"The Breeze Running through Ideas": Wordsworth's Vitalist Associationism

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I

Tradition and innovative experiment are closely bound together in Wordsworth's literary projects in the late 1790s. We know from past studies such as Mary Jacobus and Robert Mayo that pioneering experimentalism coexists with indebtedness to the past in the poet's writings, especially in those related to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*. This two-sidedness can also be observed in Wordsworth's view on human psychology. In "The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," a work of critical prose intended to round off his first great poetic period, Wordsworth employs the eighteenth-century psychological theory of associationism to explicate the mental processes leading to poetic composition (Koguchi 10-12). Characteristically, the association of ideas in "The Preface" does not remain a straightforward adoption from its founder, David Hartley; in this document Wordsworth adds a new element to this traditional position. Among the "primary laws of our nature" ("Preface" 122) that his poetry explores, Wordsworth refers, as a chief theme, to the "manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement" ("Preface" 122-24). In giving emotion or "excitement" a prominent status in the psychology of poetic production, this formulation departs from the original position of Hartley's mechanistic associationism. The same emphasis on excitement is repeated in the next paragraph when

the poet states the principal purpose of *Lyrical Ballads*: "to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement" (126). An apparent dependence on tradition thus harbours an innovation. Although in a relatively inconspicuous manner, Wordsworth in "The Preface" has gone beyond Hartley's original conception.

Hartley's psychological scheme, furthermore, does not seem to fit in "The Preface" too well when we consider another important principle adopted in this prose document: the Romantic theory. Twice in "The Preface" Wordsworth defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (126, 148). As M. H. Abrams has demonstrated, this well-known phrase indicates a new direction towards the Romantic expressive poetics in which literature is regarded as an expression of its creator's mind (21-22). In addition, the metaphor of "spontaneous overflow" also suggests that Wordsworth has subscribed to another version of the Romantic poetics, the organic theory based on the analogy of a living plant. Fundamental claims of this organicist position include the concepts of self-motivated, spontaneous growth and inherent unity, or the priority of the whole to the parts. Hartleyan associationism is clearly the opposite of this position as the basic analogy employed in this eighteenth-century psychology is that of the mind to a mechanism. In Hartley's empirical view, the human mind builds up as an aggregate of automated processes: external sensations conveyed to the brain give rise to ideas which, "by being associated with one another a sufficient Number of Times" (1. 65), are mutually linked to form an interactive network of ideas and sensations. Complex ideas and intellectual concepts, required for a fully matured intellect, are made of simple ideas put together by these associative processes. It is not difficult to see that determinism comes into this developmental scheme since those processes do not arise from spontaneous growth but are rather conducted by pre-determined laws of association. Indeed, Hartley puts

forward the idea of "the Doctrine of Necessity" (1. vi) as an inevitable corollary of associationism. Hartley goes so far as to deny free will: "a Person cannot do indifferently either of the Actions *A*, and its contrary *a*, while the previous Circumstances are the same; but is under an absolute Necessity of doing one of them and that only" (1. 500, original emphases). Given that organicist manifesto of "spontaneous overflow" and the Hartley-derived associationism with its mechanist thinking and the doctrine of necessity, "The Preface" appears to be an oddly discordant document.

Nevertheless Wordsworth in "The Preface" seems nonchalant about this obvious conflict of the old and new philosophical doctrines. Wordsworth has been characterized as a "border poet" (Johnston 9) who takes his standing on the border between here-now and beyond, or between actual and visionary. The concept of the "border poet" also applies to Wordsworth's historical position; he was one of the first-generation Romantics standing on the border of the eighteenth-century Neoclassical tradition and emerging Romanticism. That curious mixture of old and new typically observed in "The Preface," then, is worth serious consideration, for the contradictory elements in that prose document are no doubt a reflection of the poet's standpoint in that major cultural shift. In the light of the poet's "border" position, in the current paper I shall explicate the nature of Wordsworth's psychological view in the late 1790s. As stated in my first paragraph, the concept of the mind that Wordsworth held in this period is not exactly the same as Hartley's original theory. Presumably some fundamental revision has been made to adapt that older view to the changing intellectual climate of the late eighteenth century. For a fuller description of this Wordsworthian revision, I shall first sketch out the Newtonian mechanistic world-view behind the original association theory of Hartley. After that I shall trace Wordsworth's use of Hartley's theory first in an earlier poetic attempt in the first half of the 1790s, then in more major works written in the latter

half of the decade. In a conclusion I shall refer my literary discussion to some contemporary developments in medicine and biology. This approach is justified in that major rethinking of Hartley's theory was also under way in these scientific fields, and while believing in poetry's supreme status, Wordsworth held that science, too, should come into the scope of his thought. In a passage added to the revised version of "The Preface," Wordsworth declares that, whenever necessary, a poet "will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of science" ("Preface" 1850. 141).

II

I have pointed out that Hartleyan associationist psychology regards the human mind as a mechanism. In Hartley's principal work, *Observations on Man* of 1794, this position is strengthened by the doctrine of physiological vibration. Assuming the existence of a physical mechanism behind psychological processes, Hartley theorizes that external sensations are conveyed to the brain in the form of vibrations in the nervous system. When reaching the medullary part of the brain, those vibrations leave their traces, or miniature vibrations, which Hartley calls "vibratiuncles." Vibratiuncles are then combined to build up a complex intellectual system. The strongly mechanistic tendency in Hartley's thought is evident in this physical exposition of psychology. This mechanistic doctrine of vibration has its lineage in the mechanical universe of Newtonian physics; indeed, *Observations* explicitly states that the idea of vibration is directly inspired by Newton's *Principia Mathematica* and *Opticks* (1. 5). Newton's concept of ether, in particular, plays an important part as the principal medium of vibration. According to Hartley, "when external objects are impressed on the sensory Nerves, they excite Vibrations in the Aether residing in the Pores of these Nerves" (1. 21); next these vibrations "agitate the small Particles of the

medullary Substance of the sensory Nerves with synchronous Vibrations" (1. 21-22); both the vibrations in the ether and of the medullary particles then ascend to the brain. Newton's ether, originally conceived as the medium of physical forces, is used here as an indispensable theoretical ground for Hartley's physiological hypothesis.

The adoption of Newtonian ether is another factor that puts Hartley's psychology into the eighteenth-century mechanist tradition; for, in the eighteenth century Newton's ether was seen as an essential part of the self-contained mechanism of the material universe. This interpretation was not necessarily true to the original intention of that physicist-philosopher. Rather than a merely mechanical medium, the ether for Newton was an agent of divine action which transmitted God's energy into each part of nature (Wylie 29). According to Heimann and McGuire, Newton's concept of ether is not entirely corpuscular as often misconstrued; it certainly contains gross bodies in the form of small particles, but the essential nature of the ether lies not in its material aspect but in the networks of forces working among those small particles (242-43). The ether in this sense can be regarded as one of the "active principles," the term employed by Newton to refer to the causes of forces, and in particular, to the general mode of causation by divine agency in the natural world (Heimann and McGuire 239). Hence the ether as an "active principle" is a manifestation of God in Newton's Platonist thinking. In a letter of 7 December 1695, Newton conjectures that the whole frame of nature is made up with the ether condensed to substantial forms "at first by the immediate hand of the Creator, and ever since by the power of nature, who . . . became a complete imitator of the copies set her by the Protoplast" (*Correspondence* quoted in Wylie 30). The deist notion of a self-sustained world is avoided in this Neoplatonic formulation: the order of nature is maintained by the ether, an active principle of God, and the phenomena generated are physical copies of

divine Ideas (Wylie 30).

However, this was not the way eighteenth-century thinkers looked at the Newtonian ether. The world-view changed. As Cartesian dualism replaced Newton's Neoplatonism and empiricism became the dominant philosophical method, Newton's successors were led to a different interpretation of the ether: it must be material and initiate motion in other bodies by mechanical impulse (Wylie 32). Newton's notion of divine providence acting through the ether was rejected; nature came more to be seen as a self-contained system with activity ascribable to its intrinsic characteristics rather than to the operations of divine energy (Heimann and McGuire 305). In this new trend Newton's ether became a kind of matter whose activity was internal and self-sustaining, dispensing with the need for a God in the universe (Wylie 32). Later in 1795, this deist interpretation of Newton led S. T. Coleridge to suspect that "Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy leads in its consequence to Atheism" (*Joan of Arc* 42). No longer an "active principle," by Coleridge's time the ether had become a purely mechanical medium requiring no divine or living principle in its operation.

It was in this context that Hartley constructed his predominantly mechanist doctrine of associationism in 1749. The vibration hypothesis, as far as it was built upon the mid-eighteenth-century interpretation of the Newtonian ether, provides a strong support for the mechanist tendency in Hartley's fundamental outlook. Like the mechanized universe of the eighteenth century, the human mind for Hartley was a complex machine whose constituent parts of ideas and sensations are put together and operate by necessitarian causation. Hartley himself regarded this determinism positively, believing that human redemption was guaranteed by spiritual growth that necessarily occurred for individual human beings. In Hartley's scheme, therefore, the supreme human achievement is possible at the expense of free will and spontaneity. It is obvious that Hartleyan as-

sociationism with its eighteenth-century legacy is incompatible with the Romantic notions of spontaneity and organicism that characterize an important aspect of Wordsworth's 1800 "Preface." We should now focus our attention on Wordsworth's adoption of Hartley's theory in the 1790s, looking especially for traces of the poet's own re-interpretation; for only a substantial revision could have placed that eighteenth-century psychology side by side with the organicist formulation of "the spontaneous overflow."

Associationism was extremely popular during Wordsworth's formative years in the late eighteenth century. In fact, around that period Hartley's *Observations on Man* was reprinted no less than six times, and an abridged edition by Joseph Priestley was also published twice. Furthermore, Wordsworth had chances to know about Hartley through his university education. Cambridge liberals at that time were influenced by John Jebb, a devout disciple of Hartley, and Hartley was actually named a subject of college lectures and of B. A. disputations. (Schneider 109). It is likely therefore that Wordsworth, with other Cambridge undergraduates, knew of Hartley and his associationism. Indeed, a trace of a Hartleyan influence is found in the lines written in 1794 for a revised version of *An Evening Walk*. In this passage Wordsworth describes the human mind extending sympathetic feelings in terms of vibration, presumably relying on the physical aspect of Hartley's theory:

> A heart that vibrates evermore, awake
> To feeling for all forms that Life can take,
> That wider still its sympathy extends. (125-28)

Here vibration is explicitly named as the mode of communication between the human heart and other forms of life. Moreover, objects of this sympathetic vibration are not limited to living things; Wordsworth adds that the

heart "Sees sense, through Nature's rudest forms betrayed, / Tremble obscure in fountain, rock, and shade" (129-30). Apparently lifeless things, or "rudest forms," such as "rock, fountain, and shade," have sense and they are in communion with the human mind by "trembling." Wordsworth even asserts that those "rudest forms" have "social accents" (132), or language for communication, which the human heart "never vainly hears" (132). From this reading this passage can be regarded as a statement of Wordsworth's philosophical outlook in 1794 which is built both upon the philosophy of animated matter, a legacy of eighteenth-century thought (Jonathan Wordsworth, *Music of Humanity* 186-87), and upon the mechanistic theory of physical vibration as the medium of sensory perception. As Jonathan Wordsworth convincingly claims, Wordsworth's philosophical position reflected in these 1794 lines is still somewhat short of the fully pantheist doctrine of "One Life" on which he is later to collaborate with S. T. Coleridge (*Music of Humanity* 186-88). Rather, the vibration theory in the 1794 *Evening Walk* and implied existence of the ether as the vibratory medium suggest that the metaphysical view of Wordsworth in the early 1790s has more affinity with the mechanistic universe of the eighteenth century.

