

THE PLACE OF MAN AND NATURE
IN THE SHORTER POEMS OF
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH
1793-1806

Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

In his excellent new book, M. H. Abrams makes the following observation:

Many Romantic writers testified to a deeply significant experience in which an instant of consciousness, or else an ordinary object or event, suddenly blazes into revelation; the unsustainable moment seems to arrest what is passing, and is often described as an intersection of eternity with time.¹

Not only does Abrams describe these "illuminated moments" in Romantics such as Blake, Shelley and Wordsworth, but he traces similar revelatory experiences to St. Augustine and to post-Romantics as well. Wordsworth called these Moments "spots of time" and Joyce used the term "epiphany." They can be found in modern poets (for example in Yeats) and in modern fiction writers such as James, Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Faulkner and of course in Joyce. Abrams suggests that these "moments of vision" or "spots of time" can function "as a principle of literary organization, by signaling the essential discoveries or precipitating the narrative resolution."² The "spots of time" in Wordsworth's poetry constitute an extremely important aspect of it and are certainly very significant as an organizing factor. For it is true, as Wordsworth explains

¹M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), p.385.

²Ibid., p.419.

in "The Prelude" (Bk xi, ll. 274-5), that these "spots of time" are scattered everywhere in his life. It is also true that "they are celebrated everywhere in his poems."³ It seems, therefore, that to grapple with Wordsworth's "spots of time" would be to reach a full appreciation of his poetry.

Naturally there are numerous other aspects to Wordsworth's poetry. The great majority of Wordsworth's poems describe meetings or confrontations. These encounters become the vehicle through which the meaning of the poems is exposed. A study of these encounters could therefore result in a full appreciation of the whole body of Wordsworth's poetry.⁴ The understanding of the significance and use of memory is highly important for an appreciation of Wordsworth's poetry. Not only the "spots of time," but every facet of Wordsworth's imaginative mind relies on memory.⁵ Then there is the belief that Wordsworth's poetry centres around and develops from his pantheistic tendencies and studies have been made to understand Wordsworth's "natural religion" and his deviations from it.⁶

³Ibid., p.388.

⁴Frederick Garber has made such a study. See Wordsworth and the Poetry of Encounter (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971).

⁵Christopher Salvesen deals with memory in Wordsworth's poetry. See The Landscape of Memory: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry (London: Edward Arnold, 1965).

⁶See H. W. Piper, The Active Universe: Pantheism and the Concept of Imagination in the English Romantic Poets (London: Athlone Press, 1962).

These are merely a few of the many aspects of Wordsworth's poetry, but whatever "way in" the critics choose, there remain two basic fundamentals which have to be dealt with in any Wordsworthian study. Man and nature are the essential ingredients for Wordsworth's poetry. For subject-matter, Wordsworth very seldom looked further. This present essay is an analysis of the place of man and nature in that poetry. I have necessarily discussed some of the aspects enumerated above, but I have been concerned essentially with trying to discover how Wordsworth used his two most prominent poetic subjects. I have attempted to trace Wordsworth's development from the poet of nature, to the poet of man, and finally to the poet of man and nature. What I have hoped would emerge from this essay is an understanding of Wordsworth's relationship with nature and his attitude to it in the poems. I have attempted to stress that man and humanity were not always important to Wordsworth as a poet, and that their importance does not eventually equal that of nature. For by 1807 man, the mind of man and humanity in general are very much more important and much more vital as poetic subjects than is nature. I have tried to show that Wordsworth was at different times a poet of landscape descriptions, a poet interested only in man and humanity, and finally a poet interested in man within nature.

I have chosen to discuss the shorter poems of the 1793-1806 period, because this period covers the decade of Wordsworth's most intense poetic activity.

Although there are those (and I do not exclude myself) who believe that Wordsworth remained a successful poet till he neared his death,⁷ it cannot be denied that the greatest years of his long poetic career were those which saw the publication of the various editions of Lyrical Ballads and the Poems in Two Volumes. I have discussed, at relative length, Wordsworth's two fairly unsuccessful early poems, because I believe that it is in "An Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches" that his attitude to man and nature first becomes apparent. I have also discussed a poem which Wordsworth never published, called 'Salisbury Plain.' I have attempted to prove that it is of vital significance in Wordsworth's development as a poet of man and nature.

I have omitted from this essay discussion of "The Prelude." First, because the limits of time and space have made such a discussion an impossibility. More important is the fact that much of what I would have to say about "The Prelude," as it relates to the theme of this essay, would be a reiteration of what I have already said. It cannot be forgotten that "The Prelude" is after all a poem on the poet's own life and on the growth of his mind. As such it remains the most vivid account of his development, but the problems involved in differentiating between the development as the poet explains it and the development that emerges in his shorter poems, are materials for an entirely new study.

⁷Edith C. Batho, The Later Wordsworth (1933) and Mary E. Burton, The One Wordsworth (1942) have both made noteworthy attempts to prove that this is true.

CHAPTER ONE

"AN EVENING WALK"

Although Wordsworth began writing poetry while still at school and first published a poem in 1787,¹ his first major works are "Descriptive Sketches" and "An Evening Walk."² Both poems appeared in 1793 and represent, for the majority of critics, the start of Wordsworth's long poetic career. The two poems are similar in that their main intention is to describe scenery. The poems are often spoken of together as examples of Wordsworth's early preoccupation with picturesque ideas and the vogue of landscape description. There is a certain development from "An Evening Walk" to "Descriptive Sketches" and I have therefore chosen to discuss them separately. The purpose of the discussions is to show how and to what extent Wordsworth was influenced by picturesque ideas, current trends in poetry and contemporary events.

¹"Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress." See The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. by E. de Selincourt and rev. by Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-49), vol.1, p.367. All references to Wordsworth's poems are from this five volume edition, which is hereafter referred to as Poetical Works.

²All references are from the 1793 text of the poem.

the landscape observed by the poet. They are figures that were simply heard and seen; passive figures. W. M. Merchant provides one possible explanation for this when he states:

Many eighteenth-century thinkers adopted as the foundation of their thought a stable universe governed by unvarying natural laws, which the philosophers had adopted from the scientists of the seventeenth-century. This was the legacy of Francis Bacon, Newton and the Royal Society. In this uniform but mechanistic natural order, human beings with their incalculable emotions and aspirations tended to be alien creatures.⁵

This is perhaps too abstract a notion to have any concrete application to Wordsworth, but we do notice that in "An Evening Walk" Wordsworth does not dwell upon or examine in any depth the emotions and aspirations of the human beings encountered in the landscape. Their feelings are totally unimportant as subject-matter for the poem.

One exception to this may be found in the sixty-odd lines (ll. 242-300) in which Wordsworth describes a female beggar. He arrives at this sad story through a discussion of beautiful swans. While describing the swans Wordsworth breaks from his subject and says "Haply some wretch has ey'd, and call'd thee bless'd;" (l. 242). From this

⁵W. M. Merchant, "Wordsworth and the Doctrine of Nature," Die Neueren Sprachen, (1953), pp.191-2. H. W. Piper also discusses the Newtonian universe in the first chapter of his book, The Active Universe: Pantheism and the Concept of Imagination in the English Romantic Poets (London: Athlone Press, 1962).

point he digresses to tell the tale of the female beggar, who is indeed a sorry sight. Wordsworth notices her weariness as she "dragg'd her babes along this weary way;" (l. 244). Her load is heavy and her limbs are sore and Wordsworth cannot but feel for her when he imagines how she "bids her soldier come her woes to share," (l. 253).^{*} He talks of her grief, describes her misfortunes and imagines the hardships she has to face. It would seem that Wordsworth has allowed himself to become involved with the "incalculable emotions and aspirations" of one of the humans noticed in the landscape. But the vagrant's tale is a mere digression. At the end of the passage Wordsworth wastes no time in returning to his chosen subject-matter. The transition from the harsh death of the beggar's children to the sweet sounds of the countryside is extremely abrupt. This suggests the incongruity of the passage in a poem of landscape description.⁶ Furthermore, it creates the feeling of artificial compassion for the human sufferers. Wordsworth's sincere interest in humanity and the human predicament is hardly felt in this passage and certainly

^{*}The female beggar in this passage calls to mind the "Soldier's Widow" in "Guilt and Sorrow." The story of one woman seems to have been used both for this passage and "Guilt and Sorrow" (and, it follows, for "The Female Vagrant" as well).

⁶In the 1849-50 text of the poem this passage is only 27 lines long. This is perhaps significant of the fact that Wordsworth realised its incongruity.

nowhere else in the poem. If Wordsworth had any profound thoughts on humanity at this stage, he failed to get them across in this poem. The reason for this is that the unravelling of the vagrant's story in no way fuses with the general descriptions in the poem. As Donald Wesling writes, Wordsworth manages in "An Evening Walk" "to include social commentary--in the manner of Thomson and Cowper--only in digressions from description."⁷

The digression had become something of a convention. In William Gilpin's Observations a similar use of digressions can be found.⁸ On pages 63 and 64, while discussing the magnificent situation of a village in the Lake District, he digresses to tell the reader of a wealthy inhabitant of the village who had earned himself the title of "King of Patterdale." In the following pages we are told of a clergyman by the name of Mattison, in order to make us aware of the "singular simplicity, and inattention to forms which characterize a country like this."⁹ Later, Gilpin relates, in a digression,

⁷Donald Wesling, Wordsworth and the Adequacy of Landscape (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1970), p.14.

⁸William Gilpin, Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1772, on Several Parts of England; Particularly the Mountains, and Lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland, vol.II (London: R. Blamire, Strand, 1786).

⁹Ibid., p.65.

a story told to him by a tourist guide about Richard III and the Earl of Richmond.¹⁰

Christopher Salvesen indicates that Wordsworth may "have read William Gilpin's account of his Lakeland tour, which had appeared in 1786."¹¹ It is more than likely, however, that Wordsworth was familiar with Gilpin's work and had read some of it before the publication of "An Evening Walk." In the notes to the poem, Wordsworth informs the reader that the word "sugh" (l. 317), as explained by Gilpin, is "expressive...of the sound of the motion of a stick through the air...."¹² Further evidence of Wordsworth's familiarity with Gilpin's works may be found in a letter to Mathews, which was written (according to de Selincourt) in 1796. Wordsworth requests that Mathews take care of his books. The only books he mentions by name are those by Gilpin, suggesting that he valued them highly. He says: "Gilpin's tour into Scotland, and his northern tour, each 2 vols., ought to be amongst the number." De Selincourt notes that these volumes were: 1. "Observations relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, made in the year 1776, in Several Parts of Great Britain, particularly the Highlands of Scotland" (1788, 2 vols.). 2. "Observations

¹⁰Ibid., pp.249-250.

¹¹Christopher Salvesen, The Landscape of Memory: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry (London: Edward Arnold, 1970), p.53.

¹²Poetical Works, vol. 1, p.30.

relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, made in the year 1772, on Several Parts of England, particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland" (1787, 2 vols.).¹³ Although there is no definite proof, it seems likely that Wordsworth acquired these volumes before the publication of "An Evening Walk." If he bought the books after the publication of the poem, then the mention of Gilpin in the notes is still ample proof that Wordsworth was familiar with his works.

There were other accounts of visitors' impressions of the Lake District with which Wordsworth may have been acquainted. In the latter half of the eighteenth century there was an "awakening in England to an appreciation of landscape." This "awakening," writes Hussey, "was a direct result of the Grand Tour fashionable with the aristocracy after the isolation of the country from the rest of Europe during the greater part of the seventeenth century."¹⁴ With the same enthusiasm shown for the Alpine scenery, the landscape lovers turned to their own country and the Lake District became a favourite destination for such tourists. Salvesen mentions some of the descriptions of the district: Gray's Journal of his visit to the Lakes (1775) and Dr.

¹³The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805), ed. by E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p.155, hereafter referred to as Early Letters.

¹⁴Christopher Hussey, The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927), p.12.

Brown's letter describing the Lake at Keswick (1767). Then there was William Hutchinson's "An Excursion to the Lakes" (1774) and West's "Guide to the Lakes" (1780).¹⁵

The appreciation of landscape, the vogue in landscape painting and the descriptions of landscape (whether in verse or prose) were part and parcel of the Picturesque Movement. Wordsworth was certainly familiar with this movement, which had already gained a firm footing during his youth.¹⁶ The controversy over the Picturesque, which resulted from the varying opinions of Uvedale Price, Edmund Burke, Richard Payne Knight and William Gilpin, erupted in the years following the composition of "An Evening Walk." Wordsworth does not suggest his support for any particular view of the Picturesque in the landscape descriptions of the poem. In fact, the main reason Wordsworth describes the landscape is because of the pleasure he feels in observing it. Bateson remarks that "In terms of emotional attitude the necessitating condition was simply the pleasure that a man of culture and sensibility can be expected to feel in the face of nature."¹⁷ We are told that it

¹⁵Salvesen, op. cit., p.53.

¹⁶Gilpin's first major publication concerning the Picturesque appeared in 1782: Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Summer of the Year 1770 (London, 1782).

¹⁷Bateson, op. cit., p.83.

is amongst the lakes, woods and mountains that he has memories "of departed pleasures" (l. 16). These scenes have an "ever-varying charm" (l. 18) and may offer many "delights" (l. 27). The poet tells us "How pleasant" it is to view the landscape and the sun's effects on it (ll. 97-108). Later, Wordsworth writes "Not undelightful are the simplest charms/
Found by the verdant door of mountain farms." (ll. 127-128). All through the poem we have indications that it is the pleasures of the landscape--whether it be a peaceful, wild or slightly humanised one--that Wordsworth is describing.¹⁸

The Picturesque theorists attempted to lay down the law as to what constitutes a pleasant scene or beautiful landscape. Wordsworth has fallen in line with the movement by describing the type of landscape he finds pleasant. Ever since Chaucer poets have found pleasure in landscape and their natural surroundings, but Wordsworth's interest in landscape description is very much a result of his immersion in "picturesque ideas and techniques." J. R. Watson, in his discussion of "An Evening Walk," suggests that Wordsworth's landscape resembles the picturesque landscapes of Salvator Rosa and Claude.¹⁹

¹⁸See: Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966). In "The Ministry of Pleasure" (p.180-7) Beach discusses Wordsworth's belief that "it is chiefly through pleasure (otherwise joy) that nature develops man's character."

¹⁹J. R. Watson, Picturesque Landscape and English Romantic Poetry (London: Hutchinson Educational Ltd., 1970), pp.65-78.

The resemblance results from Wordsworth's immersion in picturesque ideas and not from a conscious effort to discover scenes suitable for pictures. Unlike Gilpin, Wordsworth is not concerned with the pictorial qualities of a scene. Wordsworth's choice of subject-matter for "An Evening Walk" and his general attitude to the landscape was influenced by his knowledge of the picturesque theories, but, as I have mentioned before, the poem does not suggest his support for any one view, nor does it consistently conform to particular aspects of picturesque theories.²⁰ There is, however, one aspect of Gilpin's teachings that seems to have effected Wordsworth's poem and this aspect concerns the use of figures.

C. P. Barbier discusses Gilpin's use of figures and says that for Gilpin they serve three purposes: "to characterize a scene, to give it life and animation, and lastly they often prove a mechanical necessity."²¹ This necessity might arise, for example, when trying to distinguish between a road and a river. If the painter were to place a figure on the road there could be no mistaking the road for a river. Barbier reprints a selection of Gilpin

²⁰Some of these aspects may be found in Martin Price's "The Picturesque Moment," in From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle, ed. by Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp.260-1.

²¹C. P. Barbier, William Gilpin: His Drawings, Teaching and Theory of the Picturesque (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p.144.

drawings, paintings and sketches in which we can see how Gilpin put his theory into practice. A close study of these prints show that Gilpin often excluded figures completely from his scenes. When he does insert figures there are seldom more than three. The figures, either animals or humans, are always very small and never constitute more than a fraction of the total picture. Mostly, they are placed in the bottom corners of the pictures, but never in both corners of any one picture. Sometimes the figures are so dark that they are hardly visible. The figures themselves never become the subject of the picture. It is of no importance whether the figures are bending, kneeling or simply standing. They may however point, either with a hand or a shepherd's staff. The gesticulation is either towards the centre of the picture or to the central image of it. The figures have thus been used, having no importance as subject-matter. They merely form a part of the mechanical perfection of a picturesque landscape painting. In other words, figures constitute a compositional device. Interest in them is restrained and confined to their function as focusing points.

"An Evening Walk" shows that Wordsworth was interested, as were Gilpin and all the other descriptive landscape writers of the time, in the landscape alone. They all describe the visual scene and the various effects of the sun, moon and wind on these scenes. There is no regard for and very little discussion of the emotions and feelings of human beings.

Even if Wordsworth deals with the plight of the female beggar, he does so, as I have demonstrated, only in a digression. Our attention on the observed scene is not diverted for very long. The beggar woman is merely a figure in the landscape, but her story--the actual digression--has nothing to do with it. It can be said, therefore, that Wordsworth falls in line with the general trend of the time. Though he is not a pure picturesque descriptive poet, he uses figures, be they animal or human, to highlight and animate his scenes.

Wordsworth was trying to present his pleasure at aspects of the observed landscape. The material for his poem must, therefore, necessarily consist of natural scenery. This makes the poem conform with the patterns of description which resulted from the growing interest in the Picturesque and the increasing number of descriptive sketches published by visitors to the Lake District. Although much of Wordsworth's landscape is personified and a general human presence is felt, there is a notable absence of a human subject. Wordsworth has resisted involvement, to a large extent, in human emotions and feelings. This situation does not recur in his later poetry, for he came to realise that great poetry deals with "the mind of man." Even in "Descriptive Sketches," an early publication, it can be noted that Wordsworth has realised the inadequacy of pure descriptive poetry. In order to come to grips with humanity and the human predicament, Wordsworth moved

away from landscape description, which necessarily demands concentration on a nature without man. Wordsworth's love of nature never ceased, but after his experiences in France (which will be discussed later) his concern for society and his fellow human beings, equalled his love of nature. His mature poetry has mankind as the central subject-matter and external nature is used in the development of human ideas.

CHAPTER TWO

"DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES"

Wordsworth composed "Descriptive Sketches" during his second and longer visit to France, in the years 1791 and 1792. The poem was published in July of the following year, the same year in which "An Evening Walk" appeared. It has often been assumed that the two poems appeared simultaneously as companion poems in 1793, and this may be due to the fact that they have many similarities and are generally and correctly classed as belonging to the same Wordsworthian period.¹ The later poem, as its title suggests, is a descriptive poem and as such, resembles "An Evening Walk." Wordsworth's intention in "Descriptive Sketches" is to describe the scenery of the Alps, with which he became familiar on his pedestrian Alpine tour during the summer of 1790. The tour was made together with a close friend of Wordsworth's, Robert Jones, to whom the descriptions are dedicated.

This poem, like "An Evening Walk," demonstrates Wordsworth's early habit of borrowing from

¹De Selincourt makes it clear that "An Evening Walk" was published in February and "Descriptive Sketches" in July. See: Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson and rev. by E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p.xxiv.

preceding works, authors and poets.² The style of this poem is still very much in the eighteenth-century tradition and possesses a somewhat quasi-Miltonic syntax. Wordsworth uses the heroic couplet which is unusual in his later poems, but is fairly normal for loco-descriptive poetry of this period.³

"Descriptive Sketches" attempts to go much further than "An Evening Walk." Mention will be made of the similarities between the two 1793 poems, but the main interest here is to underline a development in Wordsworth as a poet. It is in "Descriptive Sketches" that we see Wordsworth's first sustained effort to come to grips with humanity. It is in this poem that mankind is first manifested as important subject-matter for Wordsworth. Here we see Wordsworth's first attempt to populate his landscape with men whose importance is not only due to the fact that they are present in the described scene to highlight or animate it, but that they serve to abstract and depict a picture of humanity. In "Descriptive Sketches" we notice that "Humane aspirations begin to crowd upon the images of nature with which till now he has been content."⁴

²See Poetical Works, vol. 1, pp.326-329.

³Geoffrey H. Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp.110-112.

⁴George McLean Harper, William Wordsworth: His Life, Works, and Influence (London: John Murray, 1929), p.139.

These "images of nature" are to be found in the first several hundred lines of the poem. In these lines Wordsworth "emphasized chiefly the beauties of nature to be observed in the Alps, and, as in 'An Evening Walk', made cursory comments upon the activities of the human beings who lived and worked in the region he was describing."⁵ The similarities to "An Evening Walk" are mainly a result of those same early influences still working upon Wordsworth during the years of composition. For instance, the works of William Gilpin were still fresh in the poet's mind. In line 365 of "Descriptive Sketches," Wordsworth writes that "glad Dundee in 'faint huzza's' expir'd."⁶ The phrase "faint huzza's" comes from Burns's lines "The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer" (stanza xxx). However, it was Gilpin who first connected the phrase to the mortal wound of Dundee, in his Observations on ... the Highlands of Scotland. It is possible that Wordsworth's use of this phrase is a result of his reading of Gilpin.⁷

There is a description in "Descriptive Sketches" which demonstrates the still prevalent influence of picturesque ideas. From line 211 to line 242, Wordsworth describes a "wild" landscape.

⁵G. W. Meyer, Wordsworth's Formative Years. "University of Michigan Publications, Language and Literature," vol. xx (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1943), p.81.

⁶Poetical Works, vol. 1, p.64. All references are to the 1793 text of the poem.

⁷Ibid., p.327.

We are told that "Fierce comes the river down" (l. 211) on a night that has no comfort; "Heavy, and dull, and cloudy is the night" (l. 215). The sounds of the night are wild and frightening; "th'ascending roar of desert floods" (l. 223) and "The death-dog, howling loud and long" (l. 225). Wordsworth chooses to insert a figure into this scene. We read that

The dry leaves stir as with the serpent's walk,
And, far beneath, Banditti voices talk;
(ll. 233-4)

The presence of Banditti in this type of scene seems very suitable. And Gilpin's opinion is that "In wild and desert scenes, we are best pleased with banditti-soldiers, if not in regimentals, and such figures, as coalesce in idea with the scenes, in which we place them."⁸ Gilpin's use of banditti figures is an adaptation from the landscapes of Salvator Rosa. In his Tour of the Lakes, Gilpin praises Salvator's banditti as being extremely well-suited to scenes of "wild grandeur."⁹ Wordsworth's insertion of banditti into his wild scene is a direct result of the picturesque influence.

In a letter to his sister Dorothy, Wordsworth tells her of his experiences during the Alpine tour, "My spirits have been kept in a perpetual hurry of delight by the almost uninterrupted succession of sublime and beautiful objects which have

⁸Cited by Barbier, op. cit., p.144, from Gilpin's "Instructions for Examining Landscape," pp.17-18.

⁹Barbier discusses the use of figures in Gilpin, Salvator Rosa, Claude and Poussin on pages 143-7.

passed before my eyes during the course of the last month,"¹⁰ The terms "sublime" and "beautiful" had, by then, become a well-integrated part of the discussions on the picturesque, but they remain reminiscent of Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, which first appeared in 1757. It is more than likely that Wordsworth, because of his love of natural scenery and his interest in landscape, was familiar with this influential work. In the same letter quoted above, Wordsworth tells Dorothy that "... the banks of the water are infinitely more picturesque, and, as it is much narrower, the landscape suffered proportionally less from that pale stream which before almost entirely hid the opposite shore." It is clear then that on his Alpine tour, Wordsworth saw the landscape with the eye of a picturesque painter and noticed "sublime and beautiful objects" of the Burkean type. In the subsequent composition of these descriptions, Wordsworth demonstrated that he was still under the influence of picturesque ideas and the Burkean concepts of beauty and sublimity.

The much quoted footnote to line 347 supports this opinion.¹¹ The footnote does not suggest Wordsworth's reaction against the picturesque to the extent that J. R. Watson supposes it does.¹² The

¹⁰Early Letters, p.31, cited by Watson, op. cit., p.74.

¹¹Poetical Works, vol.1, p.62. "I had once given to these sketches the title of Picturesque;...."

¹²Watson, op. cit., p.72.

very fact that Wordsworth had once considered giving these sketches the title of "Picturesque" proves his preoccupation with picturesque ideas. He is here merely admitting that certain sublime scenes observed in the Alps, do not conform to the "cold rules" of picturesque painting. Although he feels that the Alps would be insulted if described in picturesque terms, he himself does so. Wordsworth is searching for sublime scenes and scenes of grandeur. He does not allow himself to distort scenes by the necessary prescribed use (for picturesque paintings) of light and shade. However, there are descriptions of scenes in which we notice the effects of light and shade, and the use of this technique draws the reader's attention to the views of Gilpin and Burke on this subject.¹³ Hartman's examples, taken from the last descriptions in the poem, serve best to illustrate Wordsworth's awareness of the effect created by light and dark contrasts.¹⁴

Last let us turn to where Chamouny shields,
Bosom'd in gloomy woods, her golden fields...
(ll. 680-1)

Alone ascends that mountain nam'd of white
That dallies with the Sun the summer night.
(ll. 690-1)

Glad Day-light laughs upon his top of snow,
Glitter the stars above, and all is black below.
(ll. 700-1)

¹³ See: Barbier, op. cit., "Light and Shade," pp.133-6, and Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, ed, by James T. Boulton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), pp.79-81.

¹⁴ Hartman, op. cit., p.102.

The best example of a picturesque presence of light and shade is in the lines 106-7.

Here half a village shines, in gold array'd,
Bright as the moon, half hides itself in shade.¹⁵

I have suggested earlier that the prevalent influence of the picturesque resulted in the minimized importance of mankind as subject-matter for Wordsworth. The humanization of the landscape is necessarily limited; however, Wordsworth develops it in the same way as in "An Evening Walk." He constantly uses personification in his descriptions of nature and the elements. This animism creates the feeling of a more humanized landscape.¹⁶ The following are merely two examples of the many uses of personification:

Where summer Suns in ocean sink to rest,
Or moonlight Upland lifts her hoary breast;
(ll. 7-8)

and,

The cloister startles at the gleam of arms,
And Blasphemy the shuddering fane alarms;
Nod the cloud-piercing pines their troubl'd heads,
Spires, rocks, and lawns, a browner night o'erspreads.
(ll. 60-3)

But the humanized landscape is created by more than mere personification. We are told of cottages and villages and often of their inhabitants. We are made aware of the presence of animals in the landscape, either by description or mention of them,

¹⁵Cited by Hartman, op. cit., p.106.

¹⁶The animism of 1793 is very different from that found in the maturer Wordsworth. For a full discussion of animism in Wordsworth see: R. D. Havens, The Mind of a Poet, vol. 1: A Study of Wordsworth's Thought (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967), pp.68-84.

or through the sounds made by them. Here, as in "An Evening Walk," these animals and men, with their man-made homes, are presented to us as part of the landscape. They are described because they happen to be present in the observed landscape. Thus, with the emergence of this type of landscape, peopled and humanized to this minimal extent, it seems that Wordsworth has again "placed himself deliberately among the writers of the 'landscape' school."¹⁷

But "Descriptive Sketches" goes much further than "An Evening Walk." Mary Moorman feels that "Human types, such as the 'Gryson gypsey (sic)' and the chamois-hunter are introduced as foreground figures in the landscape, to heighten the romantic effect, much as the Beggar-woman and her children are introduced into 'An Evening Walk.'"¹⁸ This is only partly true. Moorman suggests very much the same thing about the hermit figure.

Beneath an old-grey oak as violets lie,
Stretch'd at his feet with stedfast, upward eye,
His children's children join'd the holy sound,
A hermit--with his family around.
(ll. 172-5)

This scene does not only serve to show Wordsworth's favour for the Italians, in whom he observed a "softness and elegance" as against the "austereness" he felt amongst the Swiss.¹⁹ Nor is the hermit

¹⁷Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth: A Biography. The Early Years: 1770-1803 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p.115. I have taken the liberty of extending her comment on "An Evening Walk" to include the first several hundred lines of "Descriptive Sketches."

¹⁸Moorman, *op. cit.*, p.129.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p.143.

merely the conventional property of a late eighteenth-century landscape.²⁰ The hermit "with his family around" reminds Wordsworth of his own situation. He was orphaned at a young age and although he was well cared for, both at Hawkshead and by various members of his family, he was not unaware of the misfortunes which are the result of the absence of parents. At the time of composition, the Wordsworth estate was still unsettled and Wordsworth was distressed by the lack of finances, especially since he knew of his rightful inheritance. Wordsworth was also pestered by a concerned uncle and by his older brother who felt he should be using his time to more advantage. In short, Wordsworth was unhappy with his familial situation and longed for the congeniality of a normal parental family relationship. Dorothy was very much a favourite with Wordsworth, and it was together with her that he planned their eventual settlement in a quiet country cottage. With this background in mind, it is possible to see, in the hermit scene, an embodiment of Wordsworth's own personal desires, desires with which Dorothy, the addressee of the poem, was well acquainted.²¹ Admittedly, the parents are not present in the happy scene Wordsworth describes, but they are only a short distance away, soon to return to the pleasant family atmosphere. Moreover, the grandfather is

²⁰Bateson, *op. cit.*, p.141.

²¹For a full account of Wordsworth's biography at this period, see Meyer, Moorman and Harper.

attending the children, even entertaining them, and this strengthens Wordsworth's notion of the importance of strong family ties.

The Grison gypsy and the chamois-chaser are not only used as foreground figures in Wordsworth's landscape.²² The gypsy joins a band of "beasts and men" who together form "a mighty caravan of pain." Wordsworth is explicit as to the roots of this pain; it is a result of "social suffering." The chamois-chaser suffers too. His suffering ends in death; a cold, hungry and painful death. His family continue to suffer, constantly opening the door of their little hut to see if they might catch a glimpse of the man who might bring food to fill their aching bellies. Wordsworth uses the chamois-chaser to describe a wild, almost Gothic landscape. It is he that takes us into the

... vacant worlds where Nature never gave
A brook to murmur or a bough to wave,
(ll. 372-3)

But if Wordsworth was interested in the landscape alone he need not have brought to our attention the painful hunger which caused the whole family to suffer.

Wordsworth has become aware that the peasants, gypsies and hermits found in the natural landscape are part of a socio-political structure. They are not merely figures to be used for the

²²For the "Grison gypsey" sketch, see: Poetical Works, vol. 1, p.54, ll.188-210. The "chamois-chaser" episode may be found on pp.64-6, ll. 366-413.

animation or the enlivening of a scene. He has recognised that they are human and describes their hopes, despair, courage, suffering and their humane aspirations. He sees their plight through the eyes of one acquainted with the political concepts of liberty and freedom. In line 329, Wordsworth quotes the word "weeds" from Cowper's "Task" and if we look at the relevant lines we may note the significance of Wordsworth's quote:

'Tis liberty alone that gives the flower
Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume,
And we are weeds without it.²³

Thus, even in his landscape descriptions Wordsworth's thoughts move from the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque to thoughts of something far more profound; thoughts of the position of mankind in a world of human beings.

However, it is from line 520 to the end of the poem that Wordsworth really takes the reader into the world of humanity. We are still well aware of Wordsworth's presence in the Swiss Alps and many vivid pictures are drawn of them, but Wordsworth's chief concern is with humanity. It is at this point that the real break in subject-matter comes. It begins with a rather typical appreciation of the "noble savage" figure, who was once "entirely free" and "bless'd as free."²⁴ What Wordsworth sees in the

²³Poetical Works, vol. 1, p.327.

²⁴For a discussion on the revolutionary idea of a "return to nature," see: Edward Dowden, The French Revolution and English Literature (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1897), Ch. 1.

Alps from that point onwards is "Conquest, Avarice, and Pride," "Death," "Famine," "dark Oppression," "Machination," "Persecution," "Ambition," "Discord," and "Pow'r."²⁵ He has, in fact, traced "The general sorrows of the human race."²⁶ Wordsworth expresses his faith in the justice of Liberty and Freedom. He feels that

... Liberty shall soon, indignant, raise
 Red on his hills his beacon's comet blaze;
 Bid from on high his lonely cannon sound,
 And on ten thousand hearths his shout rebound;
 (ll. 774-7)

His prayer to God is that he give

... to Freedom's waves to ride
 Sublime o'er Conquest, Avarice and Pride,
 (ll. 792-3)

and over all the "sorrows of the human race."

It is in this switch to the subject of freedom and liberty that we see Wordsworth's first significