



The Reading of Wordsworth in the Twentieth Century

Jeffrey Side

Argotist Ebooks

Cover image by Jukka-Pekka Kervinen

Copyright © Jeffrey Side 2019
All rights reserved
Argotist Ebooks

This book is drawn from material in my PhD thesis 'Wordsworth's Empiricist Poetic and its Influence in the Twentieth Century'.

Preface

It is becoming increasingly recognised that one of the most dominant aspects of Wordsworth's influence is that which derives from the philosophical empiricism upon which part of his poetic aesthetic was based. Wordsworth used this empiricism mainly as a rationale to champion a more descriptive and discursive poetry than arguably had been formerly the case. It can be demonstrated that Wordsworth's poetry relies too consistently upon a descriptive realist aesthetic derived from empiricist beliefs about subject/object relationships. As a result of this, it can be observed that Wordsworth's poetic theory and practice are limiting both as a rationale for the creative impulse and as a critical methodology. This book traces the development of a "Wordsworthian empiricism" that had become dominant by the end of the twentieth century. It will illustrate how the reading and criticism of Wordsworth in the twentieth century (even that which viewed him principally in transcendentalist terms) tended to foreground his empiricism resulting in its wide acceptance by many influential critics as being of value to poetic composition.

The Reading of Wordsworth in the Twentieth Century

The reading of Wordsworth in the twentieth century has to be understood in terms of the reaction to Romanticism in that century. While there is no consistent response to either, the debate to some extent echoes the uncertainty to be found within the Romantic period between empiricism and transcendentalism. In this book, I would like to take a thematic rather than a strictly chronological overview of the various readings of Wordsworth in the twentieth century in order to trace the development of a “Wordsworthian empiricism” that had become dominant by the end of that century. This thematic approach will make it necessary to reduce the emphasis normally placed on the literary and historical account of the development of these ideas. I will illustrate how criticism of Wordsworth in the twentieth century (even that which viewed him principally in transcendentalist terms) tended to foreground his empiricism resulting (intentionally or otherwise) in it being widely regarded as the best model for poetic composition. The reading of Wordsworth in the twentieth century is best understood in terms of the wider critical reaction to Romanticism. This reaction has some bearing upon what John Casey sees as ‘certain presuppositions about “facts” and “emotions” which are very deeply ingrained in the empiricist tradition and which have generally dominated critical theory since Wordsworth’.¹

Both the transcendentalist and empiricist strains in Wordsworth, at one time or another, have been foregrounded. Wordsworth’s poetical *modus operandi* was often to observe closely the objects of the natural world, reflect upon the thoughts, emotions and memories that these objects evoked in him, and then to describe both the objects and the resultant effects upon him. Where this *modus operandi* was successful, the resultant verse can be seen to be heavily descriptive—I will refer to this aspect as the empiricist strain. Where it was not successful, given the natural ambiguities inherent in language, the poetry evinces ambiguities and vagueness—I will refer to this as the transcendentalist strain. In this book, I will show how it is Wordsworth’s empiricist strain that was valued by twentieth-century critics over the transcendentalist strain and how this critical favour consequently shaped twentieth-century poetry to the extent that we can say it is “Wordsworthian”. At this point I think it is important to acknowledge the view held in some quarters that Wordsworth at all times wrote from a transcendentalist perspective. This view states that: descriptions of natural objects in Wordsworth are always examples of the workings of the mind that apprehends and responds to them, rather than accurate and lucid descriptions independent of such a mind. Regardless of whether this is true or not, my purpose in this book is not to engage in a debate regarding Wordsworth’s poetic motivations but merely to demonstrate the ways in which twentieth century critics accentuated the empiricist strain that is evident in Wordsworth’s poetry. Incidentally, there is an argument to be made that Wordsworth wrote empirically partly because of his transcendentalism, rather than despite it. Because this point is quite important, I think it appropriate to look at it in some detail before commencing further.

M. A. Abrams sees Wordsworth in transcendentalist terms. Nevertheless, his argument that there was a breach between classicism and romanticism that allowed for a more personal poetic utterance does not preclude the importance of the empiricist strain. In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, he argues that before the Romantics poetry was not an end in itself but had some didactic purpose, one of the foremost being to entertain the reader through the imitation of nature.² After this,

the stress was shifted more and more to the poet’s natural genius, creative imagination, and emotional spontaneity, [...]. As a result the audience gradually receded into the background, giving place to the poet himself, and his own mental powers and emotional needs, as the predominant cause and even the end and test of art.³

This predominance of the poet’s concerns Abrams calls the “expressive theory” which he defines as:

The internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.⁴

This had important implications for poetic language:

Of the elements constituting a poem, the element of diction, especially figures of speech, becomes primary; and the burning question is, whether these are the natural utterance of emotion and imagination or the deliberate aping of poetic conventions. The first test any poem must pass is no longer, 'Is it true to nature?' or 'Is it appropriate to the requirements either of the best judges or the generality of mankind?' but a criterion looking in a different direction; namely, 'Is it sincere? Is it genuine? Does it match the intention, the feeling, and the actual state of mind of the poet while composing?'⁵

For the poet's feelings to be expressed adequately poetic language had to become more "true to life", more concordant with the facts of emotional experience. Poetic language that formerly relied upon convention for its affects was deemed too generalised and unspecific for this new task.

The "expressive theory" requires poetic language to function as mimesis of the poet's thinking processes rather than mimesis of nature. This new emphasis upon the poet enables the poetic work to give 'the reader insights into the mind and heart of the poet himself.'⁶ The value of a poem, therefore, is contingent upon the sincerity of the poet's utterances and less upon the poem's effect upon the audience:

There is, in fact, something singularly fatal to the audience in the romantic point of view. Or, in terms of historical causes, it might be conjectured that the disappearance of a homogenous and discriminating reading public fostered a criticism which on principle diminished the importance of the audience as a determinant of poetry and poetic value.⁷

To illustrate this poet-centred conceptualisation of poetry Abrams cites Coleridge from his 1818 lecture 'On Poesy or Art':

[Art is] the mediatrix between, and reconciler of, nature and man. It is, therefore, the power of humanising nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into everything which is the object of his contemplation.⁸

However, it should not be assumed here that the presentation of an "actual state of mind" is incompatible with the empiricist strain in Romantic writing.

With particular regard to Wordsworth, Wordsworth's statement that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings is viewed by Abrams as indicating that the locus of poetic inspiration is within, rather than without the poet. The result of this is that,

the focus of attention is upon the relation of the elements of the work to his [the poet's] state of mind, and the suggestion, underlined by the word 'spontaneous', is that the dynamics of the overflow are inherent in the poet and, perhaps, not within his deliberate control.⁹

Here Abrams has "mystified" the poetic process as recounted by Wordsworth. However, there are serious

doubts as to the reliability of Wordsworth's explanations regarding his poetic *modus operandi*. On some occasions he knowingly appropriated phrases from his sister's journals and inserted them into his poetry. Nicholas Roe in *The Politics of Nature*, particularly with respect to 'Tintern Abbey', acknowledges this tendency:

Some details of the scene at the beginning of Wordsworth's poem are also to be found in Dorothy Wordsworth's beautiful description of the view from the Quantock Hills above Alfoxden House, 24 February 1798.¹⁰

Adding:

The verbal similarities between Wordsworth's poem and this passage [Roe quotes part of the entry for 24 February] from Dorothy's Journal strongly suggest that in 'Tintern Abbey' (as of course in many other poems) Wordsworth's imagination responded to Dorothy's prose rather than to his own immediate observation.¹¹

In addition, Geoffrey Hartman observes:

When Wordsworth said of Dorothy, 'She gave me eyes, she gave me ears', it was no vain compliment. In her *Journals* we read, for example, of their meeting the poor old man who became the Leechgatherer of 'Resolution and Independence' or that description of the daffodils which Wordsworth transformed into 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'.¹²

However, unlike Coleridge (who famously used Dorothy's description of the moon and clouds from her journal entries for the 25th and 31st of January 1798 to inspire his treatment of the moon in Part I of 'Christabel') Wordsworth does not transform his sister's journal descriptions into poetry—he merely interpolates them into his poems, almost to the letter. It should be noted that Dorothy made no claims to poetic inspiration when she composed these phrases; she merely recorded what she had seen on country rambles into her journals. As far as it is possible to discern, these descriptions had no other inspiration than the objects that they describe. Dorothy certainly did not experience powerful feelings, spontaneous or otherwise, at the time of composition; therefore it is unlikely that these phrases are imbued with anything transcendental. In light of this fact, it is odd that these descriptive phrases should have been so readily appropriated by Wordsworth given his supposed criteria for poetry as being the consequence of a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.