The closeness of Wordsworth's position to the Hartleyan doctrine is further corroborated by another passage from the 1794 *Evening Walk*. Here again, vibration mediates between external nature and the mind in the act of perception: "Blest are those spirits tremblingly awake / To Nature's impulse like this living lake, / Whose mirrour makes the landscape's charms its own" (191-93). The metaphorical nature of this passage is obvious, as the perceptive function of the human mind is compared to a lake surface reflecting the surrounding landscape. Vibration's central role in perception is affirmed in the description that "spirits" are "tremblingly awake" to incoming sensations from natural scenery. In an oblique manner, the

vibratory nature of perception is repeated in the next couple of lines: "While, exquisite of sense, the mighty mass /All vibrates to the lightest gales that pass" (195-96). Here vibration is compared to a disturbance of "the mighty mass," or the surface of the lake water. Therefore a strictly logical reading is that the vibrations on the lake do not directly refer to the sensations coming from the external world, but to some emotional factor which adds a colouring to the perceived sensations. The meaning of vibration in this passage is thus slightly ambiguous: at one time it is directly linked to the perceptive function, and at another it refers to something that gives an extra shade of colour to mental pictures. In reading the 1794 *Evening Walk*, however, more emphasis should be placed upon the indisputable importance of vibration in Wordsworth's view of human consciousness. The fact remains that Wordsworth consistently depends on the intermediary function of vibration when he describes the human perceptive faculty. Thus, perception is no doubt a form of vibration for the Wordsworth of 1794. Indeed, from the evidence of those 1794 lines, Lucy Newlyn goes so far as to assume that Wordsworth had encountered Hartleyan associationism in a poetic form in Samuel Rogers's *Pleasures of Memory* of 1791 (41). Whether directly influenced by Hartley or not, from the quoted lines it is evident that in 1794 Wordsworth wrote within the world-view of that eighteenth-century mechanistic psychology. In this framework, psychological operations such as perception and sympathy are conducted via physical vibrations through the ether, the mechanist version of that Newtonian subtle fluid. Contrary to his later belief, the human mind for Wordsworth at this period was ultimately an automaton destined to develop and behave in accordance with the law of necessity, a representative type of which Hartley had delineated nearly half a century before.

During the few years after the reworking of *An Evening Walk*, Wordsworth's dominant concern was politics; no trace of psychological interest

appears in Wordsworth's poetry or prose written in this period (Jonathan Wordsworth, *Music of Humanity* 188). An isolated reference to associationism appears in *The Borderers* completed presumably around March 1797, but, according to Newlyn, even this sole instance could be a later revision (41). A fresh rethinking did not emerge until the early spring of 1798 after Wordsworth had fully absorbed the new philosophical principle brought to him by S. T. Coleridge. It has already been well-documented that at that time Wordsworth's thinking underwent a profound change by learning about Coleridge's "One Life" pantheist doctrine (Jonathan Wordsworth, *Music of Humanity* 184-258, Jacobus 59-82). His psychological view, too, especially that concerning associationism, underwent a corresponding metamorphosis as a result of the intellectual input from this philosophically-minded friend. Among the works of Wordsworth that echo this shift in his psychological thought, I would first like to look at two blank-verse fragments written in March 1798, the crucial period of the poet's collaboration with Coleridge. These fragments share several important themes with those 1794 lines from *An Evening Walk* and thus are useful to highlight alterations in the poet's thinking.

Those fragment poems, commonly referred to as "There is an active principle" and "Not useless do I deem" by their respective first lines, have several ideas in common with the 1794 *Evening Walk*: the notion of animated matter, sympathetic communion among all things, and the concept of language that mediates this communion. In fact, one of those fragments claims that all things are alive by being permeated by "an active principle":

> There is an active principle alive in all things;
> In all things, in all natures, in the flowers
> And in the trees, in every pebbly stone
> That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,

The moving waters and the invisible air. (1-5)

This pervasive living principle, strongly reminiscent of Newton's "active principles," hints at a lineage from the Neoplatonist side of Newtonian philosophy and claims a severance from the eighteenth-century mechanistic tradition. A universal network of communion, to be expected from the presence of this "active principle," is further articulated in the statement that "All beings have their properties which spread / Beyond themselves, a power by which they make / Some other being conscious of their life" (6-7). This "power," redefined as "Spirit" in the following line, is named as "the soul of all the worlds" (11), or a pantheist divine presence. The poem in this way suggests that the "power," "Spirit" and "soul" are identical with the "active principle" of the first line. This is a typically pantheist claim: in the form of soul, spirit, or, in this case, power, individual existences partake of the universal divine principle. In the other verse fragment, "Not useless do I deem," the theme of sympathetic communion is accompanied by another important element observed in the 1794 *Evening Walk*—a language shared by all things: "Not useless do I deem / These quiet sympathies with things that hold /An inarticulate language . . ." (1-3). It is evident from these features that these verse fragments can be read as a restatement of the 1794 *Evening Walk* from the pantheist viewpoint of "One Life."

However, there is a radical difference between that 1794 poem and those fragmentary passages of 1798. While in 1794 Wordsworth thought of mental processes in terms of vibration, no such mention is found in those 1798 lines. In the later fragments the notion of physical vibration as the mode of communication is completely absent from the poet's thought. This is a decisive step forward. In the framework of the newly acquired philosophy of "One Life," the poet now postulates a pantheist principle which, as a living agent, actively mediates the communion between every existing thing

in the world. I have pointed out that Wordsworth's "active principle" might echo the Newtonian "active principles," i.e., forms of divine participation in this world including the ether. With all the importance attached to Newtonian philosophy at Wordsworth's Cambridge (Schneider 160-62), a direct Newtonian lineage for Wordsworth's "active principle" may not be a demonstrable claim. Yet in the broader perspective of intellectual history it should be reasonable to contend that by re-emphasizing its "active" nature, Wordsworth in 1798 gave a new life to the Newtonian ether which had been regarded as a merely passive medium for vibratory motions. Curiously, Wordsworth's allegiance to the Coleridge-derived pantheism was not stable even in the relatively short period of the late 1790s. There is clear evidence that Wordsworth began withdrawing from full commitment to this metaphysical theory as early as late 1798 (Jonathan Wordsworth, *Borders of Vision* 24-26). What remained unchanged in this transition was the poet's conviction that psychological functions such as perception and sympathy were living, active processes. Unlike the poet's attitude towards "One Life," this new definition of human psychology persisted throughout the late 1790s, as our subsequent discussion will establish. In an important sense, by the turn of the century the poet had broken free from the eighteenth-century mechanist tradition.

This philosophical leap from the vibration theory to that of "active principle" is behind the new formulation of associationism in "The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" of 1800. Again no trace of the vibration doctrine is found in this work of critical prose. As we discussed in the beginning of the current paper, in place of this mechanist doctrine "The Preface" repeatedly emphasizes the importance of emotion or "excitement" in the process of association. This conspicuous leaning towards emotion is further confirmed by the paramount status assigned to feeling, a related form of emotion. "The Preface" declares that feeling is the ruling principle of *Lyrical Ballads*:

"the feelings therein [in *Lyrical Ballads*] developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (128). Elsewhere in the "Preface" Wordsworth even subordinates thought to feeling. While explicating how feelings are regulated in the mind so as to produce poetry with a worthy purpose, Wordsworth explicitly defines thought as a derivative of feeling: ". . . our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings" (126). While apparently named as superior principles, thoughts in fact originate from past feelings. In this framework feeling plays a doubly important role as the material for poetry and at the same time as the organizing agent that conducts the processes of poetic production.

In addition to its primacy in the poetics of "The Preface," another important characteristic of feeling is hinted at in the above quotation. As implied in the metaphor "influxes," feeling is treated as a kind of active fluid in Wordsworth's argument. This metaphorical definition is more clearly articulated in the remark that an agitation of mind gives rise to "fluxes and refluxes" (126) of emotions, and in that well-known phrase "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Feeling's active nature is already suggested in its function of regulating other feelings after it has been crystalized in the form of thoughts. Hence feeling in "The Preface" is a fluid entity moved to action by its own internal, active principle. Since fluidity is implied in the notion of the ether, feeling as fluid is not absolutely incompatible with Hartley's doctrine. But the active nature of fluid feeling is a decisive difference from the Hartleyan medium of mechanical vibration which cannot be otherwise than externally motivated in its operation. While writing largely in the older associationist framework, in "The Preface" Wordsworth had silently revised Hartley. John Beer's comment on Wordsworth's emphasis of emotion is particularly penetrating: "in such

state [in a state of excitement] the forces of association by contiguity, as propounded by Hartley, cease to be dominant, giving way to other, more profound activities related to the very ground of being" (65). Built upon the notion of the supremacy of feeling as active fluid in the human psyche, this new version of associationism is no longer compatible with Hartley's association operating mechanically between contiguous ideas. In a fundamental way, Wordsworth's associationism of the 1800 "Preface" is congenial to "the spontaneous overflow," the emerging paradigm of organicist philosophy.

Associationism in this revised form is one of the primary principles for Wordsworth's poetic production in the late 1790s. In fact, statements pointing to associationism and other related concepts are found here and there in Wordsworth's major poetical works in the late 1790s. In *The Pedlar* of 1798 the poet refers to "the curious links" (78) that bind together important moments of life in memory. Two years later in *The Two-Part Prelude*, he uses terms directly derived from associationism: "associated forms" (1. 406) and "quaint associations" (1. 421), both occurring in important developmental stages of the poet's mind. In some instances, rather than exhibiting his own individuality, Wordsworth faithfully follows Hartley. As already discussed, necessitarianism and the denial of free will are core elements of Hartley's associationist doctrine. These are not gloomy concepts but auspicious signs for human redemption in Hartley's thinking. He believes that simply by exposing their mind to influx of sensations from external nature, human beings are led by the law of necessity to their ultimate height of attainment, the spiritual state of the "Moral Sense" (Hartley 1. 369), which also means their final redemption. In a less grandiose tone, this providential guidance of necessity is echoed in Wordsworth's "Not useless do I deem": "we shall move / From strict necessity along the path / Of order and of good" (93-95). "Expostulation and Reply," too,

follows Hartley in stressing the importance of passive exposure to nature in the making of the human psyche: "we can feed this mind of ours, / In a wise passiveness" (23-24). In the companion piece, "The Tables Turned," the wise passiveness of "a heart / That watches and receives" (31-32) leads to moral consequences: "One impulse from a vernal wood / May teach you more of man; / Of moral evil and of good, / Than all the sages can" (21-24). The mind's passivity, necessitarianism implied in that passivity, and resultant moral amelioration: all these indicate the poet's indebtedness, conscious or unconscious, to that eighteenth-century psychologist.

On the other hand, in Wordsworth's poetry of the late 1790s there are also indications of a post-Hartleyan direction. The active working of feeling like that in "The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" appears in *The Pedlar*: ". . . deep feelings had impressed / Great objects on his mind . . ." (30-31). Here Wordsworth is quite explicit about his post-Hartleyan outlook: he rejects the idea that external objects are impressed on the passive mind mechanically; rather, he claims that the feeling actively implants perceived objects in the mind. Some ten lines later in the same poem, the poet further asserts that the Pedlar "attained /An *active* power to fasten images / Upon his brain" (39-41, original emphasis). This "active power," probably echoing the "active principle" of that blank-verse fragment of the same period, is so far away from the Hartleyan doctrine that *The Pedlar*, too, can be read as a declaration of departure from the poet's earlier mechanist position expressed in the 1794 *Evening Walk*. All these lines were written at a time when Coleridge's influence was at its peak; yet we should also note Wordsworth's originality as a thinker. The poet's primary interest in the above lines is evidently in the human psyche and the mode of its interaction with nature. While following Coleridge's predominantly religious doctrine, Wordsworth delves into the internal realm of the human mind rather than into the transcendent dimension. In the semi-autobiographical poem *The Pedlar*, we

observe the Coleridgean "One Life" reshaped into a characteristically Wordsworthian exploration of human consciousness.

In addition to its active nature, feeling is clearly assigned fluidity in Wordsworth's poetry of 1798-99. This image is especially conspicuous in *The Pedlar* and *The Two-Part Prelude*. An example from the former is nature's "overflowing soul" (204), a pantheist version of active fluid probably inspired by Coleridge's "One Life." In this instance, too, Wordsworth's individuality shows itself in contrast to his friend's influence; in the following lines it is observed that he internalizes that pantheist principle, which is first presented as something external to the mind, and converts it into the psychological element of feeling: "From Nature and her overflowing soul / He [the Pedlar] had received so much that all his thoughts / Were steeped in feeling" (204-6). Feeling's active nature is not too explicit, but its fluidity is definitely shown in the liquid image of "steeping." In this transformational process of the pantheist soul into an active psychological element of feeling, the later "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" is prefigured. A more explicit instance of active liquid is also from *The Pedlar*. The metaphor of fluid is implied where the Pedlar's spirit "drank / The spectacle" (102-3), and in the next sentence the image of dissolution strengthens this implied metaphor: "Sensation, soul, and form, /All melted into him" (103-4). Then the liquid sensation, soul and form actively "swallowed up / His animal being" (104-5). Similar active-fluid images occur in *The Two-Part Prelude* of 1799. In a childhood scene, while gazing upon a misty landscape, Wordsworth is described as "drinking in /A pure organic pleasure" (1. 395-96). And in another communion scene between nature and the mind, the sensation of the beautiful sky is presented as an active agent in a fluid form: ". . . and the sky, / Never before so beautiful, sank down / Into my heart and held me like a dream" (2. 210-14). Furthermore, the image of thoughts being "steeped in feeling," adapted from *The Pedlar* (2. 448),

confirms the unchanged use of the liquid metaphor for feeling. In the last two years of the 1790s Wordsworth thought of psychology and spiritual communion consistently in terms of active fluid; instead of a heart that "vibrates evermore," now the mind is described as opening itself to "Nature's finer influxes" (2. 328), i.e., the living flow of sensations.

The image of active fluid constitutes the central argument on the growth of the human soul in the 1799 *Prelude*, the "Infant Babe" passage. This section, the heart of the poetics developed in *The Two-Part Prelude*, delineates the process through which the infant mind acquires the faculty of unified perception "to combine / In one appearance all the elements /And parts of the same object, else detached /And loth to coalesce" (2. 277-80). The source of this perceptive power, ultimately the primary imagination as later formulated by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* (Jonathan Wordsworth, *Borders of Vision* 83), is attributed to the mother's love. The new-born baby receives from the mother's eye "passion" (2. 273) which awakens its dormant consciousness: "Such feelings [maternal passion] pass into his torpid life / Like an awakening breeze" (2. 274-75). The feelings and their metaphorical form, breeze, here employed can be read as another form of "active principle," because after receiving the mother's passion the infant baby is depicted in a way strongly suggestive of a pantheist divine principle, in particular the pantheist presence in "Tintern Abbey" of 1798. The mother-derived "virtue" which "irradiates and exalts /All objects through all intercourse of sense" (2. 289-90) echoes "A motion and a spirit that impels /All thinking things, all objects of all thought" ("Tintern Abbey" 101-2); and the lines "Along his infant veins are interfused / The gravitation and filial bond / Of Nature" (2. 292-94) are reminiscent of "something far more deeply interfused" ("Tintern Abbey" 97).

The active-fluid metaphor, implied in those lines from "Tintern Abbey" and the "Infant Babe," is also harboured in the babe's act of receiving a vital

power from someone else's eye. Robert Darnton has demonstrated that a pseudo-scientific theory related to ocular hypnosis was popular in France both among ordinary people and scientific experts from the pre-revolutionary days to the early nineteenth century: Anton Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism (3-45). Mesmer reformulated the Newtonian theory of ether into the medical sphere claiming that all living bodies were responsive to the movement of the universal fluid and by controlling this fluid health could be restored (Wylie 130-31). According to John Livingston Lowes Mesmerism influenced Coleridge, Wordsworth's closest source of influence, especially in his young days and possibly inspired his favourite theme, hypnosis with magnetic emanation from the hypnotist's eyes (231-32). If read in this historical context, the awakening passion from the mother's eyes in the "Infant Babe" can be regarded as an actively emanating flow related to the Mesmerist fluid. Not very conspicuous at first glance, the entire argument conducted in the "Infant Babe" is in fact steeped in the image of self-actuating living fluid.

The "Infant Babe" is a key text in putting forward Wordsworth's new world-view formulated after he had partly withdrawn from the dominant influence of Coleridge. Jonathan Wordsworth points out characteristic features of this passage in connection with this new position: although something of it remains in altered forms, the universally shared pantheist life-force has disappeared; the babe's mind now functions "in alliance with the works / Which it beholds," that is, instead of the pantheist interfusion, the external world existing distinctly from the babe's mind has become a fundamental assumption; and human creativity is no longer sharing with God, but acting like God, or "Even as an agent of the one great mind" (*Borders of Vision* 81-82). What is presented in the "Infant Babe" is Wordsworth's view of the human mind in the post-pantheist stage which looks in the direction of the primary imagination of Coleridge's later

philosophy. It is important that in this new stage Wordsworth still retains the notion of active fluid. That Coleridge-derived pantheism was relatively short-lived, but the active fluid accompanying the philosophy of "One Life" remains unchanged in the new framework of the "Infant Babe." In that 1799 passage psycho-physiological elements such as passion, feeling and "the gravitation and filial bond" interfused in the veins have taken over the central position from the pantheist life-force in Wordsworth's thinking. We have already seen similar conversions of the pantheist emanation into the psychological element of feeling as early as in the 1798 *Pedlar*. The "Infant Babe" can be read from this point of view as an indication of Wordsworth fully reasserting his individuality in the poetic dialogue with Coleridge.

Having looked at the poetics of the "Infant Babe" that Wordsworth reached in 1799, we are now better informed to place "The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" in perspective. The supremacy of feeling represented in the active-fluid image is a conclusion attained in 1800 after a decade of stages of philosophical thinking. For this reason, itself being a completed theory, the poetics advanced in that critical prose work retains traces of the poet's past thinking: the framework of associationism presumably comes from his world-view of the early 1790s; and the notions of active feeling and living fluid are first inspired by Coleridge's "One Life." Still, a question remains. While Wordsworth's allegiance to Coleridge's pantheist doctrine fluctuates, his belief in something alive and active in the universe and inside the human being does not. From this viewpoint Coleridge's contribution turns out to be no more than a trigger to form a philosophical position. It is conjectured that other systematic grounds than Coleridge's "One Life" might have been behind Wordsworth's thought sustaining the notion of an active agency for mind-nature intercourse and other psychological processes. A larger historical framework is no doubt the rise of the organicist-expressivist thinking in the theory of literary production as discussed by Abrams (156-225). In

addition to this general background, I would argue that there were more immediate sources that could have inspired the idea of "an active principle": contemporary developments in natural science. Wordsworth's familiarity with science is almost indisputable on the evidence of the 1794 *Evening Walk*, his educational background at Cambridge, and his friendship with Coleridge who was well-read in scientific literature as well as religion and metaphysics. As a conclusion to the current paper, I shall attempt to put Wordsworth's revision to Hartleyan psychology in a more immediate historical perspective by reconstructing some of the scientific thinking of the period. I shall focus on the vitalist trend in contemporary medicine and biology, in particular, since they were rapidly-progressing, influential fields of the day and, as I shall show below, there is evidence that Wordsworth's poetic pursuit in the late 1790s was more or less involved with these scientific disciplines.

III

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, a clear trend towards the idea of a living principle can be observed in natural philosophy. A sign of this trend is also found among associationist thinkers. As we have discussed, Hartley's original formulation was completely mechanistic because of its necessitarian view and the physical hypothesis of vibration through the nervous system. However, the importance of the vibration theory as a cornerstone of Hartley's system was diluted in the late eighteenth century by the publication of an abridged edition of *Observations on Man* in 1775. In *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind*, the editor Joseph Priestley, himself an associationist and influential scientist, removed much of Hartley's discussion of the vibration doctrine for the sake of better intelligibility. Although Priestley himself largely agreed with the vibration hypothesis,

"thinking that Dr. Hartley has produced sufficient evidence for it" (iii), his editorial principle, along with Hartley's own cautious reservation about the ultimate validity of the vibration theory, started the trend of reinterpretation by subsequent theorists that the theory of vibration is really unconnected with Hartley's main claim of mental association (Verhave).

At about the same time, a strong alternative to Hartley's mechanist thinking began to emerge from other quarters of natural philosophy. Especially in medicine and biology, sciences directly linked to the question of life, the idea of vitalism was gaining ground in the late eighteenth century. For all the advances in chemistry and physics which suggested that many living processes could possibly be explained in material terms, the dominant trend of thought of the time was that life, or the vital principle, should be different in kind from other natural phenomena (Wylie 123). Anton Mesmer's animal magnetism was an offshoot of this vitalist school. As Robert Darnton explains, Mesmer's magnetic fluid was related to the notion of vital fluid entertained both by popular minds and scientific experts of the day (15-16). In fact the universal vital fluid was approved in different ways by such scientists as Alexander Monroe and James Hutton (Wylie 128, 134). In 1791, furthermore, Luigi Galvani's discovery of electric fluid discharged from frogs' limbs gave additional support to this pervasive principle. Newton had once thought that the ether is electrical; and the credibility of this notion had been enhanced in the eighteenth century by the discoveries of electrical phenomena in the sea and by Benjamin Franklin's demonstration of the existence of electricity in the higher atmosphere (Wylie 132). Electricity was proved to be as ubiquitous as the ether. As well as corroborating the existence of electrical fluid, Galvani's discovery contributed to a firmer status of this fluid as the universal vital principle. Thus in the late eighteenth century the notion of universal vital fluid was shared widely both in popularized pseudo-science and in genuinely discipli-

nary pursuits. Having his formative years in the last two decades of that century, Wordsworth, too, was immersed in this intellectual climate. It is highly probable that, consciously or unconsciously, the poet in the 1790s was under the influence of the notion of universal fluid as the vital principle.

In addition to this general historical background, Wordsworth was also exposed to vitalist thinking more immediately. Throughout the 1790s Wordsworth was a sympathizer with the contemporary republican movement, and in fact during a few years in the middle of the decade he actively moved in radical political circles. Radical thinkers those days, many of them dissenters, were scientifically-minded or professional scientists. One of those radical scientists once acting closely with Wordsworth was John Thelwall. Thelwall, a man well-read in medicine, was elected member of the Physical Society of Guy's Hospital in 1791. Two years later at the same institute he presented a paper on vitality, which was later published as *An Essay towards a Definition of Animal Vitality*. According to Nicholas Roe's study, in this publication Thelwall proclaims himself among theorists who identify the vital principle with the electrical fluid pervading the atmosphere (187-188). Thelwall's argument might have been known to Wordsworth via Coleridge, who held a strong interest in Thelwall's *Essay* (Roe 187). On this premise Roe looks for the origin of the pantheist presence in "Tintern Abbey," "something far more deeply interfused," in a conceptually similar usage of "something" in Thelwall's *Essay*: "what is this something —this vivifying principle. . . . Something . . . it must be, that is contained in the atmosphere, and something of a powerful and exquisitely subtile nature" (Thelwall quoted in Roe 187). Although Roe's claim remains a conjecture, it proves that the notion of a vital principle, airy or fluid, was in close proximity with Wordsworth.

Another immediate route of vitalist thinking is Erasmus Darwin. Coleridge's familiarity with Darwin's biological theory has been amply

documented; indeed his curiosity once brought him to visit this biologist in 1796. Wordsworth, too, showed a strong interest and in 1798 actually read Darwin's *Zoonomia*, a medical work on diseases in connection with animal vitality, for "very particular reasons" (*Letters* 199). An obvious outcome of this reading is the ballad "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" which is openly based on a story recorded in *Zoonomia*. A number of specific instances of Wordsworth's debt to Darwin, including "Goody Blake," are discussed by Averill and Matlak. Among others, Darwin's conception of "the spirit of animation," examined by the latter, is particularly relevant to my argument. Darwin postulates this "spirit of animation" as the fundamental "living principle" that acts as the agent of every motion and sensation in the body. This living principle is derived from Darwin's strong inclination to establish laws unique to animal nature; he explicitly rejects attempts by other scientists to "explain the laws of life by those of mechanism and chemistry" (*Zoonomia* 1). An important corollary from this position is the dismissal of the Hartleyan theory of nervous vibration because this hypothesis, based typically on an analogy to physics, completely contradicts Darwin's aim of establishing laws which apply exclusively to animal life. Darwin is categorical: "nor are they [sensorial motions] supposed to be vibrations or revibrations . . . but to be changes or motions of it [the spirit of animation] peculiar to life" (*Zoonomia* 33). Quite unreservedly this biologist dropped the eighteenth-century mechanist tradition in favour of the new vitalist paradigm.

As the agent of muscular-fibre movements the spirit of animation is in a state of dynamic balance; it is "perpetually exhausted by the expenditure of it in fibrous contractions, and is perpetually renewed by the secretion of it in the brain and spinal marrow" (*Zoonomia* 75). Bindler and Verhave interpret this conceptual model by Darwin as consisting of "a series of reservoirs of potential animal energy" which is continually consumed and

continually replenished from within the physical system. Hence the specific image that Darwin held of the spirit of animation is fluid, and as the agent of motions it is active. True to the vitalist way of thinking, the spirit of animation is an active fluid. Darwin, intriguingly, still retains the old notion of association among the four modes of operation he sets for this animal energy. Darwin did not merely demolish the traditional way of thinking; he, like Wordsworth, revised Hartleyan associationism to fit it into the new vitalist paradigm.

Although *Zoonomia* only discusses animal energy inside the body, Darwin's spirit of animation is not without a broader application. In an earlier work, *The Economy of Vegetation*, Darwin had conjectured that the spirit of animation might be taken from the air into the body by respiration: "perhaps the spirit of animation itself is thus [by inhaling] acquired from the atmosphere" (46). This notion, close to Thelwall's "vivifying principle" contained in the atmosphere, indicates that at least for a time Darwin positively subscribed to the notion of the universal ethereal fluid, first devised by Newton, then revived in the late eighteenth century in connection with phenomena of animation. Hence the significance of Darwin's spirit of animation is not merely limited to biology and medicine; it was a formulation made possible after a century of discussion on the nature of the universal ethereal fluid. In this sense Erasmus Darwin is an important milestone at the historic juncture of the old and new paradigms.

It is not possible to ascertain precisely to what extent Wordsworth is indebted to contemporary scientific thinkers like Thelwall and Darwin. However, common notions shared between them can be readily detected. Starting as a poet believing in Hartley's vibration doctrine, Wordsworth grew out of this older mechanist mould into a new allegiance to Coleridge's "One Life" and to the vitalist-organicist position partly derived from that pantheism. That he adopted these new views in the older framework of

associationism is characteristic of him as a poet working in the dawn of a new era. Exactly like Wordsworth, Darwin built up his vitalist position of "the spirit of animation" while still using the traditional notion of associationism. By this living fluid Darwin proposed an explicitly post-Hartleyan concept of animal vitality which came very close to the notion of feeling as a self-generating, active fluid that Wordsworth developed in his poetry of the late 1790s and in "The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" of 1800. The universally pervasive nature attributed in different forms to the active fluid by Darwin, Wordsworth and Thelwall further indicates the lineage of their thought in the Neoplatonic origin of the Newtonian ether. Wordsworth might have been indebted to Thelwall and Darwin, or their influence might have been only indirect. But what remains incontrovertible is that when Wordsworth first emerged as a major Romantic poet, the innovation involved in his poetry was not only literary; reflected in it was a major paradigm-shift in contemporary natural science.

Wordsworth's vitalist revision to associationist psychology was given support a few years later by his literary collaborator, S. T. Coleridge. Once a enthusiastic follower of Hartley, Coleridge remarked in 1794: "I am a compleat Necessitarian . . . but I go farther than Hartley and believe the corporeality of *thought*—namely, that it is motion" (Coleridge, *Letters* 1: 137, original emphasis). As he added in a playful tone, Coleridge regarded this motion as "vibrations through the medullary substance" (*Letters* 1: 137). In June 1803, however, he openly recanted this former materialist position by declaring that he was going to write a new associationist theory "entirely defecated from all the corpuscular hypothesis" (*Letters* 2: 949). Then in August of the same year, he disclosed some detail of this revised associationism which was, in its emphasis on the role of feeling, close to Wordsworth's position in "The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*": "I hold, that association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resem-

bling states of Feelings, than on Trains of Ideas" (*Letters* 2: 961). In the same paragraph he adds: "I almost think, that Ideas *never* recall Ideas, as far as they are Ideas—any more than Leaves in a forest create each other's motion—The Breeze it is that runs thro' them / it is the Soul, the state of Feeling" (*Letters* 2: 961, original emphasis). In a sense this passage is a restatement of his earlier position since it inherits the central image of "one intellectual Breeze" (47) from his pantheist poem of 1796, "Effusion XXXV, The Eolian Harp." Yet the similarity to Wordsworth's post-Hartleyan thinking is obvious in the central role of feeling in association and the image of vital breeze, a version of the ethereal fluid, attached to feeling. Coleridge, too, is finding "more profound activities related to the very ground of being" (Beer 126). Coleridge's affinity to Wordsworth here described is certainly another indication of their literary collaboration conducted in the late 1790s; in a more profound sense, however, it points towards the far-reaching scope of the Romantic movement encompassing creative literature, speculative philosophy and experimental science.

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SYNOPSIS

"The Breeze Running through Ideas": Wordsworth's Vitalist Associationism

By Ichiro Koguchi

This paper sets out to expound Wordsworth's psychological view in the late 1790s, the period when he established himself as a major Romantic poet. In "The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" of 1800, Wordsworth assumes a peculiar position combining the traditional theory of the association of ideas and the emerging paradigm of Romantic organicism. Built upon the world-view of the eighteenth century, the former theory as devised by its originator David Hartley is characterized by its mechanist-necessitarian position, the opposite of the latter which is based on the notion of spontaneous free growth. When it was employed in the 1800 "Preface," therefore, associationism would have to be substantially revised so as to fit in with this new organicist framework. The current paper explicates this theoretical revision in Wordsworth's psychological outlook.

The mechanist aspect of Hartley's associationist theory is supported by the doctrine of vibration: the assumption that psychological processes are conducted by vibrations in the nervous system. The medium through which those physiological vibrations are communicated is the ether, that "subtle" universal fluid conceived by Newton as the medium of physical forces. Although this Newtonian ethereal fluid was originally regarded as the agent of God's participation in the created world, by Hartley's time it had been interpreted from an entirely mechanistic perspective as a part of the self-sustained mechanism of the universe. Hartley's associationism is thus doubly mechanistic both in its psychological dimension and in its physical ground.

Wordsworth in the early 1790s subscribed to this Hartley-derived mechanical doctrine. In fact, he employed Hartleyan associationism complete with the vibration doctrine in the 1794 version of *An Evening Walk*. However, in the poetry written in the late 1790s, while associationism retains its status as a

central psychological principle, the vibration doctrine is completely dropped. And, in its stead, a pantheist active principle in the guise of active fluid is introduced as the agent of mind-nature communion and other psychological processes. Then, in *The Pedlar* and *The Two-Part Prelude* written in 1798 and 1799, this religious principle is revised into a psycho-physiological notion of active feeling again in the form of living liquid. Thus by the 1800 "Preface," Wordsworth's associationism had transformed from the original mechanical doctrine into its opposite extreme, an organic theory.

It is significant that the idea of an active principle in the form of living fluid was retained after its original theoretical premise, the pantheist philosophy, had become less important. Other than pantheism, there may have been another route of influence which gave support to the notion of active fluid. This alternative source was the contemporary development of vitalist thinking in medicine and biology. Wordsworth could have known about John Thelwall's medical theory of animal vitality pervading the atmosphere, and he almost certainly learned about the spirit of animation as the vital principle of living creatures while studying Erasmus Darwin's biological treatise, *Zoonomia*. These contemporary vitalist theories could have given Wordsworth the notion of active fluid as the principal agent of human psychology. While this may not be a demonstrable claim, it is certain that these biological ways of thought contributed to the general intellectual climate that inspired Wordsworth to create a new vitalist version of associationism in the 1800 "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*."