

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN THE PROSE WORKS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH
AND ITS BEARING ON SOME CENTRAL THEMES OF HIS POETRY

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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In his prefaces and essays Wordsworth writes on metaphor and imagery in his own and other poetry; but in writing about metaphor and other aspects of poetic creation the poet often resorts to highly figurative language. Indeed, Wordsworth continually blurs the distinctions between his poetry and prose. Poetry and philosophy are modes of discourse that are usually thought of as distinct and incompatible. Yet Wordsworth has no urge to protect the borderline between these areas. If the poetry is sometimes prosaic, the prose is more often poetic. It is, for example, difficult, if not impossible, to accept the arguments of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads if the reader is unaware of the metaphoric system in that essay which personifies two radically different types of poetry, held by the poet in dynamic and dialectic opposition. On the one hand a simple, "natural" poetry is personified as a simple, natural person while, on the other hand, a highly wrought, "artificial" poetry is consistently personified as a sophisticated, jaded city-dweller.

Wordsworth's tendency, in his criticism, is to render into vividly realised personifications abstract ideas of language. Poetry "speaks", is "clothed", has "affections", weeps "natural and human tears", has "vital juices" and "human blood" circulates through her veins (I 135). So strong is the poet's attachment to words "not only as symbols of the passion, but as things, active and efficient" (P.W. II 592), that in writing about them, it seems as

though he apprehends words as a physical reality.

Particular groups of people, in particular humble rustics and sophisticated city dwellers, are identified by physical appearance, speech and dress so that a reference to, for example, the clothing of that group is a symbol, interchangeable with the whole. Humble and rustic clothing and speech thus, in Wordsworth system of metaphors, correlate to his personifications of true poetry as a humble country dweller: true poetic diction is "plain" (I 125), "unelaborated" (I 125), "manly" (I 127). False poetic diction, on the other hand, is noted for its "gaudiness" (I 166, 123), ostentation (I 123), extravagance (I 129), "foreign splendour" (I 137) and is closely associated with the personification of false poetry as "depraved" (I 121), "pernicious" (I 125), "perverted" (I 161), "vicious" city sophisticates. Throughout the Preface, country and city, simple and sophisticated, nakedness and clothing are held in dynamic balance.

Certain of the essays incorporate a coherent set of metaphors in which nearly every utterance can be seen in some kind of relationship to the predominant figures. Such is the case with the Essay, Supplementary to the Preface of 1815. Wordsworth takes the much-loved romantic notion of the poem as heterocosm, of the implied parallel between God and the poet and between God's relation to His world and the poet to his poem -- and he expands lavishly upon this theme. In his metaphorical system the poet is a deity and there are true and false prophets who direct readers to the true gods

of poetry, or mislead them to false gods (like Alexander Pope or the redoubtable MacPherson). The whole process of reading is seen as a religious ritual and readers are expected to approach the poems with due reverence. They may also experience a conversion from their false beliefs to the true gods of poetry: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and, of course, William Wordsworth:

The commerce between Man and his Maker [Wordsworth writes] cannot be carried on but by a process where much is represented in little, and the Infinite Being accommodates himself to a finite capacity. In all this may be perceived the affinity between religion and poetry (III 65)...

In his dual role as deity and prophet Wordsworth simultaneously stoops to accommodate himself to the people and directs them towards his efforts.

It is often Wordsworth's habit to introduce his reader to a new metaphorical world at the beginning of an essay or preface. For example, in his Preface to The Excursion we are invited to enter the world of the poem as if we were entering a cathedral. And the cathedral-like representation of the poem is, of course, most appropriate since, according to the prediction in the closing lines of The Prelude, The Excursion is "A work.../Of man's redemption" -- although it is devoid of specific theological content.

In the first Essay Upon Epitaphs we are invited to enter a new world of metaphors and symbols for the poet begins his work with the creation of a new planet or, in the

words of The Prelude, "an independent world,/ Created out of pure intelligence" (Prel VI 166-7):

As, in sailing upon the orb of this planet, a voyage towards the regions where the sun sets, conducts gradually to the quarter where we have become accustomed to behold it come forth at its rising; and, in like manner, a voyage towards the east, the birth-place in our imagination of the morning, leads finally to the quarter where the sun is last seen when he departs from our eyes; so the contemplative Soul, travelling in the direction of mortality, advances to the country of everlasting life; and, in like manner, may she continue to explore those cheerful tracts, till she is brought back, for her advantage and benefit, to the land of transitory things -- of sorrow and of tears (II 53).

The movement of the earth is a favorite Wordsworthian analogy for the movement of the mind, but in this instance, the mind is compared to the sun in its journey around the earth, for as the sun appears to peer down on the earth, so the "contemplative Soul" explores its earthy "tracts". The word "tract" occurs frequently in The Prelude and always with ambiguous reference: "tract" is, interchangeably the poet's "dear native regions" (Prel VIII 467) and the discursive text of the poem itself. The word is used with similar ambiguity in the first essay. Throughout the essay the eye of the poet scanning the text is compared to the eye of sun roving over the world. The epitaph, Wordsworth writes, is not "a proud writing shut up for the studious: it is exposed to all ... it is open to the day; the sun looks down upon stone, and the rains of heaven beat against it" (II 59). It is "intended to be permanent, and for universal

perusal" (II 59). The idealizing light of the poet's imagination, the "light of love" (II 57), "truth hallowed by love" (II 58) is associated with the sun's illumination. Wordsworth scans Chiabrera's epitaph on Baldi with the same movement of the sun on its journey across the world. He shows how the images are contrasted and then united and how the whole seems to turn full circle, returning to the original address (II 89).

For Wordsworth the epitaph is quintessential poetry, expressing the most basic of human emotions. Epitaphs exist in an ideal relationship with nature -- like so many poems scattered across the countryside. They are accessible to readers of all levels of society and, inscribed upon stone, they have a permanence which is usually only afforded to the best works of literature.

Because of the utterly simple nature of the epitaph, Wordsworth is horrified at the Augustan tendency to embellish and decorate it and we find images of ornate and ill-fitting garments being used as terms of derogation in much the same way as in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, but with rather more force.

Sir Philip Sidney's epitaph, for example, which is "a servile imitation from a French epitaph" is described as "nothing more than the second-hand coat of a French Commander" (II 72). It is a marvellous image which conveys Wordsworth's sense of outrage that such a distinguished Englishman should have to suffer this indignity.

Wordsworth's central proposition concerning the

relationship of words to thoughts is embedded in clothing metaphors:

If words be not...an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift; such as one of those poisoned vestments, read of in stories of superstitious times, which had the power to consume and to alienate from his right mind the victim who put them on (II 85).

The deadly attraction of the "poisoned vestments" (referring perhaps to the shirt of Nexus or the poisoned robe sent by Medea to Jason's new bride) conveys, in typically concrete terms, the fatal appeal that the various manifestations of "vicious" diction have to the author who wishes "to do justice to the occasion" (II 84). The image of the "poisoned vestments" is a particularly appropriate one in the context of Wordsworth's discussion, for his examples of "vicious" diction usually entail embellishments culled from works of classical literature. Again we note Wordsworth's tendency to visualise a particular kind of language in terms of a physical representation which is often appropriate to the style or diction that he is trying to define. Wordsworth replaces the Eighteenth-century notion of "language as the dress of thought" with his own version of "language as the incarnation of thought" -- and the opposition of "garment" and "body" which operates throughout the essay is rather strange in the context of epitaphs and graveyards. Indeed, the poet is unable to control all the associations of his metaphors and performs a sort of verbal dans macabre as he records his conception of poetry in terms of a fusion of

flesh and words: there are "skeletons" of thought and feeling (II 75), poems have "bod[ies]" (II 89), letters have "spirit[s]" (II 51), words that reveal affectation have "a killing power" and Alexander Pope, who is again the villain of the piece, is "an anatomist who dissects the internal frame of the mind" (II 57).

Not all of Wordsworth's critical essays have elaborate systems of metaphors and images. The Preface of 1815 is one of the few essays that is relatively straightforward and the reader is able to engage with the text without first deciphering the metaphorical system. Wordsworth's discussions on metaphor itself are always interesting and his prime example of the use of figurative language is Milton's epic similes, such as the following:

'As when far off at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
 Close sailing from Bengala, or the isles
 Of Ternate or Tidare, whence merchants bring
 Their spicy drugs; they on the trading flood
 Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape
 Ply, stemming nightly towards the Pole: so seemed
 Far off the flying Fiend' (III 31).

Milton "dares to represent" the fleet as "hanging in the clouds" -- a physical impossibility yet, nevertheless, quite acceptable in the language of poetry. The imagination modifies, endows, dissolves, and abstracts and, blending its might with the forms of the external world creates "a new existence". Milton's words consist of a web of allusions and associations: the "Fiend" (presumably invisible to the poet) is described as a fleet, which happens to be a rather

literary and idealized one, and it in turn is described as hanging in the clouds. Yet the description is richly suggestive of the "motion and appearance" of the "the sublime object to which it is compared", even to the extent of recreating the perspective from which the comparison set out. Wordsworth asks:

'So seemed far off the flying Fiend'...and to whom seemed?

And he provides this interesting answer:

To the heavenly muse who dictates the poem, to the eye of the Poet's mind, and that of the Reader, present at moment in the wide Ethiopian, and the next in the solitudes, then first broken in upon of the infernal regions (III 34).

The poetic text is again seen as a "tract" over which the eye of the poet, his muse, and reader may travel. The poetic text, Wordsworth implies, is in its very nature unstable and inconstant -- continually shifting its terms of reference.

When Wordsworth refers to Milton he gives to the figure of allusion a force which is not ordinarily associated with such invocations. The figure of Milton reappears in most of the critical essays to admonish the poet and to remind him of his great unfinished task. The 1815 Preface starts out as a work in praise of the sober sublimities of the poetic imagination -- with Milton as the guiding figure; but it culminates in a celebration of the anarchical powers of the fancy and in the reversal Milton is

made to suffer the indignity of having his crucial description of nature in sympathy for the transgression of man compared to one of Lord Chesterfield's witty aphorisms. Here are the passages in question -- first Milton:

Sky lowered, and muttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at contemplation of mortal sin
(III 37).

Lord Chesterfield:

The dews of evening most carefully shun,
They are the tears of the sky for the loss of
the sun (III 37).

Wordsworth has misquoted Milton, ("contemplation" for "completing"), but nevertheless claims that we see here the extent to which "Fancy ambitiously aims at rivalry with Imagination" (III 37). He explains that "The associating link is the same in each instance: dew and rain, not indistinguishable from the liquid substance of tears, are employed as indications of sorrow" (III 37). When Wordsworth deviates from his high poetic task the figure of Milton usually experiences a corresponding humiliation, as in Book III of The Prelude. Wordsworth is seduced from his poetic mission by the false sophistication of life at Cambridge and indulges in (rare) drunken revels in "the very room" that housed the "temperate Bard" (Prel III 297-8). By degrading the memory of Milton, or reducing his stature, the poet can rid himself of his stern guardian and may stray from his chosen path into the byways of fancy.

Not all Wordsworth's essays are about literature and not

not all of them employ figures and metaphors. Wordsworth's Guide through the District of the Lakes, for example, contains extremely literal descriptions of the countryside which forms such an important part of the poetry. Not only are the descriptions rather unimaginative, but they are presented in the standard terminology of the Picturesque. Words like "romantic", "gloomy", "impressive", "sublime", "majestic", "proportionate", "unified" abound. "Prospects" are compared with landscape paintings of the scene and the landscape itself is seen in terms of a painting: white destroys "the gradations of distance" in a view (II 216) or the poet complains of "an over-prevalence of a bluish tint, which the green of the herbage, the fern, and the woods, does not sufficiently counteract" (II 215).

While we may be surprised to find a guide to the well-known landscape of Wordsworth's poetry presented in an uncharacteristic, unmetaphorical way, we may be even more surprised to find an essay on the politics of the French Revolution making use of a consistent system of images and metaphors. Wordsworth's Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff is an early work in which the young revolutionary (newly returned from France) attempts to defend the violence of the revolution. Wordsworth clearly sees the revolution as the birth of a new society: the time is "big with the fate of the human race" (I 32). Yet the tension and duality inherent in the situation itself would seem to be reflected in the tension that resides in the poet's metaphorical system. Wordsworth's birth metaphors consistently return to

the idea of violence -- the birth-pains and "convulsions" (I 32, 34) rather than the birth itself occupy the poet's mind. If the new order is described in terms of a violent, but ultimately fruitful birth, the old order is described in images of "barrenness" (I 48) and stillbirth. Burke's appeal to the idea of chivalry and historical continuity is rejected as an attempt to "cherish a corpse at the bosom when reason might call aloud that it should be entombed" (I 48). The comparison is again equivocal for it suggests an image of pity rather than disgust. In one of the more startling descriptions of birth we find that, despite his fiery rhetoric, the poet betrays an aversion towards the common man and his behaviour. He expresses the hope that, under the new dispensation, "the bulk of mankind" will no longer be tempted:

to fly to that promiscuous intercourse to which they are impelled by the instincts of nature, and the dreadful satisfaction of escaping the prospect of infants, sad fruit of such intercourse, whom they are unable to support (I 43).

His hope that the "wretched class of mendicants will not much longer shock the feelings of humanity" (I 43) is reminiscent of Beaupuis' reaction to the "hunger-bitten girl" in Book IX of The Prelude. "'Tis against that/ That we are fighting'" (Prel IX 516-7), he claims, and the italicised that conveys the mixture of scorn and humanitarianism in the revolutionary's attitude. But to fight against that, the thing perceived, is also to destroy

it, the thing along with the condition. In Wordsworth's later political essays and letters, while admitting the need for reform, he indicates a reluctance to reform the idealized figures of his encounters out of their existence.

Despite his conscious espousal of the writings of Godwin and Paine, the analogy between the mob and a wanton stable beast reveals a dislike of mob behaviour, while the emphasis of his sentence falls clearly on moderation and regularity, rather than on "freedom".

The most positive image of democracy to emerge from the Letter to Llandaff is one which anticipates the idealized rustic figures of Wordsworth's poetry:

If your lordship has travelled in the democratic cantons of Switzerland [Wordsworth writes] you must have seen the herdsman with the staff in one hand and the book in the other (I 39).

The description anticipates the idealized shepherds and leechgatherers of Wordsworth's poetry.

The pamphlet on The Convention of Cintra is Wordsworth's Statesman's Manual, his prose poem: "an impassioned strain... without aid of numbers" (National Independence and Liberty II VII), "a dirge devoutly breathed o'er sorrows past", but also a "prophecy" telling of "bright calms that shall succeed" (National Independence and Liberty II VIII).

The right of the Spanish cause is presented in vivid natural imagery. The moral strength of the Spanish army is compared with the Nile in flood, spreading over "the whole face of the land" (I 234). Wordsworth's predicts the

recovery of the nation "as the root of a majestic tree recovered from a long disease, and beginning again to flourish" (I 228)... He compares the ability of the Spanish people to recover from their setback with "the bodies of Angels" which though cut, unite again (I 235).

Wordsworth is clearly not concerned with arguments of political expediency but makes "claims upon humanity" (I 278) and upon the "moral nature of man" (I 328) -- themes emphasised by his use of a poetic and emotive style. In a passage which is almost Blakean in its metaphoric linking of a limited rationalism with death, Wordsworth claims that statesmen and courtiers are deracinated, cut off from experience and knowledge of human nature:

the splendour of the Imagination has been fading; Sensibility, which was formerly a generous nurseling of rude Nature, has been chased from its ancient range in the wide domain of patriotism and religion with the weapons of derision by a shadow calling itself Good Sense; calculations of presumptuous Expediency (I 325)...

The abstractions of Wordsworth's ardent meditation on the rule of nations are personified as allegorical figures in a frozen tableau.

Wordsworth is constitutionally unable to think in pure abstraction. In the very first lines of The Recluse, supposedly his most philosophical poem, he states:

On Man, on Nature and on Human Life,
Musing in solitude, I oft perceive
Fair trains of imagery before me rise (III 6)...

When Wordsworth sits down to reflect in his solitude what first rises up before him is not the idea, but the "fair trains of imagery".

Although Wordsworth likes to represent abstractions by personifications, he often creates abstractions out of people. We know that Wordsworth greatly admired Spenser's allegorical imagination. He writes that Spenser:

maintained his freedom by aid of his allegorical spirit, at one time inciting him to create persons out of abstractions; and at another, by a superior effort of genius, to give the universality and permanence of abstractions to his human beings, by means of attributes and emblems that belong to the highest moral truths and the purest sensations (III 35)...

Any description of one of the poet's "solitaries" will reveal that Wordsworth too has attempted to give "the universality and permanence of abstractions" to his characters. The following description of a Westmorland shepherd should suffice:

His form hath flashed upon me, glorified
By the deep radiance of the setting sun:
Or him I have descried in distant sky,
A solitary object and sublime,
Above all height! Like an ariel cross
Stationed alone upon a spiry rock
Of the Chartreuse, for worship.

(Prel VIII 269-75)

Less than even the leech-gather or the blind beggar this shepherd seems to have no real roots in the world of everyday things -- he is a grand imaginary construct. Wordsworth, metaphorically, takes him out his native

Westmorland and stations him upon a "spiry rock" of the Chartreuse, where he is suitably deified.

The most extended collection of thoughts on his own poetry is to be found in the Fenwick Notes, which are particularly interesting on the issue of character. On the one hand, the notes purport to be factual, that is they provide details of the time and place of composition and describe the people who appear in the poems and tell of how the poet came to know them; but, on the other hand, once a person has been transformed into a character in a poem, he may bear little resemblance to the real person. Time and again Wordsworth defends the right of the artist to universalise and idealise the people of his encounters. Of his poem Matthew he writes:

I do not ask pardon for what there is of untruth in such verses, considered strictly as matters of fact. It is enough if, being true and consistent in spirit, they teach in a manner not unworthy of a Poet's calling (Gros III 161).

In the note to The Excursion Wordsworth is quite clear about the Pedlar's imaginative function and origins:

I am here called upon freely to acknowledge that the character I have represented in his person is chiefly an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances (Gros III 196).

Not only is this creature an imagined Pedlar but he is further imagined as a sort of surrogate for the poet.

Wordsworth's two prose biographies, A Letter to a

Friend of Robert Burns and A Memorial of Robert Walker are no less idealized:

biography [Wordsworth writes], though differing in some essentials from works of fiction, is nevertheless, like them, an art, -- an art, the laws of which are determined by the imperfections of our nature, and the constitutions of society. Truth is not here, as in the sciences...to be sought without scruple, and promulgated for its own sake...but only for obviously justifying purposes, moral or intellectual (III 121).

It is Wordsworth's tendency, throughout his biography, to see Burns in his poetry and to construct his portrait of Burns from the persona that he assumes: Burns the contrite sinner, Burns the celebrator of common humanity, the exposé of hypocrisy and the quizzical writer of animal poems. "Neither the subjects of his poems, nor his manner of handling them", Wordsworth contends, "allow us long to forget their author" (III 123).

Wordsworth's Memoir of Robert Walker is appended to the Duddon Sonnets and both the memoir and the sonnets seem to refer backwards and forwards to one another. Walker, as Wordsworth represents him, is part real person, part imaginative construct: an idealized version of the country pastor, an archetype that has been commemorated by generations of poets. He is:

A Pastor such as Chaucer's verse portrays;
Such as the heaven-taught skill of Herbert drew;
And tender Goldsmith crowned with deathless praise!

(P.W. III 261 sonnet XVIII)

Extended dialogue between the poetry and prefaces or

poetry and other critical writings is a typical feature of Wordsworth's work. References and quotations from the poems are frequently incorporated into the prose, and reference to the prose is found in the poetry. Wordsworth never shrinks from analysing his own poetry, nor is he modest about holding up one of his own efforts as an example of excellence. It is characteristic of Wordsworth that he should conclude his Essays Upon Epitaphs with an extract from The Excursion -- implying that it embodies all the described virtues of elegy. Sometimes Wordsworth will use a poem in place of a preface, a passage from The Recluse serves as an introduction to The Excursion, the poem Hart-Leap Well, with its asides by the authors (real and fictitious) indicating a selfconscious awareness of its own literary status, introduces the second volume of Lyrical Ballads.

It is because of the poet's tendency to blur the distinctions between poetry and prose that I have included a chapter on The Prelude in my discussion of Wordsworth's prose. The Prelude is, in one sense, a poem about itself, about how it came into being. The familiar terms of Wordsworth's critical discourse have their origins in the metaphors of The Prelude. The key symbols of the poem: wind, river, light, tract, receive their initial meaning because they belong to the natural world and never entirely lose contact with the reality from which they arise. Yet these symbols are also associated with the abstract realm of poetry, and in particular with the way in which the poet

sees and the sounds of his voice. The river imagery, for example, is remarkably consistent and throughout the poem the river exists as "an emblem of [the poet's] own life" (Prel IV 61). The sound of the river, in all its variants, recurs as a sort of leitmotif, signalling the return of the poet's true voice. In meditative strain the poet imitates the river "reflecting from its placid breast/ The works of man" (Prel XIV 201-2). In more agitated mood, as in the "fervour irresistible" of the "glad preamble", the poet's verse may be likened to "a torrent bursting,/ From a black thunder-cloud" (Prel VII 6-7). In high Miltonic strain the poet's voice is like "the mighty flood of Nile/ Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clouds/ To fertilize the whole Egyptian plain" (Prel VI 614-4).

The river imagery of The Prelude exemplifies the way in which Wordsworth tends to render the notion of poetry into concrete images. The influences and confluences of rivers are often associated by Wordsworth with development and growth -- and thus Wordsworth finds recourse to them, not only on the poem about his own growth, but in the letter to "Mathetes", which is concerned with the development of an idealism, and in the biography of Walker and the sonnets which it accompanies.

The clothing images, which are the most frequently occurring tropes of Wordsworth critical discourse, also have their origins in The Prelude. The poet rejects the "state arras woven with silk and gold" and other "snakey hues" (Prel III 565-7) in favour of "less elaborate fabric".

Anticipating Yeats, the poet proposes to shake off the habit of pretentious poetics and walk naked:

Gently did my soul [he writes]
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked, as in the presence of her God.

(Prel IV 150-2).

The poet prophesies that "poetic numbers" will come "Spontaneously to clothe in priestly robe/ A renovated spirit" (Prel I 52-3) and in the last words of the poem Wordsworth announces his creation of a "lasting inspiration" out of a "fabric more divine" (Prel XIV 456).

Wordsworth has a tendency to fuse literal and metaphorical states so tightly that it is difficult to decide where one ends and the other begins -- he actually sees his poems as trees and flowers: "I have lately been employed in hewing down Peter Bell" (E.Y. 222), he writes, as if it was some form of burgeoning plant life; or he describes his poems as "flowers and useful herbs to take the place of weeds" (M.Y. I 224). In his poetry, Wordsworth records his encounters with natural objects and people and it is, in a way, appropriate that he should visualise his poetry in terms of the very things he describes; that his verse, as he puts it in The Prelude, should become "A power like one of Nature's" (Prel XIII 313).

I. THE POET AS PLAYWRIGHT: PREFACE TO THE BORDERERS

This was the time, when, all things tending fast
 To deprivation, the philosophy
 That promised to abstract the hopes of Man
 Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth
 For ever in a purer element
 Found ready welcome. Tempting region that
 For zeal to enter and refresh herself,
 Where passions had the privilege to work,
 And never hear the sound of their own names.
 But speaking more in charity, the dream
 Was flattering to the young ingenuous mind
 Pleased with extremes and not the last with that
 Which makes the human Reason's naked self
 The object of its fervour. What delight!
 How glorious! in self knowledge and self-rule,
 To look through all the frailties of the world,
 And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
 The accidents of nature, time, and place,
 That make up the weak being of the past,
 Build social freedom on its only basis:
 The freedom of the individual mind,
 Which, to the blind restraints of general laws
 Superior, magisterially adopts
 One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed
 Upon an independent intellect.

(Prel 1805 X 806-30).

The character of Oswald dominates the action of the play
 and the discussion of its Preface. As much as Oswald is
 concerned to justify himself in the play, so is his author
 concerned to justify and explore Oswald motives in the
 Preface:

we are too apt [Wordsworth writes] to explain
 our own moral sentiments as a measure of the
 conduct of others. We insensibly suppose that
 a criminal assumes the same form to the agent
 as to ourselves. We forget that his feelings
 and reason are equally busy in contracting
 dimensions and pleading for its necessity (I
 80).

The Borderers is an allegory or extended metaphor for the

that Oswald represents a "stage he himself could have taken" (Sharrock 170). Wordsworth's preoccupation with Oswald is not only indicative of his youthful interests, but also represents the sort of direction his poetry could have taken.

As Wordsworth's first and only play, The Borderers anticipates the dramatic form of many of the lyrical ballads and gives evidence of the poet's keen ear for dialect and his particular ability to adapt natural speech rhythms to the requirements of verse.

Dramatic monologues have in common with plays a form which suggests action and character through speech alone and, undoubtedly, those lyrical ballads: The Brothers, The Affliction of Margaret, The Last of the Flock, The Thorn, etc., which consist almost solely of the speech of a single character, did benefit from Wordsworth's experiment in playwriting. In a dramatic monologue, however, there is always an opportunity for the poet to halt the action and offer his own thoughts on the subject, as Wordsworth does in Simon Lee or Peter Bell; and one has a strong impression, at certain places in The Borderers, that Wordsworth himself would have liked to intervene.

Several critics have related the play to Wordsworth's youthful interest in Godwinian rationalism and revolutionary politics. The play has been variously interpreted as either an endorsement (Garrod 92) or rejection (Legouis and de Selincourt 157-9) of Godwinian ideals -- although neither of

the main characters is particularly Godwinian in conception. Wordsworth has set his play in a region and a time which was comparatively free from social influences and restraints. The main characters are free agents, outlaws, at liberty to do good or evil and significantly, given such freedom, they commit evil. The action of The Borderers would thus appear to refute the central proposition of the Inquiry Concerning Political Justice, which is that man's reason alone would be sufficient to guide his conduct and that under the leadership of such reason he would be capable of living without laws or other social controls. Oswald is no Caleb Williams for his aim is not to conquer prejudice by the might of reason, but to seduce Marmaduke into evil. To achieve this end he will use any means -- and the one that suggests itself to him is a specious appeal to independent judgement, and an appeal to reason over sentiment. Marmaduke is no Godwinian hero either for he is taken in by "a few swelling phrases, and a flash of truth, enough to dazzle and blind". F.M. Todd point out that, had Marmaduke cherished Godwinian ideals, he would have insisted on the proof of Oswald's accusations and he would have remembered Godwin's strictures on violence and retribution of all kinds (Todd 162). If the play is a criticism of Godwin's theories, it is so in general rather than specific terms, reminiscent of Hazlitt's criticism of Godwinianism in The Spirit of the Age, in which he states that:

with the unlimited scope of private opinion, and
with a boundless field of speculation...there is

danger that the unseasoned novice might substitute some pragmatic conceit of his own for the rule of right reason, and mistake a heartless indifference for a superiority to more natural and generous feeling (Howe IV 178).

The real antecedents of Oswald are not to be found in the essays and novels of Godwin but in the malcontent Machiavels of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, in Milton's Satan, and in the other ill-fated heroes of literature: "He is the Orlando of Ariosto, the Cardenio of Cervantes, who lays waste the groves that should shelter him" (I 77). Wordsworth's play is closer to Othello than Caleb Williams in conception. The tragedy of the play, and the point made by its Preface, is the power of the evil person to ensnare the virtuous. The point is not, as Marmaduke laments, that "the world is poisoned at the heart" -- there are plenty of examples which disprove that: Idonea's devotion to her father, the host's kindness towards her, Eleanor's care of Herbert, the assistance given to the mad woman by the peasant -- the point is rather that a single evil person can pervert so much of this natural goodness and cause so much destruction. This lesson Wordsworth learned, not from Political Justice, but from his great models, Shakespeare and Milton, and from his own experience, in particular, of the French Revolution. In the Fenwick note to the play Wordsworth writes:

the study of human nature suggests this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart,

and the perversion of the understanding to which they may carry their slaves. During my long residence in France, while the revolution was rapidly advancing to its extreme of wickedness, I had frequent opportunities of being eye-witness of this process, and it was while that knowledge was fresh upon my memory that the tragedy of The Borderers was composed (Gros III 10).

The fact that Wordsworth was drawing on his experience of the French Revolution in his portrayal of the power of evil gives his play its political and personal point. The history of the Revolution demonstrated that man's advance towards perfection was not inevitable.

The significant discovery of the play is Wordsworth's realization that the source of evil is not in society, but in the individual. Burke, in the Reflections on the Revolution in France, makes a similar point:

In France the Revolutionists are so taken up with their theories about the rights of man, that they have totally forgotten his nature. Without opening one new avenue to the understanding, they have succeeded in stopping up those that lead to the heart (Reflections 198).

Like Burke, Wordsworth examines what happens when traditional human values are replaced by abstract theories -- the consequences are disastrous: the individual alone becomes the source of a private morality and is isolated from normal shared values.

In the third act of The Borderers Lacy asks Wallace for his opinion concerning Oswald's motives for doing evil; Wallace replies:

Natures such as his
 Spin motives out of their own bowels, Lacy!
 I learned this when I was a Confessor.
 I know him well; there needs no other motive
 Than that most strange incontinence in crime
 Which haunts this Oswald. Power is life to him
 And breath and being; where he cannot govern,
 He will destroy.

(Bord III 1428-34)

Oswald's motives are more obscure than Iago's; but unlike Shakespeare who is content with Iago's "Demand me nothing; what you know, you know", Wordsworth seems determined to explain Oswald's actions at every opportunity. We are told of his unhappy past and the several unfortunate events which have hardened him against Marmaduke, yet, as if the play itself does not offer a sufficient explanation of his actions, Wordsworth prefaces The Borderers with a further, and more psychologically detailed, examination of Oswald's "motiveless malignity".

One reason for Wordsworth's interest in clarifying Oswald's motives is to be found in his early eagerness to have the play staged which, he writes, would be impossible until the "great reason for its rejection", which is the "metaphysical obscurity" of Oswald is made clear.¹

There is yet another reason for Wordsworth's preoccupation with Oswald. The collection of his Juvenalia and other very early poems: Fragment of a 'Gothic' Tale, The Three Graves, The Convict, Incipient Madness, Argument for Suicide, and particularly, Guilt and Sorrow -- give evidence of Wordsworth's early preference for the fantastic and gothic, the abnormal and diseased over the normal and the

healthy.

Oswald is not a typically Wordsworthian character, but is a type of gothic "villain-hero", the sort of figure who dominates Mrs Radcliffe's novels and the poetry and plays of Shelly and Byron (Thorslev 84). Book VIII of The Prelude tells the story of Wordsworth's early fascination with the gothic mode. He writes that:

The dignities of plain occurrence then
 Were tasteless, and truth's golden mean, a point
 Where no sufficient pleasure could be found.
 Then, if a widow, staggering with the blow
 Of her distress, was known to have turned her steps
 To the cold grave in which her husband slept,
 One night, or haply more than one, through pain
 Or half insensate impotence of mind,
 The fact was caught at greedily, and there
 She must be visitant the whole year through,
 Wetting the turf with never ending tears.

(Prel VIII 381-91)

The exaggerated tale of the grief-stricken widow has a precedent in Oswald's story about the innocent young girl who was ensnared by the wicked Baron Clifford:

Alas!

What she had seen and suffered turned her brain.
 Cast off by her Betrayer, she dwells alone,
 Nor moves her hands to any needful work:
 She eats her food which everyday the peasants
 Bring to her hut; and so the Wretch has lived
 Ten years; and no one ever heard her voice;
 But every night at the first stroke of twelve
 She quits her house, and, in the neighbouring
Churchyard
 Upon the self-same spot, in rain or storm,
 She paces out the hour 'twixt twelve and one --
 She paces round and round an Infant's grave,
 And in the Churchyard sod her feet have worn
 A hollow ring; they say it is knee-deep...

(Bord I 382-95)

In Book VIII of The Prelude Wordsworth tells us of his growing dissatisfaction with the gothic mode "where Fancy might run wild". A few years after completion of the play, in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, he utterly condemns all "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" -- which are contrasted with the sober sublimities of Shakespeare and Milton. Shakespeare and Milton, in their more sensational aspects, are undeniably present in The Borderers. Oswald is clearly conceived as an exaggerated Iago: "there are particles of that poisonous mineral of which Iago speaks gnawing his inwards" (I 79). There are clearly also parallels between Oswald, who inhabits his own private Hell, and Milton's Satan (Gillham 8-10). The imagery of the play is thus wild and exaggerated, as is its setting in the rugged northern Border country, and in its Preface Wordsworth is concerned to justify these extravagant figures.

That Wordsworth's play is a critique of the isolated intellect is evident from the first sentence of its Preface:

Let us suppose a man of great intellectual powers, yet without any solid principles of genuine benevolence (I 76).

Because of his lack of "genuine benevolence" or, what Wordsworth later calls a "universal sense of mankind", it is likely that, when misfortune occurs Oswald will harbour "misanthropic feelings". Lacking humanity and compassion, he is not likely to value these aspects of human nature; on the

contrary, as he is a "moral sceptic":

It is his pleasure and his consolation to hunt out whatever is bad in actions usually esteemed virtuous and to detect the good in actions which the universal sense of mankind teaches us to reprobate (I 76).

As he has no belief in humanity or compassion he is free to misuse his "great intellectual powers", which he does for the purpose of self-justification:

the general exertion of his intellect seduces him from the remembrances of his own crime, the particular conclusions to which he is led to have a tendency to reconcile him to himself (I 76).

Such a character, Wordsworth suggests, will inevitably have "a strong tendency to vice" (I 77); but despite the obviously evil aspects of Oswald's character he is too complex a personality to be merely a "plain dealing villain". Oswald's suffers considerable guilt at the memory of his past crimes and at his deception of Marmaduke. The "lenitives of his pain" are twofold consisting both of action and meditation:

Accordingly, his reason is almost exclusively employed in justifying his past enormities and in enabling him to commit new ones (I 77).

The central irony of Oswald's character is that he claims to be a free agent, an "independent intellect", yet every act he commits is a compulsive attempt at self-justification. More than he himself realizes, he struggles against his own nature and is a slave to his own guilt. His freedom is an

illusion. Paul Sheets points out further ironies in Oswald's character: claiming that justice depends on our feelings "for man as man" and aiming to "enlarge/ The intellectual empire of mankind", Oswald compromises his own principles by resorting to means which are in conflict with these ideals -- the murder of an innocent man and the moral destruction of another (Sheets 126).

Oswald's "speculations" in morals are not based upon the evidence of his sense, on the contrary, Wordsworth illustrates his self-delusions in metaphors of "colours", "tints", and "optics":

He looks at society through an optical glass of a peculiar tint; something of the forms of objects he takes from objects, but their colour is exclusively what he gives them; it is one, and it is his own (I 77-8).

A mind such as Oswald's:

cannot but discover some truths, but he is unable to profit by them, and in his hands they become instruments of evil...He presses truth and falsehood into the same service (I 77).

Oswald's nature is clearly a compulsive one:

It will easily be perceived that to such a mind those enterprizes which are the most extraordinary will in time appear the most inviting. His appetite from being exhausted becomes unnatural. Accordingly, he will struggle so to characterize & exalt actions, little and contemptible in themselves, by a forced greatness of manner, and will chequer and degrade enterprizes great in their atrocity by grotesque little of manner, and fantastic obliquities. He is like a worn out voluptuary -- he finds his temptation in strangeness, he

The fact that Oswald's ingratitude and dislike of Marmaduke is highly irrational is another of the ironies of his supposedly highly rational character. Perhaps the greatest of all the ironies of Oswald's character is the "tinge of superstition" with which he is infected. The first impression that we have of Oswald is his entry with a bunch of herbs that he had gathered in the forest and which he intends to use as a sort of talisman. Throughout Act II Oswald is highly nervous and seems strangely afraid of the dark dungeon in which Herbert is sleeping. When the beggars disturb him, he starts violently: "Ha! speak -- what Thing art thou? (Bord II 9943). Oswald's obsessive need for Marmaduke to repeat his own crime is for reasons of superstition, a sort of sympathetic magic:

Know then that I was urged,
 (For other impulse let it pass) was driven,
 To seek for sympathy, because I saw
 In you a mirror of my youthful self;
 I would have made us equal once again,
 But that was a vain hope.

(Bord IV 1862-7)

The irrationality of Oswald's need to atone for his misdeeds by committing new crimes is evident to everyone except Oswald himself, and thus the play's central irony is that the chief spokesman for the superiority of reason over feeling should be compelled to act so irrationally.

Throughout the play and the Preface there are descriptions which suggest that Oswald is not the "independent intellect" he supposes but is "impelled" (I

76), "betrayed" (I 76), "seduced" (I 76) or "pressed" (I 76) into his deeds -- and despite his call to reason he is, in fact, dominated by his violent emotions which master him at every turn. These "master passions" are "pride and the love of distinction" (I 76). There is clearly irony intended in Oswald's attempts to rebel against the "tyrannical masters" of the world (I 77), when he is so clearly enslaved to his "master passion". That Wordsworth had the notion of "master passion" in mind is made even more evident by his choice of an extract from Pope's Epistle to Cobham, in which Pope explains his theory of the "master passions":

On human actions reason though you can,
It may be reason, but it is not man;
His principle of action once explore,
That instant 'tis his principle no more (I 80).

Oswald's motives are explained, therefore, not in terms of reason, but in terms of "the very constitution of his character", namely:

in his pride which borders even on madness, in his restless disposition, in his disturbed mind, in his superstition, in irresistible propensities to embody in practical experiments his worst & most extravagant speculations, in his thoughts & in his feelings, in his general habits & his particular impulses, in his perverted reason justifying perverted instincts (I 79).

Wordsworth explains that "in works of imagination we see the motive and the end", while in real life the viciousness of certain motives may be disguised by "abuses interwoven with the texture of society", but in a play those abuses can

be isolated and therefore more clearly seen.

In Marmaduke's case, "superstition" has a positive connotation, implying an ability to be guided by feeling and instinct. At a crucial moment in the play, when Marmaduke is about to kill Herbert, he raises his eyes and beholds a star:

Upwards I cast my eye, and, through a crevice,
Beheld a star twinkling above my head,

And, by the living God, I could not do it.

(Bord II, 988-90)

The star represents the connection between Marmaduke and "the living God" and thus effectively prevents him from committing a terrible crime. The star also represents the natural world and, unlike Oswald, the isolated intellectual, Marmaduke begins to see connections between the natural world and himself: "an ennobling interchange/ Of action from within and from without". Marmaduke's vision of the star reaffirms the moral power of natural influences.

When guided by his feelings and instincts Marmaduke is compassionate and humane and also more rational than Oswald because reason guided by compassion is right reason. Marmaduke instinctively knows that Herbert is a good man and devoted father, and in Idonea's presence is convinced of her innocence.

But, ironically, Oswald is able to make use of Marmaduke's tendency to be guided by his feelings for his own purposes; and this vulnerability, Wordsworth suggests,

"appears to be one great source of our vices; it is our constant engine in seducing each other" (I 80). Owen and Smyser point out in their note that Oswald turns Marmaduke against Herbert by inducing him to see a discrepancy between Herbert's language of tender fatherhood and his supposed aim of virtually selling his daughter into prostitution (I 85 note to ll 153-162): "Her virtues", Oswald says, "are his instruments" (Bord I 249). The "shudder" of the betrayed hero leads him to bring about the destruction of the innocent victim.

Wordsworth's deprecation of "superstition" as the apparent "great source of all our vices" is not as Godwinian as it may appear to be. Firstly, "superstition" has acknowledged positive value and, secondly, although Wordsworth is generally acknowledged as the champion of feeling, he does not advocate mindless enslavement to passion. Wordsworth's belief has always been that feeling should be subjected to the test of meditation, rather than the test of rationality -- which can easily become one of self-justification. Feelings must be ordered and regulated in order that they should be connected with "important subjects", as Wordsworth explains in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (I 127).

The change in Wordsworth's position from the Preface to The Borderers to that of Lyrical Ballads is not a simple change from distrust of the feelings to affirmation of their moral influence, but rather a greater understanding of the

conditions which foster their development.

Marmaduke's need for repentance at the end of the play is a case in point. His last lines are:

a wanderer must I go,
 The Spectre of that innocent Man, my guide.
 No human ear shall ever hear me speak;
 No human dwelling ever give me food,
 Or sleep, or rest: but over waste and wild,
 In search of nothing that this earth can give,
 But expiation, will I wander on --
 A Man by pain and thought compelled to live,
 Yet loathing life -- till anger is appeased
 In Heaven, and Mercy gives me leave to die.

(Bord V 2343-2353)

Repentance is commendable, but Marmaduke's rejection of all consolation and search for death in morbid solitude borders on arrogance. One can image Marmaduke, in his wanderings as prototypical of the Wordsworthian "solitary"; but unlike Michael or the leechgatherer, who endure their sufferings with equanimity and great dignity, Marmaduke lacks these virtues. In John Jones' opinion, the failure of The Borderers is Wordsworth's failure, in his portrayal of Marmaduke, to penetrate to "the other side of pain" (Jones 59).

A mere two years separates the completion of The Borderers from Lyrical Ballads, and it seems a particularly brief period for such enormous changes in Wordsworth's poetic development to have occurred -- and which are not entirely explained by his friendship and collaboration with Coleridge. Although the gothic mode and the rather old fashioned rhyming couplet was Wordsworth's preferred medium

there are, even in his earliest fragments, signs of Wordsworth's concern with man in nature. In fact, during 1795-6, while Wordsworth was at work on The Borderers, he was also composing Margaret, or The Ruined Cottage -- later to become the first book of The Excursion and the first poem that was to be included among the works of his maturity.

Like its predecessors The Ruined Cottage is concerned with the struggle to master overwhelming and potentially destructive emotions, but unlike its predecessors it does so without resorting to gothic devices or overstatements of any kind. The subject is the desertion of a wife, a subject that had in earlier poems inspired terror, guilt and fear, but in The Ruined Cottage it is treated with dignity and compassion. Margaret remains rooted to her cottage in the undying hope of her husband's return -- and this is presented in a way that inspires rather than horrifies readers:

I stood, and leaning o'er the garden wall
Reviewed that Woman's sufferings; and it seem'd
To comfort me while with a brother's love
I blessed her in the impotence of grief.
Then towards the cottage I returned; and traced
Fondly, though with an interest more mild,
That secret spirit of humanity
Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies
Of nature, 'mid her plants, and weeds, and flowers,
And silent overgrowings, still survived.

(Exc I 920-30).

Wordsworth's almost unconscious understanding of the "secret spirit of humanity", as seen in Marmaduke's perception of the star and in his natural feelings for Herbert and Idonea,

gives way to an understanding, in The Ruined Cottage and in the poems of Lyrical Ballads, which consciously relates man to nature, thought and experience to the original, immediate intuition.

But although it is the figure of Marmaduke who is developed in the later work, the figure of Oswald is not entirely lost. Stripped of his grand promethean defiance he is transmuted into Peter Bell, the mere thinker and mere perceiver; he is the questioner in We are Seven whose rationalizing habits of mind cannot penetrate the truth of the child's assertions; he is the "meddling intellect" of Expostulation and Reply and The Tables Turned who "Mishapes the beauteous forms of things" and "murder[s] to dissect". His presence is felt in The Prelude and he remains, the poet's doppelganger, in the figure of the "Solitary" in The Excursion.

NOTE

- 1 In the Preface to The Borderers and the Fenwick Notes, Wordsworth refers to the characters by their original names, thus "Rivers" is Oswald, "Mortimer" is Marmaduke, and "Matilda" is Idonea.

II. THE POET AS PROSE WRITER: PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS

Words, a Poet's words more particularly, ought to be weighed in the balance of feeling, and not measured by the space which they occupy upon paper.

(Note to The Thorn)

The Advertisement and various versions of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads have attracted a great deal of critical comment. W.J.B. Owen has pointed out the inconsistent, contradictory, and generally esoteric nature of Wordsworth's theory (Wordsworth as Critic 98); M.H. Abrams has suggested its unity as an expressionistic manifesto (Mirror and the Lamp 110); Mary Jacobus has indicated Wordsworth's debt to the Eighteenth century (Jacobus 56); and Stephen Parrish has detailed Wordsworth's innovations (Parrish 92). It is not my intention to take issue with any of these claims, or to contribute to the multiplicity of versions on these themes which appear every year in journals and other publications; instead I have examined the metaphors and other figures of Wordsworth's text. It is my contention that Wordsworth's prose challenges the common assumption that a critical text must possess philosophical and conceptual unity. Wordsworth's prose has multiple, even contradictory, meanings that threaten and subvert the progress of logical argument. The Preface does develop a logic of its own, but it is the logic of poetry, rather than the sort of logic which is usually associated with prose.

The way to read Wordsworth's Preface is not as a rational (or irrational) argument, but as a discourse which is metaphorical, symbolic and paradoxical.

In fact Wordsworth himself warns the reader that his Preface is not a "systematic defence of the theory"; he is unwilling to undertake such a defence:

knowing that on this occasion the Reader would look coldly upon my arguments, since I might be suspected of having been principally influenced by the selfish and foolish hope of reasoning him into an approbation of these particular Poems (I 121)...

As Wordsworth declines to "enter regularly" into a defence or "to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence of which it is susceptible"(121), he asks the reader not to look "coldly" upon his arguments but rather to enter into the spirit in which they were presented.

Reasons for Wordsworth's rejection of systematic argument are not difficult to surmise. Apart from the shortage of space in a Preface, Wordsworth doubts the ability of rational, critical prose, as found "in the writings of Critics" (I 116), to sustain an analysis of the mysterious nature of poetry -- for this we must look to the writings "of Poets themselves" (I 116). Thus in the very act of writing a Preface Wordsworth is aware of the limitations of Preface-writing.

At the outset Wordsworth establishes a reciprocal relationship between the poems of the collection and their Preface. At several places in the 1800 Preface Wordsworth

refers us to poems in the collection which illustrate a particular point of his critical theory. When he distinguishes his poetry from "the popular Poetry of the day" by suggesting that:

the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling (I 129)...

he adds:

My meaning will be rendered perfectly intelligible by referring my Reader to the Poems entitled Poor Susan and The Childless Father (I 128, 1800)...

How, one might ask, could the narrator's feelings be of interest if the narrative is slight? We have to turn to the poems themselves in order to establish what it is that Wordsworth has in mind. Nothing much happens in Poor Susan; a country-girl hears the song of a thrush on a city street and the images of rural life appear before her as she associates the thrush's song with her childhood. The poem is held in balance about the two conflicting images of irrevocable loss and momentary paradisaical vision; the pivot of the balance being the thrush's song which both signals and ends the vision. The "importance" of Susan's "action and situation" is implied in the significance which she attaches to her dream vision, and the extent to which poet and readers sympathise with her. The poet implies that we will all have to face such loss and reminds us that, like Susan, we must find a sustaining vision. Thus the feelings

that are developed within the poem are those of poet, character, and reader. The word "developed" seems to refer to the poet's technique in focusing our attention on Susan's melancholy through subtle shifts in perspective: "what ails her?", he asks, thereby inviting his readers to enter into the world of the poem.

Wordsworth's habit of trying to suggest the many complexities in the relationships between "feeling" and "action", without providing a detailed analysis of the poems (and thereby risking a "murder to dissect"), is an effective way of producing ambiguous, suggestive statements instead of rational arguments.

I have suggested certain ambiguities in the statement: "the feelings therein developed give importance to the action and situation..." in order to indicate the reciprocal relationship between poetry and Preface. The same poem, Poor Susan, may be used to illustrate further instances of dialogue between the poetry and its accompanying critical text.

Poor Susan provides not only an example of the relationship between "feeling" and "action"; it also illustrates Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction in fitting "a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation" to "metrical arrangement" (I 119). There are no words in the poem that can be described as self-consciously "poetic". There are no "reddening Phoebuses" or other conventional poeticisms. The major part of the poem's vocabulary comprises normal, everyday words; yet the effect

is hardly commonplace. Certain words like "enchantment", "ascending", "vision" traffic easily between ordinary and poetic worlds, trailing with them all sorts of Spenserian and Miltonic associations. The line division gives added stress to particular words and phrases, as do rhyme and metre. Certain descriptions seem to slide between metaphoric and literal states like "note of enchantment", "A mountain ascending", "a vision of trees". There are complex verbal oppositions between town and country, like "vale of Cheapside", which echo the thematic opposition. James Averill points out that the poem contains a parody of Burger's Des armen Suschen's Traum, a poem in which poor Susan has a nightmare and wakes to find that it is true (Averill 212). Wordsworth's implied criticism of Burger would thus link two aspects of his theory: the relationship between "feeling" and "action" and poetic diction. Again the complexities of Wordsworth's poetry, not the least of which is why it seems so simple yet proves to be so complex, are echoed in the way Wordsworth chooses to write about language in his Preface.

There is clearly a correlation between the subject matter of Wordsworth's poetry and the way in which he chooses to write about it. His thoughts on the brotherhood of man are paralleled by his observations on the nature of language. In The Prelude, reflecting perhaps on his letter to Llandaff, Wordsworth describes his discovery of the inadequacies of abstract theories about man, reserving his most withering scorn for the destructive potential of philosophic language

itself:

In such strange passion, if I may once more
 Review the past, I warred against myself--
 A bigot to a new idolotary--
 Like a cowled monk who hath forsworn the world,
 Zealously laboured to cut off my heart
 From all the sources of her former strength;
 And as, by simple waving of a wand,
 The wizzard instantaneously dissolves
 Palace or grove, even so could I unsoul
 As readily by syllogistic words
 Those mysteries of being which have made,
 And shall continue evermore to make
 Of the whole human race one brother-hood.

