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Richard Thomas Eldridge

Swarthmore College, reldrid1@swarthmore.edu

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3 Wordsworth and the Life of a Subject

Richard Eldridge

I

In the first sentence of §1 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche urges us to think about art in relation to life in a new way.

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, once we perceive not merely by logical inference, but with the immediate certainty of vision, that the continuous development of art is bound up with the *Apollinian* and *Dionysian* duality—just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations.¹

This claim forces us to ask two sets of questions.

(1) What is “the immediate certainty of vision” opposed to? That is, what other way of looking at art in relation to life are we being asked to give up? And how is what we are to see anew—the continuous development of art—like the development of humanity through procreation? The answers to these questions must involve the thoughts that the development of art does not come to an end, just as the development of the human species does not come to an end: Both developments are continuous. This fact makes otiose, then, the idea that the nature of art could be adequately and usefully described in a definition that specifies necessary and sufficient conditions to which the ideal work fully conforms, for no ideal, perfect work is possible. If no ideal work is possible, then there will always be imperfections in any particular work and questions about exactly how and how well it approximates the ideal. An ideal definition will then be no help in addressing such questions. Rather, judgement and discernment will be called for. Just as women and men with their differences and peculiarities, and not any perfect single human being, produce further women and men with their differences and peculiarities, so works of art are produced by temporary couplings of two forces in us—the Apollinian and the Dionysian—that are never fully integrated and balanced to form a single perfect whole. To *see* this fate—a continuing failure to achieve the ideal and to

overcome all difference, peculiarity, and opposition—in every work of art is then to be weaned from the pursuit of a standing philosophical *logos* or definition; *that* pursuit functions only to deny the movement of life. When Plato, for example, assigned poetry “the rank of *ancilla*” in relation to philosophy and its definitions, favoring only the “enhanced Aesopian fable” with a moral amenable to rational justification, he thereby shied away from both the genuine complex powers of art and the genuine turbulence of life. With Plato, Nietzsche tells us, “the Apollinian tendency has withdrawn into the cocoon of logical schematism” and so given up on life, transformation, and development (*Tragedy* §14, 91). Nietzsche, in contrast, is asking us to look the ongoing turbulence of life full in the face: to *see it at work in every work of art and every human life*.

(2) But then how is a genuinely successful work of art possible at all? It must involve a creative coupling of the Apollinian and Dionysian forces or tendencies in us that figure in artistic making, yet success in this coupling is not assessable according to any fixed ideal or conceptual measuring-stick. The various products and values that are, according to Nietzsche, typical of each of these tendencies can be roughly set out as follows:

<i>Apollinian</i>	<i>Dionysian</i>
Dreams	Intoxications
Created supplement to life	Chaotic essence of life
Sculpture	Music
Form-order	Passion, drive, content
Enjoyable illusions	Fusion in ‘feeling-with’
Composure-trance-absorption	Ekstasis
Culture, civilization	Nature
Upholding of Principium individuationis	Collapse of Principium individuationis

In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche describes these tendencies further and repeats the analogy between artistic production and sexual reproduction.

The word ‘Dionysian’ means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states . . .

The word ‘Apollinian’ means: the urge to perfect self-sufficiency, to the typical ‘individual,’ to all that simplifies, distinguishes, makes strong, clear, unambiguous, typical: freedom under law.

The further development of art is necessarily tied to these two natural artistic powers as the further development of man is to that between the sexes. Plenitude of power and moderation.²

These powers must then be jointly expressed in the successful work. This expression must involve something other than either simple fusion,

which would leave these powers unrecognizable in their individuality and hence unexpressed, and simple juxtaposition, in which there would be no coupling, no productive interrelation. But then how is success in the joint expression of these powers possible at all?

Nietzsche offers an answer, not in the form of a definition or principle, but in the invocation of an example—an example that remains central for him throughout his subsequent career—at the end of the first paragraph of *The Birth of Tragedy*: “this coupling ultimately generated an equally Dionysian and Apollinian form of art—Attic tragedy” (*Tragedy* §1, 33). So how, then, did Attic tragedy succeed in expressing these forces in an exemplary way, albeit one that is not successfully imitable according to a rule? The key to answering this question lies in seeing that the Attic Greeks courageously accepted the chaotic onwardness of meaningless, self-proliferating life and then formed coherent, recognizable, individual lives anyway. “The profound Hellene”—both certain central figures in Greek tragedies and the members of chorus and audience who see and respond to their actions—“uniquely susceptible to the tenderest and deepest suffering, comforts himself, having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature” (*Tragedy* §7, 59).

In accepting clearly the destructiveness and cruelty of human life in nature and history, the Hellene resembles Hamlet and, in turn, us—we for whom the consolations of a superintending logos or Providence story are gone.

The Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have once looked truly into the essence of things, and they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint. . . . An insight into the horrible truth outweighs any motive for action, both in Hamlet and the Dionysian man. (*Tragedy* §7, 60)

For one who bears such an insight, it is unclear what if anything is to be done, in any way that matters.

Now no comfort avails any more; longing transcends a world after death, even the gods; existence is negated along with its glittering reflection in the gods or in an immortal beyond. Conscious of the truth he has once seen, man now sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence. (*Tragedy*, *ibid.*)

And yet, somehow, the Hellene nonetheless “comforts himself.” This comfort is achieved in two distinct ways. “The comic” enables “the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity.” That is, there is a kind of purging of nausea in the Dionysian self-abandonment of laughter. And, second, there is “the sublime as the artistic taming of the horrible” (*Tragedy*, *ibid.*). This

artistic taming happens through the setting up of a fiction, within which it is possible for a life within the chaos of nature nonetheless to take on coherent form. “The Greek built up the scaffolding of a fictitious *natural state* and on it placed fictitious *natural beings*” (*Tragedy* §7, 58). The sublimity that attaches to these fictitious natural beings—the protagonists of tragic drama—is that they stand out in their coherence of personality, diction, thought, and action against the chaos of nature. Their lives have form. The imposition of artificial emplotment on and for these fictitious natural beings in this fictitious natural state requires the dramatist to “dispense from the beginning with a painstaking portrayal of reality” (*Tragedy* *ibid.*) with all its meaningless incidents. What is presented is rather an account of how a protagonist intelligibly moves towards his fate in his circumstances, with “probability or necessity” as Aristotle says.³ The *hexis* or character of the protagonist, with its one-sidedness (*hamartia*) or excess of virtue that is ill fit to the circumstances of action, intelligibly brings it about that a reversal (*peripeteia*) occurs, accompanied with recognition (*anagnoresis*) by the protagonist, the chorus, and the spectators of the intelligibility of the action.⁴ Yet though it is a fiction, this world in which protagonists coherently have characters and reach their fates intelligibly “is no arbitrary world placed by whim between heaven and earth; rather it is a world with the same reality and credibility that Olympus with its inhabitants possessed for the believing Hellene” (*Tragedy* §7, 58). This world is set up “for [the] chorus” (*Tragedy*, *ibid.*) and for the audience whose responses it shapes and models. In this world, chorus and audience see that a character—a protagonist with a *hexis* or unified ensemble of powers of thought, reasoning, expression, and action—can impress that *hexis* on the world by expressing it in intelligible action, however ill-starred the outcome. In this way, the protagonist “lives anyway” for the chorus and audience, despite the meaningless of life “in itself” in nature and history “in themselves”. Antigone and Oedipus, and Hamlet and Lear, are figures of sublime accomplishment, Nietzsche is arguing, in standing out for us intelligibly from the chaos of life in the coherence and power of their thought, diction, and action. They have lived as subjects of their lives, experiences, and actions, rather than as mere things, in a way that is both exemplary and comforting for us.

II

On the surface, Wordsworth’s tone is far more optimistic than Nietzsche’s. The universe itself “moves with light and life informed, / Actual, divine, and true”,⁵ and we may find Paradise to be “A simple produce of the common day” (“From the Recluse” [Prospectus], in Stillinger, l. 808, 46). Yet such displays of felt metaphysical confidence are never either self-standing or stable. They are surrounded by narratives that describe recurrent movements through despair and recovery, and they are strongly qualified by

being cast in the subjunctive mood or as expressions of hopes about future reception. Wordsworth typically *conjectures at a moment* both that he has so experienced nature and the human world in it and that others *may* experience them similarly, thus sanctifying his prophetic authority in matters of culture and value.⁶ His major works conclude more typically with an expression of a hard won, prayerful hope that his vision will or may be taken up than with a confident pronouncement that that vision is true and proven. Put otherwise, his major poems are more records of experiences of thinking and feeling through which poetic identity and authority are *temporarily* achieved than they are pieces of straight metaphysical philosophy.

The underlying problem that motivates Wordsworth's continual swerves among expression of feeling, metaphysical pronouncement, conjectures about reception, and recurrent hesitancy and doubt is that of achieving life as a genuinely human subject. Wordsworth seeks both to become a locus of feeling coupled with apt understanding and to find that achievement of fullness of subjectivity certified by others. Absent such certification, the achievement itself is open to doubt. For Wordsworth, the very idea that he has lived or can live *as a subject* is always threatening to falter, most memorably in the image of himself as one "Unprofitably traveling toward the grave, / Like a false steward who hath much received / And renders nothing back" that launches *The Prelude* on its course of self-interrogation (*Prelude*, I, ll. 267–69, in Stillinger, 199). When Wordsworth does at certain moments achieve a measure of confidence in his life and powers as a subject, he does so much more in the manner of the protagonists of tragic drama as Nietzsche understood them than in the manner of a theoretical philosopher. He manages, that is, recovery of himself *in time* through achieving a stably and powerfully enough formed manner of thought, expression, and (writerly) action, at least for a moment, in the face of the chaos of life, rather than simply reverting to metaphysical pantheism or any other epistemically well-founded doctrine or doxa.

That there is a threat to the existence of life as a subject—a threat that dominates a great deal of contemporary life, but a threat that may be answered by the powers of poetry (not theoretical philosophy)—is the chief argument of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. This argument is inaugurated as Wordsworth announces that "the principal object . . . proposed in these poems" is "above all, to make these incidents [and situations from common life] interesting" ("Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*" [hereafter "Preface"], in Stillinger, 446 and 447), thus implying that common life is not interesting as it stands: We are dead to it and it to us. This implication is unpacked in the further thought that "a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor" ("Preface", 449). Without the exercise of discriminating powers issuing in voluntary exertion, there is only more or less animal passivity in life, as one is buffeted

about by circumstance, often compelled addictively to try to stop the pain of life by succumbing to a “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation” (“Preface”, *ibid.*). One fails to lead the life of an active subject moved by genuine interest.

Yet there is no hope that pure reasoning can save us. Wordsworth specifically eschews “the selfish and foolish hope of *reasoning* [the Reader] into approbation of these particular poems” insofar as it is not possible “to give a full account of the present state of public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved” (“Preface”, 445). That is to say, there is no account vouchsafed to us by reason or by anything else that determines what any ideal human life must be like, which account could serve as a standing measure of present life and taste. For that, we would need to know “in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other” (“Preface”, 446) in general and how “society” in its “revolutions” might play out these interactions well or badly. Such knowledge of standing conditions that would determine what counts as an ideal human life, fitly expressing distinctively human powers, is unavailable. We are too finite for that, with our reflections on our condition too shaped by our specific, sectarian particulars of personal and social history and place. Embodiment and the exercise of intelligence within it has, always, its localities.

To undertake to make the scenes and incidents of common life interesting but without any external measure of interest is then to aim to do the work of animation from within the having of ordinary experience. As Stanley Cavell puts it,

What the words “make interesting” say is that poetry is to make something happen—in a certain way—to the one to whom it speaks; something inside, if you like. That what is to happen to that one is that he or she is to become interested in something [is] . . . to perceive us as [at present] uninterested, in a condition of boredom, which [is regarded as], among other things, a sign of intellectual suicide.⁷

One must begin *from* the experience of common scenes and incidents, together with attendant thoughts and feelings. Then *within* courses of thoughts and feelings that are often clichéd, inattentive, or unanimated, one must *discover* or *uncover* those that are aptly attentive to the subject matter, so that one becomes animated as a subject in dwelling in just these aptly attentive thoughts and feelings. In this way one might hope, without an external standard, to “discover what is really important to men” so that “the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified” (“Preface”, 448). The poet here acts as a kind of bootstrapping device for the achievement of animation from within ordinary experience that is otherwise dead, unattended to, and insignificant for us. It is for this reason that “the feeling therein developed gives

importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" ("Preface", 448). The proper work of poetry is not simply the depictive presentation of a subject matter but rather the working through of feeling in relation to a subject, so that genuineness of feeling is achieved. The poet here arrives at the aptness and fullness of response that must animate the life of a subject, if the subject is to find anything interesting at all. The poet "considers [man] as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding every where objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment" ("Preface", 455). Here the enjoyment is no simple wash of sensory pleasure; it is rather a lingering in feeling as apt to the object of attention. Even when the scene attended to is horrible, one may have the sense that here, apart from the ordinary rush of hectic and inattentive life in which we are mostly caught up, one is feeling and responding fully and aptly, as an active subject, not a thing.