Abrams cites the following statement by Wordsworth and argues that it is not, despite appearances, a confirmation for the empiricist view of Wordsworth: 'I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject'.¹³ Of this he writes:

This statement is often taken to be no more than a recommendation for objective accuracy and particularity. Wordsworth's 'subject', however, is not merely the particularised object of the sense, any more than it is in the neo-classic ideal.¹⁴

In addition, he quotes Wordsworth's preface to *Poems* (1815) to further the case:

Throughout, objects ... derive their influence not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or

affected by those objects.¹⁵

The key phrase here is: ‘bestowed upon them’. Wordsworth did not merely take the objects of nature as he found them and present them precisely as such. To a certain extent, he “modified” them.

While it is true that Wordsworth uses the word “create” in *The Prelude* to describe this activity (i.e. the modification of incoming sense impressions), his use of it should not be confused with the commonly understood sense the word evokes: to make or cause to be or to become. In *The Prelude*, he is arguing for something more modest. According to Wordsworth, this creative activity is present in early infancy. He expresses this in the “child in its mother’s arms passage” of Book II of *The Prelude* where the child, frail as he is, is nevertheless,

An inmate of this active universe:
For feeling has to him imparted power
That through the growing faculties of sense
Doth, like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.¹⁶

(1850, II, 254-60)

Because of the creative power of the ‘one great Mind’ of the universe in operation in every living thing (including the child), the child is able to share in this Mind’s creativity. Accordingly, rather than passively perceiving the world around him, the child is able to “create” or make more sensual what would otherwise be indistinct and unregulated incoming sense data. In other words, this creative activity’s function is simply to enable a more accurate perception of inert matter: reality is not falsified, and no new thing is created. As Wordsworth writes in ‘Tintern Abbey’:

of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive¹⁷

(105-7)

The salient phrase here being ‘half create’. This accurately expresses the balance whereby perception and “imagination” are held in tension. It is this regulation of sense data to render it more tangible that Wordsworth sees as the poet’s main duty. However, all that this duty allows is for a greater accuracy of description in Wordsworth’s poetry.

Wordsworth’s view that influxes of feeling are modified by thought derives from Coleridge who later in a letter to Thomas Poole in 1801 wrote that the mind was not ‘a lazy Looker-on on an external world [...] any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system’.¹⁸ Coleridge was perhaps alluding to Hartley’s theory, for which he had lost his enthusiasm. Moreover, as Melvin Rader points out, Coleridge attacked Hobbes, Locke and Hume by saying he could prove, ‘that the Reputation of these three men has been wholly unmerited, and I have in what I have already written traced the whole history of the causes that effected this reputation entirely to Wordsworth’s satisfaction’.¹⁹ Rader also quotes from an early version of

Coleridge's poem *Dejection* that is directed to Wordsworth expressing Coleridge's view that the mind is far from passive:

O Wordsworth! we receive but we give,
And in our Life alone does Nature live:
Our's is her Wedding-garment, our's her Shroud!
And would we aught behold of higher Worth
Than that inanimate cold World *allow'd*
To the poor loveless ever-anxious Crowd,
Ah! from the Soul itself must issue forth
A Light, a Glory, a fair luminous cloud
 Enveloping the Earth!
And from the Soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and pow'rful Voice, of its own Birth,
Of all sweet Sounds the Life and Element!²⁰

Rader concludes that, 'Coleridge and Wordsworth must have reached substantial agreement in converse with each other, not entirely rejecting associationism, but modifying and subordinating it.'²¹

Nevertheless, in those parts of Wordsworth's works that seem to be operating non-empirically if one looks deeply enough one can usually find an empiricist origin. In 'Emotion and Cognition in *The Prelude*' Joel Pace notes that for Wordsworth 'imagination functions as a faculty which is both emotional and cognitive'.²² He then demonstrates this concept in action by citing lines 398-403 of Book V of *The Prelude*:

Even now appears before the mind's clear eye
That self-same village church; I see her sit
(The throned Lady whom erewhile we hailed)
On her green hill, forgetful of this Boy
Who slumbers at her feet,—forgetful, too,
Of all her silent neighbourhood of graves

(1850, V, 398-403)

He says of these lines:

Let us suppose that in his travels Wordsworth sees a village church. Empirically speaking, he has received an object and it has entered into his mind through his eyes. However, in his mind's eye he transforms the church [...]. He is now creator and receiver both, for (through his senses) he has received or perceived the church; and (through his imagination) he has created the 'throned lady' [...] from the church.²³

Adding:

The imaginative transformation which the church undergoes is due partially to cognition. If he has long passed from the actual sight of the church yet he can still see it with his mind's eye (memory) then he has abstracted the church, and in doing so he has used a cognitive function.

[...] He has processed the church and its neighborhood of graves and likened them to a mother and family of children. He has made this association (or analogy) through the cognitive process of comparison, which is part of the imaginative faculty that creates a lady or mother from a church. Thus, he unites imagination, cognition, and reflection in his creative process; insofar as imagination comes to be seen as ‘amplitude of mind, / And reason in her most exalted mood’ (1805, XIII, 169-70).²⁴

Returning to Abrams and the idea of an object that has had the mind of the poet at work on it, Abrams cites Hazlitt’s essay ‘On Poetry in General’. In this essay, Hazlitt quotes the following from *Cymbeline*, Act II:

... The flame o’ th’ taper
Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids
To see the enclosed lights ...²⁵

Of this Hazlitt remarks, ‘This passionate interpretation of the motion of the flame to accord with the speaker’s own feelings, is true poetry’.²⁶ But is it really? Yes, if a sort of defamiliarization were the sole measure of what poetry should be. Abrams says of Coleridge that he was most concerned, ‘with the problem of how the poetic mind acts to modify or transform the materials of sense without violating truth to nature’.²⁷ Not ‘violating truth to nature’ seems a high price to pay if it can only reward us with lines such as those just quoted from *Cymbeline*. Coleridge’s call to “animate” the inanimate surely only draws more attention upon the object, however cleverly executed.

It may seem in this discussion of Wordsworth’s empiricism that I am giving undue importance to his visual acuity in my demonstration of his empiricism, and leaving out of account those aspects of his work which suggest that, whilst he was, indeed, aware of vision’s dominance, he, nevertheless, sought to reduce its importance. His awareness of this dominance is evident in Book XII of *The Prelude*:

I speak in recollection of a time
When the bodily eye, in every stage of life
The most despotic of the senses, gained
Such strength in *me* as often held my mind
In absolute dominion.²⁸

(1850, XII, 127-31)

Although this makes it clear that he does view vision as despotic, it remains unclear as to why he would think this necessarily a bad thing given his posture on passivity with regard to the senses discussed above. It could be that although visual acuity is highly regarded by him, it becomes suspect if valued for its own sake. That when he says that the eye is the most despotic of the senses what he means is that visual acuity has its limitations, because it cannot enable natural objects to provoke him into reasoned thinking. However, why he would want this given, again, his position on passivity is not altogether clear. Nevertheless, these speculations aside, Wordsworth does seem to seek a solution to vision’s dominance. Vision’s control can be emasculated by working out the means that Nature,

studiously employs to thwart
This tyranny, summons all the senses each
To counteract the other, and themselves,

And makes them all, and the objects with which all
Are conversant, subservient in their turn
To the great ends of Liberty and Power.²⁹

(1850, XII, 134-39)

In this way, then, the visual sense is made equal to the other senses. However, this is an unsatisfactory solution as it is not clear how this has sufficiently undermined the visual sense in its role as an empirical marker between the world of objects and the thinking mind. The fact that *all* the senses become valued merely emphasizes Wordsworth's empiricism all the more.

