faith: this is not 'The Theory of Relativity' *à la* Einstein, but *the Theory of SOCIAL Relativity*.

But the argument is not yet over: its core feature has not yet been mentioned.

There is something that Alfred Schutz did not explore even though it was an implied consequence of what he said. Some philosopher friend has probably told you that the ‘little mutual play-acting’ has trust hidden in it, that you couldn’t speak at all unless you trusted your partner in dialogue. That is what ‘granted’ means in the key phrase *taken for granted*.

Why yes, of course. But one can ignore, as Schutz did, the ‘taken for’ in his own formulation. ‘Granted’ does mean *allowed, permitted, exposed to no expectation of opposition of will and desire from the other*: however, ‘to take for granted’ means *to accept an illusion of real agreement as a perfect agreement, an apparent blending of wishes with another as a perfect fusing*, as if there no violent disagreement were possible in the future, as if there were *an item single in the same way* out in front of you both. What this means is that there is a bit of *play* in every statement, ‘play’ both as *looseness*, and ‘play,’ that is, *dramatic acting*, which has to be done seriously if it is to work. It is a matter of keeping a straight face though you *both* know perfectly well that both of you are working on judgements that are not quite the same. Better as you speak , like Groucho Marx, to wink at your partner in language, the reason being that there can never be a perfect ‘reciprocity.’

One oddity of the position objectors to this theory hold arises of the fact that one can ask them ‘How do would you distinguish between two persons in dialogue holding your view (that they are making mutual reference to real singular entities) and two people *performing* the singularity notion (knowing full well that it is only the would-be convergence of their differing Humboldtian hypotheses). It is exactly like asking them what the difference is between a pair who believe in Santa Claus and a pair who, in all earnestness, go through the motions of believing in him (as one sees in good actors) precisely because it is a *poetic* acting out of the generosity that ought to characterize Christmas. To answer the question above, then, one cannot avoid bringing up the place of faith in the language pact, which is, blatantly, what the shouters of “Relativism!” do not and, given the present set-up of their argument, cannot do.

So, strictly speaking, although there is no denying that, since we are in the middle of an awesome real, capable of giving all sorts of surprises, good and bad, the ‘things’ and ‘selves’ that we so complacently ‘count’ from it are never exactly certain. Therefore one has to say to those who think that this is a solipsistic idealistic dream, it is, on the contrary, a hopefully courageous acceptance of existence: we are, as William Wordsworth put it, open to feeling the ‘blank misgivings of a creature / Moving about in worlds not realized'(ll. 149-50). It is insidiously easy to vanish comfortably inside ‘the’ observer that is ‘one’s’ ‘self’ and drop its unknown realness from the running of ‘one’s’ life. All this particularly when we have to hypothesize a singularity in ‘the’ self to speak at all! Our continuing

practical successes in the world drive the hypothetical foundation of the Statement out of sight. Our mutual motivations, once carried through, seem to have nothing to do with the ‘identification’ of entities: we happily talk in logic of ‘satisfying’ equations without considering the significance of the word. The unethical move is to glorify the partial success with the aura of eternal ‘singularity,’ a move which hides the part that faith plays in the process, faith that has always to be alert to the risks of identification.

One can now add to the remark above about this being ‘The Theory of *Social* Relativity’: it is also, not ‘The Theory of Everything’ *à la* Hawking, but *The Theory of Every ‘Thing.’*

I saw on television a month or two ago a scene in a film where a little girl got very annoyed with her father, who was supposed to be pretending to be ‘the Big Bad Wolf,’ because he was giggling while he was doing it. She knew perfectly well what ‘playing’ means, what deliberately and *mutually* taking one thing for another involves. She didn’t for a moment believe that he was a wolf, but he had forgotten what a pretence that wasn’t an act of deceit could be. Those parents who try to convince their children that Santa Claus is real are also making a crude mistake, the reason being that children are quite capable of playing this great Christmas game seriously, consequently, as was said earlier, enjoying together the myth of worldwide, generous, familial love. This is also how to play the Language-Game of ‘God.’

Children are gradually initiated into language. Faced with the bewildering becoming of the flux of bodily experience, he or she is daily encouraged into, as we say, identifying ‘things’ and ‘persons’ and ‘selves’ in the world. Children soon find out that words, in T. S Eliot’s lines in ‘The Four Quartets,’

> . . . strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still.

But child and parent enter into the Idealization of Reciprocity with a will; after all it is what everybody else is doing even though no one is directly aware of it. It surely underlies all trust, especially that between child and parent—even more so in retrospect to Wordsworth, who lost both his parents at an early age, a fact that must have intensified the Idealization for him.

