SUMMARY

In writing this study I have tried to examine Wordsworth's concept of the imagination by means of which he presents his view of life. As far as I know, this has not yet been properly assessed, though the need for such an assessment has been generally recognized. As a prose writer Wordsworth possessed a high degree of critical intelligence, and his prose writings may be reasonably regarded as a sort of manifesto for the romantics. The tone of these writings is formidable, authoritative and confident. The impression that his prose writings leave on the mind is one of an alert and conscious poet.

The neglect that has been shown towards his prose writings is partly due to the nature of his own work. No one of them singly attempts a comprehensive survey of Wordsworth's theories. At the beginning of the Preface to the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads, which is sometimes regarded as a complete statement of Wordsworth's theory, he expressly states that a systematic exposition of his theory would require a space wholly disproportionate to the Preface. He, therefore, limits himself to the most controversial aspects of his experimental poems - his novel choice of subject and of language. In the Preface of 1815 Wordsworth explains the classification of his poems. The Essay, Supplementary to the Preface seems primarily designed to be a
defence of the lasting worth of his poems. It is obvious, therefore, that Wordsworth's theory cannot be properly formulated from any one of these essays, nor from all of them put together. The critic must also examine the passages from Wordsworth's letters, Dorothy's journals, Wordsworth's essay on Epitaphs, his conversations preserved in the records of his friends and, above all, from The Prelude. Only then does Wordsworth's thinking on the nature and function of poetry emerge in all its interrelations.

This I have considered important primarily for two reasons. First, because it will provide us a point of view from which we shall be able to measure the varying degrees of success that Wordsworth attained as a poet. For it is still the general feeling that Wordsworth's position in English literature has not been acknowledged without the absence of reservation that characterizes the status of poets like Chaucer, Shakespeare and Keats. Evidence of this feeling exists in the marked ambivalence of attitudes towards much of Wordsworth's poetry shown by the adherents of New Criticism. With a few exceptions they grant greatness to the poetry of Wordsworth, but find it less suited to their orientation and skill than the more subtle linguistic complexities in the poetry of Donne or Eliot. Secondly, this study is important because still there is much disagreement on Wordsworth's theory of poetry. The discussion, therefore, has been reviewed again.
For this purpose all the prose writings of Wordsworth have been examined carefully and after making due allowance for the inconsistencies and self-contradictions in the formulation of his theories I have tried to determine the conditions under which they are really acceptable. Finally, when all doubts about Wordsworth's theoretical position have been set at rest, an attempt has been made to estimate the absolute value of his theories and their importance today.

In this connection, I have considered it useful to trace briefly the history of the two terms - Fancy and Imagination, because this has enabled us to define correctly ideas about them. In early use the two terms were often synonymous. In the seventeenth century, there were attempts to distinguish the two faculties, though the creative power associated with the term 'Imagination' was the special contribution of the great romantics, Wordsworth and Coleridge. The eighteenth century considered imagination as an irresponsible element untroubled by truth and reality. Wordsworth's theory of the imagination is, therefore, of great historical importance, not only because of the fact that it anticipates Coleridge's more well-known theory in many ways, but because of the fact that it is really the beginning of a long line of enquiry extending to our own age. I have tried to give an idea as to how confusing the two terms have become today. Wordsworth, it seems, was not a tame disciple of Coleridge and he had given the subject a good deal of independent thought. This is evident from the more assured tone of the Preface of 1815.
Wordsworth's theory of imagination puts him closer to the German transcendentalists and their English followers. Yet Wordsworth was never a conscious or consistent exponent of transcendental doctrines.

The implication, that Wordsworth's criticism and his practice of poetry represent different aesthetic backgrounds and attitudes, is false. The eighteenth century character of the Preface of 1815 is more apparent that real, more in terminology than in substance. Again, the Preface has so often been surveyed generally as theory to be contrasted with Coleridge's that one forgets to notice how it describes the actual working of Wordsworth's mind and what he considered to be the poet's mind. Wordsworth's characterization of the term 'imagination' as a faculty producing impressive effects out of simple elements, denoting operations of the mind, modifying, conferring and shaping, is directed towards a common goal, to free the object from all sense of limitation. The emphasis on freedom from the bondage of definite form and the association of the imagination with the sublime is of great importance in Wordsworth's theory and the implications of these attitudes extend far beyond his aesthetics. He is clearly a great representative in English poetry of a tradition that is wider, commoner, and more significant than what may be called Wordsworthianism. Unfortunately, the barrier between Wordsworth and his predecessors is less high than that which cuts him off from those who succeed him.
A proper understanding of Wordsworth's concept of
the imagination is the key to the appreciation of some of
the peculiar modes of his poetry, particularly his preoccu-
pation with the transcendental and the ideal. It tells us
why deep truths are imageless and how the frustration of
the rule of the senses may become productive of great poetry.
This also explains the contradiction which has baffled many
readers of Wordsworth's poetry, the contradiction between
the desire to preserve the mystical experience of transcend-
ence and the realization that such experiences are often
indescribable. Coleridge attempted to express reality beyond
sense by circumventing the senses; he built his pleasure dome
in air. But Wordsworth's critical intelligence was masculine
in its aims and performances. To him poetry is ethereal and
transcendent, yet it is incapable of sustaining her existence
without sensuous incarnation.

This view of poetry accounts for the characteristic
Wordsworthian habit of interchanging qualities of the animate
and the inanimate, of the mind and matter in poetry. It is
the way of recapturing poetically that sense of the unity
of all existence which he felt intuitively. Wordsworth's
re-enactment of the process of interaction often depends on
the metaphoric power of a single word or group of words.
The word 'incumbencies' for example, in the following lines
felt

Incumbencies more awful, visitings
Of the Upholder of the tranquil soul...

encompasses both the physical and spiritual realm, for the word means lying down upon something as well as spiritual brooding or over-shadowing. Among the rhetorical strategies which Wordsworth developed to mediate between the physical and mental realms was one in which the visual and the visionary are simultaneously perceived. The analysis, which I have given of the two poems "To A Highland Girl" and "She Was A Phantom Of Delight", demonstrates how Wordsworth very often entangles the moral or spiritual with the sensuous. It is largely because of the concealed metaphorical transfers that we modulate so easily from the visual to the visionary. In Wordsworth's poetry the literal often becomes metaphorical and then literal again. The 'correspondent breeze' is a metaphor that brings together nature within the poet and outside him. It has been shown that the images function on two separate levels simultaneously; they are at once both literal and metaphorical.

In this sense Wordsworth's poetry is 'oblique'. The fundamental thing in Wordsworth's mind was a trust and reverence of his own experience. That experience was so important and inviolable that he could hardly endure to put into any but direct form. Tillyard says: "Not to be literal was to betray the holiness of those things he had been allowed

to feel. The apparent matter-of-factness of much of The Prelude is the oblique expression of this trust and reverence. Only through being direct could he achieve his proper obliquity."

Indeed, Wordsworth's theory of poetry in general and his concept of the imagination in particular have given rise to a special kind of rhetorical art. In his poetry, as in all great poetry, form is finally quiescent. His poems are not to be looked upon as structures of complex words or a series of reverberating images. The necessity for expressing the inexpressible accounts for yet another significant manner in his poetry, the habit of thinking in terms of paired opposites. Here are a few examples:

Calm is the nature as a resting wheel
And all the mighty heart is lying still
The winds that will be howling at all hours
Are upgathered now like sleeping flowers;
The fluttering nerves composed; the beating heart
In rest established; and the jarring thoughts
To harmony restored.

4. "Written In Very Early Youth", line I.
7. Excursion, VI, 194-196.
The study of some of these major modes of Wordsworth’s poetry that I have given in chapter four really entails an evaluation of Wordsworth’s theory of poetry. And, indeed, it would otherwise scarcely have been worth undertaking. In fact, Wordsworth’s theory embodies a more subtle play of mind than is usually conceded to him even by his admirers. An examination of Wordsworth’s theory that all good poetry “is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” is necessary to remove some misconceptions associated with it. One such misconception is that the theory eliminates the conditions of the actual world and the requirements of the audience and thus it reduces poetry to a ‘functionless vestige of a primitive mentality.’ But the Wordsworthian spontaneity is a reward of an intelligent application and hard-won skills. Wordsworth’s contention, that the object of poetry is immediate pleasure, has, in addition to its intrinsic interest, a great historical interest, not only because it sums up a characteristic tendency of eighteenth century thought but also because it bears significantly upon a characteristic tendency of our contemporary culture. The condemned epithet ‘selection of language really used by men’ is acceptable even today when considered in relation to Wordsworth’s pronouncements on poetry taken as a whole. Finally, the virtues of metre that Wordsworth claims need not be rejected on the basis of an examination of Wordsworth’s practice, particularly the insidious nature of the alliance of metre and halting words in his poetry. One’s practice need not annual one’s
If, as I have stated, our age has proved slow to acknowledge the characteristic Wordsworthian achievement, we must remember that the critical system in which we have been taught to think was devoted primarily to the defence of two extremes - the metaphysical and the modern approaches to poetry. And, often, in our zeal to uphold these extremes we have misunderstood the value of Wordsworth's utterances on poetry. Therefore, I have tried to present here his Theory of the Imagination for a more detailed consideration than it has hitherto received. It seems but just that a full account of his work should be attempted before new approaches obscure our debt.

8. James Reeves writes: "The Solitary Reaper appears on examination to be defective, at any rate at the beginning. ... There is really no earthly reason for telling us in four different ways that she is by herself; nor does the phrase 'in the field' tell us much, since it is stressed elsewhere that she is reaping, and this is the obvious place in which to reap. It is clear that Wordsworth is padding." The Critical Sense, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1964, p. 128.