In this work of the animation of the life of a subject, the use of the self is crucial. Wordsworth notes that the poet's "own feelings are his stay and support; and, if he set them aside in one instance, he may be induced to repeat this act till his mind shall lose all confidence in itself and become utterly debilitated" ("Preface", 461–62). There is nothing to go on in beginning to aim at genuineness of feeling other than feeling as it already stands; nothing to go on to aim at fullness of life as a subject other than that life as it already exists, debilitated as it may be. One must find confidence in one's feelings from within them, even if they are at first cloudy and confused. Wordsworth tells us that he has "at all times endeavoured to look steadily at [his] subject" ("Preface", 450), where this effort at steadiness of looking includes a focus not only on the scene or incident at hand, but also on himself as either debilitated or apt in his own course of feeling. The poet must ask himself: do my feeling and attention wander off into unsteadiness, absent-mindedness, or unresponsive cliché, in relation to either the scene that initiates reflection or the work of reflection on it? Am I, the poet asks, genuinely paying attention to the scene and to the work of reflection, in aptness of both thought and feeling? If, as may sometimes happen, the answer is yes, then the poet will be "a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him" ("Preface", 453).

There is a considerable inherent risk of narcissism or of excessive self-satisfaction in taking upon oneself the role of the poet as a figure of exemplarity in thought and feeling. One might become *too* pleased too quickly in one's aptness of thought and feeling. For Wordsworth, awareness of this risk continually haunts the work of the stabilization of attention and the work of writing. Doubts about whether one is genuinely thinking and feeling *as a subject* are inherent to the activity of seeking exemplarity in thought, feeling, and their expression. But if this risk is overcome and exemplarity is achieved, then the poet may arrive at "truth . . . carried alive into the heart

by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal" ("Preface", 454). No other tribunal of aptness of feeling will serve. Instinct, tradition, fixities of form and craft, and proofs constructed by reason—these are all either unavailable or impotent to sanction the work of the achievement of aptness and genuineness of feeling and its expression.

Without this work—if we shy from it in anxiety, or under the conditions of modern industrial life, or in economic competitiveness, or in simple distractedness of mind, as we all mostly do—subjects do not exist *as subjects*, as those who take *an interest* in their own experiences. They fail to live according to "the grand elementary principle of pleasure [in apt, genuine, and stable feeling], by which [man] knows, and feels, and lives, and moves" ("Preface", 455). As Wordsworth notes, no advances in science will make this work irrelevant. "If the labours of Men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present" ("Preface", 456). The work of the animation of life for us as subjects, the work of finding felt significance in scenes and incidents of common life, will continue to be necessary, no matter how the scenes and incidents of life themselves may change.

In this conception then, "the calling of poetry", as Cavell puts it, "is to give the world back, to bring it back, as to life." (Cavell, 36. Cf. Cavell, 52–53) The perception of the continuing need for this calling can be set out in a rough argument schema as follows:

1. A person lives as a subject in a world of significance if and only if that person lives with attentive wholeheartedness, felt interest, and commitment in relation to objects of common experience.
2. Mostly we do not live with attentive wholeheartedness, felt interest, and commitment in relation to objects of common experience.

Therefore

3. Mostly we do not live as subjects in a world of significance.

One can of course reject the first premise. One might, in particular, wonder what sense can be made of the phrase "lives as a subject". Isn't it enough for that just to live—to be biologically alive—and simply to be a subject, that is, simply, say, to speak a language and to be aware of oneself as speaking it? Why should attentive wholeheartedness, felt interest, and commitment in relation to objects of common experience matter ontologically, as it were?

When, however, one is in the grip of the truth of the second premise, then the first premise seems all but inescapable, or at least Wordsworth in his thoughts about poetry registers a sense that it is for him inescapable.

The issue is less ontological than it is ethical. We fail to exercise, or to exercise fully, defining powers that we possess and that we ought to exercise. Something is wrong with our present life, and that is just what premise 2) says in a specific way. When the thought that something in life is wrong is present for us, coupled with the thought that we can and should do better, should do something to remedy that wrong, then we are very close to accepting premise 1) as the expression of an ethical demand that (according to premise 2) we are failing to meet. The conclusion that we have arrived at a kind of ethical death-in-life is then itself all but inescapable. Mostly we do not live as subjects in a world of significance.

Poetry then seeks to overcome this conclusion by undertaking to reanimate our wholeheartedness, interest, and commitment in our lives and world from within the broken, half-hearted feelings we already have. No acquisition simply of information about the world will serve, for what is sought is significance in feeling, not an addition to a collection of facts. Nor will any life-denying escape from the world, say to a heaven of Platonic forms, avail us in coming to terms with this life. Instead what Cavell more or less terms getting the hang of a posture—perhaps from reflection on feeling as it stands, perhaps also from picking up a precursor's routes of interest and expression—is what is called for.

You never know when someone will learn the posture, as for themselves, that will make sense of a field of movement, it may be writing, or dancing, or passing a ball, or sitting at a keyboard, or free associating. [A] sense of paradox expresses our not understanding how such learning happens. (Cavell, 115–16)

What is needed, then, is what Wordsworth cryptically calls the ability, possessed most typically by rural men, to “communicate with the best objects” (“Preface”, 447). To communicate *with* objects (including persons and events) is not to communicate *about* them to others.⁸ It is rather to arrive at a communion or intimacy with them, or a finding in feeling that one shares with them a life of significance. Only through such communion in meaningfulness is the life of a subject stabilized in the exercise of human powers.

David Wellbery has characterized this arrival at stabilization of the life of a subject as “the specular moment”: “a perfect (and wordless) reciprocity between two selves”⁹ or between a subject and a scene, object, or incident experienced as self-like. Such a wordless reciprocity is required to lift one out of circuits of decayed conventionality, exemplified in uses of language that are thoughtless, inattentive, or unfelt. Despite their saving graces, such specular moments are, Wellbery suggests, both sociohistorically contingent and ultimately uncapturable (Wellbery, 11). The need for and reversion to such moments arises typically or at least with special intensity in modernity, when other sources of stabilization are lacking, and typically or with special intensity for male subjects, caught up in routines of conventionalized

work that they find meaningless and sealed off from an intimacy with nature that is stereotypically coded as feminine. Both women and nature are hence frequently forced to function as props for the male pursuit of the specular moment that is to stabilize anxious male selfhood. Even more troubling is the fact that specular moments themselves are transitory and subject to dispersion as soon as they become objects of explicit discursive awareness. To attend to them and to try to articulate their significance is to destroy them. As Wellbery puts it, “to render the specular moment in language is to submit it to an articulatory dismemberment and temporal deferral that fracture its essential unity” (Wellbery, 55).