Whatever is named takes on the glory—one might say ‘sacredness’—of the Idealization. The real behaves as if the promises are already fulfilled, as if the boundaries of self and nature were already breached. Instead of merely *playing* that the words have captured the real, children at first are likely to be tempted to *believe* the parents that the Idealization that binds him or her in love with the parental guides, the future that appears to promise joy and not fear, hallows all that is, as we say, identified a word, from the Latin *idem facere*, that means *to make the same*. And ‘making the same’ is what the child does,

> As if his whole vocation
> Were endless imitation. (ll. 107-8)

V. Love

‘Love’—Inevitably the word has at last surfaced in the explanation as that which, hopefully, must guide the parent-child interaction. Ask, as Schutz did not, just what the phrase ‘Idealization of Reciprocity’ actually implies—and add one of his paraphrases for it, ‘the interchangeability of standpoints, the taking for granted that, if I were in your shoes, your standpoint would seem to be the same as mine, and you and I see things with the same typicality’ (Schutz, 1962: 11-12). This inescapably means, if one is to follow it out thoroughly, that motivations are presumed to match exactly, all desires and fears being *precisely the same.* This, one can see immediately, would be an *absolute* love— which is not only impossible but, further, paradoxical! The beloved other would be just a narcissistic copy of oneself. In loving other human beings you do not wish that every one of them has ‘precisely the same desires and fears’ that you do. Love has to embrace the fact that the other has *different* desires and fears; you wouldn’t be talking at all unless they did! But, openly paradoxically, you both have then to go on the impossible idealization of a single common end for your communication if love is what has to be shown. Schutz was nearer to the state of the case when he used the word ‘reciprocity,’ for that implies give-and-take, not a perfect identifying of the motivations of each in the social dyad.

VI. Play

Incidentally, the relevance of the word ‘paradoxical’ does not entail that we have moved into the realm of the irrational, merely into that of *play*. One could say of every statement that it requires the need to take the so-far ‘literal’ as newly ‘metaphorical.’ One is reminded of Gregory Bateson’s definition of play:

> These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for*

which they stand would denote. (Bateson, 1978, 152)

On observing monkeys at play in San Francisco Zoo, he noted that a playful nip was not regarded as an act of aggression precisely because the 'attacking' monkey had a special grin on its face. *Both* meanings are simultaneously present: it is thus acceptable to use the word 'paradoxical' in this context without falling into any irrational trap. We can enter into the hypothesis of a perfect resolution of all our differences that the Idealization of Reciprocity is supposed to cancel out without losing sight of those irremediable differences. This is where the too logically-minded fall into error, especially those for whom poetry, fiction, music—indeed, all that is aesthetic—are to be regarded as suspect as against the certainty of the 'Objective,' the 'True,' etc., and for whom play is trivial, childish, immaterial—at its worst frivolous. This is where to remind oneself of Daniel Barenboim's strange advice: that music should be given as much attention and investment in education as mathematics and English. To neglect the significance of play is to be lacking in faith. Music is the prime example of the pleasures and risks of play, for at every step through time it exhibits the familiar and the unfamiliar together, each caprice bespeaking obedience to what went before, yet each repetition is revealed as novel. So too for the Statement. One can, of course, add Drama to Barenboim's list of the essential elements of education. Those who take a too-utilitarian view of education need to bring themselves up to date. Look through the poem to see on how many occasions Wordsworth refers to music.

When the Idealization comes to reveal its impossibility, then the sacrifice of some so-far-cherished desire, as we have just seen, is required by faith. Trust, which at its worst complacently believes the other will do just as has been promised, is utterly inadequate; at the emergence of the unexpected mismatch of purposes it can only see the discord as betrayal (as the surveillance police believe). What a trap for any child who has not come to accept the 'cracks' and 'strains' of common speech as surprises that are inevitable if one is to love, and consequently that possible challenges to deep-seated desires must be courageously anticipated. The child, when it wants to amuse itself, may make all its mimeses the centre of its attention, as Wordsworth emphasizes ('And see the children *sport* upon the shore,' l.172), but we cannot possibly credit it with a philosophical understanding of what it is doing when it plays, although Wordsworth, with irony directed more at us and himself, calls it 'Mighty prophet! Seer blest!' (l. 115). It looks as though parents are untrustworthy, as indeed they are, if trust is not transmuted into faith. The little girl who reproved her father for giggling knew what playing was. But the situation is far worse for any child who has lost its parents, as Wordsworth had lost his.