Moreover, in his attempt to demonstrate the value of profound thoughts over mere perception Wordsworth falls into contradiction. On the one hand, he places a premium on complex thought admitting that his former penchant for the merely visual was 'vivid though not profound' (142). Yet, on the other hand, he dismisses the complexity associated with profound thought because it makes the slavery of the visual sense 'hard to shun' (151). In the former position expressed, complexity is regrettably absent from the visual; in the latter position, complexity is regrettably the cause of visual dominance. Similarly, there are contradictions in his treatment of the maid's state of mind in the following passage:

Her eye was not the mistress of her heart;
Far less did rules prescribed by passive taste,
Or barren intermeddling subtleties,
Perplex her mind; but, wise as women are
When genial circumstance hath favoured them,
She welcomed what was given, and craved no more;
Whate'er the scene presented to her view
That was the best, to that she was attuned
By her benign simplicity of life,
And through a perfect happiness of soul,
Whose variegated feelings were in this
Sisters, that they were each some new delight.
Birds in the bower, and lambs in the green field,
Could they have known her, would have loved; methought
Her very presence such a sweetness breathed,
That flowers, and trees, and even the silent hills,
And everything she looked on, should have had
An intimation how she bore herself
Towards them and to all creatures. God delights
In such a being; for, her common thoughts
Are piety, her life is gratitude.³⁰

(1850, XII, 153-73)

Wordsworth firstly says that 'her eye was not the mistress of her heart' (153), leading us to believe that she has overcome visual domination and is free of the attendant passivity. However, he then makes obvious her passivity: 'she welcomed what was given, and craved no more; / Whate'er the scene presented to her view / That was the best' (158-60). It was her 'benign simplicity of life' (161) that enabled her to view nature in

this way, and which produced in her ‘common thoughts’ (172) that Wordsworth (earlier so vigorous in defence of profundity) now admires. Either Wordsworth’s solution is ineffective or his contradictory positions indicate that he is not seriously seeking one. If he were, then his explanation as to its remedy (and lines 153-73 above) would be consistently expressed.

Geoffrey Hartman, in relation to *Descriptive Sketches*, mentions Wordsworth’s failed attempt to gain control of this despotic sense:

The eye, the most despotic of the bodily senses in Wordsworth, is thwarted in a peculiar manner. It seeks to localize in nature the mind’s intuition of ‘powers and presences’, yet nature itself seems opposed to this process, and leads the eye restlessly from scene to scene.³¹

In this view of Wordsworth, it is nature, or sense data, which is the controlling factor in vision. Similarly, in Book II of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth recognizes nature’s unremitting controlling influence over his senses:

My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power
Abode with me; a forming hand, at times
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood;
A local spirit of his own, at war
With general tendency, but, for the most,
Subservient strictly to external things
With which it communed.³²

(1805, II, 362-68)

Wordsworth’s recognition of the despotic nature of vision and his subsequent “solution” should not lead us to the conclusion that his passivity in the presence of nature was undesirable to him.

At this point, we can now begin our examination of the reading of Wordsworth in the twentieth century. When we come to examine the critical reaction to the Romantics in the wake of the acceptance of Modernism in the early twentieth century, we find that the majority of criticism is hostile to Wordsworth and many other romantic poets. F. R. Leavis, for instance, criticised Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’ for what he saw as its confused imagery due to Shelley’s ‘weak grasp upon the actual’.³³ Edward Larrissy lists the romantic qualities deprecated by Modernists as being ‘discursiveness, the emphasis on personality, the use of the language of the emotions and the aesthetic ideal of organic form’.³⁴ In their place, Modernists privileged ‘impersonality, directness of presentation and [...] the analogy of mechanical or sculptural form, as opposed to organic form’.³⁵ Moreover, T. S. Eliot’s mentor, Irving Babbitt, saw Romanticism’s foregrounding of the spontaneous and the individualistic, coupled with its philosophical thought, as being negatively influential upon modern democratic society. He contends that these romantic principles lead ‘to an anarchistic individualism that tends in turn to destroy civilisation’.³⁶

George Bornstein explains the Modernist reaction to Romanticism thus:

Modernist criticism often conflated strong, early Romanticism with its later and weaker derivatives. Early twentieth-century writers understandably attacked the debased Romanticism around them and then read their objections to its tone, conventions, and world view back onto the high Romantics.³⁷

The result of this was to create a false perception among Modernist writers and critics that there was a permanent fracture between Romanticism and Modernism. In reality, however, there was no such breach. Rather, there was a continuation of romantic descriptiveness through Symbolist poetry and into Modernist poetry. This has been noted by Geoffrey Thurley who states, ‘The emergence of the descriptive poem is in itself an important event in the history of Western literature. It led directly to the Romantic and thence, to the Symbolist poem’.³⁸ From Symbolist poetry, Imagism eventually emerged—Imagism being only a modification of Symbolism.³⁹ Consequently, Modernism inevitably shared with Romanticism the tenet that saw value in descriptions of the physical world.

Ezra Pound’s attack on the Romantics was not because of disagreements with their empirical values but because, as Hugh Witemeyer notes, they typified an establishment poetry that ‘impeded the acceptance of the modern poetry which Pound’s circle was creating’.⁴⁰ Indeed, Pound esteemed Wordsworth’s poetic empiricism saying he had, ‘an unquestionable genius, for imagisme, for presentation of natural detail’.⁴¹ He not only shared Wordsworth’s fascination with objects but also his bias towards prose as superior to poetic artifice in that he and Wordsworth ‘offered prose as a model for good poetry’.⁴² His comment in a letter dated 4 February 1913 to Alice Corbin Henderson (the Associate Editor of *Poetry*) on one of her poems is, ‘Your most obvious superficial fault is that you invert, and in various ways disturb the natural prose order of the words’.⁴³ Adding, ‘Every alteration of this sort, that is not made for definite and worthy reason weakens the impact’.⁴⁴ To William Carlos Williams on the 19 December 1913 with regard to Carlos’s poem ‘La Flor’ he warns, ‘Your syntax still strays occasionally from the simple order of natural speech’.⁴⁵

Pound’s advocacy of a style stripped of artifice and geared towards a communicative functionality was a penchant of Wordsworth’s. In ‘A Retrospect’ he echoes Wordsworth, advising aspiring poets to ‘use no adjective which does not reveal something. [...] the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol’.⁴⁶ In same essay he asserts that ‘one “moves” the reader only by clarity. [...] the durability of the writing depends on the exactitude’.⁴⁷ In *The A B C of Reading*, he writes: ‘Good writers are those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clear’.⁴⁸ Even W. B. Yeats saw some value in this approach when he admitted that Pound ‘helps me to get back to the definite and concrete, away from modern abstractions’.⁴⁹

Pound’s erstwhile colleague T. E. Hulme, as well as seeing the twentieth century as spawning a new classical movement, also elevated the position of the object via the process of accurate visual description: albeit without the excesses to which Pound was prone.⁵⁰ In his essay ‘Romanticism and Classicism’, Hulme criticizes romantic poets for not considering that ‘accurate description is a legitimate object of verse’.⁵¹ Furthermore he says, ‘The new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than the ear’;⁵² and in poetry ‘each *word* must be an image *seen*, not a counter’ (Hulme’s emphases).⁵³ The new poetry ‘depends for its effect [...] on arresting the attention, so much so that the succession of visual images should exhaust one’.⁵⁴ Moreover, Frank Kermode observes that for Hulme, ‘whether the poem is good or not depends upon the accuracy of the representation, and upon that alone’.⁵⁵ Kermode believes that Hulme’s theory ‘makes a show of being in opposition to Romantic imprecision [...] but in fact it is fundamentally a new statement of the old defence of poetry against positivism’.⁵⁶ Herbert Read also noted the continuance of Hulme’s ideas with those of the Romantics especially with regard to Coleridge. Hulme’s statement that ‘the form of the poem is shaped by the intention’, demonstrates for Read ‘the continuity or community of thought in Hulme and Coleridge’.⁵⁷

Turning to Georgian poetry we can see that many of the Wordsworthian poetic tenets are present in it as is apparent from contemporary reviews of the debut anthology of Georgian poetry. R. Ellis Roberts notes that

of the poets included in this anthology ‘they all are agreed in this one supreme point, an intense interest in external things, an intense feeling for their reality and importance’.⁵⁸ A. C. Henson notes that these poets are ‘watching life, feeling, seeing, recording’.⁵⁹ One anonymous reviewer notes with approval the descriptiveness evident in the poems of T. Sturge Moore that appear in the anthology, where one ‘can feel the distinction of his descriptive passages’.⁶⁰ He applauds Lascelles Abercrombie for the ‘hurrying vigour of his descriptions’.⁶¹ He rounds off his review praising Wilfrid Wilson Gibson for his, ‘perfectly felicitous descriptions of Nature, never strained, observed by an eye which loves things as they are’.⁶²

From these reviews, we can see that Georgian poetry possesses a continuity with Wordsworthian poetics. According to C. K. Stead, Georgian poetry can be seen as paving the way for Modernism because the Georgians ‘were its precursors’.⁶³ This implies a Georgian continuity with both Wordsworth and Modernism. That both Georgian and Modernist principles can be such happy bedfellows suggests that any perceived significant differences between them are only apparent.

Further support for the continuance of the empiricist strain in Modernist practices can be found in Andrew Motion’s *The Poetry of Edward Thomas* where he views Thomas’s poetry as foreshadowing in a more discreet manner innovations made more explicit in Modernist works. He sees Thomas as writing, ‘slightly to the left of centre—drawing much from the Georgians but also anticipating the Modernists in several important respects’.⁶⁴ He argues that, ‘the Imagists’ juxtaposition of miniature fragments, and the Modernists’ generous use of collage and montage, both find their discreet counterpart in his poems’.⁶⁵ However, it should be pointed out that it is important for us not to conclude from this analysis that Modernist and Georgian styles are to be equated.

Motion also acknowledges the retrograde tendencies inherent in Modernist poetry—tendencies that arguably have their genesis in Romantic roots. Quoting Amy Lowell’s six attributes of Imagist poetry, listed in her anthology *Some Imagist Poets*, he comments:

The fact that these aims are sufficiently indeterminate to describe not only Thomas but a wide variety of authors suggests that strict Imagists were not espousing entirely new principles, but isolating a number of old ones and thereby making them seem unfamiliar.⁶⁶

Indeed, Thomas approved of Pound’s *Personae* because it contained ‘no golden words shot with meaning; a temperate use of images and none far fetched’.⁶⁷ Thomas’s praise for what can only be described as poetic conservatism confirms the unbroken link between the old and the “new” poetic, which Pound and Lowell failed to recognise.

In his review of Robert Frost’s collection *North of Boston*, Thomas praises it for what are essentially Wordsworthian qualities.⁶⁸ The continuity of the Wordsworthian legacy in Frost is so apparent that Thomas has little difficulty in recognising it: ‘Mr Frost has, in fact, gone back as Whitman and as Wordsworth went back, through the paraphernalia of poetry into poetry again’.⁶⁹ The Wordsworthian belief that prose is the proper form for poetry is implied in Thomas’s criticism of Swinburne—which also has echoes of organicism. For Thomas, Swinburne was one of those ‘who seem to shape their thought in order that it may fit a certain favourite type of sentence instead of allowing the thought to govern the form of the sentence’.⁷⁰ Motion’s recognition of Thomas’s sensual handling of objects as being to some extent similar to that of the Imagists, and Thomas’s Wordsworthian-like penchant for plain words (along with his approval of Pound’s *Personae*) demonstrates further the continuity between Wordsworthian poetic precepts and certain empirical strands within Modernism.

In Robert Frost, we see a poet whose poetic traditionalism was admired by Pound and Lowell. As Philip L. Gerber in his biography of Frost notes, Lowell even sought to include him among the Imagists.⁷¹ Yet, at the same time, the Georgian poets regarded him as one of their own and he became acquainted with Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, Lascelles Abercrombie and Edward Thomas.⁷² That Frost was able comfortably to straddle both the Modernist and Georgian camps further confirms the Modernist project's connection to the past. Frost is seen by Robert Faggen as stylistically connected to Wordsworth as indicated by Faggen's remark that Frost 'cultivated an ingeniously sophisticated use of colloquial speech, giving new life to the ancient tradition of pastoral poetry'.⁷³ In doing this, he 'realized what Wordsworth had proposed, "to adopt the very language of men"'.⁷⁴

Gerber also notes Frost's links to the Wordsworthian tradition, as manifested in his similarities with the neo-romantic American poet William Cullen Bryant. Like Wordsworth, Bryant, 'looked upon nature with typical nineteenth-century romantic eyes, discerning in woods and sky an authentic healing power, a spiritual inspiration'.⁷⁵ In addition, both he and Frost used 'natural things as a springboard for poetry'.⁷⁶ Gerber also notes Frost's similarities to Thoreau who was a significant influence on Frost.⁷⁷ As is well known, Thoreau was a friend and "pupil" of Emerson who, like Wordsworth, was interested in the vitality of nature. Emerson shared Wordsworth's opinion that poets were better able to understand and to commune with nature than the "ordinary" person could. As well as admiring Thoreau, Frost also admired Emerson. Lawrence Buell points out that Frost was particularly fond of Emerson's poem 'Monadnoc'. The poem, Buell says, would have especially appealed to him for its 'Wordsworthian commendation of peasant speech as the vital force behind good poetry'.⁷⁸

I. A. Richards in *Principles of Literary Criticism* makes possible a favourable evaluation of the empiricist strain in Wordsworth. Richards sees poetry as primarily communicable: 'It may be experienced by many different minds with only slight variations. That this should be possible is one of the conditions of its organization'.⁷⁹ He warns that we must preserve poetry from contamination and from the 'irruptions of personal particularities'.⁸⁰ This view of poetry as unequivocal communication of experience, features predominantly in his ideas on what constitutes "bad art" (to use his term). He believes that, 'sometimes art is bad because communication is defective'.⁸¹ To illustrate his point he cites a five-line poem called 'The Pool' and criticizes it because, 'the experience evoked in the reader is not sufficiently specific' because 'the reader here supplies too much of the poem'.⁸²

The first half of his *Practical Criticism* details the results of a survey Richards conducts with his students. His method was to hand out sheets of poems (withholding their authorship) to these students and to ask them to write detailed reports on what they thought of these poems. The poems are numbered 1 to 13. Of poem 11, he received this response from one of its readers:

Outside of the mood, *I felt no real personal connection, no personal emotion*. If they had been my words winging on, or my closest friend's—if he had alluded to my death, or let me apply it so—I should have felt it more deeply (Richards's emphasis).⁸³

Whilst Richards acknowledges the validity of such a response he is cautious as to its universal applicability:

The dangers are that the recollected feelings may overwhelm and distort the poem and that the reader may forget that the evocation of somewhat similar feelings is probably only a part of the poem's endeavour.⁸⁴

His remedy to such responses is to encourage a Wordsworthian mode of poetic writing that has a 'closer contact with reality, either directly, *through experience of actual things*, or mediately through other minds which are in closer contact.'⁸⁵