As a result, there is no possibility of arriving at a specular moment that is lasting, that possesses explicit, articulated significance, and that is innocent of a self-centred use of its object. But then there is no stabilization of the life of a subject without such moments either. The best, therefore, that one can do in seeking to certify that one is a (more) fully human subject as a locus of apt feeling, attention, and reflective-discursive awareness is to move through or in-and-out of such moments. A narrative of such movements will trace, always, an itinerary of both achievement and loss. The subject is undermined by temporality, discursiveness, and self-centredness in the very moment of arrival at an evanescent stability. Any teachings that may be derived from such a moment will be conjectural and subject to immediate doubt. Yet there is, again, no other route to the perfection and stabilization of felt responsiveness to life out of conditions of empty materiality and ossified conventionality in which distinctively human powers are mostly betrayed.

Wordsworth, I suggest, knew all this. His moments of strongest self-stabilization as a distinctive and exemplary human subject, apt in responsiveness to life and in thus achieving the life of a subject, are at the same time immediately subjected to doubt, and his itinerary of self-constitution fails to reach a fully stable end. One can hear a distinctive, honest, Wordsworthian hesitation even in the moments of most forceful conclusion. In the *Prelude*, Wordsworth announces that he and Coleridge will be

Rich in true happiness if allowed to be
 Faithful alike in forwarding a day
 Of firmer trust, joint labourers in the work
 (Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe)
 Of their deliverance, surely yet to come.
 (*Prelude*, XIV, 439–43, in Stillinger, 366)

“If allowed to be faithful . . . should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe”—it may not happen, the ways of the world as they stand may be too strong. Though the deliverance of humanity is “surely yet to come”, the “surely” hints at an effort here too at self-reassurance: it may not come; Wordsworth did not write “Of their happy deliverance, yet to come”, which would scan

about as well. In the "Preface", Wordsworth tells us that, when he thinks about the ability of his and Coleridge's poetic writing to have any significant effect under the present degraded conditions of life,

I should be oppressed with no dishonourable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible powers of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible; and were there not added to this impression a belief, that the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success. ("Preface", 449)

For all the confidence that it expresses, this passage also says that melancholy may not be dishonorable. The only blocks against it are certain impressions, but where are they to be found, how lasting can they be, and what joint work will they support under present conditions? What if the work of attention and feeling that these poems invite is not in fact taken up by others?

Yet Wordsworth does not embrace melancholy, nor does he simply acquiesce in present conditions. Instead he goes on in the endless and endlessly self-scrutinizing work of pursuing life-enabling specular moments, articulating them (and thus betraying them), and coming to terms with human life in time, with all its movements of both self-stabilization and self-undoing.

David Miall has usefully called attention to the difference between typical loco-descriptive poetry of the picturesque and Wordsworth's writing about his experience of nature. Where loco-descriptive poetry focuses on what is seen, Wordsworth in contrast distinctively describes not so much what he sees as himself in the process of seeing. Miall develops this point by commenting on a fragment from the Alfoxden Notebook.

To gaze

On that green hill and on those scattered trees
And feel a pleasant consciousness of life
In the [impression] of that loveliness

Untill the sweet sensation called the mind
Into itself by image from without
Unvisited: and all her reflex powers
Wrapp'd in a still dream forgetfulness

I lived without the knowledge that I lived
Then by those beauteous forms brought back again
To lose myself again as if my life
Did ebb & flow with a strange mystery.¹⁰

As Miall notes, traditional readings of Wordsworth would focus here only the moment of restoration, on how “the sweet sensation” of the natural scene “called the mind into itself.” More recent New Historicist readings would argue that “the vision of unmediated benefit from Nature that the poem famously provides is, in this view, only a screen on which Wordsworth projects his anxieties.”¹¹ But Miall calls our attention instead to the process, jointly of attention and of composition (of the poem and of the self) that is on display here. Wordsworth knows, and says, that his life “did ebb & flow with a strange mystery”. Moments of (recuperative) self-loss are crossed with moments of (discursive) self-awareness; the movement between these moments is all.

Perhaps Stanley Cavell had something like this fact about Wordsworth (and Coleridge and Emerson and Thoreau) in mind when he remarked that

Romantics are brave in noting the possibility . . . of what you might call death-in-life. My favorite romantics are the ones (I think the bravest ones) who do not attempt to escape these conditions by taking revenge on existence. But this means willing to continue to be born, to be natal, hence mortal. (Cavell, 143)

“To continue to be born” means here to eschew fundamentalisms involving the submission of the self to something apart from earthly life (Platonic forms or sacred texts, as may be) but also to eschew mere acquiescence and accommodation to a life of conventionalized getting and spending. Instead, movement both into and out of (Apollinian) moments of articulation and (Dionysian) moments of recuperative self-undoing is what is proper to the life of subject.

III

No matter what their theoretical desirability as both conditions of and contributions to life, whether such movements are possible—whether romantic bravery is possible—and what sort of closure or conclusiveness (without denying temporality) such movements might achieve are no small questions. That such movements are possible, and that measures of human closure and composure are available, within time and without denying life, are, I suggest, the central showings of “Tintern Abbey”. Rather than either a document that (only, merely) traces the saving influence of nature or a document that (only, merely) shows a consciousness always in anxiety about its reception and unable to compose itself, “Tintern Abbey” shows a consciousness achieving a measure of composure in time, without intellectual certainties. It points to and exemplifies a path between dogmatism and nomadism, intellectual and moral alike. It can help us to hear “Tintern Abbey”’s showings if we divide its progress into eight rough stages of subject matter (thought) and attitude.

(i) "Five years have past; five summers, with the length / Of five long winters!" (lines 1–2) [lines 1–22]. With these opening lines, the question of the meaning of life in time is raised. The apposition of the more subjective "five summers, with the length of five long winters!" (with subjectivity registered in both the felt succession of the seasons and in the sense that the winters have been long) to the more objective "five years" asks, already, what has the passing of these years meant in the life of a subject, in my life? The "and again I hear" that immediately follows introduces explicitly the I who is the subject of these reflections, an I that is wondering what its experience has meant. It has been suggested that the underlying subject and cause of this experience of questioning the meaning of some times of one's life are Wordsworth's guilt and anxiety over his evasion of the English military draft and over his affair with Annette Vallon.¹² There may be some truth in these suggestions. The complex act of writing "Tintern Abbey" may well have occasioning circumstances that are rooted in the poet's past and that lie well outside the present scene alone. But whatever the occasioning circumstances may be, there is for us a question about whether the poem does any productive work in questioning the meaning of life in time. Any life will contain enough missteps and occasions for guilt and regret to prompt the raising of this question at some point. When one is in the grip of the thought that we are mostly living in half-heartedness and so failing to live as subjects the question will be both natural and forward-looking. What might we, or I, do in order to live more fully as a subject? Given the naturalness of this question at some point in any human life, it may repay our efforts if we attend to the work of the poem in its attempts to come to terms with it, without reversion to fundamentalism and without escapism. Perhaps these attempts are not even wholly successful. But we shall scarcely be able to see that before we engage with the work that the poem undertakes.