(Prel XII 75-88)

Wordsworth's distrust of philosophical language is replaced by a growing faith in "the language of men". During his wanderings in the lake district he met and conversed with ordinary people; of those encounters he writes:

When I began to enquire,
 To watch and question those I met, and speak
 Without reserve to them, the lonely roads
 Were open schools in which I daily read
 With most delight the passions of mankind
 Whether by words, looks, sighs, or tears, revealed;
 There saw into the depth of human souls,
 Souls that appear to have no depth at all
 To careless eyes. And -- now convinced at heart
 How little those formalities, to which
 With overwhelming trust alone we give
 The name of Education, have to do
 With real feeling and just sense; how vain
 A correspondence with the talking world
 Proves to the most; and called to make good search
 If man's estate, by doom of Nature yoked
 With toil, be therefore yoked with ignorance;
 If virtue be indeed so hard to rear,
 And intellectual strength so rare a boon--
 I prized such walks still more, for there I found
 Hope to my hope, and to my pleasure peace
 And steadiness, and healing and repose
 To every passion. There I heard,
 From mouths of men obscure and lowly, truths
 Replete with honour; sounds in unison

With loftiest promises of good and fair.

(Prel XIII 160-187)

Wordsworth tends to associate the language of ordinary conversation with communication, with bonds between men; while the language of philosophy or analysis can divide man from man and man from himself.

Wordsworth's rejection of the "gaudiness and inane phraseology" (I 117) of false poetic diction is commensurate with the rejection of analytic discourse in the Preface. Gene Ruoff suggests that Wordsworth's anger against false poetic diction stems from "moral indignation that language, the surest anchor of the community, has been turned into an instrument of social stratification" (Ruoff 210).

Wordsworth points out that he cannot discuss:

in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other...without retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself (I 121).

There is not a single statement about the nature of poetic language that does not involve contradictions, ambiguities, paradoxes, metaphors or, at very least, some form of qualification: the "language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure" (I 116); "a plainer and more emphatic language" (I 125); "My purpose was to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men" (I 131); "my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance" (I 133); a poet's language, "if

selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures (I 137); the language of poetry is "the real language of nature" (I 142). In attempting to describe the language of poetry Wordsworth has to make use of contradictions and metaphors: poetic language is like ordinary language, yet it is quite different; it is like prose without being prosaic; and always the poet modifies, adapts, alters the arrangement of language in a poem so "his employment is in some degree mechanical" (I 138).

Wordsworth insists on using words like "real" and "natural" to describe the language of poetry and Coleridge and many other critics have taken exception to this, pointing out that the phrase "a selection of the real language of men" is an inadequate definition of the language of poetry which is necessarily "a studied and artificial arrangement" (Biographia Literaria 128). Such criticisms miss the point of Wordsworth's discourse, which is not prescriptive but descriptive. Wordsworth concedes to a large measure of artificiality in poetic language -- but this is not the point of his Preface. He specifically holds in opposition the idea of an ordinary, spoken language and the idea of a poetic, written language and in that irrational and apparently irreconcilable idea provides a description for the complex way in which his poetry works. Questions concerning whose language the poet uses: rustics' or his own, whether he means to adopt only words or syntax as well, etc. are irrelevant -- which is why Wordsworth

provides no details: the real language of men is "the real language of men in any situation (I 160 Wordsworth's italics). The point is that two quite different and apparently irreconcilable languages are reconciled in poetry. The two different languages are presented in contrasting images: one consists of that which is "uttered by men in real life" (I 138), the other is "alive with metaphors and figures" (I 137); the one is "the real language of men" (I 119), the other is accompanied by "colours of style" (I 147); the poet hovers between them both, selecting and rejecting whatever is appropriate. It must be remembered that as a poet and as a man Wordsworth has access to both languages. Garrod, an early champion of Wordsworth's poetic theory, implies Wordsworth's dual nature when he writes in defence of his principle of "selection" that:

The poet who composes in the spirit of a selection from the real language of men escapes 'the language of any other man of common sense' in the exact degree in which he is a poet (Garrod 164).

The strange effect that Wordsworth achieves through his mixing of conversational and poetic modes has been noted ever since his poems first appeared, as the following well-known comment, made by a confused reviewer of *The Last of The Flock*, demonstrates:

If the author be a wealthy man, he ought not to have suffered this poor peasant to part with the last of the flock (Jacobus 205).

Here the reader naively responds to the poetry of passion as if to passion itself. Charles Lamb's analysis of The Old Cumberland Beggar is rather more sophisticated in its acknowledgement of the interaction between fact and fiction, conversation and poetry, matter-of-fact and make-believe:

Here the mind knowingly passes a fiction upon herself, first substituting her own feelings for those of the Beggar's, and, in the same breath detecting the fallacy, will not part with the wish (Lucas I 239).

In the same way that Wordsworth's poems seem to move between fact and fiction, so Wordsworth's prose, in attempting to describe the sort of poems included in his volume, moves between poles of straight-forward and metaphoric discourse or, more often, what seems to be straight-forward discourse but which is actually not straight-forward at all. The volume, Wordsworth states in his Advertisement, contains poems that are "founded upon well-authenticated fact[s]" and poems that are "absolute inventions of the author" (I 117). This may seem like a straight-forward description of the contents of Lyrical Ballads until one examines the poems themselves, in which case Wordsworth seems to imply, not that some poems are factual and others are imaginary, but that all the poems consist of a fusion of both elements. That he intends to imply this fusion of fact and fancy is substantiated by Coleridge's description of Wordsworth's intention in Lyrical Ballads:

Mr Wordsworth was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us (Biographia Literaria 168-9).

The idea of the reconciliation of opposites is similarly enlarged upon by Wordsworth in the 1802 Preface, where he states that his "principal object":

was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of the imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in unusual aspect (I 123)...

Not only does Wordsworth's poetic attempt consist of the reconciliation of opposites, the ordinary with the unusual, but his attempt, in prose, to describe his efforts exhibits the same struggle to unify disparate elements. There are two co-ordinated subordinate clauses: one referring to common incidents and the language of men, the other referring to the imagination and unusual aspects. Wordsworth insists on the co-presence of these elements, they exist "at the same time". Wordsworth's design of the punctuation of the passage emphasises ideas of reconciliation, rather than opposition; we might expect the comparative clause "as far as was possible" to be a remark made parenthetically, but instead it is forced to connect directly with the phrase "in a selection of language really used by men" and the adverb "throughout" is sectioned off with commas, thus giving

emphasis to the idea of unity, the wholeness of the poems.

Disparate elements exist "at the same time" "throughout" the texts; simultaneity and cohesion are emphasised even while describing oppositions.

The basic structure of Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads is organized by oppositions which the poet continually seeks to unify: rustic and poetic, thought and feeling, innovation and tradition, didacticism and self-expression, similitude and dissimilitude, even the title, Lyrical Ballads is something of a contradiction, as Wordsworth well knew. Walter Savage Landor writes that Coleridge persuaded Wordsworth:

to adopt the name of Lyrical Ballads. He was sorry, he said, that he took the advice. And well he might be; for lyre and ballad belong not to the same age or the same people (Welby IV 35).

This was, of course, precisely why Wordsworth and Coleridge chose the title, which is suggestive of an attempt to reconcile the objectivity of ballad narration with the subjectivity of lyrical poetry, as expressed in Wordsworth's contention that the way in which the poems of Lyrical Ballads are to be distinguished from "the popular Poetry of the day" is "that the feeling therein gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (I 129).

Oppositions of this sort are to be found throughout the Preface but perhaps they are most exaggerated in the 1802 addition known as the "What is a Poet?" section (I 138-143).

The poet, we are told, is a "man speaking to men" (138) -- but no sooner has Wordsworth located his poet in common humanity than he begins to distinguish him among his fellows by describing the ways in which the poet is superior to ordinary men: he has "a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind"; he is more self-conscious than other men, being "pleased with his own passions and volitions"; he sees connections between himself and the "goings-on of the Universe"; he has a greater imaginative ability than other men: he can "[conjure] up in himself passions" where none exist, he is "affected...by absent things as if they were present" and can "create" connections "where he does not find them"; finally, the poet is, of course, better able than other men, to express these things (I 138).

But having exalted the poet at the expense of common humanity, Wordsworth starts the process of reducing his stature, claiming firstly that:

whatever portion of this faculty [that is, 'readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels'] we may suppose even the greatest Poet to possess, there cannot be a doubt that the language which it will suggest to him, must often, in liveliness and truth, fall short of that which is uttered by men in real life, under the actual pressure of those passions, certain shadows of which the Poet thus produces, or feels to be produced, in himself (I 138).

The poet must remember, Wordsworth continues, that he writes "as a man" and that he writes "under one restriction only,

namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being" (I 139):

the Poet must descend from this supposed height; and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves (I 143).

The whole passage is fraught with contradictions: on the one hand Wordsworth states that the poet will find that:

there is no necessity to trick out or elevate nature: and the more industriously he applies this principle, the deeper will be his faith that no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be compared with those which are emanations of reality and truth (I 139)

But, on the other hand, Wordsworth concedes that:

as it is impossible for the Poet to produce upon all occasions language as exquisitely fitted for the passion as that which the real passion itself suggests, it is proper that he should consider himself in the situation of a translator, who does not scruple to substitute excellencies of another kind for those which are unattainable by him; and endeavours occasionally to surpass his original, in order to make some amends for the general inferiority to which he feels that he must submit (I 139).

The language used by ordinary people may be generally inferior, mean and vulgar, but is also lively and truthful and as such, is preferable to the elaborate, over-wrought quality of much contemporary poetry. The poet may "slip into an entire delusion" (I 138) as he enters the minds and feelings of his protagonists, or he may uphold a "sublime notion of poetry" (I 141), conscious of its "divine spirit" (I 141) and the "dignity of his art" (I 139). The language

of men is more than a truth standard, a check on the straying tendencies of poetic diction, and the poet whose "employment is in some degree mechanical" (I 138) does not only exist to transfigure the raw material of experience; Wordsworth struggles to unify these opposing ideas: the poet as man, a "genuine inmate of the household of man" (I 141) and the poet as artist, upholder of the "divine spirit" (I 141). Attempts to reconcile these contrasting ideas are present throughout Wordsworth's description of the poet:

the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science. Emphatically it may be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, 'that he looks before and after'. He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and a preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of the difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time (I 141).

The passage contains many words which suggest unity and union: "join", "before and after", "relationship", "binds together", "spread", "all human beings", "all knowledge", "all Science", "the whole earth", "all time". Wordsworth's language is clearly metaphorical: truth is a "visible friend" and "hourly companion"; knowledge is personified, its "breath and finer spirit" is poetry; Science is personified, the "expression" on its countenance is poetry.

By forcing us to perceive abstractions as human beings or as having human characteristics, the personifications act as another kind of connection between the poet as poet and the poet as a man, between the language of poetry and the language of men. Note too that the allusion to Hamlet is what Shakespeare "hath said of man", rather than of poets. The image of the poet "singing a song in which all human beings join with him" perfectly expresses the reconciliation that Wordsworth is attempting: that the poet "sings", rather than converses normally, suggests the artifice of poetry, but that "all human beings join with him" implies that the poet has not cut himself off from the company of men.

M.H. Abrams claims that:

Wordsworth shows his awareness that his insight into the grandeur of the lowly and into the heroic values in ordinary life derives from the religious tradition, and ultimately from the Bible. The reigning European poetic, from the Renaissance through the Eighteenth century, had been based primarily on classical models and adapted mainly to an aristocratic audience, and Wordsworth emphasizes that the incursion into poetry of Biblical concepts and values is deeply subversive of these established hierarchies, decorums, and tastes (Natural Supernaturalism 392).

If we take Abrams's point concerning Wordsworth's use of Biblical imagery, then one of the ways in which he manages to reconcile the poet as man with the poet as poet is through the Biblical parallel of exalting the humble and lowly. The poet, like Christ, is both mortal and immortal; he is "the rock of defence of human nature" (a description with an obvious Biblical echo); he is a disciple of "love",

a "preserver and upholder", uniting "the vast empire of human society" by "passion and knowledge". In fact Wordsworth's use of the word "passion" in his Preface is closer in meaning to the Biblical passion, that is passion as suffering, than its usual meaning of overwhelming feelings.

In terms of my argument, however, the contradictory way in which the poet is presented in the "What is a Poet?" section is closely connected with the way in which Wordsworth presents himself in the poetry of Lyrical Ballads. There are a number of different ways in which the poet may be perceived in the poetry: the poet recounts his own experiences, perceptions and feelings; or the poet may recount the experiences and feelings of others; or he may create entirely fictitious feelings and experiences; or, more commonly, he may indulge in a combination of these modes.

The poem Hart-leap Well, demonstrates the various poses which the poet may assume. In fact, as the opening poem of the new volume of Lyrical Ballads, it serves as a kind of preface for the work that follows: it provides allegories for poetic activity while, at the same time, is itself an example of the sort of poetry that Wordsworth wishes to write. The poem is divided into two parts. The first part tells of the "remarkable chase" in which Sir Walter hunts and kills a hart and then decides to construct a pleasure-house upon the spot where it had died. In the second part the poet discusses the meaning of Sir Walter's story with a

shepherd whom he has encountered; and the poem seems to draw a relatively simple moral:

One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
 Taught both by what she shews, and what conceals,
 Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
 With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.

But the poem's structure is a complex one. Sir Walter is not only a destroyer but is also a creator; Geoffrey Hartman, points out that aggressive assertion has a long history of association with artistic endeavour (Beyond Formalism 283-97). It is Sir Walter who gives the place, and therefore the poem, its name:

I'll build a Pleasure-house upon this spot.
 And a small Arbour, made for rural joy;
 'Twill be the traveller's shed, the pilgrim's cot,
 A place of love for damsels that are coy.

A cunning artist will I have to frame
 A basin for that fountain in the dell;
 And they, who do make mention of the same,
 From this day forth, shall call it Hart-leap Well.

This is, as Stephen Parrish points out, a domestic version of Kubla Khan's insistent: "I would build that dome in air,/ That sunny dome! those caves of ice!" (Parrish 205). Just as the imagination-as-Kubla forces itself upon the external world, so Sir Walter's "cunning artist" will regulate and order nature. But ultimately, the kind of art represented by Sir Walter is inadequate; all that he touches petrifies: "the Hart, stone-dead", the "cup of stone" around "the living well", and the "three pillars of rude stone Sir Walter rear'd" represent the inadequacy of his sort of

artistic endeavour.

The second part of the poem depicts an alternative version of artistic creativity; the poet, in his introduction, denounces the the extravagant tale which has been told, largely by Sir Walter, in Part One:

The moving accident is not my trade,
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts;
'Tis my delight, alone in summer shade,
To pipe a simple song to thinking hearts.

Wordsworth had of course "piped" the whole poem, but creates a fiction whereby it would seem that Sir Walter, in the section in quotations at any rate, had composed the first half. Part One shows the imagination in an aggressive mood, with the poet making use of cliches, "ready arts" and other tools of the trade his tale of knighthood, courtly ladies and the hunt. Part Two establishes a different sort of relationship between poet and reader. James Averill writes that:

Piping 'a simple song to thinking hearts' seems less manipulative and morally suspect than employing 'ready arts' to give the reader a cheap thrill (Averill 217).

The image of the poet piping "a simple song to thinking hearts" echoes the image, presented in the Preface, of the poet "singing a song in which all human beings join with him" (I 141). Wordsworth does not made the mistake of confusing poetry with reality. The poet in the second part stands "in various thoughts and fancies lost" while the shepherd tells of local superstitions and surmises about

"What thoughts must through the creature's brain have pass'd". The pictures drawn by poet and shepherd, who in Part Two exists as an analogy for the new sort of poet, just as Sir Walter represents the old sort in Part One, are self-avowedly fictions, imaginative responses to suffering and death. The difference between Sir Walter and the Shepherd is that the latter sympathizes with the objects of his contemplation; where Sir Walter sees the hart's leap merely as an unusual phenomenon and wishes to commemorate it, the shepherd cries: "O Master! it has been a cruel leap". The poet claims:

'Grey-headed Shepherd, thou has spoken well;
Small difference lies between thy creed and mine;
This beast not unobserv'd by Nature fell,
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.'

The "small difference" between them is the poetry itself. The poet has been the controlling consciousness, ordering and directing our responses. The contradictions needed to describe the complex activities of the poet in the Preface are precisely those of the poet in Hart-leap Well. As we find that the main issue of the poem has not been the morality of hunting, but the morality of pleasure and sympathy, so in the Preface Wordsworth explains:

We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathise with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure (I 140).

The reader's response, the fact that we "enjoy" a sad story,

correlates to the poet's role in producing it. The poet:

considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure (I 140)...

Wordsworth's attitudes towards his readers are just as contradictory as his attitudes towards the poet. Just as the poet is simultaneously a member of common humanity as well as the supreme example of mankind, so too the reader is both common and uncommon reader. Wordsworth seems, at times, to prefer a naive sort of reader, for he writes, in the Advertisement, that the "most dreadful enemy to our pleasures" is "our own pre-established codes of decision" (I 116). He expands upon this idea in the Preface:

One request I must make of my reader, which is, that in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgement of others...let the Reader then abide, independently, by his own feelings, and, if he feels himself affected, let him not suffer such conjectures to interfere with his pleasure (I 155).

The advantage of a relatively ignorant reader is that he may be educated by the poet, who:

shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened and his affections strengthened and purified (I 127).

But the problem of the ignorant reader is that he will not appreciate the complexities of the poet's art:

there can be no presumption [Wordsworth writes] in saying of most readers, that it is not probable they will be so well acquainted with the various stages of meaning through which words have passed, or with the fickleness or stability of the relations of particular ideas to each other; and above all, since they are so much less interested in the subject, they may decide lightly and carelessly (I 153).

In the way which is typical of the Preface, Wordsworth juxtaposes two opposing ideas: the audience as literary critic and as "inexperienced Reader":

an accurate taste in poetry, and in all the other arts, as Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed, is an acquired talent, which can only be produced by thought and a long-continued intercourse with the best models of composition. This is mentioned, not with so ridiculous a purpose as to prevent the most inexperienced Reader from judging for himself...but merely to temper the rashness of decision, and to suggest, that, if Poetry be a subject on which much time has not been bestowed, the judgement may be erroneous; and that, in many cases, it necessarily will be so (I 157).

Wordsworth's ideal reader is someone with the knowledge and intellect of Coleridge and the simplicity of a lake country shepherd; an impossible ideal, but nevertheless Wordsworth does imagine such a person as his audience. In The Idiot Boy, for example, the implied reader is expected, simultaneously, to respond sympathetically to the tale of Johnny and Betty Foy and to appreciate its various literary parallels: the parody of Burger and the tradition of Tam o' Shanter. It is not a matter of the poem being read at different levels, appealing to sophisticated and unsophisticated readers at the same time; it is rather a matter, as Mary Jacobus points out, of the complex

relationship between parody and sympathy (Bicentennial Studies 89). The implied criticism of Burger is an essential accompaniment to the expression of sympathy with Johnny and his mother. Similarly the Biblical references in Michael form an essential part of our response to the character and his sufferings. There are poems in which Wordsworth directly addresses the reader, as in Simon Lee, where the poet appears to attack the false sophistication of his reader and requires him to examine his motives and values:

My gentle Reader, I perceive
 How patiently you've waited,
 And now I fear that you expect
 Some tale will be related.

O Reader! had you in your mind
 Such stores as gentle thought can bring,
 O gentle Reader! you would find
 A tale in every thing.
 What more I have to say is short,
 And you must kindly take it:
 It is no tale; but, should you think,
 Perhaps a tale you'll make it.

The expectations, which are deflated by the poet, are those of a sophisticated reader and part of the process of the poem is that the sophisticated reader should put himself in the position of an inexperienced reader and allow himself to be instructed by the poet.

When Wordsworth comes to discuss the nature of poetry itself in the sections on metre, the ambivalencies and equivocations of his prose style are particularly appropriate. Wordsworth's theory of metre has been the subject of much criticism, mainly because of his description of poetry as prose with metre superadded (I 145); this is,

of course, not all that Wordsworth has said about metre and, as in his other discussions, the contradictions are a necessary part of the dialectics of the argument.

Wordsworth conceives of metre as an element of regularity in the midst of the abnormal excitement of poetic creation. Its regularity, which can be imagined as a positive sign (as in mathematics) is able to cancel out the negative sign given to overly painful or intense feelings. Any disruption of the regularity of the metre has the immediate effect of intensifying the passion, before it surrenders to the control of the usual metre. Slight changes in the metrical scheme can thus lift "naked and low pitched words" to a higher emotional level (Gros III 48). But metre also has a "great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion"; thus metre has a tendency to "divest language, in a certain degree of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition" (I 147). The real feelings of the reader, Wordsworth suggests, are transformed into aesthetic ones in the process of reading a poem. As an example of this tendency Wordsworth suggests that the pathetic parts of Shakespeare are more bearable than those of Richardson; and that even the artless metre of the old ballads has the effect of moderating the pathos of their tragic narratives (I 147).

Following from this point is Wordsworth's concept of

"similitude in dissimilitude" and "dissimilitude in similitude", which is produced by the combination of the artificiality of metre and the relative normality of "the language of men":

Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same similar construction, an indistinct perception renewed of language closely resembling that of real life and yet, in the circumstance of metre, differing from it so widely -- all these imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling always found intermingled with powerful description of the deeper passions (I 151).

Wordsworth's theory of metre is clearly derived from his own practice: from the way in which his poetry works -- its apparent simplicity yet actual complexity. If the poetry were as simple as it seems, it might be imagined that we could rewrite it as prose with little loss of effect. Here, in prose form, is the first section of Tintern Abbey:

Five years have past; five summers with the length of five long winters! and again I hear these waters, rolling from their mountain springs with soft inland murmur. -- Once again do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs, that on a wild secluded scene impress thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect the landscape with the quiet of the sky. The day is come when I again repose here, under this dark sycamore, and view these plots of cottage ground, these orchard-tufts, which at this season, with their unripe fruits, are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves 'mid groves and copses...

As a piece of prose this passage is objectionable on a number of grounds, chief of which is that the tone is too

elevated for prose. The expression, at once natural and idiomatic in the poem, now seems, ironically, to lack simplicity. The sentence structure is too elliptical, as in the omission of a subordinate clause to modify "five years have past"; or the repetition seems redundant, in "the length of five long winters"; or the imagery seems overly romanticised, as in "these waters rolling from their mountain-springs"; the use of metaphor seems too demanding in "impress thoughts of more deep seclusion"; the grammar too ambiguous in "connect the landscape with the quiet of the sky"; and the diction too poetical in "clad in one green hue".

Yet all these defects, when given poetic form, become virtues. The poetic form justifies the tone and the diction reinforces the meaning:

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
 Of five long winters! and again I hear
 These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
 With soft inland murmur. -- Once again
 Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
 That on a wild secluded landscape impress
 Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
 The Landscape with the quiet of the sky.
 The day is come when I again repose
 Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
 These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
 Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
 Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
 'Mid groves and copses...

Immediately noticeable is the way in which the line division gives added stress to particular words and phrases, creating a rhythmic pattern. The first words, read more slowly now, have more than an air of accomplished fact -- they suggest

the irrevocable passage of time, and this statement directs us to the main theme of the poem, the changing relationship, in time, between man and nature. We see too how the repetition in "five summers with the length/ Of five long winters" is actually enforced with the stress on five, length, five, long. The effect is to stretch out the period of absence and to make the winters seem longer than the summers.

The rhythm in "These waters rolling from their mountain springs" is again more emphatic than in prose. "Rolling suggests the flowing motion of the "waters", while "mountain-springs" suggests their origins in one emphatic image. The heightened imagery implies the poet's identification with the Wye -- its progress from birth underscores the theme of growing consciousness, and of the passage of time. The poet's style imitates this stream like progress.

The enjambements, unnoticed in prose: "impress/Thought" and "connect/ The landscape with the quiet of the sky", become immediately apparent in poetry.

The impression of one-ness is sustained in the description of the "cottage-ground" and "orchard-tufts", and the poetical "clad in one green hue" now does not obtrude upon the rustic scene but suitably conveys domestic warmth and protection.

To attempt a description of this sort of poetry, as Wordsworth attempts in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, requires a discourse that will accommodate its complex and

apparently contradictory features. Thus Wordsworth's method of talking about his poetry is, in a way, another sort of poetry.

There are many similarities between Wordsworth's poetry and his prose, in particular, his use of figurative language. The most obvious metaphors in the Preface are the personification of poetry and clothing metaphors.

Throughout the text we are informed that poetry is "alive with figures and metaphors" (I 137), that poetry is carried "alive into the heart by passion" (I 139). More often Wordsworth's personification is more specific; he writes that:

We are fond of tracing the resemblance between Poetry and Painting, and, accordingly, we call them Sisters: but where shall we find bonds of connection sufficiently strict to typify the affinity betwixt metrical and prose composition? They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred, and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry sheds no tears 'such as angels weep', but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both (I 135).

Poetry "speak[s]", is "clothed", has "affections", weeps "natural and human tears", has "vital juices" and "human blood" circulates through her veins. Wordsworth's personification of poetry as a female figure is closely connected to his use of clothing metaphors for through them he differentiates between two different sorts of women, who respectively represent true and false poetic diction.

Roger Murray, in his study of Wordsworth's figures and themes in the Lyrical Ballads of 1800, points out that metaphors of clothing and nakedness are among the most frequently recurring of all Wordsworth's figures (Murray 122-30). The clothing metaphor, as Murray suggests, is a complex one: motifs of light and colour, for example, are usually associated in a positive way with poetic creation -- as in The Excursion where the Wanderer says:

Therefore with her hues,
Her forms, and with the spirit of her forms,
He clothed the nakedness of austere truth.

(Exc I 267-9)

Or in the Ode: Intimations of Immortality where "every common sight" is "apparelled in celestial light". Similar imagery is used in the Preface where Wordsworth writes about "colours of style" (I 145) and the "colouring of the imagination" (I 123).

But coverings that are opaque or ostentatious are associated with a false poetic, as in Book III of The Prelude where Wordsworth describes the false values of life at Cambridge:

The surfaces of artificial life
And manners finely wrought, the delicate race
Of colours, lurking, gleaming up and down
Through that state arras woven with silk and gold;
This wily interchange of snakey hues,
Willingly or unwillingly revealed,
I neither knew nor cared for.

(Prel III 559-65)

In contrast to the deception and showy splendour of

Cambridge, Wordsworth describes his return to the lakes as follows:

...Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked, as in the presence of a God.

(Prel IV 150-2)

Similar uses of clothing and nakedness metaphors occur in the Preface. The phraseology of false poetic diction is noted for its "gaudiness" (I 116, 123), ostentation (I 123), extravagance (I 129), "foreign splendour" (I 137). False poetic diction "trick[s] out nature" (I 139), is covered in "accidental ornaments" (I 142), is a "motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas" (I 162). In contrast true poetic diction is plain (I 125), rustic (I 125), "unelaborated" (I 125), "naked and simple" (I 145), "real" (I 142), "manly" (I 147), "genuine" (I 159), natural (I 160), "organic" (I 127).

The clothing metaphors correlate to the personifications, for the descriptions of false poetic diction could equally well be used as descriptions of a false woman or harlot: gaudy (I 116, 123), ostentatious (I 123), "depraved" (I 121), "pernicious" (I 125), "idle and extravagant" (I 129), "degrading" (I 129), "infinitely capricious (I 145), "wanton" (I 161), "adulterated" (I 161), "perverted" (I 161), "vicious" (I 164). The descriptions of true poetic diction, on the other hand, are the sort of descriptions which could be used of an unsophisticated, unspoilt rustic.

If it is accepted that clothing and nakedness, country

and city, sophisticated and simple are a part of a series of metaphors that are sustained throughout the the Preface, then it should be clear that when Wordsworth claims that poetry is the "real language of men" (I 142) or, even more metaphorically, "the real language of nature" (I 142), he is talking as figuratively as when he claims that "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge" (I 141). Thus to criticise the Preface as if it was straightforward, expository prose is a fruitless exercise. Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, as his metaphoric language demonstrates, is inseparable from the poetry in which it was conceived.

Another feature of Wordsworth's poetry, which is equally characteristic of his prose and which continually undermines a straightforward reading, is a specific type of ambiguity entailing the imperceptible joining together of literal and metaphoric modes. This sliding together of literal and figurative states is often achieved by what Roger Murray calls an "inappropriate modifier" (Murray 14). Three instances of this figure may be demonstrated in the following excerpts from It Was an April morning:

...the voice
Of waters which the winter had supplied
Was soften'd down into a vernal tone.

...beast and bird, the lamb,
The Shepherd's dog, the linnet and the thrush
Vied with this waterfall, and made a song
Which, while I listen'd seem'd like the wild growth
Or like some natural produce of the air
That could not cease to be. Green leaves were here,
But 'twas the foliage of the rocks, the birch,
The yew, the holly, and the bright green thorn,

With hanging islands of resplendent furze.

(3-5 and 25-33)

Murray suggests:

The three modifiers are 'vernal', 'of the air', and 'of the rocks'. 'Vernal' refers of course to spring and to foliage, but what a 'vernal tone' is, the reader must infer from his own experience of hearing the sound of water in spring, or when it is muffled by surrounding growth. The 'appropriate' verbalization of the idea would be 'the sound of water in the spring'; the expression 'vernal tone', with its crossover between the visual and the auditory, strikes the modern reader especially as much to be preferred, for we tend to be highly tolerant of all means of poetic compression... The strangeness is still fresh for us in the lines 'like the wild growth/ Or like some natural produce of the air'... Wordsworth appropriately closes the rupture in his comparison by describing an audible fact as though it were a visual fact and then quickly retreating into the literal... The last and possibly the most subtle inappropriate modifier of the group --the phrase 'of the rocks' -- would pass for literal usage were it not for the motif of permanence in the passage where it occurs (Murray 14-6).

There are several instances of similar "inappropriate modifiers" in Wordsworth's Preface, for example the assertion that:

the dramatic parts of composition are defective, in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature, and are coloured by a diction of the Poet's own (I 142)...

Wordsworth is talking about "those parts of composition where the Poet speaks through the mouths of his characters" (I 142) so "the real language of nature" could refer, in a literal way, to the the sort of language that would be expected of a certain kind of character. Yet the phrase is

equivocal for we have to infer what is meant by its apparent irrationality. It also acts as a variation on the theme of the "the real language of men", a phrase which recurs in various forms throughout the Preface. Indeed this very repetition is more characteristic of poetry than of prose in its incremental effect. Other examples of ambiguity in the Preface includes the statement that poetry is "as immortal as the heart of man" (I 141), that the perception of "similitude in dissimilitude" is "the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder" (I 149), that in poetry "ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect" (I 123).

Wordsworth uses the word "spirit", a favorite of his in both poetry and prose, to facilitate the mingling of literal and figurative states, for example"

...the spirit of the elder poets (I 117)...

The poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions (I 142).

Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge (I 141).

...composing accurately in the spirit of such selection (I 143)...

Clearly the phrase "in the spirit of human passions" lends ambiguity to the idea of the poet thinking and feeling in human passions. Similarly, the idea of a "the spirit of a selection of the real language of men is rather more

ambiguous than the actual language of men. Many of Wordsworth's ambiguities of language have the purpose of drawing the human realm and the realm of nature into closer proximity. This is evident, for example in the personification of nature in Michael or in the reverse personification of the leechgatherer, who is assimilated into the landscape. A similar assumed continuity between animate and inanimate realms of being is evident in the Preface, where Wordsworth claims that he has:

a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible (I 131)...

The description is clearly metaphorical for the human mind can only be described as "indestructible" in a way that is quite different from the permanent objects of nature. Wordsworth's statement is a description of his poetry rather than a philosophical statement concerning his views on man and nature. It may be compared with other descriptions which are equally metaphorical: "Poetry is the image of man and nature" (I 139) or poets converse in the "real language of nature" (I 142). The tendency to associate certain modes of being with natural objects, in particular rocks and mountains, is typical of Wordsworth's poetry -- Tintern Abbey and The Brothers, for example.

I have tried to demonstrate the various ways in which Wordsworth's prose tends to swerve away from literal meaning, to show that it cannot mean anything when separated

from the poems that it introduces and describes.

Wordsworth's critical principles are not the solution or key to his poetry; rather, an appreciation of the poetry is of assistance in determining the nature of the criticism.

Like the poetry, the Preface has both unifying and disruptive tendencies; its structures consists of a series of oppositions, like "rustic" and "poetic" which are given conflicting values. The conflicting values are not flaws in Wordsworth's logic; the mutually contradictory character of the elements of poetry is a necessary part of Wordsworth's dialectic. The poem, as symbol of the imagination, is greater and more mysterious than its parts. The following table lists some of the oppositions that occur in Wordsworth's text, very often in the same sentence or paragraph

| | |
|---|--|
| "rustics" (125) | "poets" (125) |
| "language of men" (131) | "poetic diction" (131) |
| "prose" (133) | "metrical composition" (133) |
| "language really spoken by men" (137) | "rhyme and metrical arrangement" (137) |
| "fact" (117) | "invention" (117) |
| "common life" (123) | "unusual aspect" (123) |
| "reality and truth" (139) | "fancy and imagination" (139) |
| "real and substantial action" (138) | "an entire delusion" (138) |
| "pain" (148) | "pleasure" (148) |
| "pathetic situations" (147) | "unsubstantial existence" (147) |
| "Life and nature" (153) | "Poetry" (155) |
| "ordinary" (161) | "extraordinary" (161) |
| "similitude" (149) | "dissimilitude" (149) |
| "feeling" (129) | "action and situation" (129) |
| "feeling" (155) | "thought" (155) |
| "powerful feelings" (127) | "thought long and deeply" (127) |
| "emotion" (149) | "recollected in tranquility" (149) |
| "elder poets" (117) | "experiment" (119) |
| "man speaking to men" (138) | "a more comprehensive soul" (138) |
| "inmate of the household of man" (141). | "divine spirit" (141) |

| | |
|---|------------------------------|
| "restricted" (145) | "endless combinations" (145) |
| "judge for himself" (157) | "accurate taste" (157) |
| "instinctive and infallible perception" (160) | "common judgement" (160) |

Inevitably, oppositions of the sort listed above are evident in all of Wordsworth's descriptions of poetry. When he asks himself with what the "passions and thoughts and feelings of men" are to be connected in poetry, he replies:

Undoubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations of the elements, and the appearances of the visible universe; with storm and sunshine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow (I 142).

In Wordsworth's dialectic moral and animal, loss and hope, fear and sorrow cannot be separated out for they are reconciled by the mysterious nature of poetry. Any analysis of Wordsworth's style will, appropriately, bring us back to this central issue. Let one further example suffice:

In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time (I 141).

The unremittingly dialectic quality of Wordsworth's exposition is clear. His Preface is a maieutic effort, a struggle to achieve meaning rather than a systematic presentation of theoretical criteria. The reader must be aware delicacy of Wordsworth's language, its equivocations

and metaphors which must be taken into account when engaging with it. When we come to the heart of the sentence, that "the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society" we are near the heart of a mystery.

NOTES

- 1 Numbers in parentheses refer to the 1850 version of the Preface, unless otherwise stated.
- 2 Wordsworth clearly uses the word "imitate" in its technical sense.
- 3 This is what Dryden said of Shakespeare.

III. THE POET AS TEACHER: REPLY TO 'MATHETES'

This verse is dedicate to Nature's self,
And things that teach as Nature teaches...

(Prel V 230-1)

On the 14th December, 1809 there appeared in the seventeenth number of The Friend a letter of reverential admiration for Wordsworth and his poetry. The letter was signed "Mathetes", which means "pupil", and was probably a pseudonym for John Wilson, Alexander Blair and De Quincey (Strout 144-6). John Wilson, like De Quincey, was one of Wordsworth's earliest admirers. About a year before De Quincey's laudatory address to Wordsworth in May, 1803 John Wilson had written what Dorothy described as "a complimentary and critical letter" to her brother (Journal 76). Wilson's praise of Wordsworth's poetry was lavish: "You have surpassed every poet both of ancient and modern times..." runs one of the superlatives. Wordsworth's poems "present us with a body of morality of the purest kind"; they "point out the proper way to happiness", they flash on our souls conviction of immortality". One of the remarkable things about Wilson's letter, which was written when he was only eighteen years old, is his comprehension and defence of Wordsworth's poetical theories. He comments enthusiastically that Wordsworth has:

seized upon those feelings that most deeply interest the heart, and that also come within the sphere of common observation (Knight III 435)...

In all his poems, Wilson continues, Wordsworth has adhered strictly to natural feelings, and described what comes within the range of every person's observation. Again, in contrasting "the flimsy ornaments of language" with "the real feelings of human nature, expressed in simple and forcible language", he voices the conviction that Wordsworth's poetry "is the language of nature" -- a phrase which is, of course, an echo of Lyrical Ballads. Wilson commends Wordsworth's connection of the passions of men with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature:

You have [he writes]...explained that wonderful effect which the appearances of external nature have upon the mind when in a state of strong feeling...[and the] inexpressibly beautiful idea of the effect which the qualities of external nature have in forming the human mind (Knight III 438).

For all its ecstasy of praise, Wilson's letter is not without some criticism of Wordsworth's poems. He objects, in several cases, to the poet's choice of subject and illustrates his objection by means of The Idiot Boy.

Wordsworth, in his reply, modestly accepts Wilson's praise and answers Wilson's criticism by asserting that a great poet must do more than merely reflect faithfully the feelings of human nature, he must endeavour:

to rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane, pure, permanent, -- in short, more consonant to nature, that is to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things...A great poet ought to travel before men occasionally as well as by their sides (E.Y. 126)...

Wordsworth's assumption of the role of educator and enlarger of men's sympathies is worth remembering, despite his ostensible rejection of the role of teacher in his Reply to 'Mathetes'. Many years later, writing to Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth still considered himself to be an educator: "every great Poet is a Teacher", he writes, "I wish either to be considered as a Teacher, or as nothing" (M.Y. II 317). To Lady Beaumont he writes:

There is scarcely one of my Poems which does not aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiment, or to some general principle, or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution (M.Y. II 301).

The nature of Wordsworth's teaching, which enlarges our sympathies and makes us aware of our common nature and shared experiences, is more suited to demonstration than explanation. Wordsworth is able to make us sympathise with the plight of Johnny and Betty Foy, without an account of their socio-economic condition or psychologies -- which would be unnecessary and inappropriate for his purpose.

The way in which we "learn", or are moved, by poetry is more like the way we learn from ordinary experience than from text books. De Quincey's distinction between the literature of "Power" and the literature of "Knowledge" is a useful one in this regard.¹ When Coleridge complained of The Excursion's lack of "philosophic" content, Wordsworth reminded him that:

One of my principle aims in The Excursion has been to put into the common-place truths, of the

human affections especially, in an interesting point of view; and rather to remind men of their knowledge, as it lurks inoperative and unvalued in their own minds, than to attempt to convey recondite or refined truths (L.Y. I 529a).

Wordsworth's teaching is unpreceptive and he makes no claims of special access to mysterious truths, instead he reminds men of things that they already know:

There is a life and a spirit in knowledge which we extract from truths scattered for the benefit of all, and which the mind, by its own activity, has approved to itself -- a life and a spirit, which is seldom found in knowledge communicated by formal and direct precepts (II 8)...

The similarity between Wilson's letter of May, 1802 and the letter of "Mathetes", which contains one of the highest compliments ever paid to Wordsworth, is unmistakable. How much the letter owes to Blair and De Quincey is unknown; the sentiments are clearly Wilson's and are to be found not only in the earlier letter to Wordsworth, but also in Wilson's Essays on The Lake School of Poetry, in particular, "On the Habits of Thought Inculcated By Wordsworth" (Blackwoods 1818). Wordsworth seems quite sure that the true author of the letter from "Mathetes" is Wilson for several years later he writes:

...you will find some remarks of mine upon a letter signed...'Mathetes', which was written by Professor Wilson (L.Y. I 231)...

In the letter "Mathetes" complains of the dangers which beset the young as they go forth into a world full of false values, crass materialism and low moral and intellectual

standards. What, asks "Mathetes" shall youth do in a society where "all which is drawn from depth of Nature, all which impassioned feeling has made original in thought, would be misplaced and obstructive"; where "whatever be the native spirit of a mind, it is evident that this [necessary] perpetual adaptation of itself to others -- this watchfulness against its own rising feelings, this studied sympathy with mediocrity -- must pollute and impoverish the sources of its strength" (II 32).²

Wilson's impatience with the apparent decadence of the age may seem rather out of character. He was known as "The Beau", from his love of balls and dancing, his lavish hospitality and general high spirits. (He was incorrigibly fond of practical jokes and of opportunities for showing off his immense physical strength). However, at the time of composing the letter, Wilson's love of social diversions was all but forgotten in his enthusiasm for the Lake District and his "adoration" of its high priest and poet.

The letter from "Mathetes" is an exhortation to the lofty spirit of Wordsworth to rescue, by his writings, ingenuous youth from the temptations and degeneracy of the age:

If a Teacher should stand up in their generation conspicuous above the multitude in superior power, and yet more in the assertion and proclamation of disregarded Truth -- to Him -- to his cheering or summoning voice all hearts would turn, whose deep sensibility has been oppressed by the indifference, or misled by the seduction of the times. Of one such Teacher who has been given to our own age, you have described the power when you said, that in his annunciation of truths he seemed to speak in thunders. I believe that mighty voice has not been poured out in

vain: that there are hearts that have received into their inmost depths all its varying tones: and that even now, there are many to whom the name of Wordsworth calls up the recollection of their weakness, and the consciousness of their strength (II 33).

Wordsworth's advice is eminently sensible: he urges "Mathetes" to develop a sense of self-integrity by "voluntary and self-originating effort" (II 13) and warns that "reverence and love for the Teacher" (II 8), combined with "humility" and a "docile disposition" on the part of the pupil are liable "to degenerate into passiveness and prostration of mind"(II 23) -- a very telling point against "Mathetes". Wordsworth answers "Mathetes'" despair concerning the "peculiar unfavourableness of the present times to dignity of mind" (II 10) with a challenge:

We would tell him that there are paths which he has not trodden; recesses which he has not penetrated; that there is a beauty which he has not seen -- a pathos which he has not felt -- a sublimity to which he has not been raised (II 16).

A recurring metaphor in the Reply to 'Mathetes' is that of the path or lane, to which the youth's advance towards maturity is compared. It is metaphor often used by Wordsworth to suggest limitless possibilities and potentials within himself:

wither shall I turn,
By road or pathway, or through trackless field,
Up hill or down, or shall some floating thing
Upon the river point me out my course?

(Prelude I 27-30)

Wordsworth, in similar vein, remands 'Mathetes' to:

the two powers of Reason and Nature, thus reciprocally teacher and taught, may advance together in a track to which there is no limit (II 16).

The track or road itself in Wordsworth's poetry, is often a symbol of development and advancement, for the "sublimities of virtue which all men may attain, and which no man can transcend" (II 11):

To you, ye pathways, and ye lonely roads;
... enriched with everything I prized,
With human kindness and simple joys.

(Prelude XIII 117-9)

The Mind, Wordsworth writes, in his Reply to 'Mathetes' "may be likened to that of a Traveller" (II 9) but its journey is rarely a direct one for the traveller may be "misled", "delud[ed]", "diverted" (II 9), or led astray (II 10). His progress along what Wordsworth calls "the plain straight road" (Prel XI 71) is beset by many dangers, not the least of which is the difficulty of distinguishing "false from legitimate objects of admiration" (II 8) for:

ours is, notwithstanding its manifold excellencies, a degenerate age; and recreant knights are among us far outnumbering the true. A false Gloriana in these days imposes worthless services, which those who perform them, in their blindness, know not to be such; and which are recompensed by rewards as worthless, yet eagerly grasped at, as if they were the immortal guerdon of virtue (II 20).

The "false Gloriana" is one of the most powerful images of

the Reply to 'Mathetes', a sinister contrast to the prevailing imagery of expansion and development. The "false Gloriana", who misled in morals and in life, may be likened to the false aesthetic that misleads in poetry:

duped by shows, enslaved by words, corrupted by mistaken delicacy and false refinement, as not even having attended with care to the reports of the senses, and therefore deficient grossly in the rudiments of its own power (II 21-2).

Yet there are benefits which may be gained through a surrender to evil or error:

For, as that Man cannot set a right value upon health who has never known sickness, nor feel the blessing of ease who has been through his life a stranger to pain, so can there be no confirmed passionate love of truth for him who has not experienced the hollowness of error (II 21).

Here Wordsworth is surely referring to his seduction by the necessitarian and mechanistic philosophers; and the point he makes is that only by embracing error can one experience its hollowness. Wordsworth refers us to a passage from the prose works of Milton describing:

the manner in which good and evil grow up together in the field of the world almost inseparably; and insisting, consequently, upon the knowledge and survey of vice as necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of Error to the confirmation of Truth (II 22).

The "field of the world" contains both good and evil and the traveller who crosses it will be beset by many dangers -- false beacons, the "windings" of false taste he may, in all likelihood, depart "from the side of truth" (II 22).

Wordsworth exhorts his young readers "to enter the paths that have been pointed out" without fearing that "any deviations from the truth which will be finally injurious" (II 24).

As the Letter progresses, Wordsworth substitutes the metaphor of the road for that of the river, whose indirect, yet unimpeded, progress is a favorite Wordsworthian analogy for the course of human life:

The progress of the Species neither is nor can be like that of a Roman road in a right line. It may be more justly compared to that of a River, which both in its smaller reaches and larger turnings, is frequently forced back towards its fountains, by objects which cannot otherwise be eluded or overcome; yet with an accompanying impulse that will ensure its advancement hereafter, it is either gaining strength every hour, or conquering in secret some difficulty, by a labour that contributes as effectually to further it in its course, as when it moves forward uninterrupted in a line, direct as that of the roman road with which we began our comparison (II 11).

The image of the river is implicit in many of Wordsworth's descriptions in the Reply to 'Mathetes': in the description of the searching mind discovering that "the way to knowledge shall be long, difficult, winding, and often times returning upon itself" (II 25); or in Wordsworth's memory of the "winding, excursive, and often retrograde course along which his own intellect has passed" (II 22).

In childhood, to continue Wordsworth's analogy, the progress of the river is easy and direct. In his belief, youth is inherently a state of natural virtue, for "neither worldly ambition, nor the love of praise, nor dread of

censure, nor the necessity of worldly maintenance, nor any of those causes which tempt or compel the mind habitually to look out of itself for support...have power to preside over the choice of the Young"(II 14). Youth is, as Wordsworth puts in The Prelude "a season of unperilous choice" (Prel V 234). Thus youth, "in the simplicity and purity of Nature" is able "to follow his intellectual genius through good and through evil" and may devote himself "to the practice of virtue and the preservation of integrity" (II 9). However, when youth passes into manhood:

We now apply for succour, which we need, to a faculty that works after a different course: that faculty is Reason: she gives much spontaneously but she seeks for more; she works by thought, through feeling; yet in thought begins and ends (II 17).

The argument that feeling grows out of an appreciation of nature, and that feeling is a guide to right reason is a recurring theme in Wordsworth's poetry and prose. By "Reason" Wordsworth clearly has in mind recta ratio, a compassionate and imaginative faculty, rather than the analytic skills much praised by eighteenth century writers. His linking of "Reason" and "Will" is interesting and probably derived from Coleridge, who often associates Reason and Will (that is, moral will) in his thinking (Biographia Literaria 96).

Wordsworth, in his example of the joint teaching of Nature and Reason, makes the point that nature is to be consciously interpreted as a symbol for our moral life. A

boy is lying in bed in the dark looking at the dying spark of the candle which he has just snuffed. The spark:

fades and revives -- gathers to a point -- seems as if it would go out in a moment -- again recovers its strength, nay becomes brighter than before: it continues to shine with an endurance which, in its apparent weakness, is a mystery; it protracts its existence so long, clinging to the power which supports it, that the observer, who had lain down on his bed so easy-minded, becomes sad and melancholy; his sympathies are touched (II 17)...

In relating this incident Wordsworth makes explicit both his concept of the poetic symbol and the attitude to nature that runs right through his work. There is no importance intrinsic to the event itself -- the dying spark on the wick -- its significance is entirely in its symbolic value to the contemplating mind. In looking back on the event, the associating emotions are re-organized with a new insight and discriminating power so that what was originally quite trivial has become a focal point in the growth of the mind:

the image of the dying taper may be recalled and contemplated, though with no sadness in the nerves, no disposition to tears, no unconquerable sighs, yet with a melancholy in the soul, a sinking inward into ourselves from thought to thought, a steady remonstrance, and a high resolve. -- Let the youth go back, as occasion will permit, to Nature and to Solitude, thus admonished by Reason, and relying on this newly acquired support. A world of fresh sensations will gradually open upon him as the mind puts off its infirmities, and as instead of being propelled restlessly towards others in admiration, or too hasty love, he makes it his prime business to understand himself (II 18).

The boy recalls and reviews the dying spark purely as a

symbolic event: a way of deciphering the emotions originally associated with it. The youth sees in the dying taper an emblem for "the moral life of himself". It provides him with a schema for classifying the evidence of his past in a process of matchless interpretation: "sinking inwards", as Wordsworth says, "from thought to thought".³ These "spots of time" have a "renovating virtue":

So feeling comes in aid
Of feeling, and diversity of strength
Attends us, if but once we have been strong.