F. L. Lucas notes that romantic writing, rather than being engaged upon the "wonderful" or "mysterious" is replete with realist descriptions.⁸⁶ He cites Byron's call for greater contact with reality: 'The great object of life is sensation, to feel that we exist, even though in pain'.⁸⁷ Of this he remarks, 'that Byronic cry is the keynote of one Romantic career after another'.⁸⁸ While it is true that Lucas recognises the importance of the "dream element" underpinning much of Romanticism, he emphasises the reality upon which this dreaming is grounded. Indeed, 'dreams themselves can be at times only too realistic',⁸⁹ and, like a nightmare, 'be vividly realistic at moments'.⁹⁰ He concludes that, 'Romanticism is only partly opposed to Realism; its true enemy is the hackneyed and humdrum present'.⁹¹

F. R. Leavis steers Wordsworth away from accusations of mysticism towards the more grounded practice of liberal humanism.⁹² He regards Wordsworth as so far removed from the mystical life that his poetry can act as instruction to daily existence, bringing to bear upon life 'the significance of this poetry for actual living'.⁹³ That his poetry should enable this derives from his early upbringing, 'in a congenial social environment, with its wholesome simple pieties and the traditional sanity of its moral culture, which to him were nature'.⁹⁴ This early nurturing was able to produce a man who 'was, on the showing of his poetry and everything else, normally and robustly human'.⁹⁵ Leavis recognises that Wordsworth's reputation as a mystic and the 'current valuation' of his greatness is due largely to the 'visionary moments' and 'spots of time'.⁹⁶ He acknowledges that Wordsworth, himself, placed value on the visionary aspect of his verse but thinks it important to examine the significance he assigns to it. Although he accepts that certain sections of *The Prelude* are philosophically vague he, nevertheless, tries to recuperate them from any transcendentalist taint by drawing our attention away from their vagueness and towards the 'sober verse' in which these ineffable experiences are presented.⁹⁷

This placing of aesthetic value upon the empirical and humanistic aspects of Wordsworth is also reflected in Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, where his positive valuation of the socially concerned aspect of Wordsworth is worth noting:

We may usefully remind ourselves that Wordsworth wrote political pamphlets [and that this activity] essentially related to a large part of the experience from which the poetry itself was made.⁹⁸

Moreover, he sees the new ideas of Romanticism emanating from 'a larger system of ideas in European thinking as a whole'.⁹⁹ For Williams, this system of ideas is essentially humanistic for the reason that the influence of such humanists as Rousseau and Schiller can be traced back to it.¹⁰⁰ He explains that, 'In England, these ideas that we call Romantic have to be understood in terms of the problems in experience with which they were advanced to deal'.¹⁰¹ Even the Wordsworthian notion of the poet as privileged seer and conduit of special insights to the masses is seen by him as essentially an aspect of Platonic moralism in that it can be traced back to the Socratic definition of the poet as outlined in Plato's *Ion*.¹⁰² Williams sees the full implications of Wordsworth's ideas on the role of the poet as 'deeply and generally humane'.¹⁰³

Two other critics who see in Wordsworth's poetic output a social and moral aspect are T. S. Eliot and Nicholas Roe. In his lecture 'Wordsworth and Coleridge' Eliot sees the humanism of Wordsworth as the primary purpose of his poetry. He cites an 1801 letter that Wordsworth wrote to Charles James Fox

(accompanying a copy of *Lyrical Ballads*) expressing Wordsworth's social concerns and remarks:

I believe that you will understand a great poem like *Resolution and Independence* better if you understand the purposes and social passions which animated its author; and unless you understand these you will misread Wordsworth's literary criticism entirely.¹⁰⁴

In *The Politics of Nature*, Roe suggests that Wordsworth's humanistic aims were to some extent born out of the failure of the French Revolution to deliver its utopian promises. The disappointment resulting from this failure had negative consequences for the role of the transcendental in poetry because 'after the revolutionary Terror of 1793-4, nature could never again answer as a transcendent ideal that entirely "displaced" history'.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, 'any appeal to nature as a transcendent category would reflect upon the moral, social and historical realities of the day'.¹⁰⁶ In response to Marjorie Levinson's claim that Wordsworth's greatest poetry excludes sociopolitical themes that had occupied him less than a decade earlier, Roe comments:

Far from "erasing" sociopolitical contexts, the philosophical poetry written by Wordsworth in spring and summer 1798 seeks to affirm that 'nature and the language of the sense' may inform 'moral being' to the good of society as a whole.¹⁰⁷

For Roe, Wordsworth's revolutionary experience 'informs the imaginative radicalism of his greatest poetry written between 1798 and 1805'.¹⁰⁸

In *From Classic to Romantic*, W. J. Bate views the Romantics from an empirical perspective. He notes that the later eighteenth century critics preferred that in poetry 'metaphors must not be too close, nor descriptions too detailed.'¹⁰⁹ The reason being that, 'imitation fruits and flowers, [...] please far less than a mere picture of them, and painted statues have less appeal than unpainted ones.'¹¹⁰ He also observes:

Classicism does not subscribe, therefore, to the belief that man's feelings and responses are themselves inherently good—a belief which was to underlie at least some romantic assumptions towards the close of the eighteenth century.¹¹¹

He further remarks that if art is to give expression to the subjective emotions of the poet then it becomes 'difficult to draw the line between what is valid and what is not'.¹¹² As we have seen, the assumption that the personal poetic utterance is itself of artistic value is accepted unquestioningly by Abrams. Such a stance is able to justify empiricist writing by arguing that the expressive outpourings of the poet must necessarily particularise in order for their authenticity to be recognised. Bate sees this need to particularise as growing out of British associationism, which 'exerted a far stronger immediate influence on criticism by its emphasis on the particular'.¹¹³

Harold Bloom similarly takes an empiricist reading of Wordsworth. He emphasises the fact that far from being caught up in the transcendental, for Wordsworth 'the earth is enough'.¹¹⁴ Wordsworth's imagination is, 'like Wallace Stevens' *Angel Surrounded by Paysans*: not an angel of heaven, but the necessary angel of earth, as, in its sight, we see the earth again, but cleared'.¹¹⁵ This lucidity is, according to Bloom, a result of perception; a perception that is 'a mode of salvation for Wordsworth', and for us as well 'provided that we are awake fully to what we see'.¹¹⁶ For Wordsworth, this sort of perception enables him to discover more readily the true reality beneath surface objects:

For the visual surfaces of natural reality are mutable, and Wordsworth desperately quests for a natural reality that can never pass away. That reality, for him, lies just within natural appearance, and the eye made generously passive by Nature's generosity is able to trace the lineaments of that final reality.¹¹⁷

This desire for immutable reality grows out of his love of nature 'for its own sake alone'.¹¹⁸ Nature gives 'beauty to the poet's mind, again only for that mind's sake'.¹¹⁹ This relationship between mind and matter is 'exquisitely fitted, each to the other'.¹²⁰

Turning to Bloom's analysis of 'Tintern Abbey', we see his further de-emphasising the transcendental. He quotes the following passage from the poem:

a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought
And rolls through all things.¹²¹

He remarks:

It is a laziness of our imaginations that tempts us to call this vision mystical, for the mystical is finally incommunicable and Wordsworth desires to be a man talking to men about matters of common experience. The emphasis in *Tintern Abbey* is on things seen and things remembered, on the light of sense, not on the invisible world.¹²²

He further demystifies Wordsworth (whilst at the same time illustrating the last point: '... things remembered, on the light of sense, not on the invisible world') in his analysis of the following from *The Prelude*:

in such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours; whether we be young or old,
Our destiny our being's heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.¹²³

He observes:

Even here, in a passage bordering the realm of the mystical, the poet's emphasis is naturalistic. Imagination usurps the place of the baffled mind, and the light of sense momentarily goes out:

that is, the object world is not perceived. *But*, and this proviso is the poet's, the flash of greater illumination that suddenly reveals the invisible world is itself due to the flicking light of sense.¹²⁴

Here he demonstrates clearly that any semblance of a transcendental aspect to Wordsworth's poetry is ultimately dependent upon sense impressions. Bloom's judgement on Wordsworth's theory of poetry is that it is 'a theory of description'.¹²⁵