It has also been suggested that the move into the register of subjectivity, into the questioning of the meaning of a single subject's experience, more generally enacts a flight from the political.¹³ This suggestion too may well bear some truth. But whether it does depends in large measure on what sort of politics we have in mind. Here we should not shrink from engaging with "Tintern Abbey"'s effort to find or found its own politics, that is, its own vision of a fuller, more human life in practice and in time. That vision does not have the shape of urging us towards either electoral politics or class struggle. But it is surely in part a vision of a better, more human polis. The topic, after all, is what it would be to lead the life of a subject, under present conditions and in time.

To say "and again I hear these waters" after "five summers, with the length / Of five long winters" is to raise the question of repetition. Are we fated to it? And what does it mean that one finds oneself again stopped or halted in a place, in a moment of reflection? That death is all but explicitly on the poet's mind as he raises the question of the significance of life is suggested in the thought that "The day is come when I again repose / Here,

under this dark sycamore" (9–10). "Repose" is stronger, more suggestive of permanence, than "recline", and "dark" suggests that one is in an enduring shade. To repose under this dark sycamore is almost to be under the ground. Though the poet goes on immediately to note that he views the present scene (and so is not dead, or not yet), nonetheless the thought that the day of a final repose will come is somewhere active in his consciousness of his place in relation to the scene before him. The thought of death is further echoed in the line "The Hermit sits alone" that, set apart by a line break, concludes this subject. With this Hermit, already a creature of the poet's imagination, not of perception alone, and with his isolation—with his lack of audience and companions, and so perhaps his insignificance—the poet may be taken to feel more than a little identification. With such apartness, what life? What doth life in time avail?

Consciousness of temporality is then further registered, both semantically and in internal citation, in the two instances of "Once again" (4, 14) that introduce the sentences that surround the thought about repose. What has happened in the five years before these once agains, and what, if anything, does what has happened mean? What has filled and what should fill the passing of time? In raising this question, the poet does not turn for either knowledge or salvation to any exterior entities. Instead, as Miall cannily argues, he observes himself observing, and he invites us into his own jointly perceptive and apperceptive processes of consciousness of the present scene. In particular, in commenting on the phrase "hedgerows, hardly hedgerows" (15), Miall notes that

in the order of his phrases he recreates the *process* of observation: conventional, or schematic expectation would first look for hedgerows and find them; yet, a second glance—"hardly hedgerows"—would show the hedges in fact to be running wild. These lines thus invite the reader to replicate Wordsworth's own process of observation, a feature of several other elements in the opening paragraph. An object ("plots of cottage ground"; "pastoral farms") is first named, as an objective component of the scene, or what is to be expected in such a location (perhaps what was remembered from 1793); but it is then qualified in ways that suggest a second more careful focus on the actual details before him. (Miall, 3)

The focus then is on how apperceptive awareness—awareness of oneself as observing and thinking in relation to this scene—may develop itself and on what assurances of possibilities of meaningfulness it may discover. This is, as Miall further notes, in strong contrast to typical loco-descriptive poetry that takes as its central subject the scene itself, rather than the poet's awareness of his processes of awareness of the scene.

(ii) "such, perhaps, / As have no slight or trivial influence . . ." (31–32) [22–49]. Lines 22–49 have seemed to many readers to be one of two grand metaphysical centres of the poem. (The other is lines 85–111.) Within these

lines the poet all but asserts that he has seen “into the life of things” (49) in such a way that “the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world, / Is lightened” (39–41). Yet it is crucial that the poet does not in fact simply assert these claims. The passage begins with the claim that he has in the past at times remembered these forms, first experienced five years ago. His characterization of the feelings he has had as a result of these rememberings is strongly qualified. Some of them may be “unremembered” (31)—an acknowledgement that the report of feelings had in the past may be as much present construction (perhaps driven by need and anxiety) as recovery of an actual past. Such feelings “perhaps” have “no slight or trivial influence” on our lives; but then perhaps their influence is only slight and trivial. To what “little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love” (34–35) have they led, and in what way? The poet arrives at no definite account in answer to this question, and his formulation concedes its relevance—to him and to us. How can and should a life be constructed on the basis of feelings that may be unremembered and perhaps of slight influence? While there is a move *towards* the redemption of life in time in the mention of these feelings and their influences, that move is considerably less than definite and conclusive. The gift of insight “into the life of things” provided by these feelings is also conjectural. “Nor less, I trust, / To them I may have owed another gift, / Of aspect more sublime;” (35–37)—“trust” not “say”, “may” not “thus”. Has this gift actually come, and if so, through what processes? With such gifts of such a provenance, what salvation? The very movement towards saving certainties remains a lingering in uncertainties. Apperceptive awareness of oneself as thinking and feeling (rather than full immersion in sense-experience without reflection) includes, always, the thought that one is in part constructing the experience, not simply taking in any salvific given. And with awareness of constructedness comes present doubt. Or at any rate all this—perception plus conjecture plus intimately present doubt, in sharp contrast to simple intake and assertion—lies within the process of this poetic subject’s attendings.

(iii) “If this / Be but a vain belief . . .” (49–50) [49–65]. Given the nature of the doubts that are expressed in the second section, “vain” has here the force of both “empty” and “ego-centred”: perhaps the beliefs about the gifts presented by past feeling are empty *because* merely constructed in fantasy by a needy subject. “The fretful stir / Unprofitable, and the fever of the world, / Have hung upon the beatings of my heart” (52–54). The feelings that result may be compensatory but vain reactions to this stir and fever; they may be empty, because untrustworthy to others, and so to oneself, in the face of the ways of the world. That there is a risk of escapism in turning to them is part of the poet’s own movement of thought. Human powers are not exercised amidst the stir unprofitable of the world—mostly we do not lead the lives of subjects in a world of significance—and if not there, then where might they be? The twice pronounced “How oft(en)” (50, 57) “have I turned to thee, / O sylvan Wye” (55–56) is