To use a crude contemporary analogy, take all the advice, example and admonition from the world of the grown-up as a vast *program*. It would include not only all

moral persuasion (and unthinking misdirection) but also the foundational social requirements of selfhood, language, gender role, class, cultural preference, regional and national identification, and so on. This is what Humboldt insisted upon in his book *On Language* (1999 [1836]). Apply Schutz's principle literally, and the program transmogrifies into a *rigid* input identical for all. This, it is plain, is where the program analogy fails, because programs represent a pure rationality. Unlike computers, (1) all the bodies subjected to the social persuasion and conditioning *interpret them differently* (recall Humboldt and Armstrong), and (2) *human beings have the power to suggest changes to the program*, either unconsciously by the differences in their performance of the input or consciously in proposing changes in words, customs, laws, and common habits. But this is what language exists for: to allow its evolution. Tyranny fearfully resists this challenge of evolution and ends in self-defeat. Yet if the principle is applied with faith in mind—and love in heart—one finds that the 'program' is held as the necessary hypothesis of initial agreement that *allows the newly proposed transformation of the 'program,' the 'common language,' to be democratically assessed as possibly to be generally adopted*, that is, as the little girl intuitively knew, mutually *played* as a hypothesis should be, and not held to rigidly as some kind of mechanical necessity.

It should now be no surprise that our culture is continually exploring the ambiguous implications of robot behavior, of avatar motivation. To take one current example, that of the film *Ex Machina*. The engine of the plot works on the transformation of a robot that had been a perfectly obedient slave to its masters into a self-directed entity whose motivations come to be at odds with those who had commanded it—in other words, on the way to becoming human. The film can be seen as interpretable on many levels, but one key relevance here can be seen as a warning to those who believe that their own favoured 'programs' in life admit of no exceptions. The current television series *Humans* has the same form of plot, as does the new film *Chappie.* The robot is not supposed to interpret the daily commands as a human hearer would: it is supposed to hold to a rigidly unchangeable set of word meanings, as if Schutz's Idealization of Reciprocity held *perfect* sway. Conversely, we humans hack into the 'language program' every time we utter a would-be informative 'proposition.' Consider also the allegorical message of much current fantasy of the Marvel Comics kind (the 'Incredible Hulk,' for example, runs on the superiority of love to the rules that, backed up with violent force, are imposed by the 'authorities').

Recall Schutz's method: in order to enter into the language-game, one has to begin by behaving as if the chosen portion of the real that is to be redescribed is exactly the same for Speaker and Hearer, which becomes the 'Subject' of the Statement, that which is to be updated; only then can one proceed to the updating of the selection of that portion by the 'Predicate' (for the value of the Joke as an analogy,

see Wright, 2005). For this to succeed, it is not blind trust that must underlie the hypothesis of a common ‘Subject,’ but faith which at base countenances the inevitable risk. It should not then be difficult for a child, should it, to enter into the Play structure of language?—But are parents able to?

Part II – Unlocking the Ode

Now to use the key (as you will have noted we have already made a trial of the key: see the quotation above, ‘the blank misgivings of a creature / Moving about in worlds not realized’ [ll. 149-50]).

Let us use it first on the actual title: *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. It is the word ‘immortality’ that egregiously stands out. The word ‘intimations,’ with its connotation of *reliable, intuitive clues*, does nothing to qualify the openly old-religious character of the word. Yet there is a way of reading this poem that does transform what Wordsworth would have thought—and his presumed readers would have thought—about immortality. In the 21st century the notion is not to be naively accepted in its usual sense. What is to be retained is what has led to its use, and what is retained is not an aggressive, anti-religious element such as an old-fashioned atheist would produce. On the contrary.

It has been seen that Schutz’s formulation cannot escape an imagined projection of a final total agreement by the two engaged in the language-game with regard to the portion of the real upon which both are endeavouring to bring their separate perspectives to merge. And the curious question arises: Just when will this occur? (in eternity?) The degree of overlap, if we may call it such, still remains incomplete. ‘Overlap’ is not even the right word because there will be regions of the real registering in their sensation-fields to which they have given no significance, regions different for both of them! One can’t draw a simple Venn diagram of two overlapping circles for this situation. The outcomes of further action, mutual or otherwise, can always indicate areas of misconstruction, of perhaps ironic misinterpretation the motivational significance of which can lead either to a discovery happy to both of the copartners in the game or to a shocking confrontation, leaving them as possible antagonists. Thus parent and child may, in the first case, laugh at the mismatch of their understandings; or, in the second, find themselves unexpectedly hostile to each other—the ‘dark conclusion.’

The whole social ‘program’ comes with vast implications. It is not only a parent’s mundane and present wish that is loaded into the language-game, but humble speakers have to deal with the desires and fears with which the past has ballasted the words. To quote from another of Wordsworth’s poems, *The Prelude*; from a

moment of guilt he came to have nightmarish thoughts and dreams (he had taken someone else's boat to enjoy a row on a lake and had hurried back home in a guilty state):

> Huge and mighty forms, that do not live
> Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
> By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.
> *The Prelude,* Book I, lines 398-400