Philip Hobsbaum, who was a major influence on late twentieth-century British poetry, takes an empiricist stance on Wordsworth. In his *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry*, he notes Wordsworth's 'unwavering gaze'¹²⁶ and compares the 1805 and 1850 versions of *The Prelude*—favouring the 1805 version because it 'exhibits a preternatural keenness of eye and ear'.¹²⁷ He also comments favourably on the emphasis of observation evident in the Discharged Soldier passage in Book IV of the 1805 *Prelude* where 'we are keenly aware of Wordsworth himself watching the old man'.¹²⁸

With regard to 'The Ruined Cottage', he notes that it shares with *The Prelude* 'the accurate observation of detail'.¹²⁹ Of the returning visit of the pedlar to the cottage in 'the wane of summer', when the cottage displays signs of decay, he remarks that the detail is 'sharp and accurate'.¹³⁰

Jerome McGann also takes an empiricist approach to Romantic poetry:

Romantic poetry, "reflects"—and reflects upon—those individual and social forms of human life which are available to the artist's observation, and which are themselves a part of his process of observation.¹³¹

He also praises Raymond Williams's liberal humanist criticism for its conformity to Heinrich Heine's criticism, which refuses to 'set the ideological materials of poetry free from their concrete historical environments'.¹³² He is also cognisant of the material and sensuous aspects of 'The Ruined Cottage' where 'Armytage, poet, and reader all fix their attention on a gathering mass of sensory, and chiefly vegetable, details'.¹³³ And in the 'Intimations Ode' he notes Wordsworth's emotional dependency upon the object.¹³⁴

As can be seen from the preceding digest of poetic criticism, the empiricism favoured by Wordsworth as his *modus operandi* has been acknowledged by most of the major literary critics of the twentieth century, even those who principally view him in transcendentalist terms. I would now like to look at the artistic ramifications of this Wordsworthian influence upon late twentieth-century poetry. One of the consequences of this influence upon poetic practice during that period is that it allowed for an anti-connotative view of poetic language to become predominant. This predominance was facilitated in Britain in the late 1950s by the rise of the poetic coterie known as The Movement. Similarly to the antipathetic reactions of early modernist critics to the "excesses" of later Romantic poetry, the Movement reacted against what they considered the extreme "romanticism" of the New Apocalypse poets of the 1940s.

The Movement critics were mostly critical of the non-empiricist characteristics of New Apocalypse poetry. Referring to the New Apocalypse period, Robert Conquest, in his Introduction to his influential anthology of Movement poetry, *New Lines*, asserts that 'the debilitating theory that poetry *must* be metaphorical gained wide acceptance'.¹³⁵ In contrast to New Apocalypse poetry, he welcomes the emergence in the late 1940s and early 1950s of poets who, 'have been progressing from different viewpoints to a certain unity of approach, a new and healthy general standpoint'.¹³⁶ The poetry that these poets write is, 'free from both

mystical and logical compulsions and—like modern philosophy—it is empirical in its attitude'.¹³⁷ Moreover, like so much poetry motivated by an empiricist aesthetic, it values clear meanings and there is a 'refusal to abandon a rational structure and comprehensible language'.¹³⁸ This poetry has influences from W. B. Yeats, Robert Graves and Edwin Muir, especially with regard to visual perception.¹³⁹ The Movement produced empiricist poets such as Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, D. J. Enright, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings, Donald Davie and Ted Hughes.

Philip Hobsbaum was also closely linked with the Movement. While studying at Cambridge, he met Peter Redgrove who urged him to start a poetry group, which he did in late 1955. This gathering became known as The Group and attendees at these meetings included Ted Hughes, George MacBeth, Peter Porter, Peter Redgrove, and Edward Lucie-Smith. Hobsbaum later became a lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast, where he had formed a branch of the Group there. Attendees included Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Edna Longley, and Derek Mahon. Heaney was very much an admirer of Robert Frost, and Edna Longley an admirer of Edward Thomas.

Although the Group asserted it had no unified poetic programme as such, an indication of its poetic aims can be discerned from the sorts of poets it nurtured (most obviously Heaney) and the poetic values asserted by Hobsbaum himself. The first thing that is noticeable about Hobsbaum's poetic is its objection to the suggestiveness and lack of plot in T. S. Eliot's poetry. In *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* he favours Langland, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth for their use of plot and logic but is critical of Eliot because he 'seems to work rather by suggestion, qualitative progression, evocative catalogue'.¹⁴⁰ The idea that suggestiveness in poetry is a shortcoming is most peculiar indeed. His criticism of Eliot extends to what he sees as the negative influence on English poetry of Eliot's use of the American idiom: 'Some damage was done to English verse by too close an imitation in the 1930s of the American idiom as evidenced in such poets as Eliot and Pound'.¹⁴¹ He also sees a disparity between Eliot's American writing-style and traditional English poetic writing practice. Although Hobsbaum does not see this in itself as necessarily negative, the implication is that American modernism is largely a geographical and cultural entity, unable to successfully function within an English milieu:

Again, Eliot's work exhibits the characteristic American qualities of free association or phanopoeia and autobiographical content. English verse, however, has been at its best as fiction: an arrangement of what is external to the poet to convey the tension or release within.¹⁴²

This poetic "nationalism" is also expressed more explicitly, and with some frustration in the following:

I would never deny that Eliot and Pound, who derive much from Whitman, are fine poets. But is it not time to insist that they are fine *American* poets? And that therefore the influence they may be expected to have on English poets is limited?¹⁴³

This appears a most extraordinary and insular (not to say irrational) approach to art. If Hobsbaum really believes that Eliot and Pound are fine poets then why must this talent not be allowed to function in England? How can one admit to value in a form of art yet insist that it is a value that is worthless outside of the cultural conditions which produced it?

As mentioned earlier Seamus Heaney was member of Hobsbaum's Group and it is perhaps reasonable to assume that Heaney's poetic may owe something to the influence of Hobsbaum's poetic ideas. Heaney has

been much praised over the years, particularly with his election to the Professorship of Poetry at Oxford University in 1989 and culminating in his winning a Nobel Prize for literature in 1995. However, his critics have asserted that his poetic style is essentially anachronistic—a throwback to pre-modernist concerns. Heaney places great value on poetry that is dependent upon sense impressions. For instance, he praises the use of the authorial “I” in Yeats’s poetry because, ‘it is brilliantly and concretely at one with the eye of the poet as retina overwhelmed by the visual evidence of infinity and solitude’.¹⁴⁴

The influence of Wordsworth on Heaney is well known. Hugh Haughton notes that ‘the Lake Poet’s texts haunt Heaney more radically than those of any other poet’,¹⁴⁵ and though ‘Heaney’s early poems do not directly echo Wordsworth, his criticism of the 1970s hitches them unforgettably to the Wordsworthian star’.¹⁴⁶ In addition, he ‘not only re-created Wordsworth in his own image but forged a poetic image of himself out of Wordsworth’.¹⁴⁷ And in his introduction to *The Essential Wordsworth* Heaney declares Wordsworth ‘an indispensable figure in the evolution of modern writing, a finder and keeper of the self-as-subject, a theorist and apologist whose Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) remains definitive’.¹⁴⁸

Similarly to Wordsworth, he also sees the value of poetry as having to do with its functionality as an educative process in service to humanistic and ethical concerns. In his 1989 inaugural lecture on having been elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford University he states:

Professors of poetry, apologists for it, practitioners of it, from Sir Philip Sidney to Wallace Stevens, all sooner or later have to attempt to show how poetry’s existence at the level of art relates to our existence as citizens of society—how it is “of present use”.¹⁴⁹

Additionally, he shows his deference to Wordsworth’s emphasis on poetry as a vehicle for content by saying that, ‘as Wordsworth once said, our subject is indeed important’.¹⁵⁰ He also alludes (via Emerson—a “pupil” of Wordsworth) to the Wordsworthian ideal that poetry should comprise self-reflection:

The poet—as representative man, as representative woman—this Emersonian figure then comes under the strain of bearing witness in his or her own life to the plane of consciousness established in the poem.¹⁵¹

Heaney figures largely in Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion’s 1982 anthology, *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*. Morrison and Motion are mainstream poets, both believe in the transparency of language and the communicative aspects of poetry. Indeed, Morrison was responsible for an apologia for Movement poetry (*The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s*) and Motion is Britain’s Poet Laureate. Given these mainstream credentials, it is to be expected that the anthology would include mostly “Wordsworthian” poetry. Therefore, it is odd that they claim that the anthology marks in some sense a continuation of the spirit of High Modernism. It is this attempt by Morrison and Motion to “rebrand” the anthology’s descriptive poetry as non-descriptive, in order to suggest that the descriptive aspects of the poetry are merely apparent rather than actual, that I will deal with now.

In the Introduction, they claim that the poets in this volume ‘show greater imaginative freedom and linguistic daring than the previous poetic generation’.¹⁵² They also add that, ‘The new spirit in British poetry began

to make itself felt in Northern Ireland during the late 1960s and early 70s’.¹⁵³ This is undoubtedly referring to the Belfast branch of the Group run by Hobsbaum at Queen’s University. We can be confident of this

because several of this group's attendees are included in this anthology: Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley.¹⁵⁴ As we have seen, their mentor, Philip Hobsbaum, was critical of Eliot, Pound and Modernism in general. It is curious, therefore, that Morrison and Motion describe the poets in the anthology as displaying 'a literary self-consciousness reminiscent of the modernists'.¹⁵⁵ While it is true that the anthology's empiricist assumptions are modernistic, it would not be accurate to credit much of the poetry as particularly exemplifying a literary self-consciousness (or a postmodernist playfulness, for that matter). In any case, the claimed for innovativeness of this is emasculated by Morrison and Motion when they qualify it by saying of the poets: '[...] this does not imply that their work is frivolous or amoral'.¹⁵⁶ With this caveat, we have an echo of a liberal humanist view of poetry as having to have "worth", "value" and so on.

The poets in this anthology are praised by Morrison and Motion for 'making the familiar strange again'.¹⁵⁷ However, the practice of defamiliarisation is dependent upon vision as its aim is to refresh our perception of the world and to focus our attention on its objects. To this extent, it is an empiricist tool. Another point worthy of praise for them is the outlook,

which expresses itself, in some poets, in a preference for metaphor and poetic *bizarrerie* to metonymy and plain speech; in others it is evident in a renewed interest in narrative—that is, in describing the details and complexities of (often dramatic) incidents. [These poets are] not poets working in a confessional white heat but dramatists and story-tellers.¹⁵⁸

There are several points to be noted about this passage. Firstly, the term '*poetic bizarrerie*' is left undefined by Morrison and Motion, who also fail to cite examples of it in this anthology. Secondly, a preference for metaphor is hardly novel, Ted Hughes was heavily dependent on it. Thirdly, metonymy is a legitimate poetic device and one that is non-empiricist; however, they also fail to cite instances of it in the anthology's poetry. Fourthly, the use of narrative and plain speech in poetry to describe dramatic events is something that, as we have seen, Edward Thomas, Robert Frost and Philip Hobsbaum would advocate. As an apologia for this anthology's poetic operating procedures, this passage leaves much to be desired.

What is most telling about the anthology's Introduction is its emphasis upon visual perception and the act of witnessing. Morrison and Motion point out that most of the poets have developed procedures 'designed to emphasize the gap between themselves and their subjects'; and that these poets are 'not inhabitants of their own lives so much as intrigued observers, not victims but onlookers'.¹⁵⁹ The poet who most embodies this in the anthology is Craig Raine, whose "Martian" poetry typifies the poetic outlook of the anthology's Introduction with regard to its championing of visual perception, simile and defamiliarisation. Morrison and Motion apologise for Martian poetry by claiming that far from its being the cold, arid, visually-based entity that it is usually taken for it is in actuality imbued with emotion: 'It would be wrong to think that the Martians' ingenuity prevents them from expressing emotion: their way of looking is also a way of feeling'.¹⁶⁰ However, like most of the assertions made by Morrison and Motion in this Introduction, it is not instanced by textual examples or any other evidence—it is to be taken on faith.

In this book, I have sought to trace the development of "Wordsworthian empiricism" in the various critical readings of Wordsworth in the twentieth century. In doing so, I have suggested that such readings of Wordsworth (even those that viewed him principally in transcendentalist terms) tended to spotlight his empiricism. Consequently, such empiricism came to be seen by the majority of that century's poets as having a value in and of itself to the extent that it became widely regarded as the best model for poetic composition.

-
- ¹ John Casey, *The Language of Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1966), p.177.
- ² M. A. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp.16-17.
- ³ Abrams, p.21.
- ⁴ Abrams, p.22.
- ⁵ Abrams, p.23.
- ⁶ Abrams, p.23.
- ⁷ Abrams, pp.25-26.
- ⁸ Abrams, p.52. An almost parallel example of this can be seen in 20th century German Expressionist cinema, which through the use of lighting, editing and camera angle, projected the emotion of the characters onto the surrounding objects within the mise-en-scene.
- ⁹ Abrams, p.47.
- ¹⁰ Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.119-20.
- ¹¹ Roe, p.120.
- ¹² Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.12.
- ¹³ Abrams, p.53.
- ¹⁴ Abrams, p.53.
- ¹⁵ Abrams, p.54.
- ¹⁶ *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by T. Hutchinson and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), Wordsworth Editions 1994, p.646.
- ¹⁷ *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.207.
- ¹⁸ Quoted in Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p.27.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in Rader, p.27.
- ²⁰ Quoted in Rader, p.27.
- ²¹ Rader, pp.28-29.
- ²² Joel Pace, 'Emotion and Cognition in *The Prelude*', *Romanticism On the Net*, 1 (February 1996) <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1996/v/n1/005707ar.html>>[accessed 22 March 2005] (para. 3 of 13).
- ²³ Joel Pace, 'Emotion and Cognition in *The Prelude*', *Romanticism On the Net*, 1 (February 1996) <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1996/v/n1/005707ar.html>>[accessed 22 March 2005] (para. 3 of 13).
- ²⁴ Joel Pace, 'Emotion and Cognition in *The Prelude*', *Romanticism On the Net*, 1 (February 1996) <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1996/v/n1/005707ar.html>>[accessed 22 March 2005] (para. 4 of 13).
- ²⁵ Abrams, p.54.
- ²⁶ Abrams, pp.54-55.
- ²⁷ Abrams, p.55.
- ²⁸ *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.736.
- ²⁹ *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.736.
- ³⁰ *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.736.
- ³¹ Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), p.107.
- ³² *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.647.
- ³³ F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), p.206.
- ³⁴ Edward Larrissy, 'Modernism and Postmodernity', in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. by Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.665-74 (p.665.).
- ³⁵ Larrissy, Roe, *Romanticism*, p.666.

-
- ³⁶ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau & Romanticism*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1919, 1947, 1977) p.280.
- ³⁷ George Bornstein, *Romantic and Modern: Revaluations of Literary Tradition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), p.8.
- ³⁸ Geoffrey Thurley, *The Romantic Predicament* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.54.
- ³⁹ Thurley, p.65.
- ⁴⁰ Hugh Witemeyer, 'Walter Savage Landor and Ezra Pound', in *Romantic and Modern: Revaluations of Literary Tradition*, ed. by George Bornstein (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), pp.147-63 (p.147).
- ⁴¹ Quoted in Herbert N. Schneidau, 'Pound and Wordsworth on Poetry and Prose', in Bornstein, *Romantic and Modern*, pp.133-45 (p.134).
- ⁴² Schneidau, Bornstein, *Romantic and Modern*, p.134.
- ⁴³ *The Letters of Ezra Pound to Alice Corbin Henderson*, ed. by Ira B. Nadel (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p.29.
- ⁴⁴ *Letters*, ed. Nadel, p.29.
- ⁴⁵ *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. by D. D. Page (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p.28.
- ⁴⁶ *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, [n.d.]), pp.4-5.
- ⁴⁷ Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, p.22.
- ⁴⁸ Ezra Pound, *The A B C of Reading* (London: Faber and Faber, [n.d.]), p.32.
- ⁴⁹ Quoted in Joseph Hone, *W. B. Yeats: 1865-1939*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1962), p.272.
- ⁵⁰ *T. E. Hulme: Selected Writings*, ed. by Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1998), p.68.
- ⁵¹ *Hulme*, p.75.
- ⁵² Quoted in Herbert Read, *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in English Romantic Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p.107.
- ⁵³ Quoted in Read, p.108.
- ⁵⁴ Quoted in Read, p.121.
- ⁵⁵ Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p.128.
- ⁵⁶ Kermode, p.129.
- ⁵⁷ Read, p.111.
- ⁵⁸ 'Poets of the Hour' from *The Daily News and Leader*, 8 January 1913. Quoted in *Georgian Poetry 1911-1922: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Timothy Rogers (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p.64.
- ⁵⁹ 'Georgian Poetry' from *The Cambridge Magazine*, 18 January 1913. Quoted in Rogers, p.69.
- ⁶⁰ Quoted in Rogers, p.86.
- ⁶¹ Quoted in Rogers, p.87.
- ⁶² Quoted in Rogers, pp.88-89.
- ⁶³ Quoted in Rogers, p.34.
- ⁶⁴ Andrew Motion, *The Poetry of Edward Thomas* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1980), p.2.
- ⁶⁵ Motion, p.3.
- ⁶⁶ Motion, p.3.
- ⁶⁷ Quoted in Motion, p.2.
- ⁶⁸ Quoted in Motion, p.9.
- ⁶⁹ Quoted in Motion, p.67.

-
- ⁷⁰ Quoted in Motion, p.64.
- ⁷¹ Philip L. Gerber, *Robert Frost* (New York: University of South Dakota, 1960), p.67.
- ⁷² Gerber, p.66.
- ⁷³ Robert Faggen, *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost*, ed. by Robert Faggen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.2.
- ⁷⁴ Faggen, p.4.
- ⁷⁵ Gerber, p.53.
- ⁷⁶ Gerber, p.53.
- ⁷⁷ Gerber, p.55.
- ⁷⁸ Lawrence Buell, 'Frost as a New England Poet', in *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost*, ed. by Robert Faggen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.101-22 (p.115).
- ⁷⁹ I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Fifteenth Impression 1959 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1924), p.78.
- ⁸⁰ Richards, *Literary Criticism*, p.78.
- ⁸¹ Richards, *Literary Criticism*, p.199.
- ⁸² Richards, *Literary Criticism*, p.200.
- ⁸³ I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1930), pp.147-48.
- ⁸⁴ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.239.
- ⁸⁵ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.251.
- ⁸⁶ Lucas, pp.13-14.
- ⁸⁷ Lucas, p.106.
- ⁸⁸ Lucas, p.106.
- ⁸⁹ Lucas, p.15.
- ⁹⁰ Lucas, p.35.
- ⁹¹ Lucas, p.47.
- ⁹² Leavis, p.164.
- ⁹³ Leavis, p.170.
- ⁹⁴ Leavis, p.171.
- ⁹⁵ Leavis, p.171.
- ⁹⁶ Leavis, p.173.
- ⁹⁷ Leavis, p.174.
- ⁹⁸ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Middlesex: Penguin Books in association with Chatto & Windus, 1961), pp.48-49.
- ⁹⁹ Williams, pp.53-54.
- ¹⁰⁰ Williams, pp.53-54.
- ¹⁰¹ Williams, p.54.
- ¹⁰² Williams, p.54.
- ¹⁰³ Williams, p.57.
- ¹⁰⁴ Quoted in T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933; repr. 1959), p.73.
- ¹⁰⁵ Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (London: Macmillan.1992), p.9.
- ¹⁰⁶ Roe, p.9.
- ¹⁰⁷ Roe, p.10.
- ¹⁰⁸ Roe, p.140.

-
- ¹⁰⁹ W. J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England*, First Harper Torchbook edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p.157.
- ¹¹⁰ Bate, p.157.
- ¹¹¹ Bate, p.12.
- ¹¹² Bate, pp.164-65.
- ¹¹³ Bate, p.110.
- ¹¹⁴ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, rev. edn, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), p.127.
- ¹¹⁵ Bloom, p.127.
- ¹¹⁶ Bloom, p.128.
- ¹¹⁷ Bloom, p.159.
- ¹¹⁸ Bloom, p.132.
- ¹¹⁹ Bloom, p.132.
- ¹²⁰ Bloom, p.127.
- ¹²¹ Bloom, p.135.
- ¹²² Bloom, p.136.
- ¹²³ Bloom, p.153.
- ¹²⁴ Bloom, p.153.
- ¹²⁵ Bloom, p.133.
- ¹²⁶ Philip Hobsbaum, *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979), p.205.
- ¹²⁷ Hobsbaum, p.187.
- ¹²⁸ Hobsbaum, p.190.
- ¹²⁹ Hobsbaum, p.196.
- ¹³⁰ Hobsbaum, p.198.
- ¹³¹ J. J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp.12-13.
- ¹³² McGann, pp.11-12.
- ¹³³ McGann, p.83.
- ¹³⁴ McGann, pp.89-90.
- ¹³⁵ Robert Conquest, *New Lines: An Anthology* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1957), p.xii.
- ¹³⁶ Conquest, p.xiv.
- ¹³⁷ Conquest, p.xv.
- ¹³⁸ Conquest, p.xv.
- ¹³⁹ Conquest, p.xvii.
- ¹⁴⁰ Hobsbaum, p.256.
- ¹⁴¹ Hobsbaum, p.xii.
- ¹⁴² Hobsbaum, p.290.
- ¹⁴³ Hobsbaum, p.291.
- ¹⁴⁴ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p.149.
- ¹⁴⁵ Hugh Haughton, 'Power and Hiding Places: Wordsworth and Seamus Heaney', in *The Monstrous Debt: Modalities of Romantic Influence in Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. by D. A. Davies and R. M. Turley (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2006), pp.61-100 (p.62).
- ¹⁴⁶ Haughton, Davies and Turley, *The Monstrous Debt*, p.63.
- ¹⁴⁷ Haughton, Davies and Turley, *The Monstrous Debt*, p.62.
- ¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Haughton, Davies and Turley, p.65.

-
- ¹⁴⁹ Seamus Heaney, 'The Redress of Poetry', An Inaugural Lecture, Oxford University, October 1989, printed by Oxford University Press, p.1.
- ¹⁵⁰ Heaney, Lecture, p.7.
- ¹⁵¹ Heaney, Lecture, p.4.
- ¹⁵² Introduction, *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, ed. by B. Morrison and A. Motion (London: Penguin Books, 1982), p.12.
- ¹⁵³ Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.
- ¹⁵⁴ Longley's wife, Edna Longley, is well known for her admiration of the empiricist poetry of Edward Thomas.
- ¹⁵⁵ Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.
- ¹⁵⁶ Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.
- ¹⁵⁷ Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.
- ¹⁵⁸ Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.
- ¹⁵⁹ Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.
- ¹⁶⁰ Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.18.

About the Author

Jeffrey Side has had poetry published in various magazines such as *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and on poetry websites such as *Underground Window*, *A Little Poetry*, *Poethia*, *Nthposition*, *Eratio*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Fieralingue*, *Moria*, *Ancient Heart*, *Blazevox*, *Lily*, *Big Bridge*, *Jacket*, *Textimagepoem*, *Apochryphaltext*, *9th St. Laboratories*, *P. F. S. Post*, *Great Works*, *Hutt*, *The Dande Review*, *Poetry Bay* and *Dusie*.

His publications include, *Carrier of the Seed*, *Distorted Reflections*, *Slimvol*, *Collected Poetry Reviews 2004-2013*, *Cyclones in High Northern Latitudes* (with Jake Berry) and *Outside Voices: An Email Correspondence* (with Jake Berry).