both an exclamation of gratitude to the Wye for being restoratively there to turn to *and* a genuine question: How often have I forgotten the Wye? How often have I been myself caught up in the ways of the world? There is, after all, not much chance of a life with people apart from these ways. A life wholly apart would itself be the life of a Hermit, itself too a life of death, without reciprocity, intimacy, or recognition. If "the picture of the mind revives again" (61) "with pleasing thoughts / That in this moment there is life and food / For future years" (63–65), there remains nonetheless a question about how much this food will be genuinely present and available. It has not, not always, been present in the past, as the world has had its ways, and the deliverances of feeling may, again, be vain. So "here I stand" (62). Is my life justified: before myself, before others, or before God? What is the meaning of life in time? What exercises of what human powers might lend significance to a life in time? There is survival, to be sure: "here I stand" again, after "five years have passed", so that whatever death-in-life I have succumbed to, that succumbing has not been complete. There remain in me, at least latently, human powers of feeling and reflection that might issue in expressive action, and those powers are to some extent activated by the present scene: hence the thought that life and food for future years are to be found in them. Animation of and within the life of a subject is felt to be possible. But whither doth it point? A specular moment of recovery, submitted to apperceptive reflection and to expression in language, is immediately undone by these submissions. And they are unavoidable. Wordsworth at his strongest characteristically mixes a sense of survival and restoration with doubt and uncertainty, and this standing here with pleasing thoughts that may yet be vain and evanescent ("how oft?") shows Wordsworth at his strongest.

(iv) "And so I dare to hope . . ." (65) [65–85]. Given his unresolved uncertainties, the poet's "dare to hope" is more apt than "claim to know". Daring and hope indicate willed resolution, backed by nothing more than the fact of survival as a subject who does *not* know the best exercises of his human powers but has survived anyway. The object of the infinitive "hope" is not specified, unless we read the "so" as "in this manner" or "thusly" (rather than "therefore"), so that it refers back to the "there is life and food / For future years" of lines 64–65. "To dare to hope" is again far from confident assertion of a truth. The poet dares to hope, uncertainly, that he stands, in a moment and with pleasing thoughts, but these deliverances of apperception are themselves less than apodictic. In this resolution to hope there may be some survival of a subject, but a subject whose substantial nature remains unknown to him as any kind of stable thing. Nor does he know what is commanded of him by his nature as a subject, what a fit life for a human subject would be. At best, the stance is that of Book II of *The Prelude*: "I was left alone / Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why. / The props of my affections were removed, / And yet the building stood, as if sustained / By its own spirit!" (*Prelude*, II, 277–81; 213). Neither parent

nor nature nor the visible world is present to provide props or reassuring grounds for affections. Hence the affections—the commitments and passions that motivate action—may be called into question. Their source and their value remain mysterious. And the subject stands only “as if sustained / By its own spirit!” Given the predominant effort to find or found a better standing for the subject, one may well wonder how much sustenance, how much food for future years, is really to be found in this survival.

Even the survival itself is immediately called into question. In the very moment of standing and daring to hope, the poet acknowledges that he is “changed, no doubt, from what I was” (66). There is no persistent substantial something to which the willed survival of the subject is referred. The subject has emerged within time through a fall or procession into discursive consciousness and apperceptive awareness. Somehow he knows not how he has come to be aware of himself as thinking, feeling, and judging, with less naturalness and automatism than attach to the life of a prereflective subject. He is no longer “like a roe / [Who] bounded o’er the mountains, by the sides / Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams / Wherever nature led” (67–70).

With the fallout of naturalness in affection and activity comes a pressing need for reassurance or grounding. The mysterious joint onsets of discursive consciousness and apperceptive awareness bring a sense of distance from activity and of consequent anxiety. Before these onsets, one does not even seek “the thing [one] loves” (72), for there is only immediate activity without reflection and without seeking. After these onsets, one lives with desires (*désir, Begierde*), where the object of desire is explicitly conceptualized by and present to reflection, in contrast with the earlier, lost, more animal life of appetite or need (*besoin, Bedürfnis*). (Compare the transition in Book II of the *Republic* from the first pastoral, natural, innocent but inhuman city of pigs to the second human city of luxuries and feverishness and competition.) Self-consciousness is desire in general.¹⁴ Before its emergence the poet in his movements through the natural world “had no need of a remoter charm, / By thought supplied, nor any interest / Unborrowed from the eye” (81–83). But “that time is past” (83); once somehow fallen into discursive consciousness, apperceptive awareness, and desire, there is no possibility of any return to any more innocent state. The earlier condition of prereflective awareness that is prior to the emergence of self-consciousness and desire cannot even be described: “I cannot paint / What then I was” (75–76). The origins of discursive thought cannot be established: “Hard task, vain hope, to analyse the mind, / If each most obvious and particular thought, / Not in a mystical and idle sense, / But in the words of Reason deeply weighed, / Hath no beginning” (*Prelude*, II, 228–32; 212). Yet the poet also immediately undertakes to say something about what it was like to live in appetite alone, immersed in naturalness and without any need for or access to the remoter charms supplied by thought. The only relevance of this admitted fiction, perhaps like the fiction in political theory of a state of nature, must be to provide some sense of a dim possibility of wholeness and

healthy activity for a subject who remains caught up in partiality and the feverish ways of the world. As David Bromwich has noted, the odd description of the innocent, animal activities of boyhood as those of one who is “more like a man / Flying from something that he dreads, than one / Who sought the thing he loved” (69–71) makes most sense if it is taken to refer to Wordsworth’s life from 1793 (five years past) until the present moment in 1798 (Bromwich, 8). Whatever occasioning circumstances we may suppose to lie behind these dreads and flights, it remains the case that this description suggests a life of a self-conscious being (of a man rather than boy) that is a life of dreads and flights, and not at all a life of assurance in activity or of attentive wholeheartedness, felt interest, and commitment in relation to the objects of common experience. In this circumstance, without a recovery of an indecipherable origin and without guiding assurances drawn from knowledge of the ultimate substance of the world and life, to dare to hope—across changes and in the wake of dreads and flights—must be at best an *act* of resolution that remains haunted by internal uncertainties and instabilities.

(v) “for such loss, I would believe . . .” (87) [85–111]. In this section of second resolution or standing, the subject again makes an effort to gather himself, to resolve his uncertainties about life through the use of his own powers, without appealing to exterior things. This effort is again simultaneously successful *en mesure* and haunted by uncertainties. “I would believe” registers both: “I will believe (so far as I can)” and “I would like to believe (but cannot, not quite wholly).” In either case, this formulation is substantially weaker, less assertational, than “I do believe.” Verbs of agency that would express this belief are implied, but not stated. The poet will not faint, mourn, or murmur, that is, will not give way to these at least partly passive and induced responses to life. He will or would in contrast more actively do something, but exactly what he would do is not specified. He has learned to adopt an attitude—“to look on nature” in a certain way—that should support a certain course of wholehearted interest, commitment, and activity. But what that course is remains unspecified, and learning to look on nature is itself not stabilized or grounded in learning theoretically *that* nature is (really, ultimately) thus-and-so. The adoption of an attitude is not grounded in theoretical knowledge, nor can it be. This adoption must remain in the register of resolution, in the register of what one “would believe”.