This is the alarm bell that heralds awareness of the dark conclusion, that faith demands its acknowledgement of risk. It is almost as if this moment in literature sees Plato's Forms for what they are, not divine certainties, but necessary but unreliable instruments of the imagination within language, and not nightmare rigidities 'that do not live/ Like living men.' This is not to say that we are all able to react safely to its warning, for the difficulties the attempt to be faithful brings with it have just been made clear. In particular we saw that the common aim is impossible of achievement because of the *imagined* nature of the coincidence of our desires and fears, as well as all the obstacles listed above which arise from the temptation to take our needful mutual imagining as literal. The trap lies in the fact that an unknown element of the real conceals itself in our attempt at ideal mutual understanding and neither of us has access to it; in addition, we each have a different sensing of it. The poets Emily Dickinson and Thomas Hardy have both presented the only possible notion of heaven as something forever out of reach, an acknowledgement that the goal was imagined. To believe that all words have a secure literal meaning common to us all is to turn our playing into the equivalent of religious fundamentalism, which takes the words of the holy book at their face value, whether it be the Koran, the Upanishads, the Bible or the Book of Mormon, etc. The Idealization of Reciprocity becomes an absolute guarantee of perfectly identical motivations, as if love were the exact match of all our longings. But the very belief in that final absolute eliminates all that love is, since love knows it must cope with the dark conclusion. At its heart such a belief in an absolute is timid, and, further, ignorant of what it is to be human, of what it is to be able to talk. No wonder that it was to the 'blank misgivings' Wordsworth gave his 'thanks and praise.'

VII. The hypothesized, the imagined

A modern sociologist, Benedict Anderson, has called nations 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1991), and the best way of grasping that is to see nations (and families) as similar to plays, in which actors maintain the dramatic world on stage by trying to harmonize their and our participation. All social life is a great

drama moving through time like a Mexican wave through a crowd of spectators, though, unlike spectators, its subjects were not alive and vulnerable to injury before it reached them nor after it has passed through them. It is maintained as a play is, by participants working together, with the difference that the bodies involved really feel what is produced by the action, intended or unintended, namely the pleasure and pain, the joy and the suffering that results. As Humboldt insists:

. . . the individual's *need for assistance* drives him to combine with others, and calls for understanding through *language* so that common undertakings may be possible (Humboldt's emphasis) (Humboldt 1999 [1836], 41)

What matters is our contribution. Our only 'immortality' is the influence we have had upon the *future* actors of the drama and, one must add, we must try to make, in Philip Larkin's words, love be what survives of us (in the last line of his poem 'An Arundel Tomb'), although we must remember that the old-religious did make the wicked 'immortal' too, for it cannot be denied that their influence also survives them the 'spirit' of Adolf Hitler is active, if not alive, today. Thomas Hardy was tempted to think that immortality resided only in *the memories of the dead in the minds of the living* (see his poem 'Her Immortality'), but it rather lies in *the thoughts and actions of the living that owe their origin to the influences at work in them that the dead have bequeathed,* and those are indefinably complex and subtle, and, all the more important, the living may not be consciously aware of them. When the American historian David Blight discusses the 'legacy' of the Civil War, finding it in habits of body and language, in ideology, attitudes, traditions, and more, he is exploring such influences (Blight, 2002). Raymond Tallis has also explored these 'ripples,' as he calls them, that we make, consciously or otherwise, in the scenes of the great play that succeed us (Tallis, 2015, 327-32; see also Wright, 2011, 51-60; 2014, Step 6).

It may seem odd but one can say that all utterances have this end in view, that we are in a sense speaking so that posterity will benefit. When Groucho Marx and Thomas Gray the 17th-century poet ask 'What has posterity ever done for me?' they did not realize that the final aim of all their talk was, theoretically, the happiness of posterity.

VIII. The 'spiritual'

One ought not to be distressed by the thought that after the body's death your-'self' won't survive, for it was only ever a tentative *mutual* selection from the real, and what really has mattered about it will go on having a chance of influencing the succeeding language-players. It was never 'individual' in the first place! Isn't that legacy really the basic ground of why we talk at all? and that is something beyond

your bodily life, isn't it? So this is how the notion of individual post-existence is to be seen, not as a magical prolongation of biological life, either before birth or after death. It can comfortably called 'spiritual' if you like, as long as you see its existence as part of the ongoing great social drama; it is certainly not something supernatural even though the influence is apparently spirit-like in its 'invisibility.' The very idea of a literal bodily resurrection becomes nugatory (there is no 'nut' left, only a broken shell—the word 'nugatory' comes from the Latin for *broken nutshells*). Unsurprising that our primitive forebears used the idea of the dead returning to life as a poetic expression of the Idealization; the impossible future goal underpinned all they *spoke*. It was also an implied admission that bodies and the satisfaction of their desires are what the rules, the commandments, *supposedly* exist for (literal programs don't exist for the laptops).

Thus 'pre-existence' and 'post-existence' would at first seem to lie only in the particles of matter that were to become or had been the body, that is, if we stick to the human game of conceiving of matter as consisting of *countable* quarks or gluons or electromagnetic waves! Shakespeare makes Hamlet play with the thought that 'the noble dust of Alexander' may now be 'stopping up a bunghole' (Act V, sc. I, lines 184-5). Thomas Hardy, in a poem on some birds singing, 'Proud Songsters,' reminds us that those birds are now but

> only particles
> Of earth, and air, and rain.

But, plainly, there is no identifying such remnants; the attempt is futile—even though we may, as a poetic ritual, revisit a grave or place flowers at the place of the battle or the disaster. The human identities that were fostered in those bodies by the grand program or drama or epic poem that is human life, are, not no more, but active in the influences they have upon that ongoing drama, both in the expectations of them and plans for them before they were born, and in the thoughts, feelings and actions of those they had come in contact with in their lifetime: this is the only thing their 'pre-existence' and 'post-existence' can be. The ritual actions of mourners are tributes to that influence.

IX. The nature of a play

It is worth considering what the existence of an actual play-in-performance is. If we are going to use *theatrum mundi* as a prime analogy, as Jaques, Hamlet or Prospero did, we ought to ask a scientist to give an account of it. It is obviously a shared *imagined* projection of the Anderson type, in which actors and audience join, and it proceeds through time as any playing does. One can learn from the little girl: we

seriously join in a strictly false complex of actions such that their fictive import is treated for the nonce *as if* it were part of our own lives, whether as actors we are producing it or as spectators are watching it. And this is no surprise, as it thus falls within Bateson's definition of Play. The next question is to ask its purpose: Are not Nation, Neighbour, Family and Individual, etc., but pieces in the game of trying to ensure that impossible future happiness, the impossible love that is the core of the Idealization of Reciprocity? Actual plays, whether on stage or screen, or part of children's fun, are fragments 'of [our] dream of human life' (l. 92), contributions to our theories of what life is and should be. No wonder Wordsworth's child 'newly learned art' of acting, of 'Imitation' (ll. 93, 108), presents actual occurrences in life, such as death, since they are our prime way of moving through and out of it.

The 'Individual' is a piece like any other part of the social program applied to a body, and, as any other feature, able to be adjusted, as long as that intended adjustment does not constitute a brainwash, a wiping out of all that produced the application of 'I' and 'Me' and the rest to the 'delicate warm motion' that is the feeling flesh. Once the infant is no longer *in-fans* ('not speaking'), no longer outside the symbolic universe of gestures and words that is matrix of our sense of self, he or she has become a player in the game, with a right to change the program for us all.

In the early years, the Idealization can but enhance the parents' naming of (partially) shared parts of the real. There can, for a child that is loved, be little suspicion of the dark conclusion; trust will not yet have grown into faith. No wonder then that all that is named takes on an original wonder, a wonder that can be traced to an unquestioned assurance of safety guaranteed by the parents, relations, friends— all the speakers to the child. The wonder is grounded both in the animal selections that the child has *already* been making for itself, the percepts that any advanced animal is enabled to make from those parts of its surroundings that produce pleasure and pain, but the additional power gained from the language (both of word, gesture, facial expression and body-language) supplied by his or her loving mentors. The 'heaven that lies about us in our infancy'(l. 67) is derived from the shared Idealization, which is inculcated with every act of teaching, from the affection which hopes to ensure the future happiness of the child, and from the fount of original newness which marks every sight and sound. It gives a special connotation to the opening sentence of St. John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.' The Idealization can now be seen as what lies behind the philosopher Bishop Berkeley's belief that God guaranteed our perception of things, although it is interesting that he allowed the Humboldtian caveat that each person perceived differently: you could say that he was one step away from Schutz's insight, held back by his old-religious commitment (Berkeley in his *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous,* 1713: see Luce and Jessop, 1948-51, II,

245-7, 212).

The ‘shades of the prison-house’ which ‘begin to close upon the growing boy’ (l. 68) arise from the inevitable disillusionments which the use of language produces. He moves from the narcissistic conviction that a perfect trust in his parents (and in the great social order into which he is being inducted) will guarantee his immediate happiness, moves from this blind trust to the faith that some future time will fulfill their promises and assuage his sense of loss. Some of the ‘common undertakings’ which Humboldt speaks of are open to being found not common; recall T. S. Eliot’s lines. Yet the seemingly miraculous freshness of sensory experience retains much of its intensity, and the sense of all things named around one being blessed by the real affection of one’s familial mentors is not forgotten. However, Wordsworth at first arrives at the sad verdict that the grown man loses the initial wonder at gaining and using these first words for perceptions, using singularity as an essential part of the mutual method. The very singularity of a tree, ‘of many *one,’* and of a field, ‘a *single* field that I have looked upon,’ bring the loss of that unique wonder to mind, a wonder based on an imagined identity with others that he cannot regain, although the memory of that wonder remains—the tree and field ‘speak of something that is gone’ (l. 54). So the contemporary critic of the poem, John Scott, who saw this progression as a shift from ‘beatitude’ to ‘apathy’ was profoundly mistaken (see Woof, I, 827).

X. Pre-existence

All we need to do now is sift through the lines of the ode for further signs of the Idealization at work (and it is not necessary to find every one of them, for many can be left to the reader). Take the cardinal theme on which the understanding of the poem must turn: the core notion of pre-existence. This has always been a problem for would-be appreciators of this poem, even for religious believers, who often give the impression of forgivingly tolerating this quirk in a poet who can thus still be drawn into the fold of the church. Examine these lines where pre-existence appears to be openly proposed:

> The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star
> Hath had elsewhere its setting,
> And cometh from afar (ll. 60-2)

Why should the child (and the adult) have this sense that all the marvellous identifications that are made at hands of our mentors ‘cometh from afar’? One can now see that ‘afar,’ rather than meaning *from a pre-existent spiritual world where we existed with the Creator Himself* means ‘afar’ in the sense of *drawn from the*

history of all the speakers of our language for whom that identification had been part of the sublime language-game in progress, unmistakably the deliverance of all those thoughts and observations made by our ancestors, whose mutual idealizations subtly evolved into our time. No wonder many a primitive tribe worshiped their ancestors. It will not be a literally immortal evolution, because it will not outlive our race, the reason being that in time our race will come to an end, and leave not a rack behind. But the great and subtle play that is a language in its ongoing development, that exists in the interplay between speakers and in the thoughts that accompany it, will die with the last speaker. Is that a catastrophe? People like Stephen Hawking who want human kind to travel on forever seem to think it is, but there is no necessity to take that view.

No wonder that we think of the identifications and our own consciousness as 'spiritual,' because they exist only as imagined within the twists and turns of language, but that 'spirituality,' nevertheless, as was insisted earlier, is a *real performance in existing brains* just as a play on a stage is, and is thus in principle is not outside science. It cannot be because those imagined concepts are sustained by actual pleasure and pain, joy and suffering in the bodies that are in play as they interact with the real. Our children playing 'hobbits' and 'orcs' do not turn into 'wraiths,' except in the story! One can accept that 'the Soul' is a construct within the language that our forebears spoke, and is one of the essential elements in that *language-as-program.* Feral children, who grow up unprogrammed, without the notion of being a 'self'-reflecting single entity,' are unable to think beyond the limits of the brain of an advanced animal. There is no logical 'singularity' in the ability of 'an' 'eagle' to catch 'a' 'rabbit': there is only the slow infinitesimal advance of evolution at work, in which the conditioning makes its advance through the aeons, imperceptible to us. Our 'I's' and 'Me's' come from the past historical endeavours of our speaking tribe to home in on the flows of the real of concern to it, and, being past, they seem to come 'from afar,' and the drama-like programming is hidden like a secret 'spiritual' plot within our actions, loving and otherwise. It is our mutual imagining that enables us to ignore the imperceptible advance of evolution as it involves us, but its very being a performance of the hypothetical, the imaginary, allows us to adjust to the evolution of our social life. Martin Heidegger, from a religious perspective, saw the discovery of 'truth' as an uncovering of a secret, an *alethia* (Greek for 'a bringing out of concealment' ; Richardson, 1974, 211-12); the speech and gestures of the mentors hides, both from themselves and from the children, what historically guides them. There is a presage of this, and of Wordsworth's lines, in a poem of Friedrich Hölderlin's, '*Brot und Wein'* (the 'they' refers to the gods):

> Unperceived at first they come, and only the children

Surge towards them, too bright, too dazzling this joy enters in
So that men are afraid (trans. Daniel Whistler; see Bibliography)

[Unempfunden kommen sie erst, es streben entgegen
Ihnen die Kinder, zu hell kommet, zu blendend das Glück,
Und es scheut sie der Mensch]

There are several places in Wordsworth's poetry where a moment of ecstatic excitement is succeeded by guilty fear (in Book I of *The Prelude* see the episodes concerning the Stealing of Woodcock and of Eggs from the Raven's Nest, and the Appropriation of the Boat). He was well aware of this succession and of its power over him: he called it 'a *dark* inscrutable workmanship' (my emphasis):

Thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ;
Whether her fearless visitings, or those
That came with soft alarm, like hurtless light
Opening the peaceful clouds, or she may use
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable, as best might suit her aim.
(*The Prelude*, Book I, 351-56)

We can see why he reserves 'The song of thanks and praise' for the 'severer interventions.'

. . . for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings (ll. 146-8)

These are 'the blank misgivings' mentioned above. The experience being recalled is that of his childhood, when the real, in its refusal to match the complacent identifications pointed out by his parents, escaped the presumed safety of them, and left him fearfully without support. These sublime failures of identification were the result, he says, of 'High instincts before which our mortal Nature / Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised' (ll. 152-3). Not 'instincts' within this theory, but the moments of dim awareness of the gaps and distortions in the program of guidance handed on to us. Here one can detect an 'original sin' in the program; compare the claim by John Taylor Coleridge that in the Ode's glorification of the child, Wordsworth had 'forgotten original sin' in the child! (James Taylor Coleridge, 1821:

see Woof, 2001, 807). There is in the recollection of these moments of guilt a sense of the human source of the ‘sacredness’ of the love that should guide us in our own use of language. Some of those failures of identification, nevertheless, are the source of the body’s proposals to change the language, of the very impulse to speak.

There is a certain pathos in the poem where Wordsworth seems to actually attribute ‘blessedness’ to the child, but it is at a moment where he is seeing the child as it grows, provoking ‘the years to bring ‘the inevitable yoke’ of being adult:

> 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. (ll. 131-3)

He is allowing himself to pity the child whose strivings are to join the supposed success of the parent in moving about in the ‘realized’ world. Yet in this very envy of the ‘innocent’ state he is forgetting the risk of faith to which the child must be awakened. Yet there is an ambiguity here because the child’s new response to the sensory spectacle around it contains the very freshness that can advance the language. We have all been amazed and amused by children interpreting words in unexpected ways. Language can indeed fall into desuetude as a result of ‘custom,’ the uninquiring acceptance of over-familiar interpretations; the impulse to speak comes from noticing what is not being noticed by others. This is one of the reasons why children have been divinized, for their supposed ‘misunderstandings’ have the form of all our attempts at updating others, all our statements. And, without question, sometimes they have updated us.

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth twice draws on this thought. Here is the first:

> The song would speak
> Of that interminable building reared
> By observation of affinities
> In objects where no brotherhood exists
> To passive minds.
> (*The Prelude* (1850), Book II, ll. 382-6)

In such cases, someone perceives for the first time a *likeness* in the sensory field that they have never captured before, and, in bringing it the notice of others, adds to ‘that interminable building’ that is the ‘common’ language and its so-far-

successful hypotheses about the real. Wordsworth uses ‘brotherhood’ here to characterize the *mutual* task of selection from the real that is language. Wordsworth has become a virtual psychologist—or philosopher—of perception, distinguishing between our automatic sensing of the real, which contains no knowledge, and the mutual selections human beings can fuzzily make from it together. To sense is not to know; as the American philosopher Roy Wood Sellars put it, ‘Being is one thing and knowledge is another’ (R. W. Sellars *père*, 1919, 407). In ‘Lines written above Tintern Abbey,’ Wordsworth describes himself as a lover of all the mighty world

> Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
> And what perceive
> (Tintern Abbey,’ ll. 106-8)

The ‘half-creating’ is what the mind does with the sensory intake, what we now would call the ‘perceiving’; for the actual sensing (in colour and tone and scent, etc.) he has used ‘perceive,’ but he clearly means the sensory input from outside. That our minds are engaged in the process of perception does not imply that our knowledge is without value: what we are continually ‘building’ (and readjusting) in the evolution that is language are our current theories about what best constitutes a ‘thing,’ a ‘self,’ etc. out of the sensory fields within us, themselves a part of the real, on behalf of the desires and fears in our bodies. The ‘Lifeworld,’ to use the Austrian philosopher Edmund Husserl’s term, does not disappear into idealism. We do our best to keep up with the flux of change, although ‘progress’ in the collaborative venture that is knowledge is not guaranteed. Our successes are only ‘viable’; the choice of word is that of Ernst von Glasersfeld (Glasersfeld, 1984, 25). To accept that *all* percepts are viable and that the language group is maintaining the co-reference of them by an act of faith is not easy to recognize or accept—yet it is a central tenet of the present theory.

The second quotation from *The Prelude* bears witness to the imagined *singularity* which is constructed by the Schutzian idealization: he speaks of ‘transitory qualities’ which led to

> . . . manifold distinctions, difference
> Perceived in things, where, to the unwatchful eye
> No difference is (ll. 299-301)

Whether it is a so-far-unnoticed likeness (as in the first quotation here) or a so-far unnoticed difference (as in the second), the speaker of an informative statement produces a clue which updates the now-sharing hearer who has not been able to ‘watch’—with ‘this most watchful power of love.’ Love of the other has ‘singled’ out

something worthy of his or her perceiving, something worthy of speech. ‘Watch’ is a favourite word of Wordsworth’s: he takes ‘watching’ to be the action of ranging over the offerings of the senses while alert for newly significant likenesses and differences. These are what those, neglectful of the endless sensory novelty of experience, whose perceptions are bound by ‘custom,’ have missed. Ian Dennis (personal communication) draws attention, in the lines quoted above from the ode that express the fear that ‘custom’ lies upon us ‘with weight / Heavy as frost, and deep *almost* as life,’ that Wordsworth did use the word ‘almost.’ We are not forever condemned to be blind to what can be newly perceived in our sensations because we have others to help us to sort the real into the shapes they have discovered.

Towards the end of the ode, one finds Wordsworth taking leave of ‘the radiance which was once so bright’ (l. 180) that he gazed at in his childhood. This is not nostalgia for lost innocence that he is recalling (that nostalgia is a Victorian sentimentalization), for he now in later life can recognize the child’s misconceptions of the source of language. What initiated it was the ‘brotherhood’ that sustains language at its best. He acknowledges the faith in the lines where he notes that there is a ‘strength in what remains behind,’ firstly,

> In the primal sympathy
> Which having been must ever be

Which, with our key, can be taken to be the mutual faith that should sustain our every utterance to another, without which we cannot really speak. Secondly,

> In the soothing thoughts that spring
> Out of human suffering

which is a part of a creed that accepts sorrow as the inescapable, paradoxical accompaniment of bonds that love creates, and, lastly,

> In the faith that looks through death,
> In years that bring the philosophic mind. (ll. 190-1)

Faith is ‘looking through death’ both as death-as-bogy or death as eternal reward, when threats of eternal punishment or promises of endless joy are seen for the attempts at intimidation or inveiglement that they become if taken literally. Faith that is entered into with the expectation of the final erasure of the body accepts the

animal fear as part of the commitment, nor could it accept the bait of ‘heaven’ as a compensation for the disadvantages of ‘being good.’ So, in this new interpretation, one can see that ‘the heaven that [lay] about us in our infancy’ was, understandably, an illusion, one born of the ignorance of the nature of faith, and that of death. Heaven must not lie about us in our *maturity*: it has solely to be accepted as the impossible goal that we all must imagine in the human performance that is language. It arises out of the poetic maintaining of the ‘primal sympathy’; it finds ‘soothing thoughts’ in contemplating the actions of those who try to palliate ‘human suffering’; and it looks ‘through death’ to see it for what it is, a false alarm. That there is no celestial city cannot fill us with regret, even though our every utterance should be an apparent attempt to construct ‘that interminable building’— Wordsworth’s own admission that it is no end in time.

However, the hell/heaven talk was a response to our conviction that our presence in the world has had effects, and one can argue that influence you have had on the ongoing game is what all your talk had been about. It takes years to live with a ‘philosophic mind,’ not because we learn to take the denials, as we loosely say, ‘philosophically,’ but because we must learn where our responsibility lies in the negotiations of the sharing of sacrifice—if, luckily, that turns out to be possible. It may not be, for the bouleversement of desires and fears may demand too much in the nature of a brain-washing for the self to survive it. This is where even science has to say that tragedy is an ontological possibility for social ‘selves’ (see the last paragraph of Section iii). To deny its place in human life is to abandon faith since the motive in such a denial is a wish to limit the extent of the risks that must be faced. There is a finer way of facing death than that of those ‘martyrs’ who were expecting after death to garner huge reward or, worse, who were afraid of unending punishment!

> The ‘philosophic mind’ can also bring recognition of the power of imagination that embraces posterity, that our contribution will still have its influence long after our death, our real ‘immortality.’ There is an acknowledgement of this in the combined notes of hope and acceptance in the closing verse. He says that he can now
>
> love the brooks which down their channels fret
> Even more than when I tripp’d lightly as they (ll. 198-9)

a reminder that now, in maturity, he no longer ‘trips lightly’ but is aware of faith’s confrontation with its denial. This matches Shelley’s account of hope:

> hope till Hope creates

> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates
> (*Prometheus Unbound*, Act IV, 473-4)

For Wordsworth the great drama is seen to continue beyond the deaths of the bodies of its actors:

> Another race hath been, and other palms are won. (l. 204)

His choice of the words ‘palms,’ that is, *acknowledgements of worthy actions* (as of wreaths of palm or laurel leaves about the head), expresses the hope that those influences after death that have aided humanity will have their recognition, even if not formally or directly attributable to their originators. It is significant that in his closing lines it is not to *divine* inspiration he gives thanks but to ‘the *human* heart by which we live,’ for the sacredness of the pact that is language arises, not from the action of a god, but from our more humble acts of love. This humility went too far for a contemporary of Wordsworth’s, John Scott, for whom these last lines were ‘mean and poor’ as a result of ‘raising what is low, and ‘reducing what is high’ (Scott; see Woof, I, 527). But the lines do neither: they acknowledge that God is the needful poetic instrument of our imagination. And one last comment: Wordsworth here goes beyond the grief of death, for the ‘thoughts’ inspired by the ‘meanest flower’ he finds to be encouraging to us all. We can be ‘much happier’ even at the moment of death, in the sense that Banquo was.

Such an approach dovetails with Lionel Trilling’s comment on the ode, that in it, ‘Wordsworth is talking about something common to us all, the development of the sense of reality.’

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