(Prelude XII 271-3)

After recalling and recounting "invigorating thoughts from former years" in the first Book of The Prelude, Wordsworth claims that his mind "Hath been revived" and its "wavering balance" fixed. The teaching of nature is obviously dependent upon the contemplating memory. The young man must be able to recall, and remain able to see by "the sacred light of Childhood" (II 16). Wordsworth tends to associate intellectual abilities -- "insight", "discriminating powers", and "wisdom" (II 16) -- with perception and memory; in such disposition of mind, he writes:

let the Youth return to the visible Universe; and to conversation with ancient Books; and to those...which in the present day breathe the ancient spirit: and let him feed upon that beauty which unfolds itself, not to his eye as it sees carelessly the things which cannot possibly go unseen and are remembered or not as accidents shall decide, but to the thinking mind; which searches, discovers, treasures up, --infusing by meditation into the objects with which it converses an intellectual life; whereby they

remain planted in the memory, now, and for ever
(II 18).

To contemplate means to go back in time, to remember, and while "Mathetes" complains of the lack of progress in the human race, Wordsworth, on the other hand, values returns and retracings more highly than a relentless march forward. Lack of progress or a setback in history is, he suggests, a sort of universal contemplation, and the poet finds positive effects even in the apparent sleep of "a whole generation" (II 12) or the "hurling back of the mind of the Country" following the usurpation of Henry IV. We recall the river image once more.

Meditation is clearly a key concept, implying a state of intense mental activity in which the mind turns in upon itself. The results of these mental returns and retracings are manifold:

the mind

Drooped not; but there into herself returning,
With prompt rebound seemed fresh as heretofore.

...
Or turning the mind in upon herself,
Poured, watched, expected, listened, spread my thoughts
And spread them with a wider creeping; felt
Incumbencies more awful, visitings
Of the Upholder of the tranquil soul,
That tolerates the indignities of Time,
And from the centre of Eternity
All finite motions overruling, lives
In glory immutable.

(Prelude III 96-121)

Clearly, Wordsworth places a greater value on contemplation than on action. Contemplation should precede and govern "all action that moves to salutary purposes" (II

19) and leads to "elevation, the absolute possession of the individual mind, and to a consistency or harmony of the Being within itself which no outward agency can reach, to disturb or impair" (II 19).

Behind Wordsworth's insistence on the need for self-sufficiency and self-integrity is a warning against the over-cultivation of the scientific spirit, in which is surely another personal memory of his own struggles with necessitarian and materialistic philosophies. "Nature", Wordsworth writes, "has irrevocably decreed, that our prime dependence...must be upon our own minds; and that the way to knowledge shall be long, difficult, winding, and often times returning upon itself" (II 23).

In words which recall in their intensity the early books of The Prelude, Wordsworth reminds his disciples of the blessings which are bestowed upon the young:

of knowledge inhaled insensibly like a fragrance
 -- of dispositions stealing into the mind like
 music from unknown quarters -- of hopes plucked
 like beautiful wild flowers from the ruined tombs
 that border the highways of antiquity, to make a
 garland for a living forehead (II 16).

His disinclination to accept the role of teacher to the young does not arise from a sense of modesty, but from inherent contradictions and limitations in the notion of a teacher of morals. One person cannot devise a set of moral principles for another, for this is something that he must surely discover for himself. Indeed, to teach morals would be the very opposite of the self-sufficiency and integrity

that Wordsworth has been urging upon his young readers.

But although Wordsworth declines to become any man's teacher, there are times when his poetry inevitably makes him one, when he writes "in his character of Philosopher Poet" (II 24). As an example of the way in which poetry may be morally instructive, Wordsworth refers us to his Ode to Duty:

having thought of Morality as implying in its essence voluntary obedience, and producing the effect of order, [the poet] transfers, in the transport of imagination, the law of Moral to physical Natures, and, having contemplated, through the medium of that order, all modes of existence and subservient to one spirit, concludes his address to the power of Duty in the following words:

To humbler functions, awful power!
 I call thee: I myself commend
 Unto thy guidance from this hour;
 Oh, let my weakness have an end!
 Give unto me, made lowly wise,
 The spirit of self-sacrifice:
The confidence of reason give;
And in the light of truth thy Bondman let me live!
 (II 24-5)

What Wordsworth means by the imaginative transposition of "the laws of Morality to physical Nature" is clear in descriptions like the "random gusts", "chance-desires" and "unchartered freedoms" which, paradoxically, tend to confine the young person of the poem; while the "checks" and "Bonds" are the "saving arms" of Duty, "Stern Lawgiver" and liberator.

Wordsworth's choice of the Ode to Duty is not typical of the unpreceptive nature of his teaching, and indeed Wordsworth has stressed a different sort of teaching

throughout his Reply to Mathetes. The lessons of poetry, Wordsworth implies, are very much like the lessons of nature -- "images uncalled for and rising up like exhalations" (II 16). Poetry, we may infer, like nature, is "a Teacher of truth through joy and gladness, and as a Creatress of the faculties by a process of smoothness and delight" (II 17). The comparison between nature and poetry is one which recurs in Wordsworth's work. He does not hold that his poetry is artless or unstudied when he compares it to nature -- for the comparison between the teaching of nature and the teaching of poetry is limited to specific points: the indirectness of its methods of instruction, the embedding of the message within its context and the conscious effort that the mind must make in order to interpret its symbols:

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
 A lasting inspiration, sanctified
 By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved,
 Others will love, and we will teach them how;
 Instruct them how the mind of mind becomes
 A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
 On which he dwells, above this frame of things
 (Which, 'mid all revolution in the hopes
 And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
 In beauty exalted, as it is itself
 Of quality and fabric more divine.

(Prel XIV 444-454)

NOTES

- 1 see below p 204
- 2 The letter from "Mathetes" may be found in Owen and Smyser (ed), pp 26-34
- 3 see Stephen Prickett's analysis of the candle image in Stephen Prickett, Coleridge and Wordsworth: The Poetry of Growth (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), pp 143ff

IV. THE POET AS ELEGIST: THE ESSAYS ON EPITAPHS

an epitaph is not a proud writing shut up for the studious: it is exposed to all -- to the wise and the most ignorant; it is condescending, perspicuous, and lovingly solicits regard; its story and admonitions are brief, that the thoughtless, the busy, and indolent, may not be deterred, nor the impatient tired: the stooping old man cons the engraven record like a second horn-book;-- the child is proud that he can read it;-- and the stranger is introduced through its meditation to the company of a friend: it is concerning all, and for all:-- in the church-yard it is open to the day; the sun looks down upon the stone, and the rains of heaven beat against it (II 59).

The first Essay Upon Epitaphs appeared in Coleridge's The Friend, 22 February 1810. It seems that the second and third of the essays were also intended for the same publication as there are references to The Friend in them but for unknown reasons these essays did not appear in the publication and, except for some extracts quoted by Christopher Wordsworth in his memoir, remained unprinted until they appeared in Rev Grosart's edition of the Prose Works in 1876.

In the essays Wordsworth is concerned to explain what he considers to be the true and proper style of epitaph writing which he contrasts with certain perversions of taste and pretensions of style. His arguments in favour of the simple style are founded upon the humble traditions of epitaph writing and a sense of common humanity and he finds his standard of excellence in these traditions:

It ought to contain some thought or feeling belonging to the mortal or immortal part of our nature touchingly expressed...: A husband bewails

a wife; a parent breathes a sigh of disappointed hope over a lost child; a son utters a sentiment of filial reverence for a departed father or mother; a friend perhaps inscribes an encomium recording the companionable qualities, or the solid virtue, of the tenant of the grave, whose departure has left a sadness upon his memory. This and a pious admonition to the living, and a humble expression of Christian confidence in immortality, is the language of a thousand church-yards (II 56)...

It is not difficult to surmise why Wordsworth should be so interested in epitaphs. He regards the epitaph as quintessential poetry, expressing what is most basic in human hopes and fears. They exist in an ideal relationship with nature, like so many poems scattered across the countryside. They are accessible to readers of all levels of society and, being permanently inscribed upon stone, they have a permanence which is usually only afforded to the best works of literature. Epitaphs are the original poetry:

As soon as nations had learned the use of letters, epitaphs were inscribed upon these monuments (II 50)...

The two ancient philosophers of Wordsworth's anecdote represent two basic human reactions to death: Simonides buries the dead person and the "other Sage" laments, saying: "See the shell of the flown bird!" (II 52). Each of these Sages, Wordsworth states, "was in sympathy with the best feelings of our nature" (II 52-3), and represent "the two fold desire of guarding the remains of the deceased and preserving their memory" (II 53), thus:

it may be said that a sepulchral monument is a

tribute to a man as a human being; and that an epitaph...includes this general feeling and something more; and is a record to preserve the memory of the dead, as a tribute due to his individual worth, for a satisfaction to the sorrowing hearts of the survivors, and for the common benefit of the living (II 53)...

Wordsworth attributes the traditional imagery of epitaphs to the simplicity and quiet tenor of life in past ages, hence they contain:

strong appeals to visible appearances or immediate impressions, lively and affecting analogies of life as a journey -- death as a sleep overcoming the tired wayfarer -- of misfortune as a storm that falls suddenly upon him -- of beauty as a flower that passeth away, or of innocent pleasure as one that may be gathered -- of virtue that standeth firm as a rock against the beating waves; -- of hope 'undermined insensibly like the poplar by the side of the river that has fed it', or blasted in an moment like a pine-tree by the stroke of lightning upon the mountain top -- of admonitions and heart-stirring remembrances, like a refreshing breeze that comes without warning, or the taste of the waters of an unexpected fountain (II 54)...

Wordsworth assimilates many of these traditional images into his own writing about epitaphs: in particular metaphors which compare the course of human life to that of a river, starting in dark caverns and progressing towards the sea of eternity. It is a favorite Wordsworthian analogy which is used throughout The Prelude and the Duddon Sonnets. The "contemplative Soul", Wordsworth tells us, travelling "in the direction of mortality, advances to the country of everlasting life" (II 53); thoughts of eternity are likened to an "image of an unruffled Sea" (II 64); and thoughts on the "sources of things" are compared to penetration of "the

dark cavern from which the River that murmurs in every one's ear has flowed from generation to generation" (II 79).

Clearly then Wordsworth does not advocate originality in the writing of epitaphs, for, in reply to Dr Johnson's praise of an epitaph which contains "nothing taken from common places" (II 78) he writes:

it is not only no fault but a primary requisite in an Epitaph that it shall contain thoughts and feelings which are in their substance common-place, and even trite. It is grounded upon the universal intellectual property of man; sensations which all men have felt and feel in some degree daily and hourly; -- truths whose very interest and importance have caused them to be unattended to, as things which could take care of themselves (II 78).

The skill of the elegist is to give these common-places "the freshness and clearness of an original intuition" (II 78), "to give to universally accepted truths a pathos and a spirit which shall re-admit them into the soul like revelations of the moment" (II 83).

The words on an epitaph are fascinating to the poet as the conveyors of sincere and deeply felt emotions, such as the "naked ejaculation" of the following:

Ach! sie haben
Einen Braven
Mann begraben --

Mir war er mehr als viele (II 66).

Or the "rudeness" and simplicity of the epitaphs of our forefathers:

Farewel my Frendys, the tyde abidyth no man,

I am departed hens, and so sal ye (II 67)...

Even the most elementary of messages on a tombstone has been the product of sincere feelings and has the power to evoke an emotional response in its reader:

In an obscure corner of of Country Church-yard I once espied, half overgrown with Hemlock and Nettles, a very small Stone laid upon the ground, bearing nothing more than the name of the Deceased with the date of birth and death, importing that it was an Infant which had been born one day and died the following. I know not how far the Reader may be in sympathy with me, but more awful thoughts of rights conferred, of hopes awakened, of remembrances stealing away or vanishing were imparted to my mind by that Inscription there before my eyes than by any other that it has ever been my lot to meet with upon a Tomb-stone (II 93).

The simple traditions of epitaph writing confirm Wordsworth's faith in the ability of words to uphold and convey the truth and particularly in "the language of men" as the proper medium for communication and the expression of emotion.

In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth had expressed the hope that his poetry would interest mankind permanently, and the epitaph epitomises such permanence. It exists for many centuries as the words are etched in "the language of the senseless stone" (II 54) and thus forms a relatively permanent record of a human life.

From the stone itself Wordsworth derives a principle of decorum:

The very form and substance of the monument which has received the inscription, and the appearance

of the letters, testifying with what a slow and laborious hand they must have been engraven, might seem to reproach the author who had given way upon this occasion to transports of mind, or to quick turns of conflicting passion; though the same might constitute the life and beauty of a funeral oration or elegiac poem (II 60).

For this reason, Wordsworth finds Montrose's lines on the death of Charles I (written, apparently, with the point of his sword), unsuitable for epitaphic inscription:

Great, good, and just, could I but rate
My griefs, and thy so rigid fate;
I'd weep the world to such a strain,
As it should deluge once again.
But since thy loud-tongued blood demands supplies,
More from Briareus hands than Argus eyes,
I'll sing thy Obsequies with Trumpets sounds,
And write thy Epitaph with blood and wounds (II 71).

Wordsworth does not doubt that the poet was moved and demonstrates his keen appreciation of Montrose's extravagant language and figures:

His soul labours; -- the most tremendous event in the history of the Planet, namely, the Deluge, is brought before his imagination by the physical image of tears, -- a connection awful from its very remoteness and from the slender bond that unites the ideas:-- it passes into the region of Fable like wise; for all modes of existence that forward his purpose are to be pressed into the service. The whole is instinct with spirit, and every word has its separate life (II 71)...

In an epitaph, however, Wordsworth suggests that the writer should be wary of adopting "phrases of fancy" or entering "into the more remote regions of illustrative imagery" (II 76):

For the occasion of writing an Epitaph is matter-

of-fact in its intensity, and forbids more authoritatively than any other species of composition all modes of fiction, except those which have been acknowledged by the human heart, and have become so familiar that they are converted into substantial realities (II 76).

The essays center on the matter of truth and fiction or, more specifically the allowable and unallowable fictions in the writing of epitaphs. Wordsworth establishes that extravagant figures and images are indecorous, not because they violate the truth, but because they take into account neither the permanence of the memorial nor the solemnity of the occasion. The "tender fiction", for example, whereby the dead person is represented as speaking from his own tombstone "telling you himself that his pains are gone; that a state of rest is come..." (II 60) etc, is an allowable fiction because it employs "the intervention of imagination in order that reason may speak her own language earlier than she would otherwise have been enabled to do" (II 60). Some degree of fiction may also be permitted in order that the traditional "encomiastic language" (II 65) of tombstones may be used. It would be inappropriate to dwell upon the dead person's faults -- he should always be presented in an idealized form on his epitaph:

The character of a deceased friend or beloved kinsman is not seen, no -- nor ought to be seen, otherwise than as a tree through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualizes and beautifies it (II 58)...

The idealized portrait, Wordsworth claims, "is truth, and of the highest order...it is truth hallowed by love -- the

joint offspring of the worth of the dead and the affections of the living (II 58)! Throughout the essay Wordsworth returns to his favorite metaphor for the imagination as a "veil" (II 66), a "mist" (II 58), or an idealizing light. A quiet churchyard is described as "decorated" by the "hand of Memory" and "shining" in "the light of love" (II 63); a departed friend is "viewed" through a "medium of love, sorrow, and admiration" (II 81). These various mediums through which the elegist perceives the dead person are responsible for the processes whereby he is transformed and eulogised.

From these musings Wordsworth establishes a criterion of sincerity:

an Epitaph must strike with a gleam of pleasure, when the expression is of that kind which carries conviction to the heart at once that the Author was a sincere mourner, and that the Inhabitant of the Grave deserved to be so lamented (II 66)...

The idealizing light of the elegist is transmitted to the reader, as "a gleam of pleasure". No faults, Wordsworth writes, "have such a killing power as those which prove that he is not in earnest, that he is acting a part, has leisure for affectation" (II 70). These faults are particularly shocking in epitaphic inscription "precisely in the same degree as that mode of composition calls for sincerity more urgently than any other" (II 70). Sincerity, Wordsworth claims, in a Leavis-like statement, may be proved by the "internal evidence" of the writing itself:

in other words where this charm of sincerity lurks in the language of a Tombstone and secretly pervades it, there are no errors in style or manner for which it will not be, in some degree, a recompense; but without habits of reflection a test of this inward simplicity cannot be come at (II 70)...

As examples of sincerity Wordsworth cites simple, pious epitaphs -- "epitomized biograph[ies]" as he calls them -- from Weever's collection and Milton's epitaph on Shakespeare. But his primary example of a worthy epitaph writer is Chiabrera. The following epitaph, written by Chiabrera and translated by Wordsworth, was first published in The Friend (4 Jan 1810):

Pause, courteous Spirit! -- Baldi supplicates
That Thou, with no reluctant voice, for him
Here laid in mortal darkness, wouldst prefer
A prayer to the Redeemer of the world.
This to the dead by sacred right belongs;
All else is nothing. -- Did occasion suit
To tell his worth, the marble of this tomb
Would ill suffice: for Plato's lore sublime
And the wisdom of the Stagyrte,
Enriched and beautified his studious mind:
With Archimedes also he conversed
As with a chosen friend; nor did he leave
Those laureat wreaths ungatherd which the Nymphs
Twine near their loved Permessus. -- Finally,
Himself above each lower thought uplifting,
His ears he closed to listen to the songs
Which Sion's Kings did consecrate of old;
And his Permessus found on Lebanon.
A blessed Man! who of protracted days
Made not, as thousands do, a vulgar sleep;
But truly did He live his life. Urbino,
Take pride in him! -- O Passenger, farewell!

(P.W. V)

Wordsworth provides, in the third essay, a prose version of the epitaph, demonstrating his critical understanding of the workings of Chiabrera's poem -- how the images are

contrasted and then united and how the whole seems to turn full circle, returning to the original address (II 89).

Wordsworth, in concluding his first Essay, had recommended reticence in the epitaphs of "the mighty benefactors of mankind" for, as they are familiar to all, they are not in need of biographical sketches (II 61). In accordance with these principles, Chiabrera's epitaph upon Tasso "enters into no particulars":

Torquato Tasso rests within this Tomb:
This Figure, weeping from her inmost heart,
Is Poesy: from such impassioned grief
Let every one conclude what this Man was (II 91).

When Chiabrera's diction becomes inflated, Wordsworth is quick to censure. He contrasts the language of the epitaph to "Lelius, beautiful flower of gentleness" with that upon "the youthful Pozzobonelli", showing that in the former Chiabrera:

neglected to ascertain whether the passions were
in kind and degree a dispensation of reason or at
least commodities issued under her licence and
authority (II 90).

Chiabrera's faults pale into insignificance when contrasted with those of Alexander Pope, who is the whipping-boy and arch-villain of the piece. Like Milton's Satan he has said "Evil be thou my Good!" and has acted accordingly (II 80):

the epitaphs of Pope cannot well be too severely
condemned: for not only are they almost wholly
destitute of those universal feelings and simple
movements of mind which we have called for as

indispensable, but they are little better than a tissue of false thoughts, languid and vague expression, unmeaning antithesis, and laborious attempts at discrimination (II 80).

Pope is associated with everything that is undesirable in the composition of epitaphs. His medium is satire and criticism and, according to Wordsworth, seems unable to relinquish the critical mode in his elegies. Instead of looking at his subject through the idealizing mist, he is a harsh analyst (II 56), "an anatomist, who dissects the internal frame of the mind" (II 57), the purveyor of "laborious and antithetic discriminations" (II 58). Pope writes as a "metrical Wit" not as "a Man" (II 76) and therefore his subject is not a "living creature" but an "intellectual Existence" (II 77). Wordsworth proceeds to demonstrate the flaws in Pope by "bringing words rigorously to the test of thoughts" in the following epitaph upon Mrs Corbet ("Dr Johnson having extolled it highly and pronounced it the best of the collection" (II 76)):

Here rests a Woman, good without pretense,
 Blest with plain reason and with sober sense;
 No conquest she but o'er herself desir'd;
 No arts essayed, but was not admired.
 Passion and pride were to her soul unknown,
 Convinc'd that virtue only is our own.
 So unaffected, so compos'd a mind,
 So firm, yet soft, so strong, yet so refin'd
 Heaven as it's purest gold by tortures tried
 The Saint sustained it, but the Woman died (II 76).

Wordsworth loses no time in closing in on the poem's deficiencies:

the word conquest is applied in a manner that

would have been displeasing even from its triteness in a copy of complimentary Verses to a fashionable Beauty; but to talk of making conquests in an Epitaph is not to be endured... "so firm yet soft, so strong yet so refined" -- these intellectual operations (while they can be conceived of as operations of intellect at all, for in fact one half of the process is mechanical, words doing their only work, and one half of the line manufacturing the rest) remind me of the motions of the Posture-Master, or of a Man balancing a Sword upon his finger, which must be kept from falling at all hazards (II 78-9).

Wordsworth gives us an amusing collection of inappropriate images: fashionable Belles and jugglers desperately trying to balance antithetical verses. Wordsworth objects to the "mechanical" nature of the much-loved Augustan antithesis, which he conceives as a kind of clockwork that the author winds up and the words themselves do the rest.

Wordsworth detects the influence of Pope, "whose sparkling and tuneful manner bewitched the men of letters his Contemporaries, and corrupted the judgement of the Nation through all ranks of society" (II 75), despoiling the traditional art of epitaph writing. His artificiality of manner and inflated language is evident in contemporary epitaphs, like the following:

Take, holy earth! all that my soul holds dear:
 Take that best gift which Heaven so lately gave:
 To Bristol's fount I bore with trembling care,
 Her faded form. She bow'd to taste the wave --
 And died (II 82)...

Of the line "She bow'd to taste the wave -- and died"

Wordsworth writes:

The plain truth was, she drank the Bristol waters which failed to restore her, and her death soon followed; but the expression involves a multitude of petty occupations for the fancy: "She bowed" -- was there any truth in this? -- "to taste the wave", the water of a mineral spring which must have been drunk out of a Goblet. A strange application of the word Wave! "and died" This would have been a just expression if the water had killed her (II 83)...

In the epitaph by Lord Lyttleton we have another example of "a mind misled during the act of composition by false taste" (II 75) -- a disassociation of "thought and feeling". In the extravagant epitaph to "Beauty and virtue's true epitome" (II 73), Wordsworth claims:

These fantastic images, though they stain the writing, stained not his soul. -- They did not even touch it; but hung there like globules of rain suspended above a green leaf, along which they may roll and leave no trace that they have passed. This simple hearted Man must have been betrayed by a common notion that what was natural in prose would be out of place in verse (II 74)...

If the writer fails grievously in prose, Wordsworth points out, the fault is likely to be the thought itself, rather than any unfortunate transformation that might have affected it due to an inappropriate use of language:

I allude to the conclusion of the Epitaph upon [Gray's] Mother, where he says, 'She was the careful tender Mother of many Children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her' (II 87).

The thought is unnatural and morbid and quite unsuitable for epitaphic inscription in either verse or prose.

However, it is neither unnatural nor morbid thoughts on

epitaphs which occupies Wordsworth's attention in the essays -- his concern is with the ways in which perfectly acceptable thoughts and feelings may be rendered inappropriate or pretentious when expressed in inappropriate language:

namely, that the thoughts have their nature changed and moulded by the vicious expression in which they are entangled, to an excess rendering them unfit for the place which they occupy (II 77).

This is an argument which was begun in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads and which is developed, in similarly metaphorical terms in the Essays Upon Epitaphs:

Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve (II 85)...

Many pages have been written on these lines. Frances Ferguson points out that for Wordsworth, language and consciousness seem temporarily separable from each other and may be simultaneously spirit and counter-spirit (Ferguson xvii). Jonathan Wordsworth points out the strange ambivalences in Wordsworth's style in the "language as counter-spirit" passage: the style struggles to become prophetic, but the tone keeps changing, one moment it seems sybilline, the next we are with the mother and her feeding child, then violence returns (Jonathan Wordsworth 210-1). D.D. Devlin, on the other hand, points out Wordsworth's

eneration of words themselves (Devlin 65).

To these observations I would merely like to point out the imagery of military conquest ("to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate"...) which is echoed throughout the paragraph. Words are "too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with; they hold over all other powers a dominion over thoughts" (II 65). Further down the paragraph Wordsworth refers to "the tyranny of bad taste" before which the "feelings of nature" have "yield[ed]" (II 85). The emphatic and exaggerated image of the conquering army is suggestive of the pervasive and destructive influence of Pope's artificial and pretentious style.

Clothing images are predominant in the essays and are developed in much the same way as they were in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Various forms of inappropriate language are compared to ill-fitting or ostentatious garments. Of sincere thoughts clothed in inappropriate poeticisms, Wordsworth claims that:

it is not the Muse which puts on the Garb but the Garb which makes the Muse (II 74).

When a writer rejects "the genuine affections and their self-forgetting inspirations" in favour of an overly decorated style, Wordsworth describes him as "curiously construct[ing] a fabric to be wondered at" (II 72). Sir Philip Sidney's epitaph which is, according to Wordsworth, "a servile imitation from a French Epitaph" is described as "nothing more than the second-hand Coat of a French

Commander" (II 72). It is a marvellous image which conveys Wordsworth sense of outrage that such a distinguished Englishman should have to suffer such an indignity.

Wordsworth's central proposition concerning the relationship of words to thought is couched in clothing metaphors:

If words be not...an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift; such a one as those poisoned vestments, read of in the stories of superstitious times, which had the power to consume and to alienate from his right mind the victim who put them on (II 85).

The deadly attraction of the "poisoned vestments" (referring perhaps to the shirt of Nexus or the poisoned robe sent by Medea to Jason's new bride (Owen and Smyser 115)) conveys exactly the fatal appeal that the various forms and manifestations of "vicious" diction have upon the author who wants "to do justice to the occasion" (II 84). No faults, Wordsworth had pointed out have such "a killing power" as those which indicate "affectation" (II 70).

Wordsworth replaces the eighteenth-century notion of "language as the dress of thought" with his own version of "language as the incarnation of thought". True poetic diction is not "what the garb is to the body but what the body is to the soul" (II 84).

Frances Ferguson points out the strangeness of the incarnation image in an essay which is upon the subject of epitaphs, "because the incarnation of language comes into direct opposition with the factual deaths, the de-

incarnation of the actual human beings who are memorialized in the epitaphs" (Ferguson 31). The "incarnation" images (while they might be inappropriate in the context of graveyards) is quite specifically related to the clothing imagery. Wordsworth has recourse throughout the essays to the metaphors of "garment" and "body", which are maintained in opposition to each other. Cynthia Chase points out that the metaphor (even more morbidly) is extended into "skeletons" as well as bodies (Arden Reed 84). Complaining of the lack of substantial thought in the epitaph by Lord Lyttleton (II 74), Wordsworth claims:

there is no under current, no skeleton or stamina,
of thought and feeling (II 75).

The several references to "spirit" also extend the "incarnation" imagery. When Wordsworth states that the young child's concept of immortality is derived from the contemplation of natural objects he makes a distinction between the "letter" and the "spirit":

Never did a child stand by the side of a running stream, pondering within himself what power was the feeder of the perpetual current, from what never-wearied sources the body of water was supplied, but he must have followed in with another: 'Towards what abyss is it in progress? what receptacle can contain the mighty influx?' And the spirit of the answer must have been, though the word might have been sea or ocean...these might have been the letter, but the spirit of the answer must have been as inevitably,-- nothing less than infinity (II 51).

By the time we have read the final essay we have an image of poetry as a living being. The thought and feeling that the

poem conveys is its "skeleton", the words of the poem are its flesh, and its larger meaning and significance its spirit or soul. This poetic being exists in the medium of language, which is to it "like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe" (II 85). The image is one of vital self-sufficiency -- Wordsworth uses the word "naked" (II 66,) several times in the essays. In contrast the decorated, antithetical style is envisioned as a person draped in ostentatious or "poisoned" cloths.

The same exaggerated contrasts of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads may also be found in the Essays Upon Epitaphs. Wordsworth erects a dialectic of heart versus head (II 72), nature versus art (II 83), "simple effusions of the moment" versus "laboured composition[s]" (II 72) "self-forgetting inspirations" versus "a certain straining of the mind" (II 72). Wordsworth, of course, associates his standard of excellence in epitaphic inscription with the former parts of the dialect, but clearly these things form part of a metaphorical system and are not to be taken too literally.

Wordsworth concludes his final essay with an extract from The Excursion which was inspired by an epitaph which he found "in one of the most retired vales in the Mountains of Westmoreland" (II 93). It tells, in the starkest language, the story of one Thomas Holme, a deaf man who was much loved by his fellow Dalesmen. Wordsworth assures us that there is nothing in his poem which is not either "founded upon the Epitaph or gathered from enquiries concerning the Deceased

made in the neighbourhood (II 94); but it soon becomes apparent that the "gentle Dalesman" is a symbol of patience and fortitude, rather than an actual person. Paul De Man believes he is the poet himself for numerous verbal echoes link the passage with the boy of Winander, in particular, their muteness -- the one literal and the other metaphorical (De Man 73). To the Dalesman, nature is "silent as a picture" -- and the idea of the silent picture is a recurring metaphor for the poem in Wordsworth's poetry. De Man finds the muteness of the dalesman in the epitaph particularly significant for it ties together several types of silence described in the essays: the silence of the grave, the language of epitaphs as the language of repose, tranquillity, and serenity, as well as the silent workings of corrupt language which "unremittingly and noiselessly" seeks to subvert meaning (De Man 78-80).

The Cottager's deafness is described, not in terms of silence, but of not hearing things:

And this deep mountain valley was to him
Soundless, with all its streams.

Similarly, the Dalesman's poverty and self-denial is seen in terms of not having things:

He wrought not; neither field not flock he owned;
No wish for wealth and place before his mind;
Nor husband's love, nor father's hope or care.

Although he never knew him, Wordsworth is convinced of his admirable qualities: "his outward dignity/ Which all

acknowledged", and is even able imaginatively to reconstruct his physical appearance:

His gentle manners: and his peaceful smiles,
The gleams of his slow-varying countenance...

The poet expresses his sense of loss when the Dalesman dies:

A slow disease insensibly consumed
The powers of nature; and a few short steps
Of friends and kindred bore him from his home
(Yon cottage shaded by the woody crags)
To the profounder stillness of the grave.

The last line may be criticised as a "clever hit" (II 69), but is really the natural conclusion of a series of images describing the Cottager's deafness. Finally, the poem returns to its beginning, to the Pine tree which marks the grave and "Murmurs not idly o'er his peaceful grave" (II 96).

It is most appropriate that Wordsworth should end his Essays on Epitaphs with an epitaph, and also that he should conclude his disquisition on the powers of language with the image of the river, for he habitually associates its murmuring sound with his own voice and language, which is "like a river, murmuring/ And talking to itself" (Prel IV 110-1).

V. THE POET AS LANDSCAPE PAINTER:

A GUIDE THROUGH THE DISTRICT OF THE LAKES.

O Soul of Nature! that, by laws divine
 Sustained and governed, still dost overflow
 With an impassioned life, what feeble ones
 Walk on this earth! how feeble have I been
 When thou wert in thy strength!

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

(Prel XII 102-131)

In 1809 Wordsworth agreed to the composition of a prose text which would accompany Wilkinson's drawings of the Lake District scenes. Select Views, as it was called, was published in 1810 serially in twelve monthly parts and, before the appearance of the final issue, Wordsworth had decided to publish a guide of his own. This appeared in 1820, title A Topographical Description of the Country of The Lakes in The North of England, as an appendix to The River Duddon, A Series of Sonnets and Other Poems. In 1822 a separate revised edition, called A Description of The Scenery of The Lakes in The North of England, was published. Further editions, containing further revisions, followed until Wordsworth's final version, A Guide Through The District of The Lakes, appeared in 1835. (A further edition was published in 1842 under the editorship of Hudson and Nicholson who included technical and geological information in the new Guide.)

As Owen and Smyser's notes and appendices to Wordsworth's Guide indicate, his attitude to landscape did not undergo any significant alternation between 1810 and 1835, although the form and scope of the Guide was changed and enlarged. Wordsworth's Guide aims to introduce both tourists and residents of the Lake District through his descriptions of its scenery and inhabitants.

Wordsworth's Guide was not the first of its kind, but was a different sort of guide. Earlier guide books, like Gilpin's Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty..., served to instruct readers in ways of examining and appreciating the countryside in purely aesthetic terms. For example, one of the main themes underlying Gilpin's published travels is the relationship that exists between nature and art. Indeed, this is central to his doctrine of the Picturesque: the artist's task is to provide an "ideal" imitation of nature, but the scene which he chooses to paint must be worthy of such imitation, it must in fact be "Picturesque", which Gilpin defines as "that which would look well in a picture" (Gilpin 277).

The Picturesque was conceived within Burke's system of the "Sublime" and the "Beautiful", as a sort of independent aesthetic category, but one which was closer allied to Beauty than Sublimity. In Part III of his Enquiry, Burke makes use of the terms "Beautiful" and "Sublime" in reference to features of the landscape:

sublime objects are vast in their dimensions,
beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should

be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive (Enquiry 124).

The principle informing both Burke's application of the terms "Beautiful" and "Sublime" to landscape and Gilpin's ideas on the Picturesque is that art, though itself an imitation of nature, is nevertheless able to reveal nature. Their connoisseurship of landscape, which had grown from a desire to be true to nature, thus evolved into the arrogant process of judging natural scenes by the aesthetic standards used in the criticism of landscape painting.

The Picturesque spirit was felt quite keenly by Wordsworth, and to some extent, he was influenced by it -- a fact which is hardly surprising in the light of the close association between the Lake district and writers on the Picturesque. The Guide has several references to "romantic vale[s]" (II 163), "fine chasm[s]" (II 164), "gloomy and monastic" halls (II 166) and prospects which make "a pretty subject for the pencil" (II 162). Mountains are judged according to their nobility (II 157) and lakes according to how lake-like they are, that is "the form of a lake is most perfect when...it least resembles a river" (II 179).

In passages like these Wordsworth makes precise assertions about the aesthetic qualities of natural objects, which are clearly derived from the principles of landscape

painting.

The Guide provides several examples of Wordsworth's use of, what Professor W.J.B. Owen calls, the "Burkean doublet". In his article on Wordsworth's aesthetics of landscape, Professor Owen lists Wordsworth's use of terms which imply approval of the natural scene, and which are associated by Burke with either the Beautiful or the Sublime; words like: "admirable", "fine", "interesting", "pleasing", "romantic", "striking", "grand", "impressive", "magnificent", "majestic", "noble", "unified" and "proportionate" ("Wordsworth's Aesthetics of Landscape" 71).

But though Wordsworth frequently uses the terminology of the Picturesque writers, it is often with a complete transformation of its significance. For example, Wordsworth's use of the terms "Beauty" and "Sublimity" in the following passage reveal an attitude to the landscape which is quite different from that of Burke or Gilpin:

the opposite sides of a profound vale may ascend as exact counterparts, or in mutual reflection, like the billows of a troubled sea; and the impression may be, from its very simplicity, more awful and sublime. Sublimity is the result of Nature's first great dealing with the superficialities of the earth; but the general tendency of her subsequent operations is towards the production of beauty, by a multiplicity of symmetrical parts uniting into a consistent whole (II 181).

Wordsworth's definition of the Sublime and the Beautiful by reference to the activities of natural forces is a departure from the aestheticism of the Eighteenth century.

Wordsworth's respect for such natural operations as

geological folds and the action of weathering is many degrees removed from the categories of Gilpin's insistence that natural features should conform to certain categories. The mysterious powers of nature and the metaphors imply the poet's emotional involvement with the scene that he is describing -- aspects which are not typical of the Picturesque style.

Throughout the Guide there is evidence of a certain tension between a picturesque attitude to nature, and what may be called a personal, or sympathetic one. Wordsworth's advice on the planning of new buildings, larch plantations, cottage architecture (especially chimneys!) and other evidence of "the hand of man", arises both out of a desire for the Picturesque in nature and out a respect for natural congruity. In all these considerations Wordsworth advises in terms of both picturesque beauty and natural harmony:

The principle taken as our guide, viz. that the house should be so formed, and of such apparent size and colour, as to admit of its being gently incorporated with the works of nature (II 217)...

Anyone familiar with the Guide will recall the almost personal hostility with which Wordsworth regards the larch-tree, which had been introduced into the Lake District for timber plantations. Yet Wordsworth concedes:

in countries where the larch is a native, and where, without interruption, it may sweep from valley to valley, and from hill to hill, a sublime image may be produced by such a forest (II 221-2).

Wordsworth's approval of the larch is thus on picturesque grounds and his low opinion of it is based on its appearance -- but also, as an exotic element it destroys the individuality of the landscape.

One of the main features of picturesque guides is their tendency to compare the actual landscape with well known paintings of the scene or, if none exist, to describe the scene in terms of the style of a well known landscape painter. Thus Gilpin refers to one setting as having "the gloomy terror of Poussin", another has "the glowing brilliancy of Claude", yet another has "the romantic wildness of Salvator Rosa". Wordsworth's Guide contains certain descriptions in this style, for example, his objection to the white-washing of houses:

The objections to white, as a colour, in large spots or masses in the landscape, especially in a mountainous country, are insurmountable. In nature, pure white is scarcely ever found but in small objects, such as flowers; or in those which are transitory, as the clouds, foam of rivers, and snow. Mr Gilpin, who notices this, has also recorded the just remark of Mr Locke, of N___, that white destroys the gradations of distance; and therefore, an object of pure white can scarcely ever be managed with good effect in landscape painting. Five or six white houses, scattered over a valley, by their obtrusiveness, dot the surface and divide it into triangles, or other mathematical figures, haunting the eye, and disturbing that repose which might otherwise be perfect (II 216).

Wordsworth derives his objection to white-washed houses both from the example of nature and from that of landscape painting. The fact that "white destroys the gradations of distance" in a landscape painting is also Wordsworth's

reason for disliking it in the actual landscape. The introduction of landscape painting is often incidental and not central to his arguments. Wordsworth's other references to the work of landscape artists -- Turner's "fine drawing" of Aysgarthforce (II 156) or Claude and Poussin's paintings of the Alps (II 235) -- are merely references, for the scene is not described in terms of a painting. On the contrary, Wordsworth writes:

though our scene are better suited to painting than those of the Alps, I should be sorry to contemplate either country in reference to that art, further than as its fitness renders it more pleasing to the eye of the spectator, who has learned to observe and feel, chiefly from Nature herself (II 234).

Wordsworth, while acknowledging that certain settings may lend themselves to the painter's art more readily than others, insists that this fact need not be a judgement of the natural scene itself, nor need it interfere with the spectator's enjoyment of it.

Sometimes, instead of describing nature as a painting, writers of Picturesque guides often choose to describe a scene as a setting for some literary event. Mrs Radcliffe, in her Observations During a Tour to The Lakes..., writes of the Derwent Valley that:

the wildness, seclusion, and magical beauty of this vale seem, indeed, to render it the very abode for Milton's Comus (Radcliffe 58).

She writes this lofty descriptive flight:

The rude mountains above seem to have fallen back from the shore to admit this landscape within their hollow boss, and then, bending abruptly, appear, like Milton's Adam viewing the sleeping Eve, to hang over it enamoured (Radcliffe 92).

When no literary parallel suggests itself, or when no literary or heroic event can be imagined Mrs Radcliffe is disappointed in the scene and complains of its mediocrity.

Needless to say, no such rhapsodic flights or disappointed complaints decorate Wordsworth's Guide. He wryly remarks, in his description of Ullswater, that its mountains and torrents do not, to his mind, furnish a background for Ossian (II 246).

Where other guide books dwelt on the histories and estates of leading families, Wordsworth provides a sketch of social history and an account of the lowly inhabitants of the dales, their way of life and the contribution their methods of farming had made to the interest and beauty of the landscape. He tells us of the:

perfect Republic of Shepherds and Agriculturalists, among whom the plough of each man was confined to the maintenance of his own family, or to the occasional accommodation of his neighbour...Neither high-born nobleman, knight, nor esquire was here; but many of these humble sons of the hills had a consciousness that the land, which they had walked over and tilled, had for more than five hundred years been possessed by men of their name and blood (II 206)...

Wordsworth tells how the dalesmen had gradually enclosed the sides of the fells with stone walls, and surrounded their meadows with fences of alder, willow and ash, thus giving the whole vale "a sylvan appearance"; how they had formerly

spun and woven their own wool from their own flock; how they built their cottages, giving them from time to time:

additions and accommodations adapted to the needs of each successive occupant, so that these humble dwellings remind the contemplative spectator of a production of nature, and may...rather be said to have grown than to have been erected (III 202)...

In all this Wordsworth's aim is to show how "the hand of man has acted upon the surface of the inner regions of this mountainous country as incorporated with and subservient to the powers and processes of Nature". To new landowners in the Lake District Wordsworth advises, "as they cannot be expected to leave things to themselves", that:

skill and knowledge should prevent unnecessary deviations from that path of simplicity and beauty which, with design and unconsciously, their humble predecessors have moved (II 225).

In his well known letter to Charles James Fox, Wordsworth had recommended to Fox's attention his poems Michael and The Brothers because they illustrate the values of the "small independent proprietors of land here called statesmen" (E.Y. 312-5)... Wordsworth finds a perfect partnership between man and nature in the way of life and organic constructions of the statesmen which is lacking in those who apply the false tenets of the Picturesque to landscape gardening and architecture. This is the theme of several letters to Lady Beaumont on the planning of the gardens at Colerton (E.Y. 622-9, M.Y. I 8).

In Book XII of The Prelude, "Imagination, How Impaired

and How Restored", Wordsworth acknowledges a preoccupation with the Picturesque and states that this was a lapse suffered during a specific period -- the period, it would seem, of his flirtation with rationalism and materialist theories:

Oh! Soul of Nature! that dost overflow
 With passion and with life, what feeble men
 Walk on this earth! how feeble have I been
 When thou wert in thy strength! Not this through stroke
 Of human suffering, such as justifies
 Remissness and inaptitude of mind,
 But through presumption, even here in pleasure pleas'd
 Unworthily, disliking here, and there,
 Liking by rules of mimic art transferr'd
 To things above all art.

(Prel 1805 XI 146-55)

Rules, Wordsworth states have no place in man's response to nature. To discover that one's response to nature is inadequate, Wordsworth implies, is a sign of human weakness; but to like or dislike according to "rules of mimic art" is presumptuous and arrogant. The admirer of nature must be self-sufficient, content with his own response and, like his sister Dorothy, should "welcome what was given, and crave no more" (Prel XII 158).

By application of rule, he continues, Wordsworth found himself meddling with nature, giving way to that arrogance which presumed to improve upon what was there, and blinding himself to more profound qualities of landscape:

But more, for this,
 Although a strong infection of the age,
 Was never much my habit, giving way
 To a comparison of scene with scene
 Bent overmuch on superficial things,

Pampering myself with meagre novelties
 Of colour and proportion, to the moods
 Of time or season, to the moral power
 The affections and the spirit of the place,
 Less sensible.

(Prel 1805 XI 155-64)

The Vale of Esthwaite, which was written between 1786 and 1788 when Wordsworth was still at school, is one of the few poems that is dominated by the tenets of the Picturesque and the Burkean sublime. The following is a passage of landscape description from that poem:

I lov'd to haunt the giddy steep
 That hung loose trembling o'er the deep,
 While ghosts of Murtherers mounted fast
 And grimly glared upon the blast.
 While the dark whirlwind rob'd unseen,
 With black arm rear'd the clouds between;
 In anger Heaven's terrific Sire
 Prophetic struck the mighty Lyre
 Of Nature; with Hell-rouzing sound
 Now shriek'd the quivering strings around;
 At each drear pause a hollow breath
 Was heard -- that sung of pain and Death,
 While, her dark cheek all ghastly bright,
 Like a chain'd Madman laugh'd the Night.
 Again! the deep notes strike mine ear,
 My soul will melt away with fear,
 Or swell'd to madness bid me leap
 Down, headlong down, the hideous steep.

(Vale of Esthwaite 270-87)

Images drawn from the natural scene are such as Burke considered to be "Sublime": "giddy steep", "dark whirlwind", "Hell-rouzing sound", "hideous steep". The poet seeks out as desirable natural scenes which directly convey terror and fear -- the terrifying scene is therefore not experienced as something fearful, but as aesthetically enjoyable because rules of art have modified the spectator's response to it.

Hence too the number of imaginary, or fanciful, figures which inhabit the scene, like "ghosts of Murderers", or personifications of the landscape, as in "like a chain'd Madman laugh'd the Night".

One of Wordsworth's main reasons for rejecting the Picturesque and Burkean approaches to nature is that it does not allow for a spontaneous emotional interaction between the spectator and the natural scene. In the aesthetic model of the Picturesque the viewer's emotional involvement is in bondage to the principles of harmony taken from landscape painting. The viewer stands in a fixed space outside the natural scene and sorts the visual components into a graphic hierarchy of foreground and background. With his back turned to the landscape, the viewer might raise an oval, tinted Claude glass to see the view actually framed as a picture. Within such a model, techniques of shading and highlighting, blurring and sharpening, effects of chiaroscuro, appearance and experience can be fully subordinated to picturesque description.

The conflicting claims of the Picturesque mode and Wordsworth's characteristically personal response to natural scenes can be seen in Descriptive Sketches (1791) which was written as a sort of poetic guide to the Alps. In his letter of dedication Wordsworth incidently reveals the two principles of composition. He writes:

You [these scenes] must certainly interest, in reminding you of moments to which you can hardly look back without a pleasure not the less dear from a shade of melancholy. You will meet with

few images without recollecting the spot where we observed them together; consequently, whatever is feeble in my design, or spiritless in my colouring, will be amply supplied by your own memory (P.W. I 43).

Wordsworth expects from Robert Jones both a conventional sort of melancholy and something of that recollection and identification in memory between landscape and past experience which was his own mode of thought.

Wordsworth's inspiration flagged through the poem and becomes evident that description, by way of accurately remembered details, is not his talent nor, in later works, is it his intention. In the dedication he admits that, on occasion, he has relied more on the evocative power of Jones' memory than on the descriptions of his poetry. In his best poetry, it is the sense of landscape, the general effect, the "spirit of place", which is also the "picture of the mind", that Wordsworth captures -- rather than accurate pictorial descriptions. In writing Descriptive Sketches he seems to have recognized this for he appended the following note to a passage (332-47) describing a magnificent sunset:

I had once given these sketches the title of Picturesque; but the Alps are insulted in applying to them that term. Whoever, in attempting to describe their sublime features, should confine himself to the cold rules of painting would give the reader but a very imperfect idea of those emotions which they have the irresistible power of communicating to the most impressive imaginations (P.W. I 43).

Wordsworth realized that the impression made on him by natural scenery was never essentially pictorial. "Had I wished", he says, "to make a picture of this scene I had

thrown much less light into it. But I consulted nature and my feelings" (P.W. I 62). The memory of a landscape, Wordsworth implies, is always the memory of a past experience.

Wordsworth's memoirs of the Alps some years later, rewritten in The Prelude VI, are both more generalized and more intensified. In longer retrospect the emotional presence of the great mountains, for example in the description of the Simplon Pass, was felt scarcely at all in pictorial terms. Here the "spirit of place" is derived from pictorial elements, feeling and a brilliant use of metaphor:

Characters of the great Apocalyse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.
(Prel VI 638-40)

Wordsworth's revulsion from the Picturesque was produced, not so much by its concern with pictorial values, but by its inherent falsity. A picturesque landscape is always seen through an imaginary frame and the spectator is before it, rather than in it. Such preoccupations, Wordsworth realized, would soon deaden any true feeling for the living world. For Wordsworth the search for prescribed forms and outlines and the desire to "improve" is not only absurd but unnatural. It destroys any feeling for the deep moral influence of nature.

Poem after poem in Wordsworth's poetical works asserts his belief in the morally instructive powers which are to be found, not only in natural objects themselves, but in

natural responses to them. There are poems in which the moral is obvious but there are also poems which imply the moral impact of nature when the effect cannot be fully explained. In these poems specific settings are often associated with values of community, of traditions, and of ties between family and friends. All these values are negated by the emotional falsity of the Picturesque.

In his Guide Wordsworth writes of more general effects of landscape upon the traveller or spectator:

it may happen, that the figure of one of the larger birds, a raven or a heron, is crossing silently among the reflected clouds, while the voice of the real bird, from the element aloft gently awakens in the spectator the recollection of appetites and instincts, pursuits and occupations, that deform and agitate the world, -- yet have no power to prevent nature from putting on an aspect capable of satisfying the most intense cravings for the tranquil, the lovely, and the perfect, to which man, the noblest of creatures is subject (II 192).

The imagination, aided by natural objects, "is carried into recesses of feeling otherwise impenetrable" (II 192) -- which is something Wordsworth regards as a moral gain. How much more valuable is the experience of the person who has "learned to observe and feel chiefly from Nature herself" than that of the devotee who can judge a scene only in terms of its "fitness or unfitness for the pencil" (II 234).

The distinction that Wordsworth makes between the Picturesque and the Sublime is an important one for his aesthetics of landscape. Although the Picturesque attitude to landscape is largely rejected by Wordsworth, the concept of the "Sublime" remains important, but it is substantially

different from Burke's conception.

It was common practice, at the time of Wordsworth's Guide, to regard the Swiss Alps as typical examples of the Sublime in nature and the English Lakes as exemplifying the Picturesque. Wordsworth begins his discussion on the Sublime by discrediting these assumptions:

Nothing is more injurious to genuine feeling than the practice of hastily and ungraciously depreciating the face of one country by comparing it with that of another (II 230).

Comparisons between landscapes are typical of Picturesque guides because, as J.R. Watson points out, it makes landscape essentially something to be viewed and then compared with others for the countryside is valued for those characteristics which resemble an ideal form, rather than for its local and individual uniqueness (Watson 39-40). The predominant movement of Wordsworth's Guide has been away from critical assessments of landscape in terms of some illusionary ideal and towards an appreciation of the particular and individual qualities of the Lakes.