The adoption of this attitude is supported, we are told, by the fact that “I have felt / A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts” (93–95). There is, however, no explanation of either the source of this feeling in ultimate things or its aptness to them. It is responsive to “something far more deeply infused / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, / And the round ocean, and the living air, / And the blue sky, and in the mind of man” (96–99). But this something is not named as an object of theoretical knowledge. At best it can be called an impelling “motion and a spirit”

(100). Whatever joy felt responsiveness to this motion and spirit brings, it also brings disturbance, in the thought that one has not, not yet, lived fully in resonance with this spirit and its motions; perhaps one cannot so live. Metaphysical confidence is implied, but only implied, not stated, and disturbance yielding to doubt is not banished.

The resolution that concludes this section is now explicitly in the mode of will, not knowledge. "Therefore am I still" (102) expresses a determined effort at self-stabilization, at lingering as a whole subject within the specular moment of meaningfulness. For at least this moment of feeling, the subject is stabilized enough in its responsive resoluteness to be a subject in resonance with a significant order and so capable of wholehearted interest, commitment, and activity. But it cannot last. The announcement that the subject is "well pleased to recognize / In nature and the language of the sense, / The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being" (107-11) is honest to the moment of feeling and of self-resolution. But this announcement undoes itself in the very moment of its articulation. To say that one is "well pleased" is to hint that there is at least a danger that one is pleasing oneself by constructing this experience and its felt significance, where this construction may be driven by the needs of the subject rather than by how things are. Hence this construction may be both ego-centred and empty. Wordsworth's special courage in the explorations of his movements of consciousness is to register this possibility and all the uncertainty that it entails, rather than to deny it in reversion to dogma.

(vi) "Nor perchance / If I were not thus taught" (111-12) [111-34]. And so the poet accepts the possibility of error. It may be that he has not been thus taught by nature, that his depth of feeling and his resolution to be a coherent, expressive, responsive subject may be vain constructions. The poet's response to this possibility again takes the form of a resolution crossed with an imperative. "Nor . . . should I the more / Suffer my genial spirits to decay" (111-13) were this the case. I will not suffer this, and it is best for me not to suffer this. Things would not go well (standing melancholy would be my lot) were I to do so. So I will not to do so. I would not that it be so.

That Dorothy ("thou my dearest Friend" [115]) is present with him in this spot to confirm his feeling and to stabilize his resolution suggests to the poet some help with his plight. I should not suffer my genial spirits to decay because thou art with me. But exactly how does her presence help? It does not cancel the registers of resolution and imperative, does not transform these registers into confident assertion. Quite the contrary, it moves the poet's consciousness explicitly into the mode of prayer. "Oh! Yet a little while / May I behold in thee what I was once, / My dear, dear Sister! And this prayer I make . . ." (119-21). "May I behold" not "shall I behold"; let it be so d.v., not I know that it is so. Nor is contact with an originary naturalness, putatively exemplified by Dorothy, so easily established. It is not

clear that the poet in fact beholds that naturalness now: "may I behold", not "do I behold" "in thee what I was once". As John Barrell has argued, Wordsworth's desperate effort to achieve self-composure without turning to anything external to his experience

requires Dorothy to perform a double function in the ratification of his achievement of a transcendent subjectivity. First, he needs to believe that Dorothy will grow up and sober up, for by doing so she will naturalise and legitimate his own loss of immediate pleasure in nature. The transition she makes, from the language of the sense to that of intellect, will be an observable process, one which will recapitulate and historicise the transition Wordsworth has already made. But in the second place, the language of the sense, as presently employed by Dorothy, stands as a present and audible guarantee of the meanings of his own language of the intellect; it assures him of the secure foundation of his language in the language of the sense.¹⁵

Barrell goes on to argue, quite cogently, that the double function assigned to Dorothy is incoherent. She cannot both grow up into discursive consciousness and apperceptive awareness and remain immersed in naturalness.

Dorothy can perform these two functions [repetition of growth into self-consciousness plus an anchoring persistence in naturalness], only if her potential for intellectual growth is acknowledged, but only if, also, that potential is never actualized. (Barrell, *ibid.*)

It makes no sense, however, to assign her a potential that is both actualized and never actualized.

In all this Barrell is quite correct. But the problem goes even deeper than the use of Dorothy, and the problem is, moreover, registered in the poem itself. The problem is that no transition from naturalness (appetite) to discursive subjectivity (desire) can be both historically accomplished *and* naturalized, in such a way that the transition takes place (there is a fall into discursivity and into exteriority to nature) while a continuing saving resonance to pure naturalness is maintained. This is no more possible for William than it is for Dorothy. This fact accounts for the persistence until the end of the poem of the now explicit mode of prayer. What may happen, *d.v.*, and what would save one as a subject by bringing one continuously into a life of full meaningfulness, is something that can never be known to happen, something that cannot even be coherently imagined by us to happen. "This prayer I make" (121), that Dorothy fulfill this incoherent requirement, and that the poet himself has blended transcendent natural meaningfulness with finite subjectivity, must remain a prayer, not an announcement of an accomplishment. When the poet makes this prayer "Knowing that Nature never did betray / The heart that loves her"

(122–23), the syntax undermines the claim to knowledge. “Never did” suggests an event of doubt, a fall into discursivity, apperceptive awareness, and exteriority to nature, a fall out of mere naturalness.¹⁶

It is no accident then that the knowledge that is claimed modulates very quickly into the claim that nature “can so inform / The mind that is within us” (125–26) that our cheerful faith in life is undisturbed. That this can or might be so is no guarantee that it will be so. Just what potentiality for informing our lives so as to produce cheerfulness is in fact actualized? When and how does this actualization of this potentiality take place? Exactly by what, when, and how might “all / The dreary intercourse of daily life” (130–31) be transformed? These questions have no answers, at least not within this poet’s movements of consciousness. Hence “Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold / Is full of blessings” (133–34) remains a faith, perhaps all too vainly willed, rather than an article of knowledge.

(vii) “Therefore let . . . / Thy memory be as a dwelling place” (134, 141) [134–46]. The “therefore let . . .” of line 134 explicitly begins the prayer that was announced in line 121 (“this prayer I make”). It asks for Dorothy both now to persist in her naturalness or natural connection to nature and “in after years” (137) for her memory to be “as a dwelling-place / For all sweet sounds and harmonies” (141–42). The prayer is that she should at least preserve in her maturer consciousness a sense of past connection to nature and its beneficent influences. Yet this prayer for Dorothy quickly modulates for the poet into thoughts about himself. In a question to himself that is not marked as a question, but rather as a declarative interjection within his own consciousness, Wordsworth asks “with what healing thoughts / Of tender joy wilt thou then remember me, / And these my exhortations” (144–46). The anxieties and doubts that haunt him are made explicit in this interrogative movement of his own consciousness. Will Dorothy, or anyone else for that matter, remember him, and if so, how (“with what healing thoughts”) and why? What have his life in time and his just now occurring course of experience and reflection meant? Has he been a subject who has lived, fully and memorably, or not? No doctrine is available to ground any certainty of the achievement of the life of a subject. Only exhortations are possible; no declarations and no proofs can either ground the significance of a life or control the responses of any audience, even an audience as intimately present as Dorothy is in the scene. Prayer, not declaration, is the appropriate mode of acknowledgement of the ungroundedness of any claims to fullness of value on behalf of a human life in time.

(viii) “Nor, perchance . . . wilt thou then forget” (146, 149) [146–59]. Within the concluding prayer, the topic of death, and so of the significance of a life that is bounded by death, is raised explicitly. “Nor, perchance—/ If I should be where I no more can hear thy voice” (146–48) implies, given Dorothy’s role as instance of a saving audience in general, “if I should be where no saving voice, no answering glance, neither Dorothy’s nor anyone else’s, is to be found”. Within the awareness of death and the finite

subjectivity that is bounded by it, one can declare very little, can say only “nor perchance wilt thou then forget”, not “you will not forget.” And yet a standing together, here and now, is possible, and that this standing together may be remembered is, at least here and now, enough to afford the poet some sense of stability and continuing selfhood. It is possible that the feeling or attitude borne by a subject so standing in this spot, the feeling or attitude of “deeper zeal” (154), may be appropriate to the life of a subject as such in this spot, and so it too may stand in another’s memory. The poet confesses feelings (“deeper zeal” [154], “to me . . . dear” [158–59]) and claims aptness and exemplarity both for them and for his confession of them. This claim and confession cannot be grounded in any argument. Perhaps either the feeling or the confession of feeling has been vainly constructed. Yet they may stand. Time will tell.

IV

“Each individual that comes into the world is a new beginning; the universe itself is, as it were, taking a fresh start in him and trying to do something, even if on a small scale, that it has never done before.”¹⁷ If John Dewey is right about this, then there is in the particularity of each person also a standing exteriority to the pure manifestation of the essence of human subjectivity in time and nature. Geoffrey Hartman has characterized Wordsworth as a poet as “a ‘limitour,’ licensed to haunt only the borders of the country from which imagination comes and to which it seeks to return”.¹⁸ The discursive subjectivity that is constructed through the work of the imagination in arriving at a point of view, plus the emergence of apperceptive awareness and of awareness of variously attentive others, stands apart from the full, meaningful naturalness of subjectivity that it would wish to achieve by establishing an absolute, value- and stance-affording connection to nature as such. “The terror of discontinuity or separation enters . . . as soon as the imagination truly enters” (Hartman, 190). As a result, Wordsworth’s effort to find in nature a fully saving *genius loci* or natural source of transcendent meaningfulness founders. He can only wander from one moment to another of what is felt, almost, to be an accession to meaningfulness but an accession that remains internally fragmented. Wordsworth’s “quest to localize his Idea of [A Saving] Nature in Nature fails” (Hartman, 104). And so the pursuit of such moments goes on. Apart from such moments, there is the conventionalized, less meaningful life of ordinary subjectivity, caught up in circuits of antagonism (“evil tongues, / Rash judgments, [and] the sneers of selfish men, / [And] greetings where no kindness is” [ll. 128–30]), a life that motivates, always, a wish for a fuller, more meaningful life of an exemplary, stabilized subject as such. The voice that arises out of the moments of almost accession to meaningfulness, almost achievement of exemplarity, “is the voice of a man who has been separated

from the hope he affirms" (Hartman, 104). Hartman has characterized the progress of *The Prelude* as "no argument, but a vacillation between doubt and faith" (Hartman, 218), and this halted progress is evident, too, in the waverings of prayerful hope and recurrent uncertainty in "Tintern Abbey". Wordsworth's "curious and never fully clarified restlessness" is, Hartman suggests, "the ultimate confession of his poetry" (Hartman, 38). Though they afford no doctrine to guide us, perhaps such vacillations and confessions show us something of the lives of human subjects as such.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), §1, 33; hereafter cited in the text as *Tragedy*.
2. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), 1050.
3. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 51b1, 12.
4. For a defense of this reading of Aristotle's account of the nature of the *hamartia* or "tragic flaw" as an excess of virtue that is ill suited to the circumstances of action, see Richard Eldridge, "How Can Tragedy Matter for Us?" in Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 146–64.
5. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* [1850], in Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), Book XIV, ll. 161–62, 360. References to Wordsworth's works are to this edition and are cited in the text, giving (where appropriate) section and line numbers and the page number in this edition, except for references to "Tintern Abbey", which give line numbers only.
6. On Wordsworth's conjecturalism, see Eldridge, "Internal Transcendentalism: Wordsworth and 'A New Condition of Philosophy'", in Eldridge, 102–23.
7. Stanley Cavell, "The Philosopher in American Life", in Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988), 3–26 (7).
8. Cavell notes the interest of the formulation "communicate with" and its difference from "communicate about". See Cavell, 71–72.
9. David E. Wellbery, *The Specular Moment: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), 39.
10. Wordsworth, Alfoxden Notebook, 21', in *The Ruined Cottage and the Pedlar*, ed. James Butler (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1979), 125.
11. David S. Miall, "Locating Wordsworth: 'Tintern Abbey' and the Community with Nature", *Romanticism on the Net* 20 (November 2000), <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2000/v/n20/005949ar.html>, 1.
12. David Bromwich, "The French Revolution and 'Tintern Abbey'", *Raritan* 10, 3 (winter 1991), 1–23.
13. This suggestion is made most notably by Marjorie Levinson in "Insight and Oversight: Reading 'Tintern Abbey'", in Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 14–57, especially 37: "the primary poetic action [of 'Tintern Abbey'] is the suppression of the social" in favor of a "fiercely private vision". See also Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983), 85–88.

14. For further discussion of this famous sentence from Chapter 4 of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), ¶167, 105, see Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997, 27–32.
15. John Barrell, *Poetry, Language and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988), 162.
16. I seem to recall having learned this interpretation of “never did” from reading Geoffrey Hartman, but I cannot now locate the reference.
17. John Dewey, “Construction and Criticism”, in *Later Works*, vol. 5, 1929–30, (Carbondale, IN: The Centre for Dewey Studies, 1988), 125–46. I thank Nikolis Kompridis for directing my attention to this remark.
18. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787–1814*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale UP, 1971), xv.