For the purposes of explaining what he means by the term "Sublime", Wordsworth returns to the common comparison between the Alps and the Lakes. "As far as sublimity is dependent upon absolute bulk and height, and atmospheric influences in connection with these" (II 233), Wordsworth claims that the Alps are without rival. But bulk and height do not, in Wordsworth's opinion, constitute Sublimity. In his definition Sublimity is a quality in nature which transcends the visual or actual landscape, which causes the

viewer to contemplate its creation, its eventual destruction and the corresponding powers and forces that shape his own life.

In a letter to Jacob Fletcher Wordsworth distinguishes between the Picturesque and Sublime in works of art. The Picturesque fixes and interests the eye on objects as objects, while the Sublime draws attention away from itself, it "realizes the idealism of our nature, and assists us in the formation of new ones" (L.Y. I 184). The Sublime in nature operates in much the same way, that is, it directs our attention away from the scene into further contemplation. Of Alpine scenery Wordsworth writes:

Havoc, and ruin, and desolation, and encroachment, are everywhere more or less obtruded; and it is difficult, notwithstanding the naked loftiness of the piques, and the snow-capped summits of the mounts, to escape from the depressing sensation, that the whole are in a rapid process of dissolution; and, were it not that the destructive agency must abate as the heights diminish, would, in time to come, be levelled with the plains (II 231).

A landscape which inspires the observer to such thoughts is what Wordsworth means by "Sublimity". The English Lakes can thus also be thought of as Sublime for he writes:

with respect to mountains; though these are comparatively of diminutive size, though there is little of perpetual snow, and no voice of summer avalanches is heard among them; and though traces left by the ravage of the elements are here comparatively rare and unimpressive, yet out of this very deficiency proceeds a sense of stability and permanence that is, to many minds, more grateful --

'While the coarse rushes to the sweeping breeze

In the prose fragment known as The Sublime and the Beautiful Wordsworth enlarges upon his use of the term "Sublime". He asks the observer to attempt to analyse his feelings when viewing an impressive natural scene, such as the Langdale Pikes. He suggests that, provided his mind "be not perverted by false theories", the viewer will be aware of "a sense of individual form or forms; a sense of duration; and a sense of power" (II 351). The sense of "individual form" and the notion of "duration", Wordsworth explains, are interdependent for clearly, a sense of duration would not be possible if the landscape was in a state of flux. "Power", Wordsworth writes:

awakens the sublime either when it rouses us to a sympathetic energy & calls upon the mind to grasp at something towards which it can make approaches but which it is incapable of attaining -- yet so that it participates force [sic] which is acting upon it; or 2ndly, by producing a humiliation or prostration of the mind before some external agency which it presumes not to make an effort to participate, but is absorbed in the contemplation of the might in the external power, & as far as it has any consciousness of itself, its grandeur subsists in the naked fact of being conscious of external Power at once awful & immeasurable; so that, in both cases, the head & the front of the sensation is intense unity (II 354).

The mind, Wordsworth implies, is either lifted up to a kind of empathic identification with the sublime object, or it is made conscious of its inferiority to it. Wordsworth claims that the predominant impression of the experience of "power" is "intense unity" -- a description which approximates to Kant's, rather than Burke's description of the sublime.

Kant writes:

Now, in the immensity of nature and in the sufficiency of our faculties to take in a standard proportionate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of its realm, we find our own limitation, although at the same time in our rational faculty we find a different, non-sensuous standard, which has that infinity itself under it as a unity, in comparison with which everything in nature is small, and thus in our mind we find a superiority to nature even in its immensity (Critique of Aesthetic Judgement 101).

Wordsworth's speculations on the sublime have little in common with Eighteenth century theories of the sort that Burke refers to as "delightful horror" or "tranquility tinged with terror". On the contrary, Wordsworth believes such sensationalism would destroy all feelings of sublimity. Although he analyses his viewer's reaction in terms of his "sensations", there is little mention of the physiological symptoms which characterize Burke's analysis of sensations produced by the sublime: "contracted eyebrows", eyes "rolled with great vehemence", "hair standing on end", the uttering of "shrieks and groans", and other "convulsive agitations" (Enquiry 105-6). The sensations of "form", "duration" and "power" in unity are in a category quite different from Burke's, in fact, they are not physiological sensations at all.

Yet in his definition of "power", which either intimidates the mind or invites it to seek self-elevation, Wordsworth seems to hover between alternatives which correspond to the Burkean and Kantian sublimines respectively. According to Burke, some degree of terror is always involved in the

experience of the sublime but, for Wordsworth, terror is productive of the sublime only in youth.

The young Wordsworth's confrontation with the "hugh peak" in Book I of The Prelude approximates to Burke's "astonishment", a state in which all the motions of the soul are suspended "with some degree of horror" (Enquiry 49). The verse communicates a sense of panic as the young boy attempts to retreat from the peak, which seems to chase him "like a living thing". For some afterwards the cliff continued to blot out the everyday images of nature. There was no elevation in this only prostration. However, as time elapsed and no danger threatened, the incident yielded effects corresponding to the Kantian sublime: nature in its "huge and mighty Forms" moved through the boy's mind. Forms and images now lived, not as the peak which seemed "like a living thing", but by possessing "breath and everlasting motion" in the mind of the poet.

Of his poem There Was A Boy Wordsworth explained that it dealt with "the commutation and transfer of internal feelings co-operating with external accidents to plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight in the celestial soil if the imagination" (III 52n). The episode of the stolen boat refers to a similar process in which the images "planted" were of natural forms which came to be perceived as moving with "breath and everlasting motion", or, as in Tintern Abbey, with "a motion and a spirit". Once these images are planted in the mind and their life is perceived, the boy moves beyond "vulgar" fear. This is the reason why

find sublimity in a greater range of objects and in a greater range of qualities within a single object:

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

(Intimations of Immortality)

In Tintern Abbey Wordsworth catalogues his changing impressions of sublimity -- the "abundant recompense" for the "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" of childhood:

I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; 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.

Wordsworth's account of the impressions and causes of sublimity in adulthood approximates to Kant's idea that:

Nothing, therefore, which can be an object of the sense is...to be called sublime... Consequently it is the state of mind produced by a certain presentation with which the reflective judgement is occupied, and not the object, that is to be called sublime (Critique of Aesthetic Judgement 89 my italics).

He continues:

There the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own destination, which by a certain subreption we attribute to an object of nature (conversion of respect for the Idea of

humanity in our own subject into respect for the Object) (Critique of Aesthetic Judgement 96).

Eve Walsh Stoddard suggests that Wordsworth began The Prelude in the empiricist vein of Burke and Hartley, but ended it in his own English version of Kant's transcendental idealism (Stoddard 33). Like Kant, Wordsworth's apprehension of the sublime involves an insight into a realm beyond that of sense perception. Hence the "glory" and the "radiance" which surrounds Wordsworth's natural descriptions and the "gleams" and "flashes" whereby the invisible world makes its presence felt. Wordsworth writes that with "Gleams like the flashing of a shield; -- the earth/ And the common face of Nature spake to me/ Rememberable things (Prel I 856-8). He writes "the light of sense/ Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed/ The invisible world" (Prel VI 599-603).

In his study of Tintern Abbey Albert O. Wlecke claims that Wordsworth's "sense sublime" comprises his own inwardness displaced onto nature and the misunderstood as some other presence. In other words, the "something far more deeply interfused" is, according to Wlecke, "his own mind...ubiquitously indwelling through the vistas of sky, ocean, and air", and his "sense sublime" depends on his failure to recognise that the "something" is his own mind (Wlecke 53). While such a displacement explains an important part of the sublime consciousness, to take it as the whole account makes Wordsworth's "sense sublime" a matter of self-deception and his transcendence an illusion. Wordsworth insists on the ability of the mind to perceive

transcendentally, and that the "invisible world" is one of divinity is left in little doubt:

The soul when smitten thus
By a sublime idea, whence so'er
Vouchsafed for unison or communion, feeds
On the pure bliss, and takes its rest with God.

(Prel VIII 672-5).

It is evident from the moments of sublime consciousness in The Prelude and The Excursion that a sense of the sublime is central to the imagination's operations. This issue appears in the assertion with which the fragmentary essay on the sublime opens, Wordsworth being:

persuaded that it is of infinite importance to the noblest feelings of the Mind & to its very highest powers that the forms of Nature should be accurately contemplated, & if described, described in language that shall prove that we understand the several grand constitutional laws under which it has been ordained that these objects should everlastingly affect the mind (II 350).

The Sublime and the Beautiful are two of the ways we must look at nature if we are to "contemplate accurately". The process in which the mind comes to recognise the sublime phenomena of nature is a paradigm of its own powers of creation.

A further development between nature and creativity which is illustrated by Wordsworth's Guide, is that of seeing nature in terms of "landscape" -- that is as the version of nature in which man fully experiences himself. Landscape, in contrast to general nature, had three components: place,

time, and self -- and in Wordsworth's poetry connections are made between the specific place, time and the sense of self. A continuum of experience stretching from his childhood to old age can be recreated within a single place. The recovery of the past, aided by the permanent forms of the landscape, is the stuff of Wordsworth's poetry.

VI. THE POET AS MILTON: PREFACE TO THE EXCURSION AND
PROSPECTUS TO THE RECLUSE

I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink
Deep -- and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds
To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.
All strength -- all terror, single or in bands,
That ever was put forth in personal form --
Jehovah -- with all his thunder, and the choir
Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones --
I pass them unalarmed. Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Not aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams -- can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man --
My haunt, and the main region of my song (III 7).

Wordsworth's juxtapositioning of the Preface to The Excursion and the so-called "Prospectus" creates a rather contradictory document -- the latter comprising grandiose claims of surpassing Milton and the former an apology for failing to meet these high aspirations. The discontinuity between the song of self-praise and the humble apology is exaggerated by the verse of the one and the prose of the other. The Prospectus proclaims itself as a prelude to philosophic discourse, while the Preface to The Excursion proclaims its concerns with concrete things: "lively images" (III 6) and an "existing state of things" (III 5). The combination of the two texts highlights the compatibility of philosophy and poetry -- a question which has shaped Wordsworthian criticism.

The Recluse was Wordsworth's intended masterpiece, the work to which he planned "to devote the Prime of [his] life and the chief force of [his] mind" (E.Y. 454). The Prelude,

itself of epic proportions, was to serve merely as a "preparatory poem", the "ante-chapel" to the "gothic church" of The Recluse itself. "The poem on the growth of your mind", Coleridge wrote of the original plan, "was as the ground-plat and the Roots, out of which The Recluse was to have sprung up as the Tree" (Letters IV 573). The poems were to be two distinct works, but together "one *compleat whole". In spite of persistent and anguished effort, Wordsworth accomplished, in addition to The Prelude, only Book I of Part of The Recluse (Home at Grasmere), Part II (The Excursion), and none of Part III; so that, as Helen Darbishire has remarked, all we have of The Recluse is "a Prelude to the main theme and an Excursion from it". These works were finished by 1814 and from then on, almost until his death in 1850, Wordsworth suffered from the proddings of his family and friends, as well as from his own sense that he had fallen short of his great poetic mission.

The reason, then, for publishing the Prospectus to The Recluse (which consists of the last one hundred lines of Home at Grasmere) with the Preface to The Excursion is simply because the former unfinished poem was intended to precede the latter, as Wordsworth explains:

The Author will candidly acknowledge that, if the first of these had been completed, and in such a manner as to satisfy his own mind, he should have preferred the natural order of publication, and have given that to the world first (III 5)...

In lieu of the whole poem, Wordsworth presents his readers with the final lines of Home at Grasmere, hoping that:

in the mean time the following passage, taken from the conclusion of the first book of The Recluse, may be acceptable as a kind of Prospectus to the design and scope of the whole Poem (III 6).

In a letter to Wordsworth in May 1815, just after he had with considerable disappointment read The Excursion, Coleridge reminds Wordsworth of what he had understood, from their earlier discussions, to have been the intended argument of The Recluse as a whole:

I supposed you first...to have laid a solid and immoveable foundation for the Edifice by removing the sandy Sophisms of Locke, and the Mechanic Dogmatists...Next, I understood that you would take the Human Race in the concrete...to have affirmed a Fall in some sense, as a fact, the possibility of which cannot be understood from the nature of the Will, but the reality of which is attested by Experience and Conscience... to point out however a manifest Scheme of Redemption from this Enmity with Nature...in short, the necessity of a general revolution & disciplining the human mind by the substitution of Life and Intelligence... for the philosophy of mechanism which in every thing that is most worthy of the human Intellect strikes Death (Letters IV 574-5).

According to Coleridge, Wordsworth was to have demonstrated "the whole state of man and society being subject to, and illustrative of, a redemptive process in operation, showing how this idea reconciled all anomalies, and promised future glory and restoration". He added, "it is in substance, what I have been all my life doing in my system of philosophy" (Table Talk II 70-1).

The Prospectus to The Recluse dates from the time of Wordsworth and Coleridge's collaboration (Bicentennial

Studies 15-7), when Wordsworth clearly felt confident of his ability to meet Coleridge's demands and to write a:

moral and Philosophical Poem; the subject whatever I find most interesting in Nature, Man, Society, most adapted to Poetic illustration (E.Y. 454)

In 1805, when Wordsworth anticipated The Recluse in the closing books of The Prelude, he could still think of Coleridge as a joint-labourer "in a work.../ Of [man's] redemption, surely yet to come" (Prel XIII 439-441); but by 1814 the old connections with Coleridge were severed and Wordsworth was on his own, trying to meet Coleridge's high demands. It was not so much the grandeur of Coleridge's claims for The Recluse which so daunted Wordsworth that he was unable to continue with the work but, as Wordsworth implies in his apology for not completing the poem, sustained philosophic discussion in verse is not his preferred medium:

It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system: it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself (III 6).

Wordsworth's great strength is his ability to present his ideas and beliefs in concrete form, in examples drawn from his own experience, or from his observations of the behaviour of others -- as he implies in the lines which introduce the Prospectus:

On Man, on Nature and on Human Life,
 Musing in solitude, I oft perceive
 Fair trains of imagery before me rise (III 6)...

When Wordsworth the recluse sits down to reflect in his solitude, as L.J. Swingle points out, what first rises up before him is not the word but "fair trains of imagery" (Kroeber 82). Indeed, Wordsworth makes repeated references in the Prospectus to his tendency to "mix more lowly matter" with his philosophic contemplations:

And if with this
 I mix more lowly matter; with the thing
 Contemplated, describe the Mind and Man
 Contemplating; and who, and what he was --
 The transitory Being that beheld
 This Vision; when and where, and how he lived;--
 Be not this labour useless. If such a theme
 May sort with highest objects, then -- dread Power (8)!

Most of Wordsworth's ambitions, stated in the Prospectus, are fulfilled in The Prelude, The Excursion and the shorter poems. Kenneth Johnston argues that the text of The Recluse may be reconstructed from certain blank verse poems, such as On The Power of Sound and To The Clouds, which he claims were intended to be a part of The Recluse (Johnston xvi). Wordsworth's best poetry merits the gradiose accolades of The Prospectus, and the reader, as Wordsworth states in the Preface to The Excursion, should find no difficulty in understanding the philosophic ideas which inform the poetry itself (III 6). Coleridge's plan for the design of The Recluse could only result in poetry of the worst sort:

The plan laid out, and, I believe, partly
 suggested by me, was, that Wordsworth should
 assume the station of a man in mental repose, one

whose principles were made up, and so prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy. He was to treat man as man,-- a subject of eye, ear, touch and taste, in contact with external nature, and informing the senses from the mind, and not compounding a mind out of the senses; then he was to describe the pastoral and other states of society, assuming something of the Juvenalian spirit as he approached the high civilizations of cities and towns, and opening a melancholy picture of the present state of degeneracy and vice; thence he was to infer and reveal proof of, and necessarily for, the whole state of man and society being subject to, and illustrative of, a redemptive process in operation, showing how this idea reconciled all anomalies, and promised future glory and restoration (Table Talk II 70-1).

The sustained "musing on man" that Coleridge calls for would result in poetry as prosaic as Pope's Essay on Man, or in the sort of poetry that, in Keats' phrase, has a "palpable design upon us". Musing on man is not the same thing as recreating experience, and energetic creation, rather than sustained philosophic reflection, is Wordsworth's preferred medium. The best part of Wordsworth's mind is the concrete part -- the part that deals with immediate experience or with retracing a course of development. Coleridge demands that Wordsworth should excogitate an argument, that his scheme should not be given, nor should it be an existing one, but should be constructed. Not only would such a forced construction be weak, but the organic weakness would communicate itself in flatness and diffusion. It was the dreariness of Coleridge's plan that made completion of The Recluse impossible, as Wordsworth's several references to the "long and laborious Work" and "arduous labour" (III 5) imply.

In reply to Coleridge's criticism of The Excursion,

Wordsworth writes:

I have rather been perplexed than enlightened by your comparative censure. One of my principal aims in the Exc. has been to put the commonplace truths, of the human affections especially, in an interesting point of view; and rather to remind men of their knowledge, as it lurks inoperative and unvalued in their own minds, than to attempt to convey recondite or refined truths (M.Y. II 669).

Wordsworth is surely aware of his own abilities when he writes at the beginning of the Preface:

as the second division of the Work [The Recluse] was designed to refer more to passing events, and to an existing state of things, than the others were meant to do, more continuous exertion was naturally bestowed upon it, and greater progress made here than in the rest of the poem (III 5 *my italics*)...

The sense of importance, both of The Recluse and of its author, is largely the result of Wordsworth's aspiration, encouraged by Coleridge, to be the Milton of his age.

Wordsworth's belief that he inherited the mode and office of Milton is evident in many of his descriptions of the poem.

He writes, for example, that:

if I live to finish [The Recluse], I hope future times will 'not willingly let it die'. These you know are the words of my great Predecessor, and the depth of my feelings upon some subjects seems to justify me in the act of applying them to myself (M.Y. II 596).

The Prospectus to The Recluse is Wordsworth's act of faith, his prayer for inspiration, his statement of intent and his

manifesto. Much of its splendour derives from the successful appropriation of Milton's idiom to his own concerns. Almost every sentence of the Prospectus resounds with echoes of Milton's voice in Paradise Lost, beginning with the phrase at the opening, "Musing in solitude", which recalls Milton's assertion that he sings with unchanged voice, though "with dangers compast round,/And solitude". This passage Milton used to introduce Raphael's account of the creation of the world, and as in Wordsworth, it closely precedes his prayer that he "fit audience find, though few" (P.L. VII 23-31).

The greater part of Wordsworth's allusions originate in the invocations with which Milton opens the first, third, seventh and ninth books of Paradise Lost, and it is evident that the Prospectus has a similar function to the passages in which Milton names his subject and his theme, measures it against traditional epic subjects, alludes to his personal circumstances, and justifies his fitness for the immense endeavour by invoking and claiming divine inspiration.

In the verses immediately preceding the Prospectus, at the end of Home at Grasmere, Wordsworth proclaims himself as poet-prophet of the age. He has been granted "an internal brightness" that is "shared by none" and that compels him, "divinely taught", to speak "of what in man is human or divine":

I would impart it, I would spread it wide,
Immortal in the world which is to come.

(Home at Grasmere 690-1)¹

Like Milton, Wordsworth is "intent to weigh/The good and

evil of our mortal state" and to "justify the ways of God to men" by demonstrating the implications of the Biblical revelations from the creation of "the Heav'ns and Earth...out of Chaos", the fall of man "with loss of Eden", the coming of "one greater Man" to restore us, to the last judgement (P.L. I 1-5). Wordsworth undertakes to present an emended version of Milton's argument: he will represent a "creation", a resurrection from the "sleep/Of death" and the instauration of a new paradise within the "mind of man" itself.²

The figure of Milton appears in The Prelude and the 1815 Preface to admonish the poet and to remind him of his high poetic mission. Milton is the standard of imaginative excellence -- it is Milton's epic simile comparing "the flying Fiend" to a fleet of ships that is Wordsworth's prime example of imaginative metaphor. It is also Milton who is invoked in the first lines of The Prelude and who reappears throughout the text as the poet's mentor and guide.

When Wordsworth deviates from his high poetic task the figure of Milton, as represented in his text, usually undergoes a corresponding humiliation. When Wordsworth strays from his contemplations on the sober sublimities of the poetic imagination into a celebration of the anarchical powers of the fancy, Milton has to suffer the indignity of comparison with the frivolous Lord Chesterfield (III 37). In Book III of The Prelude Wordsworth is seduced from his

high poetic mission by the false sophistication of Cambridge and, as a sort of retaliation, indulges in a drunken revel in "the very room" once occupied by "the temperate Bard" (Prel III 297-8).

Many of Wordsworth's contemporaries gave due recognition to his attempt to be the Milton of the age. Keats, for example, recognised that Wordsworth's persistent concern was to justify the experience of loss and suffering in terms of a purpose that is immanent in the mind's growth towards maturity. He also recognised that Wordsworth had elected to take up this problem where Milton had left it off. Keats writes that characteristic of the growth to maturity is:

sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of man -- of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness, and oppression... We do not see the balance of good and evil. we are in a mist. We are now in that state -- we feel the 'burden of the mystery'. To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive, when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey', and it seems to me that his genius is explorative of those dark passages (Letters 158).

In going thus far, Keats explains: "I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton" because he has profited from the general "advance of intellect"; and this advance, Keats makes clear, is the movement from Christian supernaturalism to agnostic humanism. Milton's "hintings at good and evil in the Paradise Lost were grounded on the remaining Dogmas and superstitions" which survived the Reformation; thus, according to Keats, "he did not think into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done" (Letters 159).

Wordsworth reminds us in the Prospectus that his theme of man in nature is not always a happy and a simple one, for he must:

travel near the tribes
 And fellowships of men, and see ill sights
 Of maddening passions mutually inflamed;
 Must hear Humanity in fields and groves
 Pipe solitary anguish; or must hang
 Brooding above the fierce confederate storm
 Of sorrow, barricadoed evermore
 Within the walls of cities (III 8)...

The poet is seen to have a god-like perspective as he "hang[s]/ Brooding over scenes of human misery. As part of his aim "to justify the ways of God to men", or as Keats put it, to explain in humanistic terms the role of suffering and distress, Wordsworth claims also to sing "of blessed consolations in distress" in the hope that his verse may "cheer/ Mankind in times to come" -- and for many critics in the generation or so after his death it was precisely his success in bringing consolation to a time of distress and dismay that earned him a status almost equal to that of Shakespeare and Milton. Matthew Arnold asks:

Where will Europe's latter hour
 Again find Wordsworth's healing power?
 (Memorial Verses)

Leslie Stephen held that "Wordsworth is the only poet who will bear reading in times of distress", and that his persistent concern with the possibility of transmuting sorrow into strength is "the single topic which...can really be called consolatory" (Stephen 213). Of particular importance to John Stuart Mill was the design of crisis,

loss, and compensatory gain which operates in much of Wordsworth's poetry (Mill 98).

It is typical of Wordsworth that the grandness of his vision and the extravagance of his assertions should, nevertheless, be connected with ordinary, everyday matters. "Paradise, and groves Elysian, Fortunate Fields", he claims (imitating Milton's lines), are available on this earth to each of us as an ordinary possibility of everyday:

For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day (III 7).

This theme, which is "but little heard of among Men", is to be the subject of Wordsworth's prophecy:

--I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation (III 7)...

Meyer Abrams points out the frequency of marriage metaphors in the Prospectus, and relates them to the Biblical precedent in which the fall of man is associated with divorce and separation, and that of the redemption of man with marriage and consummation (Natural Supernaturalism 61). Wordsworth's poem is therefore "spousal" -- an epithalamion to celebrate the predicted marriage between the mind and nature:

my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:-- and how exquisitely, too --

Theme this but little heard of among Men --
 The external world is fitted to the Mind;
 And the creation (by no other name
 Can it be called) which they with blended might
 Accomplish:-- this is our high argument (III 8).

The passage gives a stock description, a "policy-statement" as Jonathan Wordsworth puts it (Borders of Vision 248), of the poet's basic concerns: the ways in which the mind and the external world act and react upon each other, how moral development is fostered by natural surroundings, or how despondency and even moral degeneration is evident in those who have been forcibly removed from their natural homes. The same arguments had been stated in political terms in, for example the letter to Charles James Fox:

The domestic affections will always be strong amongst men who live in a country not crowded with population, if these men are placed above poverty. But if they are proprietors of small estates, which have descended to them from their ancestors, the power which these affections will acquire amongst such men is inconceivable by those who have only had an opportunity of observing hired labourers, farmers, and the manufacturing Poor. Their little tract of land serves as a permanent rallying point for their domestic feelings, tablet upon which they are written which makes them objects of memory in a thousand instances when they would be otherwise forgotten. it is a fountain fitted to the nature of social man from which supplies of affection, as pure as his heart was intended for, are daily drawn (E.Y. 132).

The Biblical associations of words like "tablet" and "fountain" reinforce the point of Wordsworth's argument, which is the sacred nature of the relationship between man and land.

In the book of The Recluse, Home at Grasmere, Wordsworth

recounts his own reunion with his "dear native regions" in similarly Biblical terms. Home at Grasmere is filled with a sense of spiritual homecoming, of participation in the natural life of the place and in the lives of the other dwellers in the valley. Apart from the joy in natural loveliness, perhaps the most important feeling in the poem is the sense of community, of belonging, by every tie of affection and proximity, to a natural society:

we do not tend a lamp
Whose lustre we alone participate,
Which shines dependent on us alone,
Mortal, though bright, a dying, dying flame.
Look where we will, some human hand has been
Before us with its offering; not a tree
Sprinkles these little pastures, but the same
Hath furnished matter for a thought; perchance
For some son serves as a familiar friend.

(Home at Grasmere 436-444)

The prevailing idea of the poem is a paradoxical one: that self-sufficiency and independence can only be achieved through the individual's acknowledgement of his dependence on God, society and nature. Thus Wordsworth's sings:

Of joy in widest commonalty spread;
Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
Inviolate retirement, subject there
To conscience only, and the law supreme
Of that Intelligence which governs all (III 7)...

The interrelationships between the mind and nature is not only the subject of much of Wordsworth's poetry, it is also the method whereby the poetry itself is created. In the 1815 Preface, for example, Wordsworth demonstrates his concern

with careful observation of the natural world as a means of achieving a state of action and reaction between observer and observed. The mind, regarding objects and "taking advantage of their appearance to the senses", endows them with properties:

That do not inhere in them, upon an incitement from properties and qualities an existence of which is inherent and obvious. These processes of imagination are carried on by conferring additional properties upon an object, or by abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses, and thus enabling it to react upon the mind which hath preformed the process, like a new existence (III 32).

Consistent with this attitude, Wordsworth regards the senses as exerting a mediatory function between man and nature. Therefore he would "arouse the sensual from their sleep/ Of Death" (III 7), "the sensual" being those mechanists who would reduce the power of the mind and the sense to mere receivers of information. The mind, Wordsworth states, is:

creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.

(Prelude II 273-5)

What is important is the balance, the interrelationship between the mind, the senses and the external world, and even at his most visionary, he maintains the balance of the thinking mind and the object of its thought.

The Preface to The Excursion contains Wordsworth's well known, and altogether appropriate, comparison between his poetry and the structure of a gothic cathedral:

the two Works [The Prelude and The Recluse] have the same kind of relationship to each other...as the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add, that his minor Pieces..., when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little, cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices (III 6).

Wordsworth's comparison demonstrates the general Romantic predilection for open-ended fragments and inconclusive preludes (MacFarland 62), but also tends to associate Wordsworth's poetry with the dignity and solemnity of religious matters -- and thus appropriately anticipates the "high argument" of the Prospectus. The comparison, in its specific mention of a gothic church, implies relationship with the past, a sense of community, possibilities of human achievement, and the rejection of mechanism and materialism. The structure of the gothic cathedral, its tree-like fan vaults and tendril-like carved decoration has the organicism and association with natural objects to which Wordsworth's poetry itself aspires. In the image of the unfinished gothic cathedral Wordsworth successfully reconciles the contradictions of the apologetic Preface and arrogant Prospectus. Through the comparison, which is reminiscent of Ruskin's argument that "the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art" (Keating 168). Wordsworth manages to make the incompleteness of The Recluse appear as a virtue, like a great unfinished cathedral.

NOTES

- 1 quotations from Home at Grasmere are taken from MS.D; see Beth Darlington (ed), Home at Grasmere (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp39ff
- 2 The Miltonic allusions have been well noted, see, for example, M.H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, pp55ff

V. THE POET AS CRITIC: THE PREFACE OF 1815

Imagination! -- lifting up itself
 Before the eye and progress of my song
 Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,
 In all the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud,
 Halted without a struggle to break through,
 And now, recovering, to my soul I say
 'I recognise thy glory'. In such strength
 Of usurpation, in such visitings
 Of awful promise, when the light of sense
 Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
 The invisible world, doth greatness make abode...

(Prel 1805 VI 525-36)

For some time before the publication of the first collective edition in 1815, Wordsworth must have been thinking about the arrangement and classification of the poems to be included therein, for his first reference to the subject is to be found in a letter to Coleridge, dated May 1809.

In the letter to Coleridge, divisions, corresponding to the course of human life from childhood to old age, are named and within each group, Wordsworth writes, the poems are to "ascend in a gradual scale of imagination" (M.Y. I 375). The class called "Poems relating to natural objects and their influence on the mind" is, for example, "to begin with the simply human and conclude with the highly imaginative". The selection will begin with "The Daisies" and "The Daffodils", "The Nightingale and the Stockdove", the "Waterfall and Eglantine", and these poems will be followed by the "Cuckoo" poems and by Nutting, and the class will be concluded with Tintern Abbey (M.Y. I 375).

Wordsworth obviously became dissatisfied with this early

arrangement, which was based entirely on the subject matter of the poems for the scheme, introduced in 1815, is organized "with reference to the powers of mind predominant in the production of them" (III 28). He was, perhaps, even more dissatisfied with the idea of an ascent "in a gradual scale of the imagination", which tends to imply that the first poems in a category are inferior or juvenile, while the latter poems are the better ones. This may be why, in 1815, separate categories are given to "Fancy" and "Imagination" for in the earlier scheme we would not expect these categories to have a separate existence but rather to occupy different positions on the scale of ascent in some other division.

In the same letter to Coleridge, Wordsworth writes that under the heading of "Poems Relating to Childhood" he will insert To H.C. as one of the first poems, then There Was A Boy, and finally the Ode. Intimations of Immortality. This order indicates a progression towards what Wordsworth considered to be his better poems and possibly he decided that it was unfair to judge all the poems by the same criteria. In the 1815 (and other subsequent) editions, To H.C. is a poem "referring to the Period of Childhood", There Was A Boy is a "Poem of the Imagination" and the Ode is given a class of its own.

Wordsworth insists that the establishment of a separate category for "Poems of the Imagination" does not mean that the other poems are unimaginative, for the poems are placed according to the powers of mind which are predominant in the

production of them, "predominant", which implies the exertion of other faculties in less degree (III 29):

Where there is more imagination than fancy in a poem, it is placed under the head of imagination, and vice versa (III 29).

In 1815 "fancy" and "imagination" were, in general usage, synonymous terms, which is why Wordsworth is careful to distinguish between his concept of the imagination and the commonly accepted Eighteenth Century view. His use of the term "imagination" for a class of his poetry, Wordsworth explains:

has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws. (III 31).

Wordsworth's statement of principles is, if short, lucid and pointed. It is worth pointing out that, consistent with this definition, the earlier category: "natural objects and their influence on the mind" is largely replaced by "Fancy" and "Imagination", Wordsworth being more concerned with the "operations of the mind upon those objects" than with the influence of natural objects on the mind. "Poems of the Imagination" illustrate:

processes of imagination [which] are carried on either by conferring properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses, and thus enabling it to react upon the mind which hath performed the process, like a new existence (III 32).

The objects of poetry are presented in verbal form and it is Wordsworth's aim in the Preface to examine this apparent verbal transformation and to derive a concept of imagination from the close study of actual literary texts -- rather than to analyse its operation in psychological or metaphysical terms: an achievement for which Coleridge gives due acknowledgement (Biographia Literaria 52).

Wordsworth begins his study by investigating the differences between literal and figurative language, using as his prime example the following epic simile from Paradise Lost:

'As when far off at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
 Close sailing from Bengala, or the isles
 Of Ternate or Tidore, whence merchants bring
 Their spicy drugs; they on the trading flood
 Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape
 Ply, stemming nightly towards the Pole: so seemed
 Far off the flying Fiend' (III 31).

Milton "dares to represent" the fleet as "hanging in the clouds" -- a physical impossibility yet, nevertheless, quite acceptable in the language of poetry. The imagination modifies, endows, dissolves and abstracts and, blending its might with the forms of the external world creates "a new existence".

In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth wrote that the poet:

will feel that there is no need to trick out or to elevate nature: and, the more industriously he applies this principle, the deeper will be his faith that no words which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be compared with

those which are emanations of reality and truth
(I 129).

"Reality and truth", Wordsworth suggests, is the source from which certain words, which most properly describe that source, naturally emanate. Wordsworth implies that the poet's fancy or imagination (here undistinguished) have a decorative effect and therefore obscure, rather than reveal, the source. But in the 1815 Preface this view has changed and it is indeed his intention to investigate the role of the imagination in the revelation of reality and truth.

Milton's words do not emanate from a source of reality but consist of a web of allusion and associations: the "Fiend" (presumably invisible to the poet) is described as a fleet, which happens to be a rather literary and idealized one, and it in turn is described as "hanging in the clouds". Yet this latter description is richly suggestive of the "motion and appearance" of "the sublime object to which it is compared", even to the extent of recreating the perspective from which the comparison set out. Wordsworth asks:

'So seemed far off the flying Fiend'...and to whom seemed?

And he provides this interesting answer:

To the heavenly muse who dictates the poem, to the eye of the Poet's mind, and that of the Reader, present at one moment in the wide Ethiopian, and the next in the solitudes, then first broken in upon of the infernal regions (III 34).

The poetic text, Wordsworth suggests, is in its very nature

unstable and inconstant -- continually shifting its terms of reference. Wordsworth's own poetry provides many examples of dislocation: of the describing mind and the thing described "unit[ing] and coalsc[ing] in just comparison" (III 33).

Wordsworth's analyses of his own poetry give evidence of his awareness of the sort of verbal transformations that occur in poetry and of the insubstantial nature of description itself. It is not, of course, words alone that are responsible for these transfigurations -- elsewhere Wordsworth writes:

I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communicated with all that I saw as something, not apart from but inherent in, my own immaterial nature (Gros III 195).

The source of all creative energy, Wordsworth claims in a passage not unlike Coleridge's account of the "primary imagination", is "A sublime consciousness of the soul in her mighty and almost divine powers" (III 33).

The creative imagination is an intruder which subverts the natural order of things for its tendency is "to endow", "to strip", "to divest", and "to assimilate" -- and it is in order to control its straying tendencies that Wordsworth places such great emphasis on sense perception, on the observation of "life and manners" and on "the real language of men" (which likewise acts as a restraining influence on the straying tendencies of "poetic diction"). The first words of the Preface point to the importance of observation

(detailed and accurate perception) and description
 (rendering the thing perceived into words):

The powers requisite for the production of poetry are: first those of Observation and Description, --i.e., the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind of the describer (III 26)...

Very little of Wordsworth's poetry contains passages of unmetaphorical directness: the hare that "from the plashy earth/ Raises a mist; that glittering in the sun,/ Runs with her" is an example of a closely observed, accurate detail relatively undistorted by the transforming imagination.

A surprising number of "Poems of the Imagination" are unimaginative (by Coleridgean standards) in quite another way. There are, firstly, poems like The Horn of Egremont Castle and Goody Blake and Harry Gill which were placed among the "Poems of the Imagination" not because they were "produced" by it but because they "referred" to it. Other poems illustrate:

rather an elementary feeling and simple impression (approaching the nature of ocular spectrum) upon the imaginative faculty, than an exertion of it (P.W. II 507).

From Wordsworth's discussion in the Preface, the notes to the poems and the order in which the poems are arranged it may be concluded that what Wordsworth really means by "Poems of the Imagination" is really poems about the imagination, about its development and the different forms it can assume.

In the original 1815 text Wordsworth included an

introduction to "Poems of the Imagination", revealing his intention to guide his reader through different stages of the development of the imaginative faculty", beginning by demonstrating "the earliest processes of nature in the development of this faculty" with the poem There Was A Boy, which introduces the selection:

Guided by one of my own primary consciousnesses, [Wordsworth writes] I have represented a commutation and a transfer of internal feelings, co-operating with external accidents, to plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the Imagination. The Boy, there introduced, is listening, with something of a feverish and restless anxiety, for the recurrence of the riotous sounds which he had previously excited; and, at the moment when the intenseness of his mind is beginning to remit, he is surprized into a perception of the solemn and tranquilizing images which the Poem describes (III 35n).

The poems that follow There Was A Boy "exhibit the faculty exerting itself upon various objects of the external universe"; following these are poems wherein the imagination "is employed upon feelings, characters, and actions"; and concluding the class are "imaginative pictures of moral, political, and religious sentiments" (III 35n).

The reason why Wordsworth deleted this interesting discussion is not difficult to surmise. Like the rejected "scale of ascent", the arrangement of poems according to their place in the development of the imaginative faculty implies that the first poems are less important than the last ones. Wordsworth could not have intended to imply, for example, that the "imaginative pictures of moral, political,

and religious sentiments" are more significant than the poems which "exhibit the faculty exerting itself upon various objects of the external universe". The contrary is probably more true, and for this reason he concludes "Poems of the Imagination" with Peter Bell, which:

was composed under a belief that the Imagination not only does not require for its exercise the intervention of supernatural agency, but that, though such agency is excluded, the faculty may be called forth as imperiously, and for kindred results of pleasure, by incidents within the compass of poetic probability in the humblest departments of daily life (Gros III 50-1).

The so-called "curse" poems are notoriously unimaginative (in the Coleridgean sense) but direct the readers attention to the imagination in one of its basic, but most powerful forms, which is:

sufficient to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might appear miraculous (I 150).

Of course Peter Bell, The Thorn and the other dramatic monologues do not only demonstrate the psychologies of their protagonists, imaginative or otherwise, but also give evidence of a specifically poetic imagination: an ability to make a character exist wholly and then to represent authorial thoughts and judgements through the medium of character. Of this "human and dramatic imagination" Wordsworth writes that "the works of Shakespeare are an inexhaustible store" (III 35). Wordsworth's example illustrates the way in which the "human and dramatic

imagination" allows the dramatist to enter into the lives and emotions of his protagonist and, at the same time, to organize this material:

'I tax not you, ye Elements, with unkindness,
I never gave you kingdoms, called you daughters!'
(III 35).

It may be that Wordsworth has Coleridge's reading of this extract in mind, that is, that it offers:

undoubted proof in [Shakespeare's] mind of imagination, Or the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others and by a sort of fusion to force many into one -- that which shewed itself in such might and energy in Lear, where the deep anguish of a father spreads the feeling of ingratitude and cruelty over the very elements of heaven (Shakespearean Criticism I 188).

But the example, which contains irony, specifically illustrates the dramatic imagination. The dramatist, Wordsworth writes, "does not appear at all in his own person, and the whole action is carried on by speech and dialogue of the agents" (III 27).

Wordsworth's technique, in a dramatic poem like The Thorn not only characterizes but satirizes the narrator. By his own admission the captain knows nothing about the unhappy woman or her unfortunate child but this fact does not prevent him from relating his own, fictitious account of their histories (see Stephen Parrish's reading of The Thorn in M.H. Abrams (ed) Wordsworth: A Collection of Critical Essays 75ff).

The poem is imaginative in yet another sense for the

narrative acts as an analogy for a particular experience.

Wordsworth writes that the poem:

arose out of my observing on the ridge of Quantock Hill, on a stormy day, a thorn which I had often passed without noticing it. I said to myself 'Cannot I by some invention do as much to make this thorn permanently an impressive object as the storm has made it to my eyes at this moment?' (Gros III 41).

And the reader is invited to read the poem as an account of the workings of the poetic imagination.

The narrative imagination "as it determines the course of actions" (III 34) is not expounded by Wordsworth in the Preface but most of the narrative poems contain their own commentaries -- indeed Wordsworth rarely writes a narrative without including some sort of aside on the nature of narrative itself.

Not only the poet's own fictions, but the whole body of past literature awaits imaginative reinterpretation and transformation. The Recluse, The White Doe and Dion reinterpret and rework Miltonic, Spenserian and classical themes, respectively. Milton himself performs an imaginative transformation of classical writings for:

However imbued the surface might be with classical literature, he was a Hebrew in soul; and all things tended in him to the sublime (III 35).

Milton's poetry is the product of the "meditative" imagination, and his poetry gives evidence of the "circumstances of his life" and "constitution of his mind".

Wordsworth's poems about his own experiences are also produced by the "meditative" imagination. Memory, which exists as a sort of object in the mind, undergoes a transformation when acted upon by the imagination. Unfortunately, Wordsworth decides to spare his readers "the trouble of considering the Imagination as it deals with thoughts and sentiments" (III 34). However, The Prelude, the Essays Upon Epitaphs, and the notes to the poems themselves provide us with several insights into the workings of the "meditative" imagination and the criterion of sincerity, by which its compositions are to be judged. Sincerity, as used by Wordsworth, does not entail a faithful reconstruction of experience; sincerity, Wordsworth writes "lurks in the language" of poetry (II 75), which will reveal whether or not the poet has understood his experience. Clearly, a lack of organized expression does not indicate sincerity, on the contrary, the poet who has understood his experience can express it accurately and therefore sincerely. Collingwood's distinction between the "expression" and "betrayal" of emotion is a useful one in this regard (Collingwood 120).

By bringing order to the chaos and welter of his boyhood experience in Nutting, Wordsworth is not being unfaithful to the original experience; on the contrary, his interpretation of that event in terms of a parable of destruction reveals that he has understood that experience. The "meditative" imagination has a habit of centering the events described on the self, the present self. Thus the poem Nutting reveals

more about the adult Wordsworth than the boy. "I cannot paint what then I was", Wordsworth has been known to state on more than one occasion, while succeeding in revealing much about what he is.

The allegorical imagination is evident in narrative composition, where the events represent something other than themselves, as they do in Hart-Leap Well or The Thorn. Spenser's poetry is Wordsworth's example of this sort of imaginative composition, he writes that Spenser:

maintained his freedom by aid of his allegorical spirit, at one time inciting him to create persons out of abstractions; and at another, by a superior effort of genius, to give the universality and permanence of abstractions to his human beings, by means of attributes and emblems that belong to the highest moral truths and the purest sensations, -- of which his character of Una is a glorious example (III 35).

The White Doe of Rylstone is clearly inspired by Spenser.

The doe, as Wordsworth suggests in his prologue to the poem, has much the same relationship to Emily as the white lamb, in The Fairy Queen, has to Una: it symbolizes her purity, it represents the past because of its associations with Emily's last day with Francis, and is connected with the traditions of Rylstone Hall. In its several symbolic functions it appears to Emily as "a gift of grace", remembrance, and through the grace of memory Emily can at last return to Rylstone, there to confront the past which she had tried to flee.

The laws of probability are less important to Spenser than they are to Wordsworth and Coleridge's distinction

between symbol and allegory is central to this difference (Statesman's Manual 230-1). Coleridge attributes Wordsworth's poetry to the work of the imagination and Spenser's to that of the fancy (although he concedes that Spenser's is an "imaginative fancy").

Wordsworth is less concerned with the Coleridgean reconciling imagination than with the transforming imagination, a faculty which has certain similarities with the fancy, as Coleridge defines it: both are aggregative and associative powers and, when discussing fancy, Wordsworth attaches greater importance to it than Coleridge does. Undoubtedly, imagination is the higher faculty and Wordsworth values it far more than he does fancy; but nevertheless, the 1815 Preface gives evidence of a lively appreciation of its qualities. In fact the last two pages of the Preface consist of a celebration of the powers of fancy:

The law under which the processes of Fancy are carried on is as capricious as the accidents of things, and the effects are surprising, playful, ludicrous, amusing, tender, or pathetic, as the objects happen to be appositely produced or fortunately combined. Fancy depends upon the rapidity and profusion with which she scatters her thoughts and images; trusting that their number, and the felicity with which they are linked together, will make amends for want of individual value: or she prides herself upon the curious subtlety and the successful elaboration with which she can detect their lurking affinities. If she can win you over to her purpose, and impart to you her feelings, she cares not how unstable or transitory may her influence, knowing that it will not be out of her power to resume it upon an apt occasion (III 36).

The fancy/imagination distinction is not, for Wordsworth the difference between good and bad poetry, but seems to him to point to different ways of responding to experience and to different habits of mind on the part of the author, who may consciously choose to write either fanciful or imaginative poetry, depending upon what is more appropriate in a particular context. He writes:

To the mode in which Fancy has already been characterized as the power of evoking or combining, or, as my friend Mr Coleridge has styled it, 'the aggregative and associative power', my objection is only that the definition is too general. To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy; but either the materials evoked and combined are different; or they are brought together under a different law, and for a different purpose (II 36).

Wordsworth offers two alternatives: either fancy and imagination work with different materials, or they have different methods and purposes; but, as the argument progresses, it is suggested that both fancy and imagination work with the same materials, but to a different end and by a different method. In accepting this principle Wordsworth avoids the mistake of labelling poetry which is deliberately not imaginative (in the Coleridgean sense) as a failure of the imagination.

Of the above passage Coleridge is "disposed to conjecture that he [Wordsworth] has mistaken the co-presence of fancy with imagination" as the operation of fancy alone (Biographia Literaria 160). Wordsworth is, of course, aware that imagination and fancy may be evident in the same poem,

but whether it be fancy or imagination coming to the assistance of fancy, the two faculties are equally creative, but perform their modifications with considerably different results.

The extent to which "Fancy ambitiously aims at rivalry with Imagination" and "Imagination stoops to work with the materials of Fancy" (II 37) may be seen in the following extracts. The first is attributed to Lord Chesterfield:

The dews of evening most carefully shun,
They are the tears of the sky for the loss of the
sun (III 37).

The second is Milton's description of nature "sympathising" for the transgression of man:

Sky lowered, and muttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at contemplation of mortal sin (III 37).

Wordsworth explains:

The associating link is the same in each instance: dew and rain, not indistinguishable from the liquid substance of tears, are employed as indications of sorrow (III 37).

But, as Wordsworth implies, to judge these two extracts by the standard of imagination is non-sensical. Lord Chesterfield (who is remembered chiefly for his gentlemanly pursuits) is writing with a purpose so different from that of Milton's that the two will hardly bear comparison. Lord Chesterfield's books of witty aphorisms, from which this extract of Advice to a Lady in Autumn is taken, present the trivia of everyday life with a sort of tongue-in-cheek

ingenuity -- what Wordsworth calls "a flash of surprise, and nothing more; for the nature of things does not sustain the combination" (III 37) -- the point being that Lord Chesterfield was equally aware of this.

In the second extract, however:

the effects from the act, of which there is this immediate consequence and visible sign, are so momentous, that the mind acknowledges the justness and reasonableness of the sympathy in nature so manifested; and the earth weeps drops of water as if with human eyes, as 'Earth had before trembled from her entrails, and Nature given a second groan' (III 37).

Fancy, then, has little to do with "high seriousness"; but it has to do with wit and with pure intellectual enjoyment in poetry. The narrator of The Thorn, we remember, has "a reasonable share of imagination", but is "utterly destitute of fancy, the power by which pleasure and surprise are excited by sudden varieties of situation and by accumulated imagery" (Gros III 41).

Poetic humour, Wordsworth writes, consists of:

rapidity of detail, and a profusion of fanciful comparisons, which indicate on the part of the poet extreme activity of intellect, and a correspondent hurry of delightful feeling (III 38).

As an example Wordsworth cites Cotton's Ode Upon Winter and, despite being "a water-drinker" himself, enters into the spirit of the poem, taking pleasure in transcribing the tale of the poet's drunken siege against winter.

Fancy does not only deal with levity and humour, nor does

her concern with "fixities and definitives" restrict her creative abilities, as Shakespeare's description of Queen Mab illustrates:

'In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the forefinger of an alderman' (III 36).

The point of the description is the fanciful contrast (rather than imaginative reconciliation) between Queen Mab -- tiny, light, faery and possibly mischievous -- and the pudgy finger of a heavy, pompous and ponderous alderman.

When the imagination frames a likeness, Wordsworth suggests that it strikes:

on the first presentation, a sense of the truth of the likeness, from the moment that it is perceived, grows -- and continues to grow -- upon the mind; the resemblance depending less upon the outline of form and feature, than upon expression and effect; less upon casual and outstanding, than upon inherent and internal properties (III 36)...

Wordsworth's practice, in the Preface, of contrasting fanciful and imaginative renderings of similar themes is also evident in a comparison between "Poems of the Fancy" and "Poems of the Imagination" -- some of which seem to be companion pieces. One of the guiding principles of the arrangement of the poems is "mutual illustration" (III 29); and Wordsworth hopes that "the arrangement of the poems will serve as a commentary unostentatiously directing [the reader's] attention to [his] purposes, both particular and general" (III 28). Referring to his comparison between his collected poems and a gothic cathedral in the Preface to the

Excursion (III 6), Wordsworth writes that:

I have alluded to a meditated arrangement of my Minor Poems, which should assist the attentive Reader in perceiving their connection with each other (III 26n)...

Clearly, the poems are not arranged in a sequential progression but are designed to have a reflexive relationship, or to provide commentaries on one another. The imaginative narrator of The Thorn, for example, could be contrasted with the fanciful narrator of The Oak and The Broom. To the narrator of the former poem the thorn is a symbol for the suffering of Martha Ray and the events of the poem persuade us of what Wordsworth calls "a sense of the truth of the likeness": Martha's child is dead, she is oppressed with guilt and sadness and the thorn is similarly barren and weighed down with heavy tufts of moss. To the narrator of The Oak and The Broom, who overhears a conversation between the two trees, the pessimistic oak and cheerful broom represent different attitudes to the business of living. But there is not much to convince us of the "truth of the likeness". The poem is based on a series of fictions: the traditional exaggerations of the fireside tale, the unbelievable conversation, the poetic justice of the ending, and, unlike The Thorn, there is no sense of the narrator's character -- the language, for example, is far too sophisticated for the humble shepherd. But there is, however, a delightful sense of audience in the opening of the poem:

One winter's night, when through the trees
 The wind was roaring, on his knees
 His youngest born did Andrew hold:
 And while the rest, a ruddy quire,
 Were seated round the blazing fire,
 This tale the Shepherd told.

This group, we imagine, would be satisfied with nothing less than a tale of marvellous invention, and would be quite prepared to suspend their disbelief:

When, in a voice sedate with age,
 This Oak, a giant and a sage,

begins to address his neighbour, the broom. Wordsworth writes that:

Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch; it is enough if it be slight, limited, and evanescent (III 36).

The world of Wordsworth's fancy is populated with talking trees, intelligent flowers, aggressive waterfalls and other "rural illusions" (to borrow the title of one of the "Poems of the Fancy"). Many of these fantasies have obviously humorous intentions and contain elements of self-parody. In the second "Daisy" poem, for example, having exhausted all the possibilities of extravagant apostrophe, from "nun-demure" to "Cyclops with one eye", the poet then dismisses this "freak" and decides to call the daisy by its proper name:

Bright Flower! for by that name at last,
 When all my reveries are past,
 I call thee, and to that cleave fast...

In A Morning Exercise Wordsworth ascribes to fancy the sort of anarchical quality known as "pure poetry":

Fancy, who leads the pastimes of the glad,
Full oft is pleased a wayward dart to throw;
Peopling the harmless fields with signs of woe:
Beneath her sway, a simple forest cry
Becomes an echo of man's misery.

Blithe ravens croak of death; and when the owl
Tries his two voices for a favorite strain --
Tu-whit -- Tu-whoo! the unsuspecting fowl
Forbodes mishap or seems but to complain;
Fancy, intent to harass and annoy,
Can thus pervert the evidence of joy.

This poem, which introduces the selection of "Poems of the Fancy", demonstrates the extreme instability which is typical of fanciful poetry. The calls of the raven and owl, Wordsworth contends, are as blithe as most bird calls, but fancy delights to "pervert" them for her own purposes. The whole argument is, ultimately, a piece of sophistry for Wordsworth has no more authority for seeing "evidence of joy" than fancy has for seeing "misery". The poet's interpretations of the bird calls is dependent upon his own perception of them and on his transference of his own mood onto nature; and fancy's interpretation works in much the same way. The poem depends, for its effect, on the discrepancy between our tendency to treat certain bird songs as symbols and a literal, or at least a different, view of them. In this regard the poem seems to parody the bird poems classified under the heading of "Imagination".

The poem, The Redbreast Chasing The Butterfly, similarly alludes to the poetic traditions surrounding the robin

redbreast, who is:

the bird whom Man loves best,
The pious bird with the scarlet breast,
Our little English Robin...

known too for his compassion towards mankind:

to man so good,
That after their bewildering,
Covered with leaves the little children,
So painfully in the wood...

Clearly taking delight in parodying these literary associations, Wordsworth exposes the robin as a nasty little beast callously intent upon pursuing his helpless prey:

Could Father Adam open his eyes [the poet claims]
And see this sight beneath the skies,
He'd wish to close them again.

The Simpliciad contains a burlesque of the poem and of:

'Poets [who]
With brother lark or brother robin fly
And flutter with half-brother butterfly'.

Lest we miss the point of his satire, the author adds the following note:

The relationship of the Butterfly is not so easily settled, but in virtue of his being brother to the robin,

'a brother seems he of thine own'
I have ventured to give his geneology as above
(P.W. II 492).

The author of The Simpliciad, presuming to ridicule sentimentality and misguided sympathies, has misunderstood

the point of the poem which is precisely Wordsworth's parody of the "poetic sensibility" which, of course, neglects to take into account such unpleasant realities of survival.

The sexton (in the poem of the same name) has a literal interest in death -- his activities are concerned with the clearing of graves and the "piling [of] bone on bone". These activities offend the speaker, who has a somewhat more sentimental attitude towards death and he asks that:

should I live through sun and rain
Seven widowed years without my Jane,
O Sexton, do not then remove her,
Let one grave hold the Loved and Lover!

The sexton's morose presence provides us with an ironical commentary on the elegiac musings of the equivalent "Poems of the Imagination".

The sexton poem may seem to be something of an anomaly containing as it does such a literal view of death in the midst of so much lighthearted and fantastical poetry. But, in fact, most of the "Poems of the Fancy" have in common a kind of literal-mindedness which consists of a self-conscious usage of fantastical elements, poetic diction and form -- often accompanied by, or implying, criticism of the poetic sensibility. "Poems of the Fancy" are not characterized by their depth of feeling, but by specifically literary thoughts.

The obviously literary ballad, The Seven Sisters is a case in point. The poem, with its plaintive refrain and intricate rhyme, has often been admired as an outstanding

example of ballad imitation; however, although Wordsworth greatly admired the early balladeers, he has nevertheless created a delightful pastiche. The traditionally objective narrator is, for example, rather more "deadpan" than objective, and occasionally slips into bathos -- as he does in the second line of the poem:

Seven Daughters had Lord Archibald,
All children of one mother...

The ballad is laden with burlesqued tricks of the ballad style: internal rhyme, verb inversion, repetition, and authorial asides, for example:

Beside a grotto of their own,
With boughs above them closing,
The Seven are laid, and in the shade
They lie like fawns reposing.
But now, upstarting with affright
At noise of man and steed,
Away they fly to left, to right --
Of your fair household, Father-knight,
Methinks you take small heed!
Sing, mournfully, oh! mournfully,
The solitude of Binnorie.

Much of the delightful absurdity of this parody lies in the heavy-handed use of parallelism, a prominent feature of most traditional ballads. There are seven sisters (a magical number, but rather unwieldy all the same) and these seven siblings do everything together, as the narrator wryly remarks:

You could not say in one short day
What love they bore each other.

They get up together, the lie down together, they are even

simultaneously abducted by the seven Campbell brothers, and finally they decide to die together:

They run, and cry, 'Nay, let us die,
And let us die together'.
A lake was near; the shore was steep;
There never foot had been;
They ran, and with a desperate leap
Together plunged into the deep,
Nor evermore were seen.

The Seven Sisters could be contrasted with a narrative from "Poems of the Imagination". The imaginative narratives contain commentaries on their own imaginative status, but The Seven Sisters does so in the extreme form of parody and burlesque.

Peter Bell and The Waggoner are clearly intended as companion pieces: they occupy similar positions in their respective classes,¹ both make use of the same mock-heroic mode, and, at one stage in their histories, were both preceded by the same mottos. It is specifically, as Wordsworth writes in the dedication, "the deeper touches of passion" that distinguishes Peter Bell as a "Poem of the Imagination", although the recipient of the passion is not specified and, possibly, it is the poem itself. Its genesis is explained and its imaginative nature is extensively explored.

The passions involved in the composition of imaginative poetry are generally closely concerned with the creation of the poem itself. If the poet is inspired by strong feelings:

in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment (I 149).

It is necessary for the poet to control or subdue his feelings in order to concentrate on the aesthetic task of writing the poem. "Poems of the Fancy", despite their self-consciousness, are less "voluntary" than "Poems of the Imagination", and this is seen both in their exuberance and in their expressions of sympathy and pathos. The poet has less control over his flights of fancy than he has over the sober sublimities of the poetic imagination. In this regard, fancy can be seen as an extreme (rather than debased) form of imagination. Fancy can also be seen to have a close association with "the affections" which, Wordsworth writes, "are their own justification" (II 57).² The poet has as little voluntary control over the combinations and associations of his fancy as he has over the objects of his affections.

The poem Address to my Infant Daughter originally concluded the selection of "Poems of the Fancy" and was intended as a bridge between the two classes. Wordsworth claims that it exhibits:

something of the communion and interchange of instruments and functions between the two powers [fancy and imagination] (III 37n)...

The poem, a thanksgiving for the baby's survival of her first month, comprises a delightful mixture of imaginative and fanciful description. The baby's smiles, for example:

are beginning, like the beams of dawn,
 To shoot and circulate; smiles have there been seen;--
 Tranquil assurances that Heaven supports
 The feeble motions of thy life, and cheers
 Thy loneliness: or shall those smiles be called
 Feelers of love, put forth as if to explore
 This untried world, and prepare the way
 Through a strait passage intricate and dim?

Wordsworth hopes that his daughter will be given the gift of imagination: "Reason's godlike power be proud to own"; but also hopes that it will be accompanied by the civilizing influence of fancy, the power whereby "the affections" are "grac[ed]", "exalt[ed]", and "refin[ed]". Imagination is given, Wordsworth writes, "to incite and to support the eternal" part of our natures, while "Fancy is given to quicken and beguile the temporal" (III 37).

In order to establish the value and place of fancy within Wordsworth's poetical works it may be useful to refer to his own model which compares his poetry to the structure of a gothic church (III 6, 26n). The cathedral is a universe in which all the creatures of God's kingdom and of the human mind can be accommodated. There is an appropriate space for saints and demons, angels and gargoyles. "Poems of the Fancy" is not the grand imaginative spire, but must be awarded a place among the aedicules and recesses of Wordsworth's poetic cathedral.

NOTES

- 1 From the time of the second collective edition (1820) Peter Bell and The Waggoner are similarly positioned in their respective classes, either introducing or concluding "Poems of the Imagination" and "Poems of the Fancy", respectively; except in 1836 when each was given a category of its own.
- 2 I am indebted to Jonathan Wordsworth for pointing out the relationship between fancy and the affections.

XIII. THE POET AS PROPHET:

ESSAY, SUPPLEMENTARY TO THE PREFACE

If thou partake the animating faith
 That Poets, even as prophets, each with each
 Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
 Have each his own peculiar faculty,
 Heaven's gift, a sense that fits him to perceive
 Objects unseen before, thou wilt not blame
 The humblest of this band who dares to hope
 That unto him hath also been vouchsafed
 An insight that in some sort he possesses,
 A privilege whereby a work of his,
 Proceeding from a source of untaught things,
 Creative and enduring, may become
 A power like one of Nature's.

(Prel XIII 300-12)

A few weeks after completing the 1815 Preface Wordsworth wrote the Essay, Supplementary to the Preface and the two works were published together, forming the introduction to the first edition of Wordsworth's collected Poems. In the editions of 1845 and later, the Essay is printed after the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, as though it is intended as a supplement to that Preface, rather than the Preface of 1815. Wordsworth does not make it known whether the transference of reference was intended, but the Essay does seem to be more closely allied, in theme and language, to the earlier Preface. Indeed, Wordsworth does seem to suggest that it is specifically the poems of Lyrical Ballads that he intends to defend against the "senseless outcry", "the unremitting hostility", and "the slight, the aversion, and even contempt, with which these Poems have been received" (III 80).

The Essay, Supplementary contains many descriptions of

the falsely poetical which echo those of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads: "absurdities, extravagances, and misplaced ornaments" (III 64); "vicious style" "false ornaments" (III 74); "endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations" (III 82); "vicious poetry" (III 83). As in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, we are told that readers are to be "humbled and humanized, in order that they may be purified and exalted" (III 80-81), good poetry, we are told, is "the overflowings of a tender benevolent heart" (III 73), while the ideal critic of the Essay, Supplementary (III 66) approximates to the ideal reader of Lyrical Ballads. Other enlargements on the arguments of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads are included in my discussion below.

The Essay is regarded by many critics, from Henry Crabb Robinson onward, as little more than a personal attack on Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review (Crabb Robinson III 186, Owen, Wordsworth a Critic 188). Wordsworth had, of course, been the target of Jeffrey's unfavourable reviews for some time, but it was, according to Professor Owen, his scathing attack on The Excursion (1814) that prompted Wordsworth's angry reply (III 59). Owen suggests that Wordsworth, in the Essay, Supplementary, devised a subtle method of retaliation, for in the Essay Wordsworth imitates Jeffrey's argument in favour of Sir Walter Scott. Jeffrey argues that, for various reasons, the contemporary audience is unable to appreciate Scott's genius; in the Essay Wordsworth turns this argument against Jeffrey by using the same argument for his own poetry ("Wordsworth and Jeffrey in Collaboration"

161-7). If this is the case then Wordsworth has far outdone the original in the extent of his claims and the extravagance of his language.

Professor Owen criticises the Essay as an elaborate attempt to forecast the ultimate success of Wordsworth's poetry, based on the following invalid syllogism:

All poetry of permanent value is neglected by the contemporary audience.
 My poetry is neglected by the contemporary audience.
 Therefore, my poetry has permanent value
 (Wordsworth as Critic 189)...

This is clearly the intention of the Essay, but to reduce Wordsworth's argument to its bare logical (or illogical) bones is to misrepresent the spirit of his discourse, which is revealed through the extravagance of its metaphors and images.

M. H. Abrams, identifies the critical notion, current in Romantic discourse, of the poem as heterocosm; in this metaphor there is an implied parallel between God and the poet, and between God's relation to his world and the poet to his poem (The Mirror and the Lamp 272). Wordsworth expands lavishly upon this notion: in his metaphorical system, if the poet is a deity then the critic is his prophet and the reader is expected to approach his poems with due reverence.

This figurative level of discourse is sustained throughout the essay, indeed the role of prophet, as Geoffrey Hartman and Meyer Abrams have pointed out, is one

highly favoured by Wordsworth in his poetry (Lipking 15, Natural Supernaturalism 110). If Wordsworth seems, at times, not to distinguish too clearly between his role as prophet and his role as creator it must be remembered, firstly, that as poet and critic he is both deity and prophet and, secondly, as David Robertson points out, prophets are so closely associated with the word of God that at times are almost inseparable from Him (Robinson 73).

Wordsworth writes that worthy critics are "prophetic of the destiny of a new work" (III 62); they may utter an "ill omen" (III 78) or "a prophetic enunciation of the remotest future" (III 83). Poetry has a "divine origin" and "breathes the spirit of religion" (III 65). Poets are "immortal" (III 83); Shakespeare is an "almost omnipotent genius" (III 68) and Chaucer is deified by the titles "morning-star" and "ever-to-be-honoured Chaucer" (III 79). Good poets are:

select Spirits for whom it is ordained that their fame shall be in the world an existence like that of Virtue, which owes its being to the struggles it makes, and its vigor to the enemies whom it provokes; -- a vivacious quality ever doomed to meet with opposition, and still triumphing over it (III 67)...

The struggle involved in achieving due recognition for good poetry is analogous to the operation of virtue itself, which "owes its being to the struggles it makes". Prejudiced criticism, on the other hand, is immoral:

Love, if it before existed, is converted into dislike; and the heart of the Reader is set against the Author and his book (III 65).

In an extended analogy, Wordsworth compares the effect of good poetry to that of the Scriptures:

The concerns of religion refer to indefinite objects, and are too weighty for the mind to support them without relieving itself by resting a great part of the burthen upon words and symbols. The commerce between Man and his Maker cannot be carried on but by a process where much is represented in little, and the Infinite Being accommodates himself to a finite capacity. In all this may be perceived the affinity between religion and poetry; between religion -- making up the deficiencies of reason by faith; and poetry -- passionate for the instruction of reason; between religion -- whose element is infinitude, and whose ultimate trust is the supreme of things, submitting herself to circumscription, and reconciled to substitutions; and poetry -- ethereal and transcendent, yet incapable to sustain her existence without sensuous incarnation (III 65).

The scriptures, as the revealed word of God, stand alongside God's revelation of Himself in the physical universe and the poem is described as a similar incarnation, approximate to those attributes of God which theologians refer to as the "condescension" and "accommodation". Just as the word of God is a symbol, a representation or substitution of the infinite, so the poem too is greater than its parts and should be read in the spirit of the whole.

Wordsworth attempts to isolate certain aspects of poetic experience and poetic sensibility which may be compared to religious experience and religious sensibility (see Prickett Romanticism and Religion 70-90). Unlike Arnold, Wordsworth does not offer poetry as a substitute for religion; his analogy only suggests that poetry can evoke emotional and spiritual states with a "power" which is not possible in

other forms of discourse. Poetry, in other words, like the Scriptures, is able to reach the remotest depths of the human mind, to move and to inspire man's better nature. Wordsworth's brief reference to what he calls "power" (III 82), which I discuss below, is implicitly connected with the analogy between poetry and religion. What Wordsworth affirms through the experience of "power" is a unity or wholeness that may be apprehended as religious in quality.

Like later writers, Arnold, Yeats and Eliot, who posit a system of relationships between poetry and religion, Wordsworth's analogy is problematic because of inherent and irreconcilable differences between the sacred and the profane. These problems are evident in Yeats's many essays on symbolism; in The Autumn of The Body, he writes that:

The arts are, I believe, about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of priests, and to lead us back upon our journey by filling our thoughts with the essences of things, and not with things (Yeats 26).

Yet the poet can only imply the "the essences of things" through "things" themselves, which Yeats seems to acknowledge for he continues:

I think we will learn again how to describe at great length an old man wandering among enchanted islands, his return home at last, his slow-gathering vengeance, a flitting shape of a goddess (Yeats 32)...

The Poet will always be concerned with "things", although those things may act as symbols. Moreover, the poetic symbol

is relished for its own sake in a way that is quite different from the sober contemplation inspired by Biblical symbols. The religious man, Wordsworth writes, "values what he sees chiefly as an 'imperfect shadowing forth' of what he is incapable of seeing" (III 65); while the poetic symbol, in Coleridge's definition, "partakes of the reality that it renders intelligible" (Stateman's Manual 137). Wordsworth claims that despite what may be called its religious dimension (its "ethereal and transcendent" qualities), poetry is unable "to sustain her existence without sensuous incarnation" (III 65). The insistence on "sensuous incarnation", for which there is no religious equivalent, is a dividing point in Wordsworth's analogy. There are literal disadvantages in all metaphors and the problems with Wordsworth's analogy is that, by insisting on the concrete qualities of poetry, he implies idols and graven images, which, for many readers, will be associated with a false religion.

There have, to use Wordsworth's metaphorical system in the way he seems to have intended, always been false prophets to extol the virtues of false gods. The obscure Dubartas was once considered to be superior to Spenser; Beaumont and Fletcher were once more popular than Shakespeare, and Shadwell more so than Dryden (III 68). Francis Jeffrey, it is implied, (III 71 n) is a false prophet for he has underestimated the genius of Wordsworth. Dr Johnson, according to Wordsworth's system, is a false

prophet for he has overlooked the true gods of poetry:

We open the volume of Prefatory Lives, and to our astonishment the first name we find there is that of Cowley! -- What is become of the morning-star of English Poetry? Where is the bright Elizabethan constellation? Or, if names be more acceptable than images, where is the ever-to-be-honoured Chaucer? where is Spenser? and, lastly, where is he, whose rights as a poet, contradistinguished from those which he is universally allowed to possess as a dramatist, we have vindicated, -- where Shakespeare? -- These, and a multitude of others not unworthy to be placed near them, their contemporaries and successors, we have not. But in their stead, we have...Roscommon, and Stepney, and Phillips, and Walsh, and Smith, and Duke, and King, and Spratt -- Halifax, Granville, Sheffield, Congreve, Broome, and other reputed Magnates -- metrical writers utterly worthless and useless, except for occasions like the present, when their productions are referred to as evidence what a small quantity of brain is necessary to procure a considerable stock of admiration, provided the aspirant will accommodate himself to the likings and fashions of his day (III 79).

Of writers most admired by the contemporary audience

Alexander Pope is Wordsworth's prime example of the false god wrongly worshipped by the literary public:

He bewitched the nation by his melody, and dazzled it by his polished style, and was himself blinded by his own success (III 72).

False gods are associated with blinding light so that their readers are "dazzled; and prize and cherish the faults" (III 64); are "caught and excited" by "the glaring hues of diction" (III 64); and the world is "startl[ed] by their audacity and extravagance" (III 83). It is not surprising, then, that the foolish admiration of the gullible public is described as "blind wonderment" (III 74). In her essay on

"Wordsworth and Glitter", Josephine Miles notes a consistent usage in Wordsworth's writing of glitter, glare, and other harsh lights as terms of derogation (Miles 563). The true poet, on the other hand, is recognised by the permanence of his brilliance, which neither startles nor blinds:

Genius [Wordsworth claims] is the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe (III 82)...

Implied in this metaphor is the comparison between genius and a new star, recalling the "morning-star of English Poetry" and the "bright Elizabethan constellation" (III 79). The false god is comet-like, his productions:

blazed into popularity, and have passed away, leaving scarcely a trace behind them (III 67)...

Also implicit in Wordsworth's metaphors is the contrast between the benign influences of the constellations in their preordained order and the malevolent influences traditionally associated with comets.

Among the true gods of poetry Wordsworth numbers the early ballad writers, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Thompson and (we assume) himself. The true prophets are the literary critics who are their champions: Wharton, Collins, Bishop Percy and the German school (III 75). As the predominant tenor of the time is antipathetic to true poetic genius, the true gods have not been given due recognition. If they have achieved any recognition it has usually been for the wrong reasons, as is the case with Thompson:

In any well used copy of the Seasons [Wordsworth writes] the book generally opens of itself with the rhapsody on love, or with one of the stories (perhaps Damon and Musidora) (III 74)...

Pope's edition of Shakespeare's plays in another case in point:

with a view to rendering the general reader a necessary service, he printed between inverted commas those passages which he thought most worthy of notice (III 68).

Wordsworth notes the lack of due respect for the "almost omnipotent genius" of Shakespeare:

among us is a current, I might say, an established opinion, that Shakespeare is justly praised when he is pronounced to be 'a wild irregular genius, in whom great faults are compensated by great beauties' (III 69).

"How long may it be", Wordsworth asks:

before this misconception passes away and it becomes universally acknowledged that the judgement of Shakespeare in the selection of his materials, and in the manner in which he has made them, heterogeneous as they often are, constitute a unity of their own (III 69)..?

In his revaluation of Shakespeare, which includes the underestimated sonnets, Wordsworth is undoubtedly influenced by Coleridge's great critical task, which was to demonstrate that "great as was the genius of Shakespeare, his judgement was at least equal" (Shakespearean Criticism II 167).

George Stevens, the false prophet who claimed that not even "the strongest acts of Parliament" could induce him to peruse Shakespeare's poems, is described in suitably

diabolical terms:

genius whom he had been compelled to regard with admiration, as an inmate of the celestial regions -- 'there sitting where he durst not soar' (III 69).

Milton is another poet, a true god, who has been revered for the wrong reasons. Of Paradise Lost, Wordsworth writes:

Take from the number of purchasers...those who wished to possess the Poem as a religious work, and but few I fear would be left who sought it on account of its poetical merits (III 70).

In the case of Milton, we have to distinguish between Wordsworth's figurative system in which religious metaphors are used to describe the relationship between poet, critic and audience and the reader or critic who expects a poem to be faithful to the doctrine of Christianity. Wordsworth, it is implied, values Paradise Lost for its "poetic merits", its "sensuous incarnation" of religious truths, rather than for the truths themselves. He criticises readers who attach "so much importance to the truths which interest them" that they "are prone to over-rate the Authors by whom those truths are expressed and enforced" (III 65). Wordsworth claims that "no poetry has been more subject to distortion, than that species, the argument of which is religious; and no lovers of the art have gone further astray than the pious and the devout" (III 66). Milton, Wordsworth writes, is to be respected for his "original excellence" (III 71), rather than for his adherence to Christian doctrine.

If true poets are admired for the wrong reasons by false

critics and their gullible followers, then this is even more evident in the case of bad poets. Macpherson is Wordsworth's prime example of a false god foolishly admired by an indiscriminating audience. Between 1760 and 1763 Macpherson published a series of blank verse epics which he attributed to Ossian and which he claimed to have translated from the original Gaelic. His version had an immediate success although it was later shown that Macpherson forged the text, which he based on various Celtic legends. Wordsworth reserves his most withering irony for Macpherson, whom he addresses by parodying the Witches' greeting of Macbeth:

All hail, Macpherson! hail to thee, Sire of
Ossian (III 77)!

The address is, of course, as equivocal as that of the Witches' for Wordsworth is concerned to topple Macpherson from his position of high regard, a task which he performs with some success. It is difficult to imagine one of Macpherson's admirers returning to his epic with quite the same devotion after reading Wordsworth's burlesque of Temora:

'The blue waves of Ullin roll in light. The green
hills are covered with day. Trees shake their
dusky heads in the breeze. Grey torrents pour
their noisy streams. Two green hills with aged
oaks surround a narrow plain (III 77)...'

Wordsworth claims that, from the moment he read the poems, he knew that they were forgeries, "essentially unnatural", "audacious" and "worthless" (III 78):

From what I saw with my own eyes, I knew that the imagery was spurious. In nature every thing is distinct, yet nothing defined into absolute independent singleness. In Macpherson's work, it is exactly the reverse; every thing (that is not stolen) is in this manner defined, insulated, dislocated, deadened, --yet nothing is distinct. It will always be so when words are substituted for things (III 77).

The first section of Wordsworth's criticism is easily understandable, we need only to compare a few lines from Tintern Abbey with the Macpherson parody to realize what Wordsworth means by "insulated, dislocated, deadened". What Wordsworth means by the substitution of "words" for "things" is more problematic. He seems to imply, by this apparently illogical statement, that Macpherson was seduced by the extravagant language of the Celtic epics but, in Macpherson's case, the grandeur of his diction is not supported by a similar grandeur in thought or subject. Macpherson imitates Ossian's diction without a sympathetic understanding of his subject -- his characters "never could exist", their "manners are impossible" (III 77). The substitution of "word" for "thing", then, which is evidence of the empty showiness of Macpherson's epic, is also evidence of its imposture.

Words and "things", ideally, must be reconciled through the imagination of the poet. In one sense imagination, as the creative power of the artist, is analogous to the ability of God to create out of his own being. Of Thompson, who is Wordsworth's main example of the "imaginative poet" (III 74), Wordsworth claims that he writes "from himself"

(III 72), that he "owe[s] nothing ut to nature and his own genius" (III 73). But the imagination is primarily a reconciling agent and Wordsworth's discussion on Thompson's imagination is continued in terms of the "conferring", "abstracting" and "modify[ing]" characteristics of imagination that were noted in the 1815 Preface (III 32-33). Thus natural objects are modified by the poet's imagination: the "eye of the Poet has been steadily fixed upon his object", while "his feelings had urged him to work upon it in the spirit of genuine imagination" (III 73). "Things", natural objects or "manners", which give to poetry its concreteness and substance, are lacking in Macpherson's text. They are similarly lacking in Dryden's lines which, according to Wordsworth, are "vague, bombastic, and senseless", and even a blind man "might easily depict these appearances with more truth" (III 73).

In one sense, then, the words/things dichotomy corresponds to the problem of manner and matter, of fitting the style to the subject, but Wordsworth's enquiry into the nature of language is more complex. Jonathan Wordsworth suggests:

There is an important distinction to be made between the substitution of words for things that takes place as a result of failure to connect them with their archetypes, and the tendency of words when being creatively used to achieve in their own right the status of things (Borders of Vision 231).

Macpherson's failure is an example of the former, while Wordsworth offers his own poetry as an example of the

latter, for, concluding his Essay, he expresses the hope that:

both in words and things, [the collected poems] will operate in their degree, to extend the domain of sensibility for the delight, the honour, and the benefit of human nature (III 84)...

There is, in Wordsworth's thinking, an implied correspondence between the animating Word of God which creates the universe and the creative imagination of poets and their created worlds. Both have been created out of words, although the animating fiat makes words into physical things, while the poem remains a "word-thing". There are times, however, as Wordsworth implies in his defence of tautology in the note to The Thorn, when words seem to become things, although this is, of course, only an illusion caused by:

the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as things, active and efficient, which are themselves part of the passion (P.W. II 355).

More often the thing-like qualities of words tend to obtrude between the poet and the precise emotion he is trying to express. Wordsworth comments that:

the medium through which, in poetry, the heart is to be affected, is language; a thing subject to endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations. The genius of the poet melts these down for his purpose; but they retain their shape and quality to him who is not capable of exerting, within his own mind, a corresponding energy (III 82).

In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth had associated arbitrariness and fluctuation with false poetic diction, but in the Essay, Supplementary he perceives these qualities to be general characteristics of language and claims that their "endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations" must be controlled by the poet. Wordsworth here concedes a greater measure of craftsmanship to the poet (who, in his task of melting down words, is likened to a goldsmith) than in the earlier Preface where it was hoped that ordinary, conversational language itself would control the straying tendencies of "poetic diction." Wordsworth's meditations upon the power of language and the problems of fitting words to thoughts may be summarized by the following paradox: on the one hand, when properly chosen and ordered by the poet, words are the vehicle for conveying the thoughts of the poet to his reader, but, on the other hand, these well-chosen, well-ordered words are themselves entities which delight both poet and reader. Poetry, to return to Wordsworth's earlier definition, is a "sensuous incarnation" (III 65). The dual functions of language are, of course, not mutually exclusive, as Wordsworth acknowledges when he refers to his own work which operates "both in words and in things" (III 84).

Whether words will perform an "incarnation of the thought" or act as "a counter-spirit" (II 85) to subvert meaning (to use the terminology of the Essays on Epitaphs) depends not only on the poet's ability but also on the attitude of his readers. It is only, Wordsworth suggests,

the unaccommodating reader for whom language stubbornly retains its opacity, its "shape and quality" (III 82).

Wordsworth insists that readers must exert their intellects if poetry is to be properly appreciated:

Is it to be supposed that the reader can make progress of this kind, like an Indian prince or general -- stretched on his palanquin, and born by his slaves? No; he is invigorated and inspirited by his leader, in order that he may exert himself; for he cannot proceed in quiescence, he cannot be carried like a dead weight (III 82).

In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth complained of "false refinement" (I 125) as the major barrier to the understanding of his poetry and, although he again refers to "the prejudices of false refinement" (III 80) in the Essay, Supplementary, his main complaint is against the apathy and passiveness of unappreciative readers. Throughout the Essay he stresses the need for "a co-operating power in the mind of the Reader" (III 81), the need for "effort", "exertion" and "action" (III 81) on the part of reader as well as poet. The reader's attitude is crucial to the success of an original work for the poet's task in "creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed" (III 80) is rendered more difficult when his audience is unsympathetic.

The true deities of poetry (among whom Wordsworth includes himself) are notable for their innovative practices; thus much of Wordsworth's arguments center upon the idea of originality. Because of his originality Wordsworth implies that, like his heroes, he is fated to

suffer misunderstanding and hostility while contemporary readers pursue false, and more accessible, gods.

Wordsworth pays homage to Coleridge's pronouncements on the nature of originality, that:

every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen (Statesman's Manuel 212)...

But Wordsworth finds the idea of "taste" an inadequate description of the relationship between poet and reader. In place of "taste" ("a metaphor, taken from a passive sense of the human body, and transferred to things which are not passive, -- to intellectual acts and operations" (III 81)), Wordsworth offers "power":

If every great poet...in the highest exercise of his genius, before he can be thoroughly enjoyed, has to call forth and to communicate power, this service, in a still greater degree, falls upon an original writer, at his first appearance in the world... Therefore to create taste is to call forth and bestow power, of which knowledge is the effect (III 82)...

In terms of Wordsworth's system of religious metaphors we may infer that what he means by "knowledge", as an effect of "power", is not theoretical understanding, but knowledge (in its Biblical sense) meaning experience. The distinction between positive, scientific knowledge and the alternative knowledge which is felt on the pulses is implicit in the concept of "power".

Although Wordsworth does not explain what he means by

"power" there are accounts by De Quincey, in particular his essay The Literature of Knowledge and the Literature of Power (1848) (Masson V 138), and descriptions in Wordsworth's own poetry which suggest what it is that Wordsworth means by this term (Wordsworth as Critic 192). Indeed, much may be inferred from the Essay itself: Wordsworth claims that the poet's function is not the "mere communication of knowledge" (III 81), he must move his readers, thereby "humbl[ing] and humanis[ing]" them "in order that they may be purified and exalted" (III 81), and the religious parallel is again evident in the operation of "power".

Professor Owen indicates Wordsworth's debt to Eighteenth Century writers on the sublime, particularly John Dennis, for the formation of his concept of "power" (Thompson 140). But, in terms of Wordsworth's system of religious metaphors in the Essay, "power" may be understood as the poetic equivalent of religious conversion. Religious conversion is traditionally described in terms of battles and victories, hence the effect of "power" as "an advance, or a conquest, made by the soul of the poet" (III 82). Elsewhere he writes of establishing a "dominion over the spirits of readers" (III 80) and of extending "the domain of sensibility" (III 84).

Wordsworth's relationship with his readers is an intense but ambivalent one. He divides them into two categories: the "People" and the "Public" (see Cruttwell 71-80). False critics and their followers are associated with the "Public"

for in this category will be found those who read for "luxurious amusement" and "fashionable pleasure" (III 62), "censors" and critics "too petulant to be passive to a genuine poet" or "too feeble to grapple with him" (III 66). It is with reference to Wordsworth's specific sense of the "Public" that he conceives of the word "popular" as a term of derogation:

Away, then, with the senseless iteration of the word, popular, applied to new works in poetry, as if there were no test of excellence in this first of the fine arts but that all men should run after its productions, as if urged by an appetite, or constrained by a spell (III 83)!

But the estimate of the "People" is of supreme importance:

The People have already been justified, and their eulogium pronounced by implication when it was said, above -- that, of good poetry, the individual, as well as the species, survives. And how does it survive but through the People? What preserves it but their intellect and their wisdom (III 84)?

In one sense, then, the "People" are posterity, but the "People" are also the contemporary audience, ordinary people who do not aspire to "consideration in Society" as the "Public" do. Shakespeare, for example, "stooped to accommodate himself to the People" (III 68). The "People" are not only humble, unsophisticated readers, they are also the body from which Wordsworth's "ideal critic" is drawn. The People's critic has:

a mind at once poetical and philosophical...[his] understanding is severe as that of dispassionate government...initiatory composure of mind which no selfishness can disturb...a natural

IX. THE POET AS BIOGRAPHER

A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns and A Memorial of Robert Walker comprise Wordsworth's major biographical writings. Although he composed few proper biographies, this genre and the related genre, autobiography, are of general significance to Wordsworth's poetry. Many of the poems, Resolution and Independence, Michael, The Brothers and Simon Lee, for example, include elements of biography, although biography has, in these cases, been imaginatively reconstructed as poetry. In his Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns Wordsworth has constructed a portrait of the poet from Burns's poetry.

Much early criticism of Burns is characterized by a failure to examine the art of his songs and poems, and instead consists of a grudging admission of his genius, combined with the disapproval of the man on moral, social, religious and political grounds. Henry Mackenzie's review of Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, entitled "Surprising effects of Original Genius, exemplified in the Poetical Productions of Robert Burns, an Ayrshire Ploughman", set the tone. Mackenzie's subject was not Burn's poetry, but Burns as a socio-literary phenomenon: "the Heaven-taught Ploughman".

After the poet's death in 1796 the critical debate continued to centre on the conflict between genius and morality. In that year an anonymous obituary notice, which was widely reprinted, made a great deal of Burns's alleged

sensibility that has been tutored into correctness without losing anything of its quickness...active faculties, capable of answering the demands which an Author of original imagination shall make upon them (III 66)...

The Essay moves full circle, beginning and ending with a discussion on the relationship between the poet and his readers. Wordsworth had started his essay by assuming the role of Bard or Vates, uttering dire warnings to the misguided "Public", but in the final paragraph Wordsworth relinquishes the role of Prophet and instead humbles himself before the "People", offering them his "devout respect" and his "reverence" (III 84). He commends his poems to the care of the "People" in the hope that they will be "faithfully supported by its two wings, the past and the future" (III 84). The conclusion is at once humble and supremely arrogant as Wordsworth moves from the Old Testament to the New. As critic and poet Wordsworth is both prophet and god, a Christ-like figure, performing an intercession on behalf of the "People". Like God, giving his only-begotten Son to mankind, Wordsworth gives his poems to the world:

he would not, if a wish could do it, save them from immediate destruction; -- from becoming at this moment, to the world, as a thing that had never been (III 84).

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faults, and in 1797 a biography by Robert Heron, containing undocumented but plausible suggestions of his dissipation in later years in Dumfries, was published. In 1800 Dr James Currie, a Liverpool physician, brought out the first collective edition of Burns's work. Although undertaken for the benefit of the poet's family, the edition contained an essay on Burns's life which exposed what Currie took to be the moral and social weaknesses of the poet. Currie claimed, for example, that Burns was "perpetually inflamed with liquor" and "in the practice of such vices as humanity and delicacy veil from description" (Currie I xxiv).

In 1814 the first attempt to rehabilitate Burns's reputation was made by Alexander Peterkin in his Review of the Life of Robert Burns, and of various criticisms on his Character and Writings. Peterkin attacked what he saw as a falsely moralistic tendency in criticism since Currie, and much of his essay was concerned with a point-by-point refutation of errors in fact or emphasis in the biographical commentaries of Currie, Irving, Jeffrey, Scott,¹ and Walker. Peterkin stated his conclusions boldly: far from being being pernicious, Burns's works were "eminently friendly to good morals" and Burns has been "cruelly wronged" (Peterkin lxxiv-lxxvi).

Although he kept to the area of biographical discussion and did not consider Burns's poetry in any detail, Peterkin succeeded in showing that an adequate critical response to the poetry could only be based on a humane approach to Burns's life and work. His defence of the poet implies the

rejection of moral fault-finding within the sphere of critical debate:

It matters little, whether this evil has arisen from credulity, misinformation, or malicious purpose. It is fit that the error should be corrected, -- not merely because it is fair that the dead as well as the living should have justice in every individual instance, but because the general interests of society and literature are outraged if calumny is permitted, in such a case, to circulate in triumphant dogmatism. By calumny we mean injurious accusation without proof. And if ever calumny of the most dastardly kind poisoned public opinion, it has been in the case of Burns (Peterkin lxi)

Unfortunately, the effect of Peterkin's defence was largely lost by the reprinting, at the same time, of Currie's Life of Burns. Gilbert Burns, brother of the poet, announced that he would superintend a revised edition of Currie, in which he hoped to be able to correct some of the worst errors and to supply explanatory notes to some of the more controversial pronouncements. In 1815 Dr James Gray, a friend of Gilbert Burns, sent Peterkin's book to Wordsworth, informed him of Gilbert's suggestion and asked Wordsworth to advise him "upon the best mode of conducting a defence of his brother's injured reputation" (III 117).²

Peterkin found a ready sympathizer in Wordsworth who had himself expressed similar sentiments in earlier letters defending the poet. Wordsworth lost no time in complying with Gray's request and, in May 1816, he published a pamphlet called A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns. James Hogg, in his memoir of Burns, provided his own version of the letter's origins. Gray, he said, has asked Wordsworth to

contribute something to a new edition of Burns and "the poet complied...but perceiving that it [the Letter] was a masterpiece, that Gilbert Burns might reap the sole benefit of such a gem, he published it by itself first as a pamphlet" (Moorman II 295). Whether or not Gray was surprised to find himself addressed in a public letter is unknown, but he did receive a manuscript version of the letter prior to its printing (III 111).

Wordsworth's advice to Gilbert Burns on his editorial task is given in a few sentences: he should issue a new edition of the poems; prefix to it a new memoir of the poet; and relegate Currie's Life to the end, supplying corrections to the misrepresentations (III 117-8).

It was not until 1926, when Sir James Crichton-Brown published Burns from a New Point of View, that the poet's death was shown to have been caused by rheumatic fever and heart disease, not alcoholism. Wordsworth therefore makes no attempt to rehabilitate Burns's character, for he believed that Burns had been dissipated, but he is indignant with Currie because he had not attempted to see Burns's shortcoming with sympathy, or to relate them to "the spirit from which they derived their existence and which governed the agent" (III 119). Wordsworth directs his readers to Burns's own defence of human frailty in his address To The Unco Guid:

Who made the heart, 'tis he alone
Decidedly can try us;
He knows each chord -- its various tone,
Each spring, its various bias.

Then at the balance let's be mute,
 We never can adjust it;
 What's done we partly may compute,
 But know not what's resisted (III 119).

"How happened it", Wordsworth asks, "that the recollection of this affecting passage did not check so amiable a man as Dr Currie, while he was revealing to the world the infirmities of its author" (III 119)? Indeed, it is Wordsworth's tendency throughout the Letter to see Burns in his poetry and to construct his portrait of Burns from the persona that he assumes.

In defining that class of literature known as biography, Wordsworth insists that it is a part of literature and therefore subject to the same criteria that would be applied to a literary work:

biography [he writes], though differing in some essentials from works of fiction, is nevertheless, like them, an art, -- an art, the laws of which are determined by the imperfections of our nature, and the constitution of society. Truth is not here, as in the sciences, and in natural philosophy, to be sought without scruple, and promulgated for its own sake, upon the mere chance of its being serviceable; but only for obviously justifying purposes, moral or intellectual (III 121).

The argument here is similar to that advanced in the second Essay Upon Epitaphs: the epitaphic inscription, a compressed biography, "must strike with a gleam of pleasure, when the expression is of that kind which carries conviction to the heart at once that the Author was a sincere mourner, and that the Inhabitant of the Grave deserved to be so lamented" (II 66). Biography may be further associated with elegy in

that it should observe a certain decorum: "ceremony" Wordsworth writes, is not to be discarded and the memory of the person is not to be "sacrificed" (III 121).

The history of a man, a biography, Wordsworth suggests, is different from the history of fact because there is much that cannot be divined (except perhaps by an intimate friend). Motives, desires, feelings, attitudes and pressures underlie the bald facts and these should be accounted for imaginatively and sympathetically (III 120).

Currie's biography, Wordsworth claims, is utterly lacking in these justifying virtues. It is written in the sensational style of Boswell's Life of Johnson which, Wordsworth wryly remarks:

had broken through many pre-existing delicacies, and afforded the British public an opportunity of acquiring experience, which before it had happily wanted (III 120)...

In addition to his tendency to dwell on sensational aspects of Burns's life, Currie had not that intimate knowledge of Burns which would have enabled him to represent "as in a map, the way which the afflicted pilgrim had pursued till the close of his diversified journey" (III 120). Currie had, after all, only met the poet on a single occasion (Currie I xix-xx). A contrast could be drawn from the case of Isaac Walton who, though he disapproved of much in Cotton's life, remained his life-long friend and was therefore qualified to retrace "the unsteady course of a highly-gifted man" (III 120).

Poets, Wordsworth claims, are their own best biographers for their writings comprise "the familiar knowledge which they convey of the personal feelings of their authors" (III 123). This, Wordsworth believes, is especially true of Burns. He writes:

in the small quantity of narrative that he has given, he himself bears no inconsiderably part...Neither the subjects of his poems, nor the manner of handling them, allow us long to forget their author. On the basis of his human character he has reared a poetic one, which with more or less distinctness presents itself to view in almost every part of his earlier, and, in my estimation, his most valuable verses. This poetic fabric, dug out of the quarry of genuine humanity, is airy and spiritual: -- and though the materials, in some parts, are coarse, and the disposition is often fantastic and irregular, yet the whole is agreeable and strikingly attractive (III 123).

There seems to be some ambivalence in Wordsworth's attitude to Burns. Certain descriptions like "dug out of the quarry" and "coarse" imply disapproval of Burns the man, yet out the raw materials of his experience, Wordsworth acknowledges that Burns has created something "airy and spiritual". Wordsworth does give expression to nostalgic thoughts on what Burns might have been, if he "could have controlled the propensities which his sensibility engendered (III 125); but the poet goes on to admit that, had this been the case, Burns would have been "a poet of a different class" and "many peculiar beauties which enrich his verses could never have existed" (III 125). Wordsworth has in common with Burns the autobiographical basis of many poems, yet Wordsworth's own transformations of experience into poetry

are imaginative, rather than morally instructive.

In his lecture On Burns and The Old English Ballads (1818), Hazlitt pointed out certain ambivalancies in Wordsworth's attitude to Burns. He suggests that:

It is hardly reasonable to look for a hearty or genuine defence of Burns from the pen of Mr Wordsworth; for there is no common link of sympathy between them. Nothing can be more different or hostile than the spirit of their poetry. Mr Wordsworth's poetry is the poetry of mere sentiment and pensive contemplation: Burns's is a very highly sublimated essence of animal existence... Mr Wordsworth is 'himself alone', a recluse philosopher, or a reluctant spectator of the scene of many-coloured life; moralizing on them, not describing, not entering into them. Robert Burns has exerted all the vigour of his mind, all the happiness of his nature, in exalting the pleasures of wine, of love, and good fellowship: but in Mr Wordsworth there is a total disunion and divorce of the faculties of the mind from those of the body; the banns are forbid, or a separation is austerely pronounced from bed and board -- a mensa et thoro. From the Lyrical Ballads it does not appear that men eat or drink, marry or are given in marriage (Howe VI 129).

How different would it have been, Hazlitt suggests, if Lamb, rather than Wordsworth, had undertaken to write a letter in defence of Burns.

Hazlitt, though he correctly implies certain incompatibilities between Wordsworth and Burns, is surely wrong on a number of points. Lamb, for example, approved wholeheartedly of Wordsworth's Letter and in fact assisted Wordsworth in its composition (Lucas II 190). Wordsworth is able to delight in exuberance, extravagance, and excess -- and these are celebrated, with uncensorious sympathy in such poems as Beggars, The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale, The Waggoner

and many other poems. In this regard the comments on Cotton's Ode Upon Winter at the end of the 1815 Preface could be noted: though "a water-drinker" himself, Wordsworth delights in transcribing the story of the poet's drunken siege against winter (III 38).

"It is the privilege of poetic genius" Wordsworth writes, "to catch...a spirit of pleasure wherever it can be found":

The poet, trusting to primary instincts, luxuriates among the felicities of love and wine, and is enraptured while he describes the fairer aspects of war: nor does he shrink from the company of the passion of love though immoderate -- from convivial pleasure though intemperate -- nor from the presence of war though savage, and recognized as the hand-maid of desolation. Frequently and admirably has Burns given way to these impulses of nature (III 124)...

There is surely no "disunion or divorce of the faculties of the mind from those of the body" here; on the contrary they are reconciled more fully than Hazlitt admits. Wordsworth does not stereotype Burns as the writer of amoral songs of pleasure. His point is that the fun and exuberance of Burns's poetry is not unaccompanied by thought, nor is it without moral effect. Tam o' Shanter, according to Wordsworth is the masterpiece of this kind of poetry:

Who [he asks] but some impenetrable dunce or narrow-minded puritan in works of art, ever read without delight the picture which he has drawn of the convivial exaltation of the rustic adventurer, Tam o' Shanter?... I pity him who cannot perceive that, in all this, though there was no moral purpose, there is moral effect (III 124).

Wordsworth description of moral effect without moral purpose

succinctly captures the goodnatured, undidactic quality of Burns's poetry.

Hazlitt, in accusing Wordsworth of prolonging the biographical debate on Burns, tends to miss the complexity of Wordsworth's arguments. Clearly Wordsworth does remark upon Burns's life, but he does not continue the attack upon Burns's moral character. A defence that ignored the allegations against Burns could not convince, and who could be better able to defend an alleged reprobate than one whose own tenor of life seemed to be the reverse?

But having indulged in biographical speculations, Wordsworth goes on to dismiss their significance for the business of literary criticism:

Our business is with their books, -- to understand and to enjoy them (III 122).

This would, of course, become a critical principle of considerable importance. Wordsworth restates this view in even more polemical terms:

it is, I own, comparatively of little importance, while we are engaged in reading the Iliad, the Eneid, the tragedies of Othello and King Lear, whether the authors of these poems were good or bad men; whether they lived happily or miserably. Should a thought of the kind cross our minds, there would be no doubt, if irresistible external evidence did not decide the question unfavourably, that men of such transcendent genius were both good and happy: and if, unfortunately, it had been on record that they were otherwise, sympathy with the fate of their fictitious personages would banish the unwelcome truth whenever it obtruded itself, so that it would but slightly disturb our pleasure (III 123).

Referring specifically to Burns, Wordsworth writes that:

Granting that all which has been raked up to the prejudice of Burns were literally true; and that it added, which it does not, to our better understanding of human nature and human life (for that genius is not incompatible with vice, and that vice leads to misery -- the more acute from the sensibilities which are the elements of genius -- we need not those communications to inform us) how poor would have been the compensation for the deduction made by this extrinsic knowledge, from the intrinsic efficacy of his poetry -- to please, and to instruct (III 123-4)!

Wordsworth opinion on the irrelevance of biographical information could not have been more emphatically stated.

Unfortunately, as part of his defence of Burns, Wordsworth takes the opportunity of launching an attack against the Edinburgh Review and, in particular, against Francis Jeffrey who, in 1809, had unjustly attacked Burns's character in a review, which included Wordsworth in its contemptuous invective (Edinburgh Review, January 1809). Wordsworth complains that the "narrow range of his own comprehension" disqualifies Jeffrey for the task of judging Burns's poetry (III 127). Wordsworth was, of course, hardly an impartial judge of the Edinburgh Review for he had himself suffered at the hands of its reviews. The attack upon Jeffrey within his defence of Burns did Wordsworth no good. Jeffrey wrote to John Wilson:

Is it possible for you to believe after this that the tirade against the Edinburgh critic was dictated by pure, generous resentment for the injuries done to Burns and not by a little vindictive feeling for the severities practiced on himself (Moorman II 298)?

Jeffrey pointed out that the attack upon Burns in the Quarterly was far more violent and offensive than his own, yet Wordsworth had failed to mention it.

Wordsworth's dismissal of the Edinburgh Review provoked yet another bitter reply from Hazlitt, who accused Wordsworth of using Burns as a stalking horse in his own battle with Jeffrey. Hazlitt writes that Wordsworth:

shews a great dislike of Robespierre, Buonaparte, and of Mr Jeffrey, whom he, by some unaccountable fatality classes together as the three most formidable enemies of the human race that have appeared in his (Mr Wordsworth's) remembrance; but he betrays very little liking of Burns. He is, indeed, anxious to get him out of the unhallowed clutches of the Edinburgh Reviewers (as a mere matter of poetical privilege), only to bring him before a graver and higher tribunal, which is his own; and after repeating and insinuating ponderous charges against him, shakes his head, and declines giving any opinion in so tremendous a case; so that though the judgement of the former critic is set aside, poor Burns remains just were he was, and nobody gains anything by the cause but Mr Wordsworth, in an increasing opinion of his own wisdom and purity (Howe VI 127).

Wordsworth's attack upon Jeffrey and the Edinburgh Review is to be regretted, but does not negate the value of the rest of the Letter nor the sincerity of Wordsworth's defence. Wordsworth was passionately fond of Burns's poetry and, while still in his teens, he had recommended the Kilmarnock edition to his sister, who writes:

he had read it and admired many of the pieces very much (E.Y. 12)...

In August 1802 Dorothy and William made a pilgrimage to

Burns's grave, which Dorothy records in her journal:

Went on to visit his grave. He lies at a corner of the churchyard, and his second son, Francis Wallace, beside him; there is no stone to mark the spot... We looked at the grave with melancholy and painful reflections, repeating to each other his own verses... We were glad to leave Dumfries, which is no agreeable place to them who do not love the bustle of a town that seems to be rising up to wealth. We could think of little else but poor Burns, and his moving about on that 'unpoetic ground' (Journals 62).

The fervour of Dorothy's description of their visit to Burns's grave is matched by Wordsworth's own urgent tone in the poems which he wrote as a result of that visit: At the Grave of Burns, Thoughts suggested the day following..., and To the Sons of Robert Burns.

In the poem At the Grave of Burns Wordsworth claims that Burns's poetry inspired his own writing:

I mourned with thousands, but as one
More deeply grieved, for he was gone
Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
 And showed my youth
How verse may build a princely throne
 On humble truth.

In the Fenwick note to the same poem, written many years later, Wordsworth again acknowledges his indebtedness to Burns:

It gives me pleasure, venial I trust, to acknowledge at this late day my obligations to these two great authors [Cowper and Burns], whose writings, in conjunction with Percy's Reliques, powerfully counteracted the mischievous influence of Darwin's dazzling manner, the extravagance of the earlier dramas of Schiller, and that of other German writers upon my taste and natural tendencies (Gros III 254).

Burns, in choosing to write in his native Scots, particularly influenced Wordsworth's diction. He writes that "familiarity with the dialect of the border counties of Cumberland and Westmorland made it easy for me not only to understand but to feel" Burns's poetry (Gros III 255). Burns's diction is, of course, deceptively simple for, upon closer examination, it reveals sophistication and the influence of wide reading in both English and Scottish literature. The complexity of Burns's poetry is one of Wordsworth's recurring arguments in his defence of the poet.

Long before the appearance of any Edinburgh Review articles on Burns or himself, Wordsworth had been in the habit of defending Burns. In February 1799 he wrote to Coleridge, who was not particularly impressed by Burns, attempting to persuade him of Burns's greatness:

I do not so ardently desire character in poems... as manners, not transitory manners reflecting the wearisome unintelligible obliquities of city-life, but manners connected with the permanent objects of nature and partaking of the simplicity of these objects... Now ...in Burns you have manners everywhere. Tam Shanter I do deem a character, I question whether there is any individual character in all Burns' writings except his own. But everywhere you have the presence of human life. The communications that proceed from Burns come to the mind with the life and charm of recognitions. But Burns is also solemn and sublime in sentiment and profound in feeling. His 'Ode to Despondency' I can never read without the deepest agitations (E.Y. 255-6).

Early appreciation of Burns's poetry by the public was limited to the sentimental pieces, like To A Mountain Daisy. Henry Mackenzie's reviews in The Lounger set the tone. The

tendency of Mackenzie's essay was the emasculation of Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect: he ignored the humorous and satirical pieces, he shrank from Burns's characteristic mode of self-expression, he apologized for the language in which the poet did his best work, and praised only those poems of sentiment written in English. it was a disastrously inaccurate essay in criticism and a distortion of Burns's poetry, but nevertheless became accepted as critical orthodoxy on Burns.

Wordsworth's Letter helped to give a new direction to several aspects of Burns criticism: he insists on Burns's right to realistic self-expression, he perceives that wit and satire are Burns's true medium, he praises Burns's use of the Scottish dialect, he points out Burns's craftsmanship -- points to the cunningly wrought qualities of the apparently simple verse, and expresses his belief in the lasting moral effect of Burns's poetry. De Quincey claims that Wordsworth's Letter "embod[ies] some profound criticisms" of Burns's work and that Wordsworth was instrumental in "reviv[ing] the interest...in all that related to Burns" (Masson XI 131).

Wordsworth sees that Burns operates with his fullest strength and art in satirical poems like Address To The Unco Guid and Death and Dr Hornbook; and that, in some degree, all of Burns's satirical poems deal with appearance and reality: exploring and exposing the truth about human behaviour and restoring the protagonists to common humanity. Of Tam's "selfishness", which lurks behind "the mask of

social cordiality", Wordsworth writes:

The poet, penetrating the unsightly and disgusting surfaces of things, has unveiled with exquisite skill the finer ties of imagination and feeling, that often bind these beings to practices productive of so much unhappiness to themselves, and to those whom it is their duty to cherish; -- and, as far as he puts the reader in possession of this intelligent sympathy, he qualifies him for exercising a salutary influence over the minds of those who are thus less deplorably enslaved (III 124-5).

Although Wordsworth is correct in suggesting that there are premonitory undertones in Burns's poetry, his account of Tam o' Shanter reveals his ambivalent attitude to the poet in its rather puritanical approach. Yet despite his habitual seriousness and sobriety, Wordsworth is, at times, able to enter into the spirit of Tam's drunken revelry. of the lines:

'Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious
O'er a' the ills of life victorious' (III 124).

Wordsworth writes:

What a lesson do these words convey of charitable indulgence for the vicious habits of the principal actor in this scene, and of those who resemble him! -- Men who to the rigidly virtuous are objects almost of loathing, and who they therefore cannot serve (III 124)!

Of Dr Hornbook's intoxication, Wordsworth writes:

With what lively humour does he describe the disorder of the senses and the confusion of the understanding, put to the test by a deliberate attempt to count the horns of the moon!

'But whether she had three of four
He could na' tell'.

Behold a sudden apparition that disperses this disorder, and in a moment chills him into possession of himself (III 125).

Wordsworth's commentary shows a lively appreciation of Burns's humour and of the spirit of tolerance within the poems. In his essay, "Wordsworth and Burns" (which includes a comparison of Tam o'Shanter and The Waggoner), Russel Noyes states his belief that, at the heart of both Burns's and Wordsworth's poetry, lies a tolerant understanding and acceptance of human frailty (Noyes 382).

There is a quality of sincerity in Burns's writing which Wordsworth greatly admires. he believes that the "momentous truth" of the poem A Bard's Epitaph:

could not possibly have been conveyed with such pathetic force by any poet that ever lived, speaking in his own voice; unless it were felt that, like Burns, he was a man who preached from the text of his own errors; and whose wisdom, beautiful as a flower that might have risen from seed sown from above, was in fact a scion from the root of personal suffering (III 125-6).

The poem, Wordsworth states, is "a sincere and solemn avowal -- a public declaration from his own will -- a confession at once devout, poetical, and human -- a history in the shape of a prophecy" (III 126). It is ultimately, Wordsworth believes, Burns's scrupulous honesty about his own shortcomings and his use of autobiographical material in his poetry, that makes biographies of the poet unnecessary. the profundity and the value of Burns's poetry, Wordsworth states, is due to its characteristic honesty and integrity:

Plague, then, upon your remorseless hunters after matter of fact (who, after all, rank upon the blindest of human beings) when they would convince you that the foundations of this admirable edifice are hollow; and that its frame is unsound (III 123)!

Burns is undeniably present in all his poems, not only Burns the contrite sinner, but Burns the celebrator of common humanity, of love and friendship, of work as well as pleasure, the exposé of hypocrisy and the quizzical writer of animal poems. "Neither the subjects of his poems, nor his manner of handling them", Wordsworth writes, "allow us long to forget their author" (III 123).

The fact that Burns often creates a persona, Wordsworth points out, is not an indication of insincerity for Burns usually has a specific purpose in mind: either to poke fun at the Edinburgh literati by assuming the persona of the untaught peasant-poet, or to assume the role of ironic commentator on the foibles of his fellow men. Wordsworth writes:

Not less successfully does Burns avail himself of his own character and situation in society, to construct out of them a poetic self, -- introduced as a dramatic personage -- for the purpose of inspiriting his incidents, diversifying his pictures, recommending his opinions, and giving point to his sentiments (III 125).

Even in Burns's most extravagant poses, Wordsworth believes that there is evidence of his real sympathies, concerns and feelings, for "through the veil of assumed habits and pretended qualities, enough of the real man appears..." (III

125). In pointing out that in the midst of lighthearted passages are thoughts of sadness and fear, Wordsworth returns to his central theme concerning the moral effect of Burns poetry and the insignificance of biographical details:

Lastingly is it to be regretted in respect to the memorable being, that inconsiderate intrusion has not left us at liberty to enjoy his mirth, or his love; his wisdom or his wit; without an admixture of useless, irksome, and painful details, that take from his poems so much of that right -- which, with all his carelessness, and frequent breaches of self-respect, he was not negligent to maintain for them -- the right of imparting solid instruction through the medium of unalloyed pleasure (III 126).

Despite the residual ambivalence in his attitude toward the poet, Wordsworth's pioneering work on Burns's poetry helped to restore Burns to his rightful literary status.

Wordsworth's Letter to A Friend of Robert Burns is notable for changing critical approaches to Burns. Henceforward Burns's satires would be regarded as his greatest achievements, the complexity of his poetry would be more seriously considered and its moral content generally acknowledged. It would be left to later critics to clear Burns's injured reputation, to expand upon the political sympathies expressed in his poetry, and to appreciate his mastery of traditional forms like the song and the verse letter.

* * *

If the message that emerges from the Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns is that poets are to be known by their

poems, then the message that emerges from Wordsworth's memorial of Robert Walker is that men are to be known by their works. While A Letter to A Friend of Robert Burns presents a theory of biography, the essay on Robert Walker provides an example of the theory in practice. While the prose of the Letter is concise and expository and the poet is primarily concerned with conducting a rational defence of Burns and his poetry, the prose of Wordsworth's memorial is imaginative and emotive and the poet's task is to reconstruct the life of Robert Walker.

Robert Walker was born in 1709 and died in 1802, having spent almost the whole of his ninety-three years in his native Seathwaite, becoming vicar of its chapel in 1736. Wordsworth had paid tribute to the virtuous country priest in The Excursion:

'The great, the good,
The well-beloved, the fortunate, the wise,--
These titles emperors and chiefs have borne,
Honour assumed or given: and him, the Wonderful,
Our simple shepherds, speaking from the heart,
Deservedly have stiled. --From his abode
In a dependent chapelry that lies
Beyond yon hill, a poor and rugged wild,
Which in his soul he loving embraced,
And, having once espoused, would never quit;
Into its graveyard will ere long be borne
That lowly, great, good Man. A simple stone
May cover him; and by its help, perchance,
A century shall hear his name pronounced,
With images attendant on the sound;
Then shall the slowly-gathering twilight close
In utter night; and of his course remain
No cognizable vestiges, no more
Than of this breath, which shapes itself in words
To speak of him, and instantly dissolves.'

(The Excursion VII ll 341-360)

The Pastor of The Excursion, who speaks these lines, is in

many ways similar to Wonderful Walker and indeed, for several reasons which will become apparent, the image of the virtuous country priest is particularly significant for Wordsworth's poetry.

Wordsworth begins his biography of the Rev Walker in a note to "Return" and "Seathwaite Chapel", the seventeenth and eighteenth sonnets of the Duddon series. It soon becomes evident that Wordsworth's account of Walker's life is no ordinary footnote for the narrative runs to 6000 words -- which gives some indication of the enthusiasm that Wordsworth felt for his subject. Wordsworth did not apparently know Walker personally (although he might have encountered him in his boyhood wanderings (Moorman II 378)). Nevertheless the portrait is full of vivid personal details which the poet gleaned from his family and friends. He also includes extracts of letters by Walker, his fellow clergymen, and a published account by Robert Bamford, a great-grandson of Robert Walker. By including these letters and testaments from those who knew Walker intimately Wordsworth puts into practice the belief, stated in the Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns, that close friends or sympathetic admirers are the only suitably qualified biographers (III 118-120). The aim of biography, Wordsworth stated, is not to "sit in judgement" over the subject (III 119), neither is truth to be sought for its own sake, "but for obviously justifying purposes, moral or intellectual" (III 121).

Robert Walker was hardly in need of a defence for he was,

by all accounts, frugal, industrious, well-educated and utterly devoted to his parish -- indeed he had achieved near perfection in certain essential Christian virtues: charity, humility, industry and tolerance. Wordsworth's aim in writing the memorial is to raise Walker from his position of obscurity for though he was not a figure of any historical significance his goodness is "worthy of being recorded" (PW III 510).

In Wordsworth's account of Walker's life the relationship between biography and epitaph, hinted at in the Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns (III 125), is made explicit. The essay is a "memoir" -- both a biographical notice and a thing which preserves the memory of the commemorated person. As a biographical notice the memoir is filled with details of Walker's daily activities and the values and attitudes that may be inferred from them; as a memorial we are invited to reflect upon the simplicity and virtue of his life and, by implication, to reflect upon our own lives.

Although the essay is considerably longer than a normal epitaph, it retains the commemorative quality of the epitaph: the expression of tender sentiments and the idealization of the remembered person.³

Clearly Wordsworth's portrait is an idealized one, even the pastor's name, "Wonderful Walker", is suggestive of a superior and somewhat unreal being. We learn of his "munifi[cence] in hospitality" despite his extreme poverty (PW III 514), that he was "eminently dextrous" in haymaking and shearing (PW III 516), that he hardly allowed himself "a

moment of recreation" (PW III 516) and that his parishoners were pacified "before the breathings of his good-will and saintly integrity" (PW III 517-8). Wordsworth's tendency throughout the essay is to idealize his subject by these, and other, exaggerations of his goodness. Undoubtedly Wonderful Walker was a virtuous person, but descriptions of his "munificent" hospitality and, even more poetical, "the breathings of his good-will", are clearly overstatements.

Walker, as Wordsworth presents him, is part real person, part imaginative construct: an idealized version of the country vicar, an archetype that has been commemorated by generations of poets. He is:

A Pastor such as Chaucer's verse portrays;
Such as the heaven-taught skill of Herbert drew;
And tender Goldsmith crowned with deathless praise!
(PW III 261 sonnet XVIII)

When not idealized as figure in literature, Wonderful Walker is presented as a Christ-like figure. Suggestive emblems are associated with him: he is the shepherd tending his flock, both literally for he owned a small flock of sheep (PW III 516), and figuratively in his role of pastor:

he was tenderly alive to all the duties of his pastoral office: the poor and needy 'he never sent empty away',-- the stranger was refreshed in passing that unfrequented vale -- the sick were visited; and the feelings of humanity found further exercise among the distresses and embarrassments in the worldly estate of his neighbours, with which his talents for business made him acquainted; and the disinterestedness, impartiality, and uprightness which he maintained in the management of all affairs confided to him, were virtues seldom separated in his own conscience from religious obligation (PW III 517).

Even when not quoting directly from the Scriptures, Wordsworth's descriptions have Biblical associations, seen in Walker's care for the poor, the sick and the stranger. Wordsworth even manages to make Walker's practical assistance in everyday business matters assume a religious quality.

It is particularly appropriate that Wordsworth's memorial should be affixed to The River Duddon sonnets for the influences and confluences of rivers have traditionally been associated with the course of human life. This metaphor is one of Wordsworth's favorites and is often used of his own life. In the final retrospect in The Prelude he writes:

...we have traced the stream
 From the blind cavern whence is faintly heard
 Its natal murmur; followed it to light
 And open day; accompanied its course
 Among the ways of Nature, for a time
 Lost sight of it bewildered and engulfed;
 Then given it a greeting as it rose once more
 In strength, reflecting from its placid breast
 The works of man and face of human life;
 And lastly from its progress we have drawn
 Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought
 Of human being, Eternity, and God.

(XIV 11 194-205)

Wordsworth compares the progress of his life to the irregular course of a river, starting from "the blind cavern" of its birth and predicting its final meeting with the sea of eternity. The Essays on Epitaphs also contain several references to the river as an analogy for the progress of human life towards eternity (II 51, II 78-9). In the Duddon sonnets it is the river that is personified. It begins its life as a "Child of the clouds" (PW III 246

sonnet II) and a "cradled Nurseling of the mountain" (PW III 247 sonnet IV), embarks on its eventful journey, and finally "The Wanderer" is united with the sea, "that receptacle vast/ Where all his unambitious functions fail" (PW III 260 sonnet XXXIII). The poem ends with an After-Thought, which begins as a kind a epitaph -- as though the river really was a person:

I thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
As being past away...
(PW III 261 sonnet XXXIV)

But the poet puts this fancy aside:

For, backward, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;
The Form remains, the Function never dies...
(PW III 261 sonnet XXXIV)

Whether the poet looks back at the real river Duddon or whether he looks back over his poem about the river is intentionally ambiguous and clearly of central significance to the idea of the epitaph. The process of commemoration preserves the memory of the person or place thus honoured:

Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour...
(PW III 261 sonnet XXXIV)

The need to preserve and honour the past is a central impulse in Wordsworth's writing. "I would", he states:

enshrine the spirit of the past
For future restoration...
(Prel 1805 XI ll 342-3)

The river is also conceived of as a stream of time, linking the past with the future, it is permanent yet ever onward-flowing, still gliding, still remaining. Indeed Wordsworth conceives of permanence in transience as a general characteristic of all natural objects and in this regard a connection between nature and the epitaph, which is a permanent record of a transient life, could be made. In the 1815 Preface Wordsworth explicitly links pastoral and elegiac genres:

The Idyllium,-- descriptive either of the processes and appearances of external nature, as the Seasons of Thompson; or of characters, manners, sentiments, as are Shenstone's Schoolmistress, The Cotter's Saturday Night of Burns, The Twa Dogs of the same Author; or of these in conjunction with the appearances of Nature, as most of the pieces of Theocritus, the Allegro and Penseroso of Milton, Beattie's Minstrel, Goldsmith's Deserted Village. The Epitaph, the Inscription, the Sonnet, most of the epistles of poets writing in their own persons, and all loco-descriptive poetry, belong to this class (III 28).

The relationship between nature poetry and the elegiac mode seems to be the attempt which is made in each of these genres to commemorate or make permanent an elusive spirit of place.

Wordsworth's stated intention in the Duddon sonnets to create a permanent memorial of the river would appear to be redundant for the river is its own memorial; but the river is, of course, not commemorated entirely for its own sake: it is a part of the landscape in which various human activities have taken place. The sonnets thus commemorate

all those who have been associated with the river: prehistoric hunters, Roman conquerors, as well as ordinary country folk. Mary Moorman points out that the sonnets are also an offering to Mary Wordsworth, "The One from whom [the poet's] heart shall ever beat/ With tenderest love" (PW III 257 sonnet XXV), for the sonnets record their walk along the river in 1811 (Moorman II 386). Primarily, however, the Duddon sonnets seem to merge with the memoir of Robert Walker so that Wordsworth's intention to commemorate the river is also the intention of his biography:

Pleased could my verse, a speaking monument,
Make to the eyes of men thy features known.
(PW III 247 sonnet III)

The image of the poem as a "speaking monument" is one which recurs in Wordsworth's poetry, and is particularly apt in its combination of the spontaneity of living speech with the permanence of stone.

In The Excursion, again combining pastoral and elegiac styles, Wordsworth writes:

The Poets in their elegies and songs
Lamenting the departed, call the groves,
They call upon the hills and streams to mourn,
And senseless rocks; nor idly; for they speak,
In these their invocations, with a voice
Obedient to the strong creative power
Of human passion, Sympathies there are
More tranquil, yet perhaps of kindred birth,
That steal upon the meditative mind,
And grow with thought.
(Exc I 475-84)

Like the Duddon sonnets, The Excursion has appended to it a series of biographies: of the Wanderer, the Solitary, the

Pastor, etc. (Gros III 521-89), and Wordsworth also included, in an appendix to The Excursion, the Essays On Epitaphs, which were originally composed for The Friend.

Wordsworth habitually links people with places in an elegiac union. The people die, but the landscape remains to remind the poet of their deeds and thoughts. Geoffrey Hartman suggests that in Wordsworth's poetry nature takes on the aspect of a giant graveyard in which various natural objects seems to act as memorials to human actions (Wordsworth's Poetry 299). Indeed, there is a kinship between the Pastor in The Excursion, whose duty it is to remember the names and deeds of those who lie buried in unmarked graves, and the poet, who similarly records the deeds of men.

Yet the poet's duty is not only to remember but to recreate, for though the poem records an event in time, it becomes an epitaph, a permanent memorial which removes the event from time and makes the past a perpetual present.

NOTES

- 1 Scott was uniquely qualified to write about Burns' poems and songs but his firm belief in the moral influence of famous example led him to present an unflattering example of Burns as a man who forgot the responsibilities of genius.
- 2 Gray's letter is not extant and the only reference to it is at the beginning of Wordsworth's pamphlet. The nature of the relationship between Gilbert Burns, Gray and Wordsworth is not known. There are a few letters between Gray and Wordsworth as well as an account of Gray's visit to Rydal in the Dove Cottage collection.
- 3 For the influence of epitaphs upon Wordsworth's poetry, see Geoffrey Hartman, "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Poetry" in Harold Bloom and Frederick W. Hilles (eds), From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle (New York: OUP, 1965), pp 389-405

X. THE POET AS POLITICIAN

And now, O Friend! this history is brought
To its appointed close: the discipline
And consummation of a Poet's mind,
In everything that stood most prominent,
Have faithfully been pictured...

(Prel XIV 302-6)

The French Revolution in the Eighteenth century and the great reform movements of the Nineteenth century were the political events that dominated Wordsworth's long career and, as his political views changed, he responded to these historic events, in poetry and prose, in significantly different ways.

In January 1793 Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff and erstwhile supporter of the French Revolution, turned apostate and in an appendix to a volume of sermons, denounced the revolution and its supporters. In February or March 1793 Wordsworth wrote his reply to Bishop Watson in the form of an open letter -- which was not finished and never published in his lifetime. It was discovered by Helen Darbyshire among the papers bequeathed by Gordon Wordsworth to the Dove Cottage Trust.

Wordsworth's position in the letter is antiaristocratic, anti-monarchical and thoroughly republican. He was clearly stung by Bishop Watson's apparent breach of political faith for his letters contains several remarks concerning "an enemy in our ranks" and Bishop Watson's "desertion" (I 49).

There is little in Wordsworth's letter, as C.W. Roberts

points out, that is not taken from Godwin (Roberts 226), in particular the reliance on rationalism and the rejection of intuitive and instinctive pity (especially when directed towards Louis XVI) as "irrational and weak" (I 33). F.M. Todd indicates Wordsworth's debt to Paine, in particular his attack on the hereditary principle and his defence of the behavior of the mob while under the residual influence of monarchical corruption (Todd 61-2).

Wordsworth's intention in the Letter to Llandaff is to justify the violence of the French Revolution and, it is hardly surprising that his language should assume a correspondingly violent character, yet the most aggressive of his descriptions are used, not of the oppressive rulers, but of the angry mob who "[strip]" the clergy of their possessions (I 34, 35), who have the "privilege of annihilating the trust" given to a chosen leader (I 37) and who "[destroy] every external object of delusion" (I 38). Words like "violence" (I 33, 34), "compel" (I 39), "destroy" (I 36, 38) and "enforce" (I 34) recur throughout the text with reference to the behaviour of the mob. That Wordsworth is not entirely convinced by his own defence is evident in his his choice of simile:

The animal just released from his stall will exhaust the overflow of its spirit in a round of wanton vagaries, but it will soon return to itself and enjoy its freedom in moderate and regular delight (I 38).

Despite his conscious espousal of the writings of Godwin and Paine, the analogy between the mob and a wanton stable beast

reveals a dislike of mob behaviour and the emphasis of the sentence is clearly on moderation and regularity, rather than on "freedom". Wordsworth's stated preference for the "open field of a republic" rather than "the shade of monarchy" reveals a similar tension. The metaphor of the tree and the shade does not immediately call to mind a destructive image of monarchy, but rather a beneficent and protective one; while the metaphor of the open field implies not only freedom but vulnerability and exposure.

The Letter to Llandaff is closely allied with the poetry of Descriptive Sketches, The Convict and Salisbury Plain, which are inspired by the same republican creed, revolutionary zeal and violence of description. The conclusion of Descriptive Sketches, for example, reveals the French Revolution as a fulfillment of the Biblical covenant in the form of a modern deluge of freedom:

Oh give, great God, to Freedom's waves to ride
 Sublime o'er Conquest, Avarice, and Pride,
 ...
 And grant that every sceptred child of clay,
 Who cries, presumptuous, 'here their tides shall stay',
 Swept in their anger from th'affrighted shore,
 With all his creatures sink -- to rise no more.

(Descriptive Sketches 722-809)

Wordsworth implies that, like the Biblical prototype, the revolution will sweep down from the high valleys of the Alps, purging the surrounding territories from all their corruption. The violence of the action is implicit in Wordsworth's metaphor which compares the revolution with the catastrophic Flood. The conclusion was significantly

altered by the poet in 1835, and records his later belief that democracy, when it eventually happens, would be a gradual movement, reflecting the general will of all people.

The style of the Letter to Llandaff may also be compared with Salisbury Plain in which a traveller's encounters with vagrant women on the plain is recounted. In Salisbury Plain the traveller echoes many of the ideas of the letter: he urges reform and, in language dense with personified abstractions and analogies, he places his trust in the advancing wave of freedom and, by implication, condones its violence.

The violence of Wordsworth's style in the Letter to Llandaff is also evident in his rather heavy-handed use of satire and sarcasm against his opponent. "I congratulate you" (I 47) or "we thank you" (I 49) he remarks as he pounces on a contradiction or inconsistency in Watson's arguments. In an obvious attempt to undermine Bishop Watson's status as a religious leader he compares him to a drunk man:

In some parts of England it is quaintly said, when a drunken man is seen reeling towards his home, that he has business on both sides of the road. Observing your lordship's tortuous path, the spectators will be far from insinuating that you have partaken of Mr Burke's intoxicating bowl; they will content themselves, shaking their heads as you stagger along, with remarking that you have business on both sides of the road" (I 49).

Wordsworth's attack degenerates into personal ridicule. There is, he would later write, "a spice of malignity" in

all satires "whatever the authors may say" (E.Y. 155).

A predominant metaphor in the Letter to Llandaff is that of birth. Wordsworth clearly sees the French Revolution as the birth of a new society: the period is "big with the fate of the human race" (I 32). Yet it is not the birth (or re-birth) that is stressed but the violence of birth. The "present convulsions" (I 32) occupy Wordsworth's thoughts, although it is hoped that they are "convulsion[s] from which is to spring a fairer order of things" (I 34) and that "a race of men" who are "truly free" will be "creat[ed]" (I 34).

If the new order is described in terms of a violent, but ultimately fruitful birth, the old order is described in images of "barrenness" (I 48) and stillbirth. Burke's appeals to the ideal of chivalry and historical continuity are rejected as attempts to "cherish a corpse at the bosom when reason might call aloud that it should be tombed" (I 48). The comparison is again equivocal for it suggests an image which evokes pity rather than disgust.

In one of the more startling images of birth that Wordsworth uses in his letter, we find that, despite his fiery rhetoric, he looks callously upon human life. He expresses the hope that, under the new dispensation, "the bulk of mankind" will no longer be tempted:

to fly to that promiscuous intercourse to which they are impelled by the instincts of nature, and the dreadful satisfaction of escaping the prospect of infants, sad fruit of such intercourse, whom they are unable to support (I 43).

Wordsworth betrays an aversion towards the common man in his man-as-stable-beast image. Wordsworth's greater compassion towards his fellow men is apparent, for example, in his letter to Sarah and Mary Hutchinson describing the political, or sociological background to his poetic aims in Resolution and Independence. Wordsworth points out that the leechgatherer is to be considered as "carrying with him his own fortitude, and the necessities which an unjust state of society has entailed upon him" (E.Y. 306). But despite the "unjust state of society", Wordsworth no longer sees the poor as social "helots", nor are "mendicants" considered as a "class of wretches" whose existence "shocks the feelings of humanity" (I 43).

Although his period as a revolutionary was not a long one, it nevertheless had a profound influence on many aspects of Wordsworth's work. Indeed, many years after he had renounced radical political activities Wordsworth was still considered to be revolutionary as poet. The Preface to Lyrical Ballads may be read as a revolutionary document which attacks previously held notions of poetry. Indeed, Wordsworth connects his literary revolution to those "of society itself" (I 121). Wordsworth muse, Hazlitt writes, is a "leveling" one (Howe V 61-3). He did not forget his old democratic sympathies and, even in 1837, after a Continental tour, the poet's interest in causes of national freedom was undimmed and he returned to compose a fiery set of sonnets on the Italian struggle for independence.

On the whole, however, Wordsworth's interest in politics

from 1797 onward, assumed more of a personal nature as he considered himself and other individuals as political beings. Marilyn Butler suggests that:

At the end of the 1790's, not only in the subject matter of the Lyrical Ballads but in the scale of discussion in the Preface [Wordsworth and Coleridge] achieve a startling contraction, a domestication of their subject to the scale of a single individual and his experience (Butler 165).

Wordsworth's interest in politics may be seen in his analysis of the revolutionary mind (such as that of Oswald in The Borderers) and in allowing the reader into the thoughts and feelings of characters who have suffered political and social oppression. As Wordsworth rejected his revolutionary attitudes we witness not a reduction of interest in political events, but a growing compassion. Herman Wuscher, in his study of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity in Wordsworth, points out that Wordsworth relinquishes the rhetoric of universal brotherhood in favour of an immediately felt brotherly bond between individual and individual (Wuscher 148-50).

Poetic activity, for Wordsworth, becomes another kind of political activity. He avoided confrontation both in France and in his failure to publish the Letter to Llandaff, but strove to address the issues of the age in poetry rather than in political prose. Political revolution had failed precisely because it had neglected the passions and affections of men. Wordsworth hoped to reach a larger and more sympathetic audience through poetry. Burke points out

that:

The worst of the politics of revolution is this: they temper and harden the breast, in order to prepare it for the desperate Strokes which are sometimes used in extreme occasions. But, as these occasions may never arrive, the mind receives a gratuitous taint; and the moral sentiments suffer not a little (Reflections 52)...

Wordsworth's art would thus become an instrument that actively seeks to attain the ends that revolution had failed to achieve: the regeneration of human nature. Through the medium of his poetry the reader would be "in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified" (I 127).

Wordsworth's putting aside of his political prose in favour of an exploration of his personal reactions to the French Revolution in The Prelude is in an attempt to find a middle ground where he, Janus-like, could face two ways at once: outwards towards society and inwards to the life of the imagination. Books X-XIII of The Prelude provide an answer to the question: what is the proper relationship between the poet and his society? The poet traces his transition from revolutionary goals to compassionate ideals, from external to internal goals, from preoccupation with political affairs to concern with poetic ones -- the value of poetry and the imagination are asserted because they are dependent on all spheres of human experience. The Prelude, which enacts the poet's intellectual and spiritual journey, is thus also a national epic since it explicitly weighs the

social and political ideology of the French Revolution against the ideology of conservative powers.

* * *

It was not until 1809 that Wordsworth again sought to address himself, in political prose, to the problems of the age. Popular uprisings against Napoleon's rule in Spain and Portugal began in 1807 and the early success of the insurgents won many allies among Bonaparte's enemies. The English Government, urged on by considerations of military strategy as well as idealistic appeals, formed an alliance with the Iberian rebels; but shortly thereafter the British generals betrayed their Spanish and Portuguese allies by signing the Convention of Cintra with France -- a treaty so lenient towards the defeated French army as to make the Iberian victory valueless¹.

The generals, Wordsworth claims, "had changed all things into their opposites":

hope into despair; triumph into defeat;
confidence into treachery...justice into the
keenest injury. -- Whom had they delivered but
the Tyrant in captivity? Whose hands had they
bound but those of their Allies, ...Whom had they
punished but the innocent sufferer? Whom rewarded
but the guiltiest of Oppressors? They had
reversed everything:-- favour and honour for
their enemies -- insult for their friends and
robbery (they had both protected the person of
the robber and secured him to his booty) and
opprobrium for themselves; -- to those over whom
they had been masters, who had crouched to them
by an open act of submission, they had made
themselves servants (I 252)...

Throughout the pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra Wordsworth presents us with startling images of a world gone mad, of inverted values and ideals. Even the "British Lion" himself is changed into "a beast of burden, to carry a vanquished enemy, with his load of iniquities, when and wither it had pleased him" (I 253). The Spanish had expected a "garland" and had been given a "yoke" (I 227), they had asked to help, and were "level[ed] to the ground with one blow (I 253). The English generals have "forgot the nature of their calling", and have acted like "an ordinary bargain-maker in a fair or market", or as if they had been "men of common sagacity for business" (I 257). The defeated French sing "songs of savage triumph and wicked gaiety" (I 290).

Wordsworth finds himself compelled to speak out against this travesty of justice:

Condemnation of actions and men like these is not...a matter of choice; it is like a physical necessity (I 263).

In his pamphlet Wordsworth recreates the events leading up to the Convention of Cintra by dramatising the thoughts and motives of the opposing sides, and intersperses these with extracts from the reports of the Spanish junta and English Generals:

It is not from any thought that I am communicating new information [Wordsworth writes]...but to recall to the reader his own knowledge, and to re-infuse into that knowledge a breath and life of appropriate feeling; because the bare sense of wisdom is nothing without its

powers, and it is only in these feelings that the powers of wisdom exist (I 248).

Wordsworth's style of dramatizing the events puts the case vividly before the reader, who is then able to make his own moral judgement on the conduct of the various parties, according to his feelings of "indignation", "sorrow", "shame" and his "sense of right and wrong" (I 275). The Cintra tract is thus in its conception an imaginative piece, a prose-poem: "an impassioned strain...without aid of numbers" (sonnet VII), "a dirge devoutly breathed o'er sorrows past", but also a "prophecy" telling "of bright calms that shall succeed" (sonnet VIII).

The right of the Spanish cause is presented in vivid natural imagery. The moral strength of the Spanish army is compared with the Nile in flood, spreading over "the whole face of the land" (I 234). Wordsworth predicts the recovery of the nation "as the root of a majestic tree recovered from a long disease, and beginning again to flourish with promise of wider branches and a deeper shade than it had boasted in the fullness of its strength" (I 228), or he compares their ability to recover with "the bodies of the Angels" which, though cut, "unite again" (I 235). In contrast their false allies are like an oak which does not "lift its branches towards the heavens", but strikes its roots downwards towards hell" (I 265).

Clearly, Wordsworth is not concerned with arguments of political expediency but makes "claims upon humanity" (I 278) and upon the "moral nature of man" (I 328) -- themes

which are emphasized by his use of a poetic and emotive style. He is not primarily interested in the political advantages of the convention, though he does call into doubt the likelihood of any political advantage or the existence of any political good cause whatever. Wordsworth's interest is in the moral issues:

The fact of subjugated Spain may be expressed in these words, -- pillage -- depressions -- and helotism -- for the supposed aggrandizement of of the imaginary freeman its master (I 330).

In effect, the Convention of Cintra pamphlet is Wordsworth's Statesman's Manual -- and it is characterised by the same organically related concerns as Coleridge's work. It contends that beneath the conditions of the treaty lurks a disease of the English spirit, untreatable by political nostrums. "I have been noticing", Wordsworth writes, "a delusion":

it is this: that practical Statesmen assume too much credit to themselves for their ability to see into the motives and manage the selfish passions of their immediate agents and dependents (I 305)...

Time and again in his essay Wordsworth asserts that rulers must "begin with their own minds" (I 310) and must look to [themselves]" (I 342); they must consider the moral implications of political action, as well as its short term material advantages. Tyranny, Wordsworth writes:

is, in the strictest sense, intolerable; not because it aims at the extinction of life, but of everything which gives life value -- of virtue, of reason, of repose in God, or in truth (I 254).

Michael Friedman, in The Making of a Tory Humanist, writes that:

Wordsworth's thought is so highly integrated that it is not possible, in reading the Cintra tract, to separate Wordsworth's political theory from his ethics, epistemology, psychology, and aesthetics (Friedman 247).

These interrelationships are clearly evident in Wordsworth's refusal to separate political from moral behaviour and in his dismissal of abstractions and euphemisms. He insists on dealing with the problem as he sees it: the moral nature of the individual and the suffering of individuals.

Wordsworth views the partisan warfare as an imaginative experience in a number of ways. The spectacle of the small Iberian nations raised "to an elevated mood" by "indignant passions" (I 234) fires the imagination of her allies. The Spanish do not intend self-aggrandizement, but the restoration and protection of their community, and such resistance is seen by the poet as an act of imaginative fulfillment. Wordsworth asserts that "in the moral virtues and qualities of passion which belong to a people, must the ultimate salvation of a people be sought for" (235). Community is, in Wordsworth definition, an ideal state linked backwards in time to its ancestors and forwards to posterity:

And surely to a people thus united in their minds with the heroism of years which have been long departed, and living under such obligation of gratitude to their ancestors, it is not difficult...to take upon themselves the highest obligations of duty of their posterity; to enjoy

in the holiness of imagination the happiness of unborn ages to which they shall have eminently contributed; and that each man, fortified by these thoughts, should welcome despair for himself, because it is the assured mother of hope for his country (I 244).

The ideas which emerge from Wordsworth's discussion of the Spanish cause: the value of passions roused by injustice and the importance of the defence of community are themes which recur in Wordsworth's prose and poetry. The poems of Lyrical Ballads pay tribute to their author's passions, which are associated with worthy subjects and purposes; while Book I of The Recluse, Home at Grasmere, celebrates the virtues of communal life and its traditions.

Throughout his essay Wordsworth stresses the importance of the interaction between an individual and the world at large -- whether that individual is a political leader or an ordinary member of his society. The responsibility for political action must be borne by individuals and while the individual may, to a certain extent, be a product of his society and its values, it is nevertheless his duty to transcend its norms in the pursuit of excellence:

the vigour of the human soul is from without and from futurity,-- in breaking down limit, and losing and forgetting herself in the sensation and image of Country and of the human race; and, when she returns and is most restricted and confined, her dignity consists in the contemplation of a better and more exalted being, which, though proceeding from herself, she loves and is devoted to as to another (I 292).

Wordsworth thus reduces all action: political, moral, social and aesthetic, to the simple foundation of human passion,

intellect and, by implication, imagination. It is from this base that all human activity emanates and it is by this standard that all human actions should be judged. It is these communal interests that justify Wordsworth in his instruction of statesmen:

we may confidently affirm [he states] that nothing, but a knowledge of human nature directing the operations of our government, can give it a right to an intimate association with a cause which is that of human nature (I 304).

But statesmen and courtiers are deracinated, cut off from experience and knowledge of human nature. England, Wordsworth writes, is developing "Mechanic Arts, Manufactures, Agriculture, Commerce, and all those products of knowledge which are confined to gross -- definite -- and tangible objects" (I 324) while works of imagination and sensibility are languishing:

the splendour of the Imagination has been fading: Sensibility, which was formerly a generous nurseling of rude Nature, has been chased from its ancient range in the wide domain of patriotism and religion with the weapons of derision by a shadow calling itself Good Sense: calculations of presumptuous Expediency -- groping its way among partial and temporary consequences -- have been substituted for the dictates of paramount and fallible Conscience, the supreme embracer of consequences: lifeless and circumspect Decencies have banished the graceful negligence and unsuspecting dignity of Virtue (I 325).

The passage is almost Blakean in its metaphoric linking of a limited Newtonian rationalism with death. In contrast:

The Spaniards are a people with imagination; and the paradoxical reveries of Rousseau, and the flippancies of Voltaire, are plants which will not naturalise in the country of Calderon and Cervantes (I 352).

The state of literature, Wordsworth suggests, is an accurate reflection of the spirit of the age. There is an implied parallel that suggests that a country which has produced Wordsworth cannot have lost all its beliefs in the value of humanity and the life of the community! The relationship between the poet and his society can, of course, work the other way; and Wordsworth clearly did believe that it was possible for a poet to inject new life into his society.

It is for this reason that Wordsworth returns to poetry, rather than to prose, as his medium of communication. He hopes, not only to reach a large audience but to affect the way in which that audience feels and behaves.

It is in this regard that I would challenge the contention of critics like E.P. Thompson who claim that Wordsworth turned his back on society and turned inwards as an escape from society (O'Brian 152-3). Wordsworth does turn inwards and he does turn to the individual, but the movement inwards is not an escape from society but is a period of meditation, which is often in itself an implicit address to society, or which precedes a more public mode. The arrangement of Wordsworth's poems demonstrates the complementary nature of these inward and outward shifts. Under the heading of "Poems of the Imaginations", for example, there are outward-looking, society-addressing

poems like Song at The Feast of Brougham Castle and The French Revolution as well as the so-called "self-communing" poems, like Tintern Abbey ².

At the time when Wordsworth was developing his ideas on the Convention of Cintra, he was was also developing the sonnet as a form ideally suited to the analysis of political argument, because of its compact and orderly structure. Although some of the "Poems dedicated to National Independence and Liberty" are odes or other forms, the predominant form in the series is the Miltonic sonnet in which octave and sextet are divided, respectively, into proposition and development, question and response, or argument and counter-argument.

These political sonnets, perhaps because of Byron's accusation that by the time Wordsworth came to write them he had "turn'd both his creed and his coat" (The Blues II 55), have the reputation of being a turncoat's creed. Not many critics have studied the political sonnets, but those who have accuse Wordsworth of extreme conservatism (Eagleton 20), of enunciating "an anti-democratic doctrine which foreshadows the 'hero-worship' of Carlyle" (Lehman 640).

Wordsworth does single out individuals whose actions are worthy of praise but he does not degenerate into mindless hero-worship. In the Cintra tract he had written that:

There is an unconquerable tendency in all power, save that of knowledge acting by and through knowledge, to injure the mind of him who exercises that power; so much so that best natures cannot escape the evil of such alliance (I 308).

Wordsworth realised that power inevitably corrupts even conquering heroes.

To regard the poems as the expressions of a complacent conservatism is to misread them entirely. The predominant features of the sonnets are the Miltonic outbursts: calls to arms, exhortations to his country to regenerate and reform herself. The sonnet sequence begins with a series of daring and spirited attacks upon England's shortcomings and her failure to assert herself as the moral leader of Western Europe

Therefore the wise pray for thee, though the freight
Of thy offences be a heavy weight:
Oh grief that Earth's best hopes rest all with Thee!
(I XXI)

The rantings and impassioned outbursts are tempered by Wordsworth's faith in an essentially English tradition of liberty and idealism, for "Great men have been among us; hands that penned/ and tongues that uttered wisdom" (I VX).

The next series of sonnets are directed to Spain and the insurgent Germans as well as to Wordsworth's own country. The Iberian sonnets, in particular, closely parallel the sentiments expressed in the Cintra tract: the poet links himself in sympathy with the Spanish rising against Napoleon and, as in the Cintra pamphlet, he does not review the rising in military or political terms, but as a moral force which is the centre of a new hope for millions of Europeans under Napoleon's despotism.

The continuation of the discourse through prose and

poetry is not as strange as it might at first seem. The sonnets highlight or encapsulate the larger themes of the prose work. The poetry allows the poet, and reader, to focus on details that tend to get lost in the lengthy prose essay, in particular, the poetry allows us into the minds and feelings of individuals, for example: "Feelings of a Noble Biscayan", or "Indignation of a High-Minded Spaniard". Poetry tends to be read rather differently from prose; the reiteration of a theme or idea in poetry has a somewhat different effect and the reader is able to muse on the symbolism of the "happy garlands of the pure white rose" or the "oak at Guernica".

The self-consciously poetic language of the political sonnets, the Biblical turn of phrase and the archaisms are usually taken by critics as evidence of Wordsworth's decaying imaginative powers and as a reinforcement of his growing political conservatism. Hugh l'Anson Fausset, in his study called The Lost Leader, writes that:

life gradually ceased to inform [Wordsworth's] views, as they hardened into the fixed dogmas and prejudices which he donned as an armour against the radical tendencies in his age and the disintegrating tendencies in himself (l'Anson Fausset 412).

Biblical and archaic language require an interpretation that is different from that of straightforward prose, especially when used in a modern context. The sonnets move backwards and forwards in time, from Ancient times to some unspecified time in the future and the universality of the

archaic terms enhance the poet's attempts to broaden the issues of his concern. In the same way the Miltonic allusion³ in "Spanish Guerrillas", universalises and ennobles the actions of the liberating Spanish army:

They seek, are sought; to daily battle led,
Shrink not, though far outnumbered by their Foes,
For they have learnt to open and to close
The ridges of grim war; and at their head
Are captains such as erst their country bred
Or fostered, self-supporting chiefs, -- like those
Whom hardy Rome was fearful to oppose;
Whose desperate shock the Cathaginian fled.
(II XXXI)

The Spanish Guerrillas are thus compared to Milton's angels in the war in Heaven and their heroic status is further enhanced by the references to the events of classical history. The poetic language thus evokes a complex, emotive response which would be quite impossible to achieve in straightforward prose.

The political sonnet sequences allow Wordsworth to pause during his lengthy and ardent meditation on the rule of nations in order to collect and focus his thoughts on single, urgent problems. One of the most striking examples of such concentrated thought is the sonnet which adumbrates the theme of the entire Cintra tract in exposing the heresy of the age:

O'erweening Statesmen have full long relied
On fleets and armies, and external wealth:
But from within proceeds a Nation's health;
Which shall not fail, though poor men cleave with pride
To the paternal floor; or turn aside,
In the thronged city, from the walks of gain,
As being unworthy to detain
A Soul by contemplation sanctified.
(II XXIX)

* * *

Political matters continued to interest Wordsworth throughout his long life. In fact, it is precisely because of his increasing involvement in local politics that his later political prose fails to attain the disinterestedness and generality of the Cintra tract. The Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmorland are not entirely without merit, although Wordsworth does not achieve the balance between contemporary reference and universal reflection that characterised the Cintra tract. Wordsworth's role in the Westmorland election of 1818 has been extensively documented (Moorman II 337-59); and the products of that involvement comprise several letters (both public and private), some poetry, and the election pamphlets known as Two Addresses to The Freeholders of Westmorland. The pamphlets, which indulge in much propaganda for Lord Lonsdale, are generally regarded as the lowpoint of Wordsworth's political life.

Wordsworth's Addresses anticipate many of the Coleridgean principles of The Statesman's Manual and On The Constitution of The Church and State, without Coleridge's horror of the mob or of "plebification". Indeed, where Coleridge insists that:

in the disclosure of opinion, it is our duty to consider the character of those to whom we address ourselves, their situations, and probable degree of knowledge. We should be bold in the avowal of political truth among those only whose minds are susceptible of reasoning: and never to the multitude, who, ignorant and needy, must

necessarily act from the impulse of inflamed passions... Consequently we should plead for the oppressed, not to them (Essays on Literature in Our Times 21-9)

Wordsworth does not call upon Torydom to save the people; he calls upon the people to save themselves. Although wary of mass movements and popular reform, Wordsworth has rather more faith in the ordinary inhabitants of Westmorland who, after all, appear in many poems to inspire and instruct both poet and reader. Wordsworth's call is not for reform, but for "a restoration of that genuine English character, by which alone the confidence of the sound part of the People can be recovered" (III 163 *my italics*). The Convention of Cintra tract had appealed to the inherent virtue of common men against the cowardice and equivocation of their leaders; the Addresses to The Freeholders, which directly address the ordinary voters of the district, appeals, in a similar manner, to their common sense and their spirit of independence. The Freeholders, Wordsworth believes, are "honest Englishmen" (III 159), unaccustomed to "submitting" before either landowners or merchants (III 154).

In Westmorland there was little evidence of the resident gentry; Wordsworth had, as he points out in The Prelude (IX, 217ff), hardly ever in youth encountered a human being who claimed superiority due to birth or rank. Social oppression was not the predominant hardship of the North Country. Unlike the pauperized masses of the South, a great many of the local inhabitants were small independent farmers, or "statesmen", who owned the land they worked on, even though

they lived in hardship and poverty.

Wordsworth's arguments in the two Addresses, as F.M. Todd points out, are not entirely concerned with party politics (Todd 177). Lonsdale was no ordinary Tory, and Brougham was no ordinary Whig. Wordsworth is able to justify his admiration for Lord Lonsdale for he writes:

I do not think that there exists in England a man of any rank more anxiously desirous to discharge his duty in that station of life to which it has pleased God to call him... The more he is known, the more he is beloved, and respected and admired (M.Y. II 598).

The Lowther representatives, Wordsworth believes:

are independent in every rational sense of the word; acknowledging, however, that they rest upon a principle, and are incorporated with an interest; and this they regard as a proof that their affections are sane, and their understandings superior to illusion (III 170).

Brougham, on the other hand, offers not independence but a "dark dependence" (III 182), licence in place of liberty (170), "jacobinical infatuation" (III 170) and the dangerous theories of Paine (III 179).

Wordsworth's main objection to Brougham's candidature for a Westmorland seat is his threat to the established order of Lakeland life. Lonsdale, Wordsworth believes, is the best representative precisely because he has so much vested in the country, while Brougham, a newcomer, owns no substantial property nor has any knowledge of the traditions and characters of the local inhabitants. In a political squib written at the time of the election but published much

later, Wordsworth is unable to resist questioning the sincerity of Brougham's motives, for he points out that there was a time when Brougham would have been content to join the ranks of the Tories, had they been prepared to accept him:

...from the Castle's turrets blew
 A chill forbidding blast,
 Which the poor Broom ⁴ no sooner felt
 Than she shrank up as fast;
 Her wished-for yellow ⁵ she forswore,
 And since that time has cast
 Fond looks on colours three or four
 And put forth blue at last.

(PW IV 377)

Until the arrival of Brougham, Wordsworth claims that the "County has not for a long time been disturbed by electioneering contests" (III 170), and he goes on to ask:

Is there no species of choice, then, but that which is accompanied with commotion and clamour? Do silent acquiescence and deliberate consent pass for nothing? Being contented, what could we seek for more? Being satisfied, why should we stir for stirring's sake (III 170-1)?

Wordsworth does not deny that there are abuses and injustices within the present system, in particular, the matter of tithes and the Poor Laws (III 169); but he does question Brougham's ability to correct them:

This is the heaviest burthen that now lies upon England!--Here is a necessity for reform which, as it cannot prosper unless it begin from the Government and the upper ranks of society, has no attraction for demagogues and mob-exciting patriots (III 169).

Like Burke before him, Wordsworth is concerned to point out

that "to innovate is not to reform" (Reflections 120). Indeed, the election Addresses give evidence of Burke's growing influence on Wordsworth's political principles. At the time of the Addresses Wordsworth uses, for the first time, another Burkean principle, namely, the necessity for balancing the political forces of the time. "What else", he wrote to Lord Lonsdale:

but the stability and might of a large estate, with proportional influence in the House of Commons, can counter-balance the democratic activity of the wealthy commercial and manufacturing districts (M.Y. II 804).

The idea of political balance is further explained in the note to the Addresses wherein Wordsworth concludes that:

The amicable reader will rejoice with me that, in spite of mutual shocks and encroachments, the three Orders of State are preserved in salutary equipoise, although the mode of bringing this about has unavoidably changed with change of circumstances. The spirit of the Constitution remains unimpaired, nor have the essential parts of its frame undergone any alteration (193).

The idea of the balance of the forces of "permanence" and "progression" (in Coleridge's term (On the Constitution of the Church and State 16)) and the idea of the "spirit of the Constitution", which allows for change by its very nature, anticipate Coleridge's great debate on the nature of governments and their rule.

Perhaps the most inspiring concept to emerge from Wordsworth's Addresses to The Freeholders is his idea of the common man. Wordsworth does not patronise his audience

and, unlike many Tories of the time, clearly believes that the common people were something other than a mob and had instincts and habits something above drunkenness, gullibility and ignorance. The Addresses to The Freeholders of Westmorland may be contrasted with George Eliot's Address to The Working Men (in the persona of Felix Holt) written on the eve of the Great Reform Bill some fifteen year later. There the dangers of active democracy are expressed with cynicism and with loss of human respect (Felix Holt 613). Even greater is the contrast between Wordsworth's pamphlet and a work like Carlyle's Shooting Niagara in which the characters of the common people are reduced to "blockheadism, gullibility, bribeability, amenability to beer and balderdash" (Carlyle 79).

Wordsworth's part in the 1818 election did not indicate a permanent reconciliation to Tory policies; although he looked upon the Opposition as "the costumelious and vacillating Whigs", he found little to recommend the "prostrate Tories" (L.Y. II 548). Wordsworth's Toryism was not of the cynical or complacent variety but was always tempered by an idealistic humanism.

Wordsworth's fears concerning the nature of popular reform and its selfserving spokesmen proved to be well founded. On the whole, the Reform Act of 1832 did not serve the interests of the working class but served instead the industrial middle class of employers. These newly risen men were, at the turn of the century, an underpriveleged class

as, owing to the growth and changed distribution of the population, parliament was more unrepresentative than ever before (Webb II 146). This class of "self made" men used slogans like "the common good" to gain power, but once the Reform Act was passed, conveniently forget their obligations to their voters. By the time the workers woke up to the fact that the Reform Act served only to increase their employers' power, it was too late; for such men were inevitably obstructive to humanistic reform, contemptuously indifferent to education and actively resistant to the attempts of the working class to achieve political power. It was left, not to the Whigs, but to conservatives like the Earl of Shaftesbury and Disraeli to amend the worst abuses.

In fact, the reform movement was paradoxical in its operation: it liberated society from laws that were inefficient survivals from the past, like the Elizabethan Poor Laws, only to replace them with laws that operated with cold inhumanity, like the New Poor Law, which made life on relief more degrading than the most unpleasant means of earning a living; it reduced senseless government interference in society, but neglected to allow for necessary government intervention; it liberated employers, but did not concern itself with the needs of employees; its principle was benevolence, but it was heartlessly indifferent to human suffering (Webb II 85-95).

Wordsworth's distrust of popular reform movements did not make him indifferent to the need for reform. He did not, for example, harbour the sentimental notion that all was peace,

rusticity and happy poverty in Grasmere. Both Dorothy's Journals and Wordsworth's poetry reveal that they were well aware of the poverty and suffering around them. But while recognizing the hardships suffered by many of his fellow Lakelanders, Wordsworth did not wish to see the independent statesmen reformed out of their condition; he admired them as they were and his thoughts on reform consist of musings on the possible ways in which the local inhabitants and their way of life may be preserved. Carl Woodring writes that:

According to the elderly Wordsworth's view the philosophic radical is certain that his own enlightened state is superior to the state of the lowly; ... the later Wordsworth remains more humble than the reformer who would have people changed along with their condition (Woodring 146).

The proud, independent spirit of the Lakeland farmer, who is attached to his plot of ground and the values of his community, is not only a significant figure in Wordsworth's poetry -- he is a role model for Wordsworth as poet. His combination of individual pride with a spirit of community underlies Wordsworth's own conception of the combined independence and civic responsibility of the artist. The threatened extinction of this group, either by capitalistic agricultural practices or by the great reform movements of the time, was thus felt by Wordsworth as a threat to his own role in society.

As a result of this forced reconsideration of his own

position, Wordsworth's poetry after the 1820's becomes more overtly political than ever before. Wordsworth is more occupied with the sort of political sonnet sequences that directly address contemporary matters. The Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty and Order, for example have titles such as Composed After Reading a Newspaper of the Day, or Upon the Late General Fast, March 1832.

The series called Sonnets Upon the Punishment of Death reveal Wordsworth's reaction to Bentham's reforms in the penal code. Wordsworth's Ecclesiastical Sonnets present his views, through a historical survey, on the pressing issue of Church autonomy. The imagery of certain poems becomes more obviously political. The river or stream, always a Wordsworthian symbol of natural freedom, becomes in the Duddon sequences, in poems like "The unremitting voice of nightly streams", Grace Darling, or Humanity, representative of political liberty and order. Wind, storms, and torrents, previously associated with violent passions, now become symbols for immoderate political action.

* * *

The poetry written at the time the Cintra pamphlet expounded the need for moral regeneration and spiritual reform; the poetry of the 1820's onward deals with specific political matters of the time. Wordsworth saw his new poetic role as twofold: to speak out against the dangers of misguided and premature reform while, at the same time, to assert his continued affection and support for the lower

classes of society.

Nowhere does Wordsworth better demonstrate this conciliatory role than in his Postscript to Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems. F.M. Todd writes:

On measures such as the Reform Bill, Catholic emancipation and the abolition of slavery, he had pointed the danger of an unreflecting benevolence, of a humanitarianism which refused to be modified by a consideration of circumstances; but in face of the heartless economic theory embodied in the new Whig Poor Law he appealed to that same benevolence, to that same human charity, to counter the dictates of the unfeeling intelligence. It is a tribute to his sincerity that his desire to recall legislators to their sentiments led him to as notable extremes in one direction as his previous anxiety to recall them to their senses had done in another. For that reason the Postscript makes refreshing reading (Todd 40).

In the first section of the Postscript, Wordsworth attacks the heartless Malthusian and Utilitarian principles of the Poor Law Amendment Act and asserts his belief:

that all persons who cannot find employment, or procure wages sufficient to support the body in health and strength, are entitled to a maintenance by law (III 240).

Wordsworth's faith in the fundamental virtue, honesty and dignity of the poor is clearly as strong in 1835 as it was in 1798; his concern for the individual's dignity extends even to the dispensing of charity (III 245).

Wordsworth objects to the new Poor Laws because they uproot people from their homes, destroy their bonds with their community, and force them into workhouses. While there were many faults in the Elizabethan poor law structure, the

advantage was that people were not removed from their families and friends, but were assisted by their local parishes. If the Church and nobility are denied their proper responsibilities in the care of the poor, Wordsworth claims, this will inevitably result in distrust and revolt. He writes:

Now it may be affirmed that, in quarters where there is not an attachment to the Church or, the landed aristocracy, and a pride in supporting them, there the people will dislike both, and be ready, upon such incitements as are perpetually recurring, to join in attempts to overthrow them (III 249).

It is Wordsworth's contention that the "noble advance" (III 248) of the abolition of the slave trade has been negated by the introduction of a new kind of slavery: that of rampant capitalism. He appeals for humanity on the part of businessmen and industrialists and deplores the tendency among capitalists to see the working class as a resource to be exploited (III 244). It is at this point that Wordsworth's turns his attention to the unhappy lot of the urban poor and the conditions of their employment in factories and industry.

Wordsworth's solution to the problem of the factory workers has been described as innovative and even socialistic (Hartsell 617-26); but it has its roots in his attitude towards land ownership among the rural poor. As the urban worker works in a factory, rather than on the land, Wordsworth recommends a law to encourage the formation of joint-stock companies, partly for the prudential reason of

containing the trade unions, but also in order that workers might realize capital gains from their work:

The establishment of these [joint-stock companies] would enable a workman to turn his savings to account by vesting them in processes with which he was habitually connected (III 268)...

The urban poor of the industrialized South do not feature much in Wordsworth's poetry before 1835 (with the notable exception of The Excursion) for his main concern had always been with the rustic inhabitants of Westmorland. In the Yarrow Revisited collection there are a number of poems that deplore the plight of the working class; in Humanity (the significance of the title is obvious) Wordsworth writes:

Shame that our laws at distance still protect
 Enormities, which they at home reject!
 'Slaves cannot breathe in England!' -- yet that boast
 Is but a mockery! when from coast to coast,
 Though fettered slave be none, her floors and soil
 Groan underneath a weight of slavish toil,
 For the poor Many, measured out by rules
 Fetched with cupidity from heartless schools,
 That to an Idol, falsely called 'the Wealth
 Of Nations', sacrifices a People's health,
 Body and mind and soul; a thirst so keen
 Is ever urging on the vast machine
 Of sleepless Labour, 'mid whose dizzy wheels
 The Power least prized is that which thinks and feels.

In the political poems of 1835 onward Wordsworth assumes the role of "Bard", uttering dire warnings to the "Time leagued with adverse Change". In The Warning he writes:

--O for a bridle bitted with remorse
 To stop your Leaders in their headstrong course!
 Oh may the Almighty scatter with His grace
 These mists, and lead you to a safer place,
 By paths no human no human wisdom can foretrace!

In the third section of the Postscript Wordsworth voices his fear for the autonomy of the Church at the hands of a reformed Parliament. While he concedes that a measure of Church reform is necessary, Wordsworth believes that the prevailing spirit of reform reveals a desire to curtail the independence of the established Church, which would, of course include a threat to the individual's "liberty of conscience" (III 256). In the limiting of the powers of the Church, Wordsworth sees an attempt to limit its usefulness as a moderating influence in the reform process.

Wordsworth's conception of the clergy closely approximates Coleridge's views on the "clerisy", a body of educated men whose duties extend into realms of politics and culture (Church and State 36-8). Wordsworth writes that the "Christian pastor":

will be a teacher of moderation, a dispenser of the wisdom that blunts approaching distress by submission to God's will, and lightens, by patience, grievances which cannot be removed (III 253).

In the Postscript Wordsworth divides his discussion into three separate sections, but in the poetry of Yarrow Revisited he directs our attention to the interrelations between his subjects:

...these several Lays
Have moved in order, to each other bound
By a continuous and acknowledged tie
Though unapparent...

(Apology)

The ties that bind the poems are the complex ties of community. Under the ideal conditions of rural Scotland various classes of society are shown to be mutually supportive. In the Countess' Pillar a member of the aristocracy fulfills her responsibility towards the peasantry with affection. In On the Sight of a Manse Wordsworth shows us the good Priest "truly serving God". In the Highland Hut the humble cottagers instruct the reader to love "as Nature loves, the lonely Poor". The "Yarrow" poems, comprising descriptions of the interrelations in the community and the accommodating natural surroundings contrast sharply with the "Other Poems" included in the edition -- poems like Humanity and The Warning, which describe the less fortunate plight of the urban poor.

Wordsworth concludes his Postscript with a renewed wish to be considered as a teacher of men. His concept of the poet as teacher had been an important factor in Wordsworth's literary theory since the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. His teaching, prior to the 1820's had been largely concerned with the education of the "affections" and with the matter of natural and artificial "taste" in poetry; but here Wordsworth sees himself as a teacher of moderate political principles. "If a single workman", Wordsworth writes:

should read these lines and be touched by them, I should indeed rejoice, and little would I care for losing credit as a poet with intemperate critics (258)...

Wordsworth hopes that the sincerity of his concern for the

working class is evident, and he ends the Postscript by quoting, from The Prelude, his eulogy "To men as they are men within themselves". That he should quote from The Prelude, a work that was, for all intents and purposes, completed by 1805 in order to justify a political view in 1835 indicates that many of his fundamental ideas did not change. V.G. Kiernan, in his article on "Wordsworth and The People" writes that:

Under extreme adverse pressures [Wordsworth's] genius maintained itself for longer than that of most of the Romantic poets of Europe; because he was able, as The Prelude asserts over and over again, to maintain his faith in the common man and the qualities lurking in him (Craig 180).

It is not often that direct links between Wordsworth's political and poetic aspirations are evident; yet indisputably these links exist. The poetry and political prose reveal a similarity in their use of images, particularly of the independent farmer and the proud and virtuous poor; there are also consistently applied metaphors in the political writing and the political sonnets and in many cases it would appear that the prose writer gave the poet his goal. The facile view that after the "great decade" Wordsworth turned his back on politics and society is clearly unacceptable. If the influence of the French Revolution on his early work is evident, then it is clear that the great reform movements of the Nineteenth century exerted a major influence on the later poetry and prose.

NOTES

- 1 See Wordsworth's appendix on the terms of the treaty, Prose Works I 345 - 366.
- 2 Recent scholarship has shown that even the "self-communing" poetry is not quite as devoid of political comment as was previously thought. See, for example, Kenneth R. Johnston, "The Politics of Tintern Abbey", TWC 14 (1983) 6-13
- 3 See Paradise Lost, VI, ll 235 - 236: "...open when, and when to close/ The ridges of grim war..."
- 4 A pun on Brougham's name, as well as allusion to his Scots background.
- 5 In election time Westmorland Tories, to this day, wear yellow; in the rest of England they are, of course, true blue.

XII. THE POET AS LETTER WRITER

I will not conceal from you that I never set any value upon my Letters; and that it was my wish that they should have been destroyed as soon as read, and that I have frequently requested that this should be done. Allow me further to say that publishing the Letters of a living Person without his consent previously obtained furnishes a precedent the effect of which, as far as it acts, cannot but be to check the free communication between Man and Man (L.Y. II 957).

Letters are of a personal and less guarded nature than public utterances and it would therefore be unfair to use them in a prescriptive way for the interpretation of poetry or critical opinions. It is with these reservations that I include Wordsworth's letters in my discussion of his prose.

There are six volumes of the letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth and perhaps the most significant aspect of this large body of writing is the broadness of Wordsworth's interests and knowledge: there are letters to artists about painting, letters to country gentry about landscape gardening, letters to politicians about politics, letters to teachers about teaching, letters to ministers about religion and letters to parents about child-rearing -- to mention only a few. Among the most interesting letters are those in which Wordsworth talks about his own and other poetry.

The chronological sequence of the letters does not only insistently remind us of time passing in its record of marriages, births and deaths, but also emphasises Wordsworth's changing concepts of poet, poetry and

criticism. In the first volume the young Wordsworth gives an account of himself as an "enthusiast" of nature (E.Y. 34) an admirer of Alexander Pope (E.Y. 55) and Erasmus Darwin (E.Y. 169); he reads Monk Lewis (E.Y. 188) and Gilpin (E.Y. 155). He calls himself a "democrat" (E.Y. 116) and he intends to compose an "imitation of Juvenal" (E.Y. 143). He also shows a penchant for the elaborately decorative turn of phrase:

Such an excursion [he writes to the depressed William Mathews] would have served like an Aurora Borealis to gild your long Lapland night of melancholy (E.L. 55).

However, Wordsworth soon settles into his characteristic mode of writing about poetry, using the familiar terms and metaphors of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. He criticises The Female Vagrant for its "vicious" diction and "false" descriptions (E.Y. 270); Hogg's poem The Queen's Wake is "disfigured with false finery" (M.Y. I 601); Milton's sonnets are "manly and dignified compositions, distinguished by simplicity and unity of object and aim, and undisfigured by false or vicious ornaments" (E.Y. 312). The familiar terms of approbation and derogation make their appearance: the poet's style is lauded when it is "natural" (M.Y. II 789), "animated" (L.Y. I 221), when it reveals "simplicity" (L.Y. II 554) or "chastity" (L.Y. I 129), and when the expression is "vigorous" and "spirited" (L.Y. I 354); poems are disapproved of when they reveal "over-refinement" (L.Y. I 127), when they pander to the tastes of the "fine world"

(L.Y. I 249), or are "artificial" (M.Y. II 7331).

Wordsworth reveals a tendency in his letters to render abstract notions of poetry as concrete images. For example, because of the "pervading sense of intense unity" in the sonnet he compares its form to "the image of an orbicular body, -- a sphere -- or a dew drop" (L.Y. II 653). In a letter to Southey Wordsworth contrasts the styles of Virgil and Tasso, giving his comparison in the form of vivid personifications:

How noble is the first paragraph of the Aneid in point of sound, compared with the first stanza of the Jerusalem Delivered! The one winds with the majesty of conscript Fathers entering the Senate House in solemn procession; and the other has the pace of a set of recruits shuffling on the drill ground, and receiving from the adjunct or drill-serjeant the command to halt at every ten or twenty steps (M.Y. II 633-4).

Many metaphors and personifications which create concrete images are present: there are "villainous lines" (L.Y. I 307), metre is described as "chains" (M.Y. II 713), the couplet "promises rest at agreeable intervals" (M.Y. 848), the "formal accumulation of particulars" in a poem is seen as "bricklaying" (L.Y. I 307), a poor translation of Aristophanes is "a mutilated skeleton" (E.Y. 222), "Apostrophe", we are told "is not a figure, that like Janus, carries two faces with a good grace" (M.Y. II 597), writings are "disfigured" by "slovenliness" (M.Y. II 631) -- the terms "disfigured" (M.Y. II 611) and "undisfigured" (E.Y. 312) recur throughout the letters, indicating Wordsworth tendency to personify good and bad poetry.

The disastrous effect of the ornate style of Pope and Dryden is presented in startlingly graphic form:

It will require yet half a century completely to carry off the poison of Pope's Homer (M.Y. I 548d).

Wordsworth writes of an aspiring poetess that:

the range of her sensibilities...will extend as she improves in the habit of looking at things through the steady light of words; and, to speak a little metaphysically, words are not a mere vehicle, but they are powers either to kill or to animate (L.Y. I 437).

The image created is of a poet in the dark, whose way will be illuminated by "the steady light of words". (The description of words as "powers" recalls the metaphors of the Essays Upon Epitaphs).

The comparison of his poetry to a beam of light is a favourite metaphor of Wordsworth's in both verse and prose.

He writes:

I know that the multitude walk in darkness. I would put into each man's hand a lantern to guide him (E.Y. 121).

He hopes that the destiny of his poetry will be "to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier" (M.Y. I 126) and he writes the Convention of Cintra pamphlet by the "best light of [his] Conscience" (M.Y. I 290).

The light of poetry is, of course, not to be confused with the "broad light of the world" (M.Y. I 126) or the "glare" and "sparkle" that are associated with Pope and his school

(see Miles " Wordsworth and Glitter" 553). Of Lady Winchelsea (one of Wordsworth's favorite poetesses) he writes:

her style in rhyme is often admirable, chaste, tender, and vigorous; and entirely free from sparkle, antithesis, and that over-culture which reminds one by its broad glare, its stiffness and heaviness of the double daisies of the garden, compared with their modest and sensitive kindred of the fields (L.Y. I 478).

The letters contain several images of growth and plant life. Wordsworth writes to John Heraud, another aspiring poet, that:

You feel strongly; trust to those feelings, and your poem will take its shape and proportion as a tree does from the vital principle that actuates it (L.Y. I 537).

The simile of the tree and the seed is, of course, derived from Coleridge -- Wordsworth's organic images tend to be more pictorial. Indeed, much of the imagery of the letters is derived from a vividly realized organicism. To John Hamilton Reynolds Wordsworth writes that:

Your fancy is too luxuriant, and riots too much upon its creations (M.Y. II 758).

In a letter to Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth associates the art of the poet with that of the gardener:

Laying out grounds, as it is called, may be considered as a liberal art, in some sort like Poetry and Painting; and its object, like that of the liberal arts, is, or ought to be...to assist Nature in moving the affections (E.Y. 527)...

Describing his reworking of a poem, Wordsworth states: "I have lately been employed in hewing down Peter Bell" (E.Y. 222) -- as if it was form of burgeoning plant life. He compares the effect of his poetry to "flowers and useful herbs to take the place of weeds" (M.Y. I 224). To John Bowring, known for his translation of the folk-songs of Europe, Wordsworth writes, expressing the hope that he may continue "transplanting the flowers of foreign Poetry into our tongue" (L.Y. I 287).

If poetry is idealized through organic images which imply that it is "natural" and unstudied -- "the breathings of Simple Nature", as Wordsworth describes his own poetry (M.Y. I 149) -- then the poet too is idealized as a being who creates his verses spontaneously and without effort:

Milton talks of 'pouring easy his unpremeditated verse'. It would be harsh, untrue, and odious, to say there is anything like cant in this; but it is not true to the letter (L.Y. II 586).

Wordsworth perpetuates the myth of the "unpremeditated verse" by claiming to have "[thrown] off" his Thanksgiving Ode, which he calls an "effusion" rather than "composition" (M.Y. II 713) -- although Wordsworth concedes that these descriptions are "not true to the letter" and in many letters we hear of the arduous labour of altering and polishing poetry. "My first expressions I often find detestable", he writes on another occasion, "and it is frequently true of second words as of second thoughts, that they are the best" (M.Y. II 614). Wordsworth's preference

for "second words" is evident in many letters in which detailed explanations for the alteration of certain poems are given. There are a number of letters to Sir George Beaumont, for example, which recommend alterations to the proposed Inscriptions for Coleorton (M.Y. II 474-5). There are no less than four letters to the painter Benjamin Haydon recommending changes to a sonnet which Wordsworth composed at his request (L.Y. II 1034, 1035, 1036, 1037).

Wordsworth is thus not entirely happy with the image of the poet as skylark, pouring forth his full heart in "profuse strains of unmediated art" (as his qualifications imply); he prefers to idealize his artist as a man of sober habits and elevated thoughts. "It is such an animating sight", he writes to Sir George Beaumont:

to see a man of genius, regardless of temporary gains, whether of money or praise, fixing his attention solely upon what is intrinsically interesting and permanent, and finding his happiness in an entire devotion of himself to such pursuits as shall most ennoble human nature (E.Y. 402).

"All men of first rate genius", Wordsworth writes, "have been as distinguished for dignity, beauty, and propriety of moral conduct" -- but he adds (thinking of Burns) that:

the man of genius ought to know that the cause of his vices is, in fact, his deficiencies, and not, as he fondly imagines, his superfluities and superiorities (M.Y. II 746).

Wordsworth sees himself in the role of teacher, he writes that "every great Poet is a Teacher: I wish either to be

considered as a Teacher, or as nothing" (M.Y. I 170) and his assumption of a didactic role is evident in his well-known letter to John Wilson. It is not enough, he writes:

to delineate merely such feelings as all men do sympathise with; but it is also highly desirable to add to these others, such as all men may sympathise with, and such as there is to believe that they would be better and more moral beings if they did sympathise with (E.Y. 298).

Wordsworth likes to idealize himself as a poet of the people: his reads "the leech-gatherer" to his haircutter (E.Y. 304) and records, with pride, the opinions of a humble grocer who had read and enjoyed his poetry. He is convinced that his poetry is "for the benefit of readers in the humblest condition of life" and will "touch their hearts, and purify and exalt their minds" (L.Y. II 915). Wordsworth is delighted with praise received from ordinary people; in 1840 the elderly Wordsworth writes:

You will be pleased to learn that I frequently receive testimonies from Individuals who live by the labour of the hands, that what I have written has not been a dead letter to them (L.Y. II 1057).

In 1808 Wordsworth told Francis Wrangham about the "half-penny Ballads, and penny and two-penny histories" which are hawked about the cottages and added that:

I have many a time wished that I had talents to produce songs, poems and little histories, that might circulate among good things in this way (M.Y. I 224)...

When Wordsworth is not imagining himself as a simple

poet, occupying the hearts of ordinary people, he tends to see himself in terms of his great Predecessors, Shakespeare and Milton, making allusions that associate himself with the utterances of the great poets, or with generally known statements made about them. Thus he refers to himself as: "I...who know little of Latin, and scarce anything of Greek" (E.Y. 61) -- recalling Ben Jonson's words on Shakespeare. The English public, he writes "are at the moment in the same state of mind with respect to my Poems, if small things may be compared with great, as the French are in respect to Shakespeare" (M.Y. I 170). Quotations from Milton tend to outnumber those from Shakespeare, and are used with greater personal reference, especially in the letters written at about the time of the publication of The Excursion. Of that work he writes:

I have at last resolved to send to the Press a portion of a Poem which, if I live to finish it, I hope future times will 'not willingly let die'. These you know are the words of my great Predecessor, and the depth of my feelings upon some subjects seems to justify me in the act of applying them to myself (M.Y. II 596).

Critics of The Excursion accuse Wordsworth of pedantry "as Milton has been" (M.Y. II 621), and favourable reviewers declare that it is "all but Milton" or that "there has been nothing equal to it since Milton's day" (M.Y. II 622).

In letter to a fellow poet, the elderly Wordsworth associates his friend and himself with famed poets who wrote their best work in old age:

Chaucer's and Milton's great works were composed when they were far advanced in life. So, in times nearer our own, were Dryden's and Cowper's; and mankind has ever been fond of cherishing the belief that Homer's thunder and lightning were kept up when he was an old man and blind. Nor is it unworthy of notice that the leading interest attached to the name of Ossian is connected with gray hairs, infirmity, and privation (L.Y. II 817).

There are letters which assert the right of the poet to idealize himself and his subjects. When Sir Walter Scott writes to Wordsworth, with accurate details of the history of the Nortons (in The White Doe), Wordsworth replies: "a plague upon your industrious Antiquarianism that has put my fine story to confusion" (M.Y. I 458e). Writing about his sonnet Gravestone upon the floor in the Cloister of Worcester Cathedral, Wordsworth remarks:

I have had a Worcester paper sent me that gives, what it calls a real History of Miserrimus -- spoiling, as real Histories generally do, the Poem altogether (L.Y. I 340).

Writing to William Rowan Hamilton on the subject of his poem Yarrow Revisited, Wordsworth states:

You are artist enough to know that it is next to impossible entirely to harmonize things that rest upon their poetic credibility, and are idealized by distance of time and space, with those that rest upon the evidence of the hour, and have about them the thorny points of actual life (L.Y. II 580).

There are times when Wordsworth claims to have achieved this impossibility; he writes to Richard Sharpe of his Ode The Eclipse of the Sun that it is to be valued:

as a specimen of description in which beauty, majesty, and novelty, nature and art, earth and heaven are brought together with a degree of lyrical spirit and movement which professed Odes have, in our language at least, rarely attained (L.Y. I 65).

The poet complains, of his Ecclesiastical Sonnets, that:

several of them suffer as poetry from the matter of fact, there being unavoidably in history ...something that enslaves the Fancy (L.Y. I 65-6).

Many letters give evidence that Wordsworth's fancy was not always enslaved by history, indeed he is anxious to point out the strict adherence to truth in his poetry. The objects of Wordsworth's perceptions are wide ranging: portraits of small landowning farmers, or "Statesmen", whose realism Wordsworth asks his readers to confirm (E.Y. 259, L.Y. II 812); representations or descriptions of rural life and scenery are said to be accurate (M.Y. I 170, M.Y. II 469, L.Y. II 579); the description of Coleridge's interests and character in an epitaph is said to be faithful (L.Y. III 1189).

Wordsworth's criticism of other poets is usually that they failed to adhere to historical fact, to accurate description or to actual speech. Wordsworth takes issue with seemingly insignificant issues in Collins' Ode to Evening:

Hard is their shallow soil and bleak and bare,
Nor ever rural Bee was heard to murmur there.

He disapproves of the first line because an accurate account of the soil "scarcely agrees with the words of the Poet".

Far from being "hard" or "shallow":

the soil is very grateful to the Labourer producing ordinarily 16 or 18 or 20 fold -- they use no plough but a kind of inverted spade -- their harrows are of wood, as are the teeth in the front also (L.Y. II 490).

Reacting to a reader's opinion that the daffodils of the well-known poem are reflected in the lake, Wordsworth replies:

what shall we think of criticism or judgement founded upon, and exemplified by, a Poem which must have been so inattentively perused? My Language is precise; and, therefore, it would be false modesty to charge myself with blame.

Beneath the trees,
Ten thousand dancing in the breeze.
The waves beside them danced, but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee.

Can expression be more distinct? And let me ask your Friend how it is possible for flowers to be reflected in water where there are waves? They may indeed in still water; but the very object of my poem is the trouble or agitation, both of the flowers and the Water (M.Y. I 170).

Wordsworth's concern with accuracy of description is paralleled by his concern to make sense in poetry. He is highly critical of grammatical errors, ambiguous syntax, and other "defects and imperfections" and has a determinedly literal view of figurative language. Of these lines of an aspiring poet:

Some touch of human sympathy find way,
And whisper that while Truth's and Science's ray
With such serene effulgence o'er thee shone --

Wordsworth writes:

Sympathy might whisper, but a 'touch of sympathy' could not. 'Truth's and Science's ray', for the ray of truth and science, is not only extremely harsh, but a 'ray shone' is, if not a pleonasm, a great awkwardness; a 'ray fell' or 'shot' may be said; and a sun, or a moon, or a candle shone, but not a ray (L.Y. I 274).

It is clearly not the personifications that Wordsworth objects to, but their imperfect use. Of his own tendency to personify natural objects or abstractions, Wordsworth claims that:

I have never given way to my own feelings in personifying natural objects, or investing them with with sensation, without bringing all that I have said to a rigorous after-test of good sense (L.Y. I 436-7).

In a letter to Maria Jane Jewbury, another aspiring poetess, Wordsworth brings to her notice:

a faulty couplet for the sake of summoning you to rigorous examination, which I look upon as indispensable in verse --

Death thou art half disarm'd and even I
Could find it then less terrible to die.

There is confusion between the person of Death and act of dying -- the process under two conflicting views -- it ought to be, to meet thy dart -- or, submit to thy might -- or something of that kind (L.Y. I 199).

On another occasion Wordsworth reduces a whole poem to absurdity by pointing out a syntactical error in the title:

Another poem, one of Mr Hervey's, has many sweet lines, but is unfortunately entitled on a Picture of a dead Girl -- instead of a Girl since dead. Such a title reminds one of Picture of dead Game (L.Y. I 250).

He indicates a grammatical error in Shelly's Witch of Atlas:

There was nought there
But those three ancient hills alone.

Wordsworth states:

Here the word 'alone', being used instead of only, makes an absurdity like that noticed in the Spectator -- 'Enter a king and three fiddlers, solus' (L.Y. I 355).

Writing to Hamilton after having read his sonnets, Wordsworth reminds him of what he has "so often insisted upon, the extreme care which is necessary in the composition of Poetry". Of his lines:

The ancient images shall not depart
From my soul's temple, the refined gold
Already prov'd remain.

Wordsworth comments that:

Your meaning is that it shall remain, but, according to the construction of our language, you have said that it shall not.

the refined gold,
Well proved, shall then remain,
will serve to explain my objection (L.Y. II 655).

Of constant irritation to Wordsworth are printing error, "gross blunders of the Press" which "materially affect the sense" of his verses (M.Y. I 150) as well as the "culpable neglect of correctness" of many critics when quoting from his poetry, which results in "lines turned into nonsense" (M.Y. II 718). In fact, Wordsworth does not have much

regard for critics at all. Jeffrey (of the notorious Edinburgh Review) is a "Dunce" and a "Coxcomb", Wordsworth notes his "sheer, honest insensibility, and stupidity" (M.Y. I 149), and writes:

As to the Ed Review I hold the Author of it in entire contempt. And therefore shall not pollute my fingers with the touch of it (M.Y. II 620).

Critics are noted for their "audacity and presumption" (M.Y. II 620) and "dishonesty" (M.Y. II 620, 631). The poet thus divides literary critics who have partaken of "the vulgar clamour" against him into two categories: those who fail to meet him halfway, who are reluctant to "enter into the spirit" of the work (M.Y. I 149) and those who are "dishonest" -- by which he means critics who misread the text, those who judge according to the dictates of fashion (producing "crushing reviews" for the "Coxcomb's Idolaters" (M.Y. II 622)) and those who fail to recognize their own limitations. The critic referred to in the following letter to Alaric Watts is clearly of the latter variety:

I have to thank you, I presume, for a Leeds Intelligencer, containing a critique on my poetical character, which, but for your attention, I probably should not have seen. Some will say 'Did you ever know a poet who would agree with his critic when he was finding fault, especially if on the whole he was inclined to praise?' I will ask, 'Did you ever know a critic who suspected it to be possible that he himself might be in the wrong?' In other words, who did not regard his own impressions as the test of excellence? The author of these candid strictures accounts with some pains the disgust or indifference with which the world received a large portion of my verse, yet without thinking the worse of this portion himself; but whenever

the string of his own sympathies is not touched
the blame is mine (L.Y. I 159).

Some of the most memorable of Wordsworth's letters were written to his family from his tours of Scotland, Wales and Europe. The letters describe, in great detail, the sights and experiences that he clearly wants to share with Mary, Dorothy and Dora who were often obliged to stay behind at Rydal. Wordsworth went on his several excursions, so he said, to enrich his mind "by innumerable images" which he could turn to account in verse and to "vivify" his feelings for "noble purposes" (L.Y. II 876). He often complains of the scenery, on his European tours, as being too exotic for his tastes, but Wordsworth never tired of the people, whom he observed with great interest, on his travels. From Paris he writes to Isabella Fenwick:

We descended from the windmill, on which we stood, and looked back; there was the miller looking out of a square open window with his brown face, and cap as white as snow, not apparently at us, but upon the City, with the nonchalance of the Philosopher in Lucretius, who from the eminence of his wisdom regards the world and all its wanderers as something far beneath his anxieties (L.Y. II 843).

From the same letters comes this description of a peasant girl:

Entered an omnibus which was empty, and filled gradually: Women of rather the upper class came in smirking, but a peasant girl sat down by my side with her embrowned face, and stiff and fixed features, as if they were not free to smile, at least not in the dignified company of an Omnibus (L.Y. II 843-4).

In a letter to Dora Wordsworth produces this amusing description of the English on holiday:

I went to the Public Drive where I saw most of the fashionables of Florence; more than one half of them I thought English. The ride is under trees and the ground is very damp. This place I am told is very injurious to health and often avoided by the Florentines, at times when the English crowd thither to the great benefit of the purses of their physicians (L.Y. II 867).

When Wordsworth does produce descriptions of natural objects on his foreign tours, they often assume the form of vivid images in stark contrast to the cityscape, such as the following description of a pine tree, apparently planted in Rome by Sir George Beaumont:

A great part of the city of modern Rome lay below us, and St Peter's rose upon the opposite side; and...at no great distance from the dome of the church on the line of the glowing horizon was seen one of those broad-topped pines, looking like a little cloud in the sky, with a slender stalk to connect it with its native earth (L.Y. II 853).

Wordsworth, of course, wrote many letters from home, giving long descriptions of his activities and the changing countryside. Many of these descriptions recall, in vividness of detail and vigour of language, scenes from The Prelude. Wordsworth writes to Coleridge:

Rydal is covered with ice, clear as polished steel, I have procured a pair of skates and to-morrow mean to give my body to the wind (E.Y. 236)

To Sir George Beaumont he writes:

This path winds on under the trees with the wantonness of a River or a living Creature; and if I may say so, with the subtlety of a Spirit, contracting or enlarging itself, visible or invisible as it likes (E.Y. 526).

In his letters nature is animated and personified in ways which are often more exaggerated than in the poetry -- as in the following description of a storm in Rydal Wood:

I cannot conceive any danger to surpass what would have been encountered by a Person in the midst of these woods during the hurricane. In one quarter you might imagine that giants had been hurling Oaks and Pines at each other after tearing them up by the roots (L.Y. I 160).

Some letters contain accurately observed details of natural objects which the poet seems to be in the process of reworking into imaginative poetry:

On the the summit of the cave [he writes to Coleridge] were three festoons or rather wrinkles in the rock which ran parallel to each other like the folds of a curtain when it is drawn up; each of them was hung with icicles of various length, and nearly in the middle the festoons in the deepest valley made by their waving line the stream shot from between the rows of icicles in irregular fits of strength and with a body of water that momentarily varied. Sometimes it threw itself into the bason in one continued curve, sometimes it was interrupted almost midway in its fall and, being blown towards us, part of the water fell at no great distance from our feet like the heaviest thunder shower. In such a situation you have at every moment a feeling of the presence of the sky (E.Y. 240-1).

The descriptions are charged with an energy that seems to point to some great animating principle. The stone "festoons" appear to set the stage for a dramatic event -- which is the performance of the waterfall and, despite

being contained by rocky outcrops, the poet feels in "the presence of the sky" -- a description of obvious symbolic force. In descriptions like these it would appear that his letters, particularly those to Coleridge, Dorothy and later Sir George Beaumont, served the poet as a sort of testing ground for poetry -- and they prove to be an ideally conversational medium for the trying out of ideas.

XIII. THE POET AS ANNOTATOR: THE FENWICK NOTES

During the winter of 1842-3 the ladies of Rydal Mount persuaded Wordsworth to dictate aloud a series of notes on his published poems, describing the circumstances under which they were written and other matters of interest. Miss Isabella Fenwick, Dora's friend and neighbour of the Wordsworths, undertook to write them down "in a book", as she said, "interleaved with Mr Quillinan's help -- so that when they are revised they may be added to -- if other matter should recur to the Poet's mind" (Crabb Robinson 479). Dora and Edward Quillinan immediately made a transcript, which was completed by August 1843. Miss Fenwick then destroyed her own copy. Dora's transcript is among the Dove Cottage Papers and has been published as a separate document by Rev. Grosart in his collection of Wordsworth's prose. Most of the Fenwick notes, as they are known, have been used as annotations to Wordsworth's poems by Ernest de Selincourt and other editors.

That Wordsworth intended his account of the poems as notes rather than a self-contained essay seems obvious. The manuscript consists of the titles of the poems, underlined, followed by an account of that poem and, occasionally, a reference to the poem immediately preceding or following the poem under discussion. Sometimes Wordsworth refers to a poem which is similar in theme or sentiment to the one which he is discussing.

Several times Wordsworth refers to his account as

"notes". Isabella Fenwick is "the dear friend for whose sake these Notes were undertaken, and who has written them from my dictation" (Gros III 49). Ending the note to An Evening Walk he writes:

I will conclude my notice of this poem by observing that the plan of it has not been confined to a particular walk (Gros III 5).

But despite their note-like characteristics -- the lack of a proper introduction or conclusion and occasional incomplete sentences, there are certain features which tend to unify the text.

Occasionally, as in the notes to There is an eminence and A narrow girdle of rough stones and crags (Gros III 30), the two commentaries each describing a view over Grasmere lake from Dove Cottage, are in sequence and make sense when read together.

For the reader who is familiar with Wordsworth's arrangement of his collected poems, the notes seem to follow quite logically, starting with the juvenile pieces and ending with The Excursion, so that, the "Poems of the Imagination", for example, are all discussed in one section and this makes for a fairly coherent text. Most of the notes are of an anecdotal and digressive nature -- few of them have line references -- which indicates a certain continuity. Thus the notes have in common a similar sort of style: a kind of unstructured musing or free association of thoughts inspired by the poem. Such is the note to The Pet Lamb, in which Wordsworth tells us about Barbara

Lewthwaite's boastfulness (Gros III 20-1); or the note to Though narrow be that old Man's cares in which describes the gardener who enjoyed following the poet and listening carefully to his mutterings (for it was Wordsworth's habit to compose aloud); he would then repeat the lines he had overheard -- much to everyone's surprise (Gros III 59).

The notes are crammed with similar anecdotes about the characters described in the poems and often, in the course of an anecdote or digression, Wordsworth's sheds some light on the meaning or origin of the poem. Such is the case with the note to We are Seven. Midway through the description of his encounter with the young girl he is sidetracked into an interesting discussion on The Ancient Mariner:

I had been reading in Shelvocke's Voyages...that while doubling Cape Horn they frequently saw Albatrosses in that latitude... 'Suppose', said I, 'you represent him as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary Spirits of those regions take upon them to avenge the crime'. The incident was thought fit for the purpose and adopted accordingly (Gros III 17).

In a vague aside to We are Seven Wordsworth locates the origins of The Ancient Mariner and points out the role he played in its composition.

In the same note Wordsworth provides us with a succinct summary of the aims of Lyrical Ballads, which he describes as "a Volume, which was to consist, as Mr Coleridge has told the world, of Poems chiefly on natural subjects but looked at, as much as might be, through an imaginative medium" (Gros III 17). The image of the imagination as a veil or a

mist which alters and idealizes images drawn from the real world is, of course, a favorite Wordsworthian analogy. Here, because of the phrase "imaginative medium", Wordsworth implies that the medium through which the poet sees is poetry itself. He cites The Idiot Boy as an example of a subject taken from "common life" yet viewed through an imaginative medium. The story of Johnny and Betty Foy was told by Thomas Poole to the poet, who immediately began to mould and shape the narrative for his own ends.

It is perhaps on account of the necessary changes that characters undergo in their transmutation into poetry that Wordsworth is so fond of using other people's stories and experiences in his poetry, often substituting himself as the protagonist. By using other people's material he can still claim the tale is "grounded in fact" while, at the same time, providing himself with greater objectivity concerning its poetic potential and giving himself greater imaginative freedom.

In the Fenwick notes, Wordsworth is quite candid about his use of other people's material; among the poems which were derived from his friends he lists: Her eyes are wild (Gros III 29), Peter Bell (Gros III 50-1), Farmer of Tilsbury Vale (Gros III 186), Hartleap Well (Gros III 42), Alice Fell (Gros III 15), and many others. From other records we know of the importance of Dorothy's journals which supplied the poet with a constant source of poetic material. Wordsworth's need to construct his own imaginative version of another person's experience is aptly recorded by

Dorothy in her account of the genesis of Wordsworth's poem Beggars. She writes:

After tea I read to William that account of the little Boys belonging to the tall woman and an unlucky thing it was for he could not escape from those very words, and so he could not write the poem (Journals 101).

There are, of course, many characters who were known to Wordsworth himself who make an appearance in the poems and who are described in the notes: the leechgatherer, Michael, Matthew, and the little girl in We are Seven, for example. These too have been modified in their poetic states -- as may be seen by contrasting Dorothy's factual description of the the leechgatherer with Wordsworth's imaginative one. Dorothy writes:

When Wm and I returned from accompanying Jones we met an old man almost double, he had on a coat thrown over his shoulders above his waistcoat and coat. Under this he carried a bundle and had an apron on and a night cap. His face was interesting. He had dark eyes and a long nose... He had had a wife 'and a good woman and it pleased God to bless us with ten children'. All these were dead but one of whom he had not heard for many years, a sailor. His trade was to gather leeches, but now leeches are scarce and he had not the strength for it. He lived by begging and was making his way to Carlisle where he should buy a few godly books to sell (Journals 42).

In Wordsworth's version of the leechgatherer several of Dorothy's details are omitted: the old man does not indulge in begging, he does not give up the search for leeches, and Dorothy is not present during the encounter. These omissions are clearly connected with the character's new poetic status

and symbolism: the "resolution" and "independence" of the poem's title.

A major source of tension, and sometimes contradiction, in the Fenwick Notes is the whole issue of character. On the one hand the notes purport to be factual, that is, they provide details of the time and place of composition and describe the people who appear in the poems and how the poet came to know them; but, on the other hand, once a person (or a place) has been transformed into a character in a poem, he may bear little resemblance to the real person. It is in bridging the gap between who the person actually is and what he has become in the poem that Wordsworth sheds some light on matters of literary creation.

Of the poem Matthew Wordsworth writes:

This an other poems connected with Matthew would not gain by a literal detail of facts. Like the Wanderer in 'The Excursion', this Schoolmaster was made up of several both of his class and men of other occupations. I do not ask pardon for what there is of untruth in such verses, considered strictly as matters of fact. It is enough if, being true and consistent in spirit, they move and teach in a manner not unworthy of a Poet's calling (Gros III 161).

Wordsworth's need to locate the characters of his poems in actual people is a way of asserting the truth of the poem but, ultimately, as he points out in the note above, the poem must provide its own authenticity: it must be "true and consistent in spirit". Matthew may not be drawn from an actual person but the composite character of the poem is nevertheless grounded in Wordsworth's experience and

knowledge of such men.

In the note to Lucy Gray Wordsworth writes that:

The way in which the incident was treated and the spiritualizing of the character might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative influence which I have endeavoured to throw over common life with Crabbe's matter-of-fact style of treating subjects of the same kind (Gros III 16).

A case could probably be made for the presence of imagination in Crabbe's narratives, although many reader have found his stark realism unimaginative (Byron called him "Nature's sternest painter" and Hazlitt wrote of Crabbe's almost obsessive concern with "helpless, unimaginative distress"). The interesting point is that Wordsworth should disassociate himself from Crabbe's "matter-of-fact" style -- especially as he is so often at pains to persuade his reader that much of his poetry is "drawn from life" or is based on some actual experience. The note to Lucy Gray reveals the essential characteristic of Wordsworth's poetic style: the clothing of "common life" with "imaginative influences". Here Wordsworth returns to his standard image of the imagination as a garment of a veil through which the subject may be seen but which is also responsible for changing and transforming it. The transformation of character into symbol, or as Wordsworth puts it: "the spiritualizing of the character", is typical of the action of the imagination in the creation of poetry.

When a note claims that a person in the poem is exactly as he was in real life, there is an immediate contradiction

between the information supplied by the note and that provided by the poem itself. Such is the case with Simon Lee. In the Fenwick note Wordsworth writes:

It is unnecessary to add the fact was as mentioned in the poem; and I have, after an interval of 45 years, the image of the old man as fresh before my eyes as if I had seen him yesterday. the expression when the hounds were out 'I dearly love their voices' was word for word from his own lips (Gros III 160).

But the poem itself can hardly be described as a factual incident taken from the old hunter's life. In fact, in the poem itself the narrator challenges the reader not to find a "tale" in the episode described; and the effect of this challenge is to cause the reader to examine his expectations and, indeed, the entire enterprise of reading poetry -- for by removing importance from the story itself Wordsworth is able to emphasise its imaginative details: the mirroring of the sickly old man and the "old tree,/ A stump of rotten wood", and the creation of Simon Lee as an archetypal figure through obvious hyperbole, like the assertion that "He might have worked for ever", or through endowing the simplest of actions with mythic force, as the decisive gesture of the "single blow" against the root. The effect of many of the Fenwick Notes is to detract from from, rather than to enhance, the significance of the poem discussed.

This is often the case with the notes to The Excursion, the longest of all the Fenwick Notes (Gros III 195-216). In the notes Wordsworth makes repeated claims concerning the factual nature of the people described. Of the young boy in

Book VI, for example, he writes that "his story is here truly related" (Gros III 202), he claims that the story of the miner "is true to the letter" (Gros III 204), the story of the clergyman and his family in Book VII, he says, is "as faithful to the truth as words can make it" (Gros III 207), the infant's grave, he claims, is "an exact picture of what fell under [his] own observation" (Gros III 207).

Attempting to reconcile the factual basis of the characters described with their obviously imaginative function in the poem leads Wordsworth into some strange byways. So keen is he to prove that the character of the Pedlar and his ability to alter the lives of the characters he encounters is "founded upon general fact" that he quotes a long extract from Heron's Journey in Scotland, which asserts that it was the merchants who played the most significant role in introducing conquered peoples to the Roman way of life (P.W. V). To have to return to Roman Britain to find some factual parallel to the character of the Pedlar is devious indeed!

But despite this obsession with facts Wordsworth, even in the midst of his search for veracity, acknowledges his Pedlar's imaginative function. He writes:

It may...be satisfactory to have some prose testimony of how far a Character, employed for purposes of imagination, is founded upon general fact (Gros III 195 *my italics*).

Earlier in the note to The Excursion Wordsworth was even more emphatic about the Pedlar's imaginative function and origins; he writes:

I am here called upon freely to acknowledge that the character I have represented in his person is chiefly an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances (Gros III 196).

Not only is this creature an imagined Pedlar but he is further imagined as a sort of surrogate for the poet. Then, in a strange reversal, Wordsworth finds life imitating art for, at a later stage he meets Patrick, a real Pedlar, and claims:

My own imaginings I was happy to find clothed in reality, and fresh ones suggested, by...this old man's tenderness of heart, his strong and pure imagination, and his solid attainments in literature (Gros III 197).

Qualities of imagination and literary prowess would not be of much practical use to a real Pedlar, but the are, of course, of tremendous importance to the Pedlar of the poem, who is the poet's alter-ego.

With the Pedlar acting as guide and as a substitute for the poet himself, Wordsworth is able to dramatize the relationship between teller and tale -- which provides the basic structure of the poem. In The Excursion Wordsworth is concerned to explore, in particular, the relationship between narrator and the pathos and suffering of his protagonists: the extent to which he is affected by what he hears and sees and the resultant enlarging of his sympathies. He writes:

At the risk of giving a shock to the prejudices of artificial society, I have ever been ready to pay homage to the aristocracy of nature; under a

conviction that vigorous human-heartedness is the constituent principle of true taste (Gros III 211).

Although written many years later the note captures much of the essence of the poem. In an early version of The Excursion, known as The Pedlar, Wordsworth had written:

And never for each other shall we feel
 As we may feel till we have sympathy
 With nature in her forms inanimate
 With objects such as have no power to hold
 Articulate language. In all forms of things
 There is a mind...

Sympathy with nature and sympathy with mankind, Wordsworth claims, are elements of the same "vigorous human-heartedness". Of "Pedlarism in general", Wordsworth remarks on "its favourableness to an intimate knowledge of human concerns" (Gros III 197) and it is because of his ability to enlarge the sphere of human and natural sympathy that the Pedlar is justified in his task of looking, listening and recording. In this regard his relationship with the poet is obvious. In later versions of The Excursion the Pedlar becomes known simply as "the Wanderer" -- and the change, because it denies him a specific occupation, tends to emphasise his role as observer and recorder.

Wordsworth always thought of The Excursion as his great philosophical poem and in it the role of philosopher-poet is played by the Pastor, who appears as another of Wordsworth's alter-egos. A similarity between the Pastor and the poet is hinted at in the Fenwick Note:

I am gratified by the opportunity afforded me in The Excursion, to portray the character of a country clergyman of more than ordinary talents, born and bred in the upper ranks of society so as to partake of their refinements, and at the time brought by his pastoral office and his love of rural life into intimate connection with peasantry of his native district. To illustrate the relation which in my mind this Pastor bore to the Wanderer, and the resemblance between them, or rather the points of community in their nature, I likened one to an oak and the other to a sycamore; and, having here referred to this connection, I need only add, I had no one individual in mind, wishing rather to embody this idea than to break in upon the simplicity of it, by traits of individual character or of any peculiarity of opinion (Gros III 198).

While it is the task of the Wanderer to observe and record the many instances of human suffering which he encounters on his travels, it is the task of the Pastor to address himself to the philosophical and religious aspects of the problem of suffering. The pastor attempts to answer the central question for men who want to believe in the benevolence of God and nature -- why there is evil and suffering in the world. The complementary roles of the Pastor and the Wanderer and their different reactions to human suffering -- emotional and philosophical -- are seen in many places in the poem, in particular in their encounters with Margaret, who has the effect of inspiring rather than depressing them.

The Solitary is a third manifestation of the poet's alter-ego -- or in this case perhaps doppelganger would be a more accurate term for the Solitary's lack of faith, his cynicism and despair are darker aspects of the poet's nature. Again the Fenwick Note provides the clues which

suggest that Wordsworth had something of himself in mind in his portrait of the Solitary. In the note Wordsworth explains that he is a composite character, based on his experience of people during the French Revolution. People like the Solitary, he says:

had not strength of character to withstand the effects of the French Revolution, and of the wild and lax opinions which had done so much towards producing it, and far more in carrying it forward in its extremes (Gros III 197).

Undoubtedly Wordsworth's own experience of necessitarianism and Godwinism played a part in the shaping of the Solitary's character. In The Excursion the Solitary is cynical about human suffering and values neither human nor natural sympathy. The Solitary opposes all that the Wanderer and the Pastor hold dear and, despite their attempts to correct his pessimism and despondency, the Solitary's voice remains as a negative and cynical commentary throughout the poem.

That Wordsworth, either in his own person or in the guise of another, frequently appears in his poetry is a commonplace; but in the notes to his poems, Wordsworth does not often document his own presence, although he often provides clues and suggestions. There is, for example, in his note to The Borderers an implication that the character of Oswald was based on his own earlier self -- or what he might have become had he surrendered to the materialist theories of the French Revolution. Oswald was created, Wordsworth writes:

to preserve in my distinct remembrance what I had observed of transition in character, and the reflections I had been led to make during the time I was a witness of the changes through which the French Revolution passed (Gros III 13).

The strongly worded "to preserve in my distinct remembrance..." suggests that it is an actual experience, rather than mere observation alone, that Wordsworth wished to record as a warning about what might have been.

Perhaps the reason why the Fenwick notes are not of a particularly personal nature is because of the fact that The Prelude, the most obviously autobiographical of all his poems, was not published during his lifetime and was not annotated.

In the note to the Ode. Intimations of Immortality, however, Wordsworth sheds some light on the question of why his childhood experiences play so important a part in the creation of his poetry. There is, firstly, the much quoted account of the poet as a young boy on his way to school, grasping at walls and trees to rescue himself from the "abyss of idealism" (Gros III 194). It was not so much the fact that the young child could not distinguish between the internal and external existence, but the particular intensity of the experience, the "dream-like vividness and splendour" through which even ordinary things were seen that makes his childhood experiences such eminently suitable subjects for poetry. The equally vivid nature of his fantasies, as Jonathan Wordsworth points out in the extraordinary detail of Wordsworth's fantasy about bodily

assumption,¹ provided the poet with a rich source of poetic material. It was the utter conviction that he would not die, for example, that enabled the poet to write with any authority on the subject of immortality. Wordsworth establishes that intensity and sincerity of feeling is the only sound basis for the creation of poetry:

I took hold of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorising me... to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a poet (Gros III 195).

Time and time again Wordsworth returns to the intensity and clarity of his boyhood experiences and observations. In a note to Once I could hail he states:

like most children, I had been in the habit of watching the Moon through all her changes, and had often continued to gaze at it while at the full, till half blinded (Gros III 181).

The intensity of the child's gazing at the moon epitomises his fascination with the natural world; and this sense of awe and wonder is often behind the adult Wordsworth's descriptive poetry.

Wordsworth's descriptive poetry is usually of an intensely personal nature -- a fact of which he was well aware, even from a early age. Commenting on these lines from An Evening Walk:

And, fronting the bright west, yon oak entwines
Its darkening boughs and leaves, in stronger lines...

Wordsworth writes:

This is feebly and imperfectly expressed, but I recollect distinctly the very spot where first this struck me. It was in the way between Hawkeshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure. The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them; and I made a resolution to supply, in some degree, the deficiency. I could not have been at that time above 14 years of age (Gros III 5).

These remarks indicate Wordsworth's awareness of his own poetic direction, in matters of both sentiment and technique. The comments also reveal his ambition to be original, and the nature of that originality -- which has to do with his "consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances". In fact it would prove to be his consciousness of nature, rather than nature herself, which would prove to be the most radically innovation aspect of his poetry.

Wordsworth's early preoccupation of "the infinite variety of nature has an inherent tendency towards fragmentation. This is the case in The Vale of Esthewaite, An Evening Walk, and Description Sketches: they are, in the main, a collection of images.

The greater integration of Salisbury Plain, The Ruined Cottage and most of the early Lyrical Ballads is achieved through the use of narrative elements. Moments of vision remain, but are unified by the plot which implies a comparison between mood and landscape, event and location.

Sometimes landscape is used to illuminate aspects of one of the characters: like Margaret and the solid vines and

plantings, which seem to correlate to her inner state, or the destitution mother of Salisbury Plain and the "visionary dreariness" of the bleak Stonehenge landscape.

At other times the reverse occurs: a particular landscape or setting seems to suggest an appropriate character. Such is the case in The Thorn, where the barren, oppressed tree suggests to Wordsworth the story of Martha Ray and her sufferings.

Wordsworth's note to The Borderers provides some evidence of his increasing sophistication in the use of narrative elements. He writes:

Had it been the work of a later period of life, it would have been different in some respects from what it is now. The plot would have been something more complex, and a greater variety of characters introduced to relieve the mind from the pressure of incidents so mournful. The manners also would have been more attended to. ...As to the scene and period of action, little more was required for my purpose than the absence of established Law and Government (Gros III 12)...

Wordsworth explains a further development in his use of narrative elements in his note to Guilt and Sorrow:

It may be worth while to remark, that, though the incidents of this attempt do only in a small degree produce each other, and it is not therefore wanting in continuous hold upon the mind, or in unity, which is effected by the identity of moral interest that places the two personages upon the same footing in the reader's sympathies (Gros III 11).

Plot, character and description, in a particularly symbolic relationship, is the basic method by which unity and

integration are achieved in the narrative poems.

In the later Lyrical Ballads, the poems published in Moods of my own Mind and, of course, Tintern Abbey, a typically Wordsworthian solution to the problem of fragmentation is found. In these poems there is usually no plot, nor any obvious character studies; instead the descriptions are unified and directed by the poet's own thoughts and feelings -- resulting in a unification of internal and external landscape.

The connection between the poet's internal state and the external scene is made in many of the notes. Although it may be common-place to refer to a natural scene as "impressive" or "moving", Wordsworth always writes on these matters with a particular intensity, as if there was a visible or tangible effect caused by the interaction between man and nature. He writes, for example, that he took a young friend to one of his favorite haunts:

My motive was to witness the pleasure I expected
the boy would receive from the prospect of the
islands below and the intermingling water. I was
not disappointed (Gros III 9)

Wordsworth anticipates his friend's pleasure as if it was a physical gift from nature.

Remarking on his poem Lyre! through such power, Wordsworth writes that:

The natural imagery of these verses was supplied
by frequent, I might say intense, observations of
the Rydal torrent (Gros III 12).

Here, as in several other notes, Wordsworth stresses the importance of mutual interaction between spectator and scene and implies a relationship between the intensity and clarity of the perceiver's vision and his creative ability -- a fact which seems to be substantiated by Wordsworth's complaint about a Highland tour:

We travelled through the country in October and to the shortness of the days and the speed with which we travelled (in a carriage and four) may be ascribed this want of notices, in my verse, of a country so interesting (Gros III 143).

Wordsworth's idea of a disappointing tour is one which fails to elicit any form of interaction between himself and the surrounding countryside. A rushed tour provided little opportunity for such interaction. He needed to contemplate the scene and internalize it before it had any significance. Wordsworth writes of the poem Composed at Cora Lynn:

I had seen this celebrated waterfall twice before. But the feelings to which it had given birth were not expressed till they recurred in presence of the object on this occasion (Gros III 69).

One of the reasons why Wordsworth has written so many memorials of tours taken and poems commemorating a specific place has to do with his views on the imagination in connection with landscape. A landscape, Wordsworth believes, is imitated in poetry in a rather more imaginative way than is usually associated with painting. In his note to The Thorn, for example, he claims that the poem:

arose out of my observing, on the ridge of Quantock Hill, on a stormy day, a thorn which I had often passed without noticing it. I said to myself, 'Cannot I by some invention do as much to make this Thorn permanently an impressive object as the storm has made it to my eyes at this movement?' (Gros III 41).

The story of Martha Ray is thus invented, in part, to celebrate or commemorate a particular feature of the landscape. The thorn is not merely described, but is recreated into a new medium which makes use of narrative and symbol in order to suggest its grandeur and impressiveness.

Scenes and places of Wordsworth's various tours of Scotland, Ireland and Europe are similarly recreated in his poetic memorials; and evidence that these are imaginative reconstructions, rather than factual records of the tours, is to be found in many of Wordsworth's annotations. The Yarrow poems are a case in point. There are three quite different poems describing the same scene. The first, Yarrow Unvisited, is a purely imaginative one, for the poet had not yet seen the celebrated stream:

'Be Yarrow stream unseen, unknown!
It must, or we shall rue it:
We have a vision of our own;
Ah! why should we undo it?
The treasured dreams of times long past,
We'll keep them, winsome Marrow!
For when we're there, although 'tis fair,
'Twill be another Yarrow!'

And indeed the stream described in Yarrow Visited is "another Yarrow":

But thou, that didst appear so fair
To fond imagination,

Dost rival in the light of day
Her delicate creation...

Despite his attempts to provide a straightforward description of the stream, the poet finds that his attempts at description are inevitably coloured by his mood and thoughts:

I see -- but not by sight alone,
Loved Yarrow, have I won thee;
A ray of fancy still survives --
Her sunshine plays upon thee!

In the Fenwick Note to Yarrow Revisited, the final Yarrow poem, Wordsworth describes the sad circumstances of this visit to the stream and, inevitably the description of Yarrow takes on a more sombre colouring and performs a "pensive duty" while the poet muses upon old age, sickness and death:

Yea, what were Nature's mighty self?
Her features could they win us,
Unhelped by the poetic voice
That hourly speaks within us?

In several notes Wordsworth alludes to the imaginative transformations of place in poetry. The Excursion, for example, is supposedly set in the Lake District but in fact Wordsworth cast his mind back to Alfoxden in Somersetshire for many of its descriptions. He writes:

All that relates to Margaret and the ruined cottage etc., was taken from observations made in the South-West of England, and certainly it would require more than seven-league boots to stretch in one morning from a common in Somersetshire or Dorsetshire to the heights of Furness Fells and

the deep valleys they embosom. For thus dealing with space I need make, I trust, no apology, but my friends may be amused by the truth (Gros III 198-9).

Wordsworth reminds us, in the note to An Evening Walk that, although he does look closely at natural objects and tries to describe them accurately, this is not the most important aspect of his poetry. He writes:

I will conclude my notice of this poem by observing that the plan of it has not been confined to a particular walk or an individual place; a proof (of which I was unconscious at the time) of my unwillingness to submit the poetic spirit to the chains of fact and real circumstance. The country is idealized rather than described in any one of its local aspects (Gros III 5).

Wordsworth's poem is composed of images of changing landscapes that reflect the changing moments in his personal history. Sometimes the landscape is more abstractly connected with certain thoughts. In his note to To the Clouds Wordsworth tells his readers that:

These verses were suggested while I was walking on the foot-road between Rydal Mount and Grasmere. The clouds were driving over the top of Nab Scar across the vale; they set my thoughts agoing, and the rest followed almost immediately (Gros III 49).

In this case the clouds are not described for their own qualities and attributes, but as a prelude to the poet's musing.

Perhaps Wordsworth best describes the dual pull between description for its own sake and description for other reasons (what he calls "romance" versus "the pressure of

fact" in the note to Yarrow Revisited (Gros III 140)) in his account of Robert Burns's poetry:

Whether he speaks of rivers, hills, and woods, it is not so much on account fo the properties with which they are absolutely endowed, as relatively to local patriotic remembrances and associations, or as they ministered to personal feelings, especially those of love, whether happy or otherwise; -- yet this is not always so. Soon after we had passed Mosgiel Farm we crossed the Ayr, murmuring and winding through a narrow woody hollow. His line -- 'Auld hermit Ayr strays through his woods' -- came at once to my mind with Irwin, Lugar, Ayr, and Doon, -- Ayreshire streams over which he breathes a sigh as being unnamed in song; and surely his own attempts to make them known were as successful as his heart could desire (Gros III 154-5).

As much as it does in Burn's poetry, the mimetic mode, the need to imitate nature in a poetic medium, remains in Wordsworth's poetry, co-existing with expressionistic elements. It is a healthy rather than an uneasy union for the things imitated provide a check on the workings of passion, or a reason for their existence in the first place.

Much the same relationship exists between Wordsworth's fictitious characters and his observations of people and their customs or "manners" and imitated landscapes. Many of the Fenwick notes provide evidence of Wordsworth's thorough knowledge of the Lakeland inhabitants: the spinning of wool by cottagers, the huntings on foot, the habits of workers in the fields and customs of burial. From this reservoir of fact based on personal observation Wordsworth is able to extract the material that will be imaginatively reworked in his poetry.

Because so many interesting characters appear in his

poems, it is not surprising that Wordsworth, in his annotations, should have been persuaded to provide some biographical details of the important people that he knew. The notes give us thumb nail sketches of interesting personalities like John Thelwall, whom Wordsworth met at Alfoxden during his refuge from politics; or descriptions of Sir Walter Scott at different stages of his life and career.

Wordsworth does not always follow his own advice concerning certain principles of biography. In his Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns he had said of poets that their private lives should not be scrutinized, nor should their public conduct be explained for "our business is with their books -- to understand and to enjoy them" (III 122). Despite this lofty principle Wordsworth is not above making some personal and rather derogatory remarks about other poets. Of Coleridge he writes:

of all the men whom I have ever known, Coleridge had the most passive courage in bodily peril, but no-one was so easily cowed when moral firmness was required (Gros III 85)...

He writes of Lamb's:

indulgences of social humours and fancies which were often injurious to himself, and causes of severe regret to his friends, without really benefiting the object of his misplaced kindness (Gros III 191).

Wordsworth is equally scathing about James Hogg:

He was undoubtedly a man of original genius, but of coarse manners and low and offensive opinions (Gros III 191).

Wordsworth is so aggressive in his attack upon Crabbe in his note to Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg (Gros III 191-2) that even his daughter saw fit to write a note in the margin, begging her father to remove some of the more offensive passages. These derogatory comments, especially as they are meant to accompany the poem, cast serious doubts upon the sincerity and integrity of the poet. One wonders why he exalted them as "the rapt one, of the godlike fore-head", as "Lamb, the frolic and the gentle", as "the Ettrick Shepherd" and "Mighty Minstrel", if he held them in such low esteem. One cannot but agree with Dora that these notes are most unfortunate and should have been altered.

There is, of course an appropriate place for satirical biography and we are provided with some humorous pictures of local eccentrics, such as the portrait of "the Lady E.B." and "the Hon Miss P.":

They took much delight in passing jokes on our friend Jones' plumpness, ruddy cheeks, and smiling countenance, as little suited to a hermit living in the vale of Meditation. We all thought there was ample room for retort on his part, so curious was the appearance of these ladies, so elaborately sentimental about themselves and their Caro Albergo, as they named it in an inscription on a tree that stood opposite, the endearing epithet being preceded by the word ECCO! calling to the saunterer to look about him. So oddly was one of these ladies attired that we took her, at a little distance, for a Roman Catholic priest, with a crucifix and relics hung at his neck. They were without caps, their hair bushy and white as snow, which contributed to the mistake (Gros III 61).

Wordsworth also gives us a humorous biography of Mr Rowlandson, the notorious drunken curate of Grasmere:

Two vices used to struggle in him for mastery, avarice and the love of strong drink: but avarice, as is common in like cases, always got the better of its opponent; for, though he was often intoxicated, it was never, I believe, at his own expense (Gross III 176).

In contrast, the Fenwick Note to Epitaph in the Chapel at Langdale gives us a portrait of quite a different sort of curate. In a simple and dignified manner, which is a prose extension of the epitaph of the poem, Wordsworth tells us the important facts of Owen Lloyd's life (Gros III 187-8), following the principles put down in the Essays Upon Epitaphs, namely that:

The character of a deceased friend or beloved kinsman is not seen...otherwise than as a tree through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualizes and idealizes it (II 58)...

In the note to At Vallonbrosa Wordsworth enlarges upon the idealizing process, as it occurs in memorial verse:

To praise good and great men has ever been one of the worthiest employments of poetry, but the objects of admiration vary so much with time and circumstance, and the noblest of mankind has been found, when intimately known, to be characters so imperfect that no eulogist can find a subject which he will venture upon with the animation necessary to create sympathy, unless he confines himself to a particular art or he takes something of a one-sided view of the person he is disposed to celebrate. This is a melancholy truth, and affords strong reason for the poetic mind being chiefly exercised in fiction: the poet follows wherever the spirit of admiration leads him, unchecked by such suggestions as will be too apt to cross his way if all that he is prompted to utter is to be tested by fact (Gross III 92).

Wordsworth concludes that, of necessity, a character must be considerably changed, or entirely fictionalised, in eulogy

for there are no people so perfect that they deserve to be eulogized in their natural, human state.

If disillusionment in his fellow men is a feature of Wordsworth's old age, then it must be pointed out that it is accompanied by a delightful and often self-directed sense of humour -- something for which the young Wordsworth is not remarkable. There is much self-mockery, for example, in Wordsworth's account of his disappointment upon seeing Vaucluse, the supposed home of Petrarch:

'Has Laura's Lover', often said I to myself, 'ever sat down upon this stone? or has his foot ever pressed that turf?' Some, especially of the female sex, would have felt sure of it: my answer was (impute it to my years), 'I fear not' (Gros III).

Wordsworth provides us with several amusing self-portraits: himself dozing off in front of a Raphael painting (Gros III 94), or at home in his characteristic mode of composition, which the neighbours call "boeing" (Gros III). In another portrait the poet contrasts his terror while crossing Lake Geneva in a storm with the imagined fearlessness of other poets:

I was not a little glad when we gained the shore, though Shelly and Byron -- one at least, who seemed to have courted agitation from any quarter -- would have probably rejoiced in such a situation: more than once I believe were they both in extreme danger even on the Lake of Geneva (Gros III 87).

In the note to The Forsaken Wordsworth humorously acknowledges his deficiency in the composing of love poetry:

My poetry has been complained of as deficient in

interests of this sort [love poetry] -- a charge which the piece 'Lyre! though such power do in thy magic live', will scarcely tend to obviate (Gros III 12).

The older Wordsworth clearly felt confident enough to indulge in self-parody, he is even able to accept adverse criticism with good humour. He writes that Miss Fenwick finds certain of his verses "vulgar, and worthy only of having been composed by a country Squire". He also includes in his notes extracts from a Review, written by "a blockhead of a critic", which he succeeds in turning to his favour:

'What so monstrous', said he, 'as to make a star talk to a glow-worm?' Poor fellow, we know well from this sage observation what the primrose on the river's brim was to him (Gros III 34).

NOTE

- ⁴ see Jonathan Wordsworth, William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 97

XIII. THE POET AS POET: THE PRELUDE

Enough of humble arguments; recall,
My Song!

(Prel VIII 475-6)

The reason why I have chosen to include The Prelude in my discussion of Wordsworth's prose is because it is a poem about poetic composition and uses a vocabulary of metaphors and figures that anticipates those used by the poet in his prefaces and essays. The Prelude is, more specifically, a poem about itself, about how it came into existence. Indeed, Wordsworth refers to his work in progress, what he has achieved and what he hopes to attain.

The familiar terms of Wordsworth's critical writing have their origins in the metaphors of The Prelude. As in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads and the Essays Upon Epitaphs images of heavily decorated fabric are associated with an artificial and overwrought style of writing. As a youth he had praised the "overwrought splendour" (Prel V 570) of Macpherson and other fanciful writers; but in time the poet rejects the "state arras woven with silk and gold" and other "snakey hues" (Prel III 565-7) in favour of "less elaborate fabric" (Prel III 571). Coleridge's "gorgeous eloquence" (Prel VI 295) is, in the context of Wordsworth's metaphors of ornamentation, rather dubious praise -- and he goes on to state that Coleridge, in the "plumage of his youth" was given to fantasy and to substituting "words for things". After a period of seduction by "syllogistic words", the poet writes:

I shook the habit off
 Entirely and for ever, and again
 In Nature's presence stood, as now I stand,
 A sensitive being, a creative soul.

(Pre1 XII 204-7)

The poet prophesies that "poetic numbers" will come
 "Spontaneously to clothe in priestly robe/ A renovated
 spirit" (Pre1 I 52-3). In the last words of the poem
 Wordsworth announces his creation of "lasting inspiration"
 out of a "fabric more divine" (Pre1 XIV 456).

In a compact series of images Wordsworth compares the
 fanciful style of London preacher to a decorated shepherd's
 crook -- he takes "ornaments and flowers" from other men's
 writing:

To entwine the crook of eloquence that helped
 His pretty Shepherd, pride of all the plains,
 To rule and guide his captivated flock.

(Pre1 VII 569-72)

Wordsworth has a tendency to fuse literal and metaphorical
 states so tightly that it is difficult to decide where one
 ends and the other begins -- like the "ornaments and
 flowers" that decorate "the crook of eloquence", or "the
 vernal heat/ Of poesy" (Pre1 IV 103-4) and "Nature's book"
 (Pre1 III 557). Through such figures, language seems to
 assume a physical presence and indeed, Wordsworth does treat
 words and style as something concrete rather than abstract.
 The solid image of the "monument" (Pre1 VI 56, VIII 172, XII
 241) is a favourite of Wordsworth's, capturing as it does the
 ephemeral word in the permanent stone.

In Book I he gives us an inventory of his poetic abilities and credentials, as if they were actual, physical things.

He does not lack:

that first great gift, the vital soul,
Nor general truths, which are themselves a sort
Of Elements and Agents, Underpowers,
Subordinate helpers of the living mind:
Nor am I naked of external things,
Forms, images, nor numerous other aids
Of less regard, though won perhaps with toil
And needful to build up a Poet's praise.

(Prel I 149-57)

Poetic form and language is given a solid presence in many of Wordsworth's metaphors: he writes of "The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase/ From languages that want the living voice..." (Prel VI 110-1); he regrets that, as a child, he was not "fed upon a fatter soil/ Of arts and letters" (Prel V 409-10) and he talks of "manag[ing] books, and things, and mak[ing] them act/ On infant minds as surely as the sun/ Deals with a flower" (Prel V 351-3). The way in which abstract notions of language are realised in vivid, organic images is typical of Wordsworth's critical discourse, and that fact that he tends to visualise the operations of language accounts for some of his more extreme pronouncements on the "wond'rous power of words, by simple faith/ Licensed to take the meaning that we love!" (Prel VII 119).

Wordsworth is clearly extremely sensitive to subtle changes in writing style and can put on or take off (to use his own metaphors) any number of different styles. In the

hope of finding "some old/ Romantic tale by Milton left unsung" (Prel I 169) Wordsworth proceeds through various themes and styles: classical tales, tales of old England and pastoral tales with shepherds, swains and reposing knights. In Book III he writes in witty mock-heroic mode, in Book V he produces a dream-vision, in Book VII he creates satire, in the Augustan mode, and in the French Revolution books he writes in a drawn out, painful style which seems to imitate the effects of his languishing imagination. These styles are, of course, not the true style, the special voice that is uniquely the poet's own. These styles are like the elaborate fabrics which Wordsworth associates with falsehood. Anticipating Yeats, Wordsworth proposes to shed the coat of pretentious poetics and walk naked:

Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked, as in the presence of her God.
While I walked on, a comfort seemed to touch
A heart that had not been disconsolate:
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
At least, not felt; and restoration came
Like an intruder knocking at the door
Of unacknowledged weariness.

(Prel IV 150-8)

As is often the case, it is difficult to distinguish between the literal and the figurative level, for the literal walk becomes a spiritual journey and then a literal walk again. Allusion is similarly incorporated into the text, for example when Wordsworth describes his soul as standing "Naked, as in the presence of her God" the journey begins to take on connotations of paradise regained, of man assuming

his original sin-free state. Wordsworth represents this return as a complex one, rather than one of simple acceptance. There is "comfort", but the soul was unaware of her discomfort; there is "strength", but the soul was unaware of her "weakness"; and her "weariness" was "unacknowledged". If we translate this analogy into one of poetic composition, then Wordsworth seems to be saying that the false poetic mode is an easy one to adopt and one which, because it is founded on deception, would regard truth or "restoration" as an "intruder". Admitting the "intruder", Wordsworth may become "self-transmuted".

Before the poet can find his proper voice, he has to find himself -- his best self: "that calm existence that is mine when I/ Am worthy of myself!" (Prel I 349-50); and thus autobiography, a discovery of the self, becomes the perfect vehicle for the discovery of the poet's voice.

M.H. Abrams has suggested that The Prelude is achronological, that it begins at the end (Wordsworth: A Collection of Critical Essays 158). Abrams is referring to Wordsworth's musings, in Book I, on his subject and these musing obviously occur at a point in time after the writing of the main text of the poem. (As the mind "Hath no beginning" (Prel II 233), so Wordsworth's account of the mind also has no beginning). But the beginning of the autobiography entails the end in a different way because, by the time Wordsworth wrote those passages dealing with his boyhood experiences in Book I, he had already found his poetic voice.

The fact that Wordsworth is able to write about his childhood, and even babyhood, in Books I and II, implies that he has already re-entered paradise and has won the war against corrupt, inflated language. It is, of course, inevitable that these childhood memories be recorded in the language of the regained paradise for it would be impossible (even if the poet were to resort to some Joycean linguistic device) to write in the language of the original paradise.

Wordsworth's re-creation of his babyhood, in which he "held mute dialogues with [his] Mother's heart" (Prel II 268) is a case in point. Such passages are necessarily imaginative recreations, and in his address to Coleridge at the beginning of Book II Wordsworth acknowledges this duality, the tale of the young Wordsworth told by the older:

so wide appears
The vacancy between me and those days
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind,
That, musing on them, often do I seem
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
And of some other Being.

(Prel II 28-33)

These imaginative recreations are unlike the ornate "inventions" of the false poetic mode, for unlike those "unsubstantial structures" which melt like "mist into air dissolving" before the heat of the sun, true imagination almost makes:

remotest infancy
A visible scene, on which the sun is shining...

(Prel I 634-5)

In the first case the light of truth exposes the deceptions of the false poetic, but in the latter case, the light of truth and imagination have fused: "losing, in no other way than light/ Is lost in light, the weak in the more strong" (Prel XI 171-2).

It is Wordsworth's tendency in his critical writing (the Essays Upon Epitaphs, for example) to associate the poet's idealizing light with the clear light of truth. The poet's is "a light of beauty" (Prel VIII 364), an "auxiliar light" which "on the setting sun/ Bestows new splendour" (Prel II 368). The imaginative faculty is "Space like a heaven filled up with northern lights" (Prel V 532). The revelations of the poet's imagination are described in images of light: "gleams life the flashings of a shield" (Prel I 586) come when "the light of sense/ Goes out, but with a flash that [reveals]/ The invisible world" (Prel VI 600-2) and the ideal form of the shepherd, Wordsworth writes, "hath flashed upon me, glorified" (Prel VIII 269). When the poet is despondent, his sister assures him that "brightness would return" (Prel XI 344). There are many images which suggest that the poet's materials are diffuse and obscure: "shapes and forms and tendencies to shape/ That shift and vanish, change and interchange/ Like spectres" (Prel VIII 570-2). Wordsworth uses the example of the flickering shadows on the walls of a cave (in Book V) to invoke Plato's analogy concerning the basic uncertainty underlying physical perception as a whole. The poet, plumbing the depths of his memory is:

As one who hangs down-bending from the side
 Of a slow-moving boat, upon the breast
 Of a still water, solacing himself
 With such discoveries as his eye can make
 Beneath him in the bottom of the deep,
 Sees many beauteous sights -- weeds, fishes, flowers,
 Grotts, pebbles, roots of trees, and fancies more,
 Yet often is perplexed and cannot part
 The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,
 Mountains and clouds, reflected in the depth
 Of the clear flood, from things which there abide
 In their true dwelling; now is crossed by gleam
 Of his own image, by a sun-beam now,
 And wavering motions sent he knows not where,
 Impediments that make his task more sweet...

(Prel IV 256-70)

It is the light of imagination, "The light that never was,
 on sea or land" (Elegiac Stanzas 15) that enables the poet
 to recreate his past for "We see but darkly/ Even when we
 look behind us" (Prel III 482); things may be "fancied in
 the obscurity of years" (Prel XIII 351). The gleam of the
 poet's imagination illuminates the "obscure sense/ Of
 possible sublimity" (Prel II 317-8) that the soul retains.

The illuminations of the imagination are, of course, not
 to be confused with Wordsworth's use of glitter, glare and
 other harsh lights as images for the false poetic mode. The
 "diamond light" (Prel VIII 407), the "glittering verse"
 (Prel V 591), "the light of circumstance" and other
 "artificial lights" (Prel XIII 207) are associated with the
 false dawn that "dawns to disappear" and "ripens not/ Into a
 steady morning" (Prel I 125-7).

The predominant metaphor of The Prelude, and one that
 recurs in Wordsworth's prose, is the comparison of the
 course of his life to that of a river. Imagination, he

writes:

hath been the feeding source
Of our long labour: we have traced the stream
From the blind cavern whence is faintly heard
Its natal murmur; followed it to light
And open day; accompanied its course
Among the ways of Nature, for a time
Lost sight of it bewildered and engulfed:
Then given it greeting as it rose once more
In strength, reflecting from its placid breast
The works of man and face of human life;
And lastly, from its progress have we drawn
Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought
Of human Being, Eternity, and God.

(Prel XIV 193-205)

The river imagery is remarkably consistent; Wordsworth has an appropriate river image for most occasions: as an infant the river "blend[s] his murmurs with [his] nurse's song" (Prel I 271), when the poet is unhappy at Cambridge the river "seemed to suck [him] in with an eddy's force" (Prel III 14). When he returns home for the vacation the poet associates himself, confined at university, with the channelized stream:

that unruly child of mountain birth,
The forward brook, who, soon as he was boxed
Within our garden, found himself at once,
As if by trick insidious and unkind,
Stripped of his voice and left to dimple down
(Without an effort and without a will)
A channel paved by man's officious care.

(Prel IV 50-55)

Lest we miss the point of the description, Wordsworth's fancy whispers:

'An emblem here behold of thy own life;
In its late course of even days with all

Their smooth enthrallment'...

(Prel IV 61-3)

Wordsworth establishes the river as the ideal image for the course of the poet's life because, unlike the light or clothing imagery, it is an essentially aural symbol and its murmuring sounds are associated with the poets's own voice. The sound of the river thus becomes the most vividly realized organic symbol for poetry : a "stream/ Flow[ing] in the bent of nature" (Prel XIV 370-1), as Wordsworth describes his verse at the end of the poem. The aural wind images, the "correspondent breeze" (Prel I 35) and "strange utterance" of the "loud dry wind" that blows through the poet's ear (Prel I 337) do not occur as frequently as the river images and tend to be associated with the unnatural excitement of the false poetic "a redundant energy,/ Vexing its own creation" (Prel I 37-8). The wind brings "Aeolian visitations; but the harp/ Was soon defrauded, and the banded host/ Of harmony dispersed in straggling sounds (Prel I 96-8)...

In Book I, addressing the river Derwent, Wordsworth bemoans the fact that it cannot supply him with its own "ceaseless music" (Prel I 279), but in this extended colloquy with the landscape he, apparently unintentionally, finds his poetic inspiration and subject. In a Feuerbachian ritual of baptism, Wordsworth is cleansed of his misplaced poetic pretensions and is able, imaginatively, to re-enter the paradise state of childhood -- for after this first

address to the river Wordsworth recounts the first of his childhood memories: "Fair seed-time had my soul..." (Prel I 301). The river has, Wordsworth writes, "a voice/ That flowed along my dreams" (Prel I 273-4).

When Wordsworth returns to his native regions and sheds his Cambridge pretensions he is able, both literally and figuratively, to hear the sound of his own voice again:

I sauntered, like a river murmuring
And talking to itself when all things else
Are still...

(Prel IV 119-21)

Throughout The Prelude the sound of the river, in all its variants, recurs as a sort of leitmotif, signaling the return of the poet's true voice. The sound of the river is an extremely adaptable image for it encapsulates all of the poet's possible moods. In meditative strain, the poet imitates the river "reflecting from its placid breast/ The works of man" (Prel XIV 201-2). In more a more agitated mood, as in the "fervour irresistible" of the "glad preamble", the poet's verse may be likened to "a torrent bursting,/ From a black thunder-cloud" (Prel VII 6-7). In high Miltonic vein the poet's voice may be compared to "the might flood of Nile/ Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clouds/ To fertilize the whole Egyptian plain" (Prel VI 614-6). Wordsworth's discursive, retrospective style may be compared to the indirect course of a river:

Even as a river,-- partly (it might seem)
Yielding to old remembrances, and swayed

In part by fear to shape a way direct,
 That would engulf him soon in the ravenous sea--
 Turns, and will measure back his course, far back,
 Seeking the very regions which he crossed
 In his first outset; so have we, my Friend!
 Turned and returned with intricate delay.

(Prel IX 1-8)

Wordsworth seems to have fused so thoroughly the image of the river with his poem that, on occasions, he appears to refer to his work as if it was a river; he talks about his "drift" (Prel V 293), "these vocal streams" (Prel XIV 195), or his "pure stream of words" (Prel VIII 467). By the end of the poem it is established that the poet has "a music and and voice/ Harmonious as [the river's] own" (Prel XII 29-30).

An image closely associated with that of the river is the road, which is often used in conjunction with the river to suggest the poet's progress:

My homeward course led up a long ascent,
 Where the road's watery surface, to the top
 Of that sharp rising, glittered to the moon
 And bore the semblance of another stream
 Stealing with the silent lakes to join the brook
 That murmured in the vale.

(Prel IV 378-83)

Visualizing the poem as a road or piece of ground, the poet looks forward to the poetic ground that he is to traverse "the road lies plain before me" (Prel I 640) he writes; and during the various retrospects in his work, he seems to look back over the poetic ground that he has covered:

as a traveller, who has gained the brow
 Of some aerial Down, while there he halts
 For breathing-time, is tempted to review

The region left behind him...

(Prel IX 9-12)

Just as the river turns back on itself, so too the poet's journey by road has not been a direct one, and he records "his backward wanderings along the thorny ways" (Prel XIV 138).

The poet sees his life's journey as a road or an area of ground that has been covered and the poem which records that journey is an imitation of it. In fact the association between the poem and the road becomes close enough for the poet to indulge in some rare punning on words like "track"/"tract" -- as when Wordsworth refers to the "pastoral tract ...where Fancy might run wild" (Prel VIII 196-7) or describes himself on "A track pursuing, not untrod before,/ From strict analogies by thought supplied..." (Prel III 128-9). There is an ambiguity concerning the use of the word "tract" as a stretch of territory and "tract" as a treatise in the following:

Relinquishing this lofty eminence
For ground, though humbler, not the less a tract
Of the same isthmus, which our spirits cross
In progress from their native continent
To earth and human life, the Song might dwell
On that delightful time of growing youth...

(Prel V 534-9)

The metaphoric ground connecting childhood and adulthood is called a "tract" and the word is ambiguous, seeming to refer to the poet's "tract" which, after all, is concerned with precisely this transition from childhood to adulthood. The

Companionless your awful solitudes!

(Prel VIII 215-21)

The countryside and Wordsworth's version of pastoral fuse together into one indivisible concept. David Ferry argues that Wordsworth has merely substituted one form of pastoral for another (Ferry 138), which is quite correct and Wordsworth was quite aware of this. Wordsworth's shepherd, for example, is a variation on the Arcadian theme; he is "spiritual almost/ As those of books, but more exalted far" (Prel VIII 282-3):

His form hath flashed upon me, glorified
By the deep radiance of the setting sun:
Or him have I descried in distant sky,
A solitary object and sublime,
Above all height! Like an ariel cross
Stationed alone upon a spiry rock
Of the Chartreuse, for worship.

(Prel VIII 269-5)

Wordsworth's shepherd is a grand imaginary construct, emphasised by the imagery of gleaming light which is associated with the operation of the imagination. The poet defends his status:

Call ye these appearances --
Which I beheld of shepherds in my youth,
This sanctity of Nature given to man --
A shadow, a delusion, ye who pore
On the dead letter, miss the spirit of things;
Whose truth is not a motion or a shape
Instinct with vital functions, but a block
Or waxen image which yourself have made,
And ye adore!

(Prel VIII 293-301)

While Wordsworth conceives of the effects of language in concrete terms, the word is itself a "dead letter", a "block" which must be transcended in order for the vital qualities of language and style to be felt. One is reminded of the "delusion bold" created by the actor who has the word "'Invisible'" emblazoned on his chest.

The most concrete realization of language is evident in the speech of the ordinary people that the poet encounters; the language of these rustics is closely associated with their physical appearance and way of life: "The face of every neighbour whom I met", Wordsworth claims, "was like a volume to me" (Prel IV 68-9). On his wanderings (on literal and figurative tracts) the poet encounters "artless rustic[s]" (Prel III 569) and "plain-living people" (Prel IV 213) who speak, in the words of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, "a plainer and a more emphatic language" (I 125). The language of these humble rustics is associated with Wordsworth's true poetic voice:

There I heard,
From mouths of men obscure and lowly, truths
Replete with honour; sounds in unison
With loftiest promises of good and fair.

(Prel XIII 183-5)

The poet attributes to these men an ideal language, which is precisely the kind of utterance to which he, as poet, aspires:

Theirs is the language of the heavens, the power,
The thought, the image, and the silent joy:
Words are but under-agents in their souls;

When they are grasping with their greatest strength,
They do not breathe among them...

(Prel XIII 271-5)

The poet associates these men with truth and with silence. The old soldier, utters "low muttered sounds, as if of pain" and "with a quiet uncomplaining voice" he tells "in few plain words a soldier's tale" (Prel IV 390-459). As if to emphasise the physical presence that words seem to have for the poet, he often associates words with the organs of speech: the "mouths of men" (Prel VIII 184), the soldier's "lips" and his "mouth...ghastly in the moonlight" (Prel IV 394-5).

In contrast to the humble rustics the sophisticated city dwellers make use of a false and deceitful language, which is exemplified by the "comely" London preacher:

There have I seen a comely bachelor,
Fresh from a toilette of two hours, ascend
His rostrum, with seraphic glance look up,
And, in a tone elaborately low
Beginning, lead his voice through many a maze
A minute course; and winding up his mouth,
From time to time, into an orifice
Most delicate, a lurking eyelet, small,
And only not invisible, again
Open it out, diffusing thence a smile
Of rapt irradiation, exquisite.

(Prel VII 551-61)

Wordsworth's descriptive powers are lavished on the speaker's contorted mouth which seems to be a correlative for his devious and insincere speech.

Book VII is a very verbal book and all the main characters who are described are notable for their verbal skills:

priests, lawyers, politicians, actors -- and the poetry itself displays the poet's intoxication with words in his heaping up of detail, which culminates in the verbal tour de force describing St Bartholomew's fair.

In solemn opposition to the physical and verbal activity of London is the "blind beggar":

who, with upright face,
 Stood, propped against a wall, upon his chest
 Wearing a written paper, to explain
 His story, whence he came, and who he was.
 Caught by this spectacle my mind turned round
 As with the might of waters; an apt type
 This label seemed of the utmost we can know,
 Both of ourselves and of the universe;
 And, on the shape of that unmoving man,
 His steadfast face and sightless eyes, I gazed,
 As if admonished from another world.

(Prel VII 639-49)

Like the old soldier of Book IV, the blind beggar is a touchstone of truth and reality in an unreal world. The simple note upon his chest, in contrast to all the oratory he had heard, seems to restore the poet's faith in words and their ability to express truth. Wordsworth compares the movement of his mind to "the might of waters", and we are fleetingly reminded of the river whose music is always associated with his true poetic voice.

Wordsworth's complex system of metaphors often (as in the example above) seem to work in unison. In the section, for example, where the poet pays tribute to his Sister, he writes:

Then it was --
 Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good! --

That the beloved Sister in whose sight
 Those days were passed, now speaking in a voice
 Of sudden admonition -- like a brook
 That does but cross a lonely road, and now
 Seen, heard, and felt, and caught at every turn,
 Companion never lost through many a league --
 Maintained for me a saving intercourse
 With my true self; for though bedimmed and changed
 Both as a cloud and a waning moon,
 She whispered that brightness would return,
 She, in the midst of all, preserved me still
 A Poet...

(Prel XII 333-46)

The poet's course along the "lonely road" is "bedimmed" and Dorothy, his inspiration is associated with the sound of the "brook", which is also the sound of the poet's "true self". Dorothy is also associated with "brightness" -- the idealizing light of the imagination. Like the blind beggar, Dorothy "admonishes" the poet and reminds him of his high calling.

The metaphors of poetic creation and language are implicit in Wordsworth's tale of the drowned man. Throughout Book V Wordsworth is led to revalue his estimate of language as a "frail shrine" for by the time we come to the end of the book he has, verbally, re-created for us scenes from his childhood, a portrait of his mother, the boy of Winander, an allegorical dream-vision and finally, in a sort of ironic reversal of the poet waking from his dream (which predicts the end of the world in a flood) in time to prevent himself from drowning, Wordsworth presents us with his nightmare of the drowned man:

At last, the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene
 Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright

And through the turnings intricate of verse,
 Present themselves as objects recognised,
 In flashes, and with glory not their own.

(Prel V 595-605)

The familiar terms of the operation of the imagination are all here: the "veil" and "light divine" which is transform "forms and substances", the "turnings" of the verse which recall the river imagery. But here the action of the imagination is exaggerated: the light appears in "flashes" and the "glory" given to the objects is "not their own". This light seems to be more closely allied with the glitter and glare that are terms of derogation than with the idealizing light of the poet's imagination. The wind imagery, associated with the agitation of the false poetic, is mentioned. Here words retain their stubborn opacity and "darkness" and the poet is unable to illuminate them in the way usually associated with the illuminating imagination. The turnings of the poetic river are "intricate" -- a word rarely used by Wordsworth in a favourable sense.

Wordsworth's praise of the false sublime is, of course, ironic. At several place in Book V he criticises this extreme form of imagination and implies that he will soon relinquish this mode, that later his:

Song might dwell
 On that delightful time of growing youth
 When craving for the marvelous gives way
 To strengthening love for things that we have seen;
 When sober truth and steady sympathies,
 Offer to notice by less daring pens,
 Take firmer hold of us, and words themselves
 Move us with conscious pleasure.

(Prel V 538-45)

Again we notice the physical effect ascribed to words which "move us with conscious pleasure". The poet does not suggest that we should not find pleasure in his mastery of language, but that the pleasure should be "conscious" -- in contrast to the the dark and shadowy deceptions of the false poetic.

In Book VI Wordsworth leaves fantasy and the false sublime to embrace the Alps and the true sublime. Mountains and the sublime have been associated with Wordsworth's thinking to the point of cliché, yet they are associated in a remarkably literal way, which recalls the "tract" ambiguities. As certain "tracts" of the countryside are associated with the poetic ground that the poet has covered, so the mountainside is associated with the quality of sublimity in the text. This is clearly the case with the description of the Simplon Pass which follows immediately after the well-known apostrophe to the imagination (Prel 592-603). The environment which is described takes on the quality and attributes of the written text:

Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.

(Prel VI 638-640)

A similar fusion between the mountain scene and the poetic text is evident in Wordsworth's vision of the "full-orbed moon" shining on the "billowy ocean" in his ascent of Snowdon. The "roar of waters, torrents, streams/
innumerable, roaring with one voice" (Prel XIV 59-60),

which concludes the scene is suggestive both of the apocalyptic might which accompanies Wordsworth's deepest perceptions, and the sound of his own voice -- the sublime poetry with which the passage is written.

In his account of the Snowdon episode the poet writes:

There I beheld the emblem of a mind
That feeds upon infinity, that broods
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
Its voices issuing forth to silent light
In one continuous stream...

(Prel XIV 70-4)

In the contracted image of "voices issuing forth to silent light/ In one continuous stream" there is implicit the idea of the light of the imagination which illuminates "the dark abyss". The association of the poet's voice with that of the river is evident in the verbal "continuous stream". The word "silent" is always a relative term for Wordsworth and must be seen as a contrast to the verbosity of Cambridge and London and the "syllogistic words" of rationalist theorists. Silence is associated with the few, earnest words of humble rustics and with the poet's "solitude" (Prel IV 351): "The calm existence that is mine when I/ Am worthy of myself!" (Prel I 349-50).

As the poet reflects on the scene: "There I beheld the emblem of a mind..." (Prel XIV 70 my italics), his words refer not only to the actual experience or to Wordsworth's recollection of it but to its existence "there" -- within the text of The Prelude.

The poet's stated intention is to give:

as far as words can give,
 Substance and life to what I feel, enshrining,
 Such is my hope, the spirit of the Past
 For future restoration.

(Prel XII 283-6)

And he goes on to describe one of the tales about his boyhood as a "memorial" (Prel XII 287). The desire for permanence, which is a recurring theme in the critical prose, is accompanied by a corresponding attitude towards the physical and concrete nature of words: "monumental letters" with "characters fresh and visible" (Prel XII 241-5), and to represent those words in vividly realised personifications, in images of light and organicism and in the sound of the river. While the poet might lament the fact that the mind has not "Some element to stamp her image on/
 In nature somewhat nearer to her own" (Prel V 45-7), yet his verse "Creative and enduring, may become/ A power like one of Nature's" (Prel XIII 312-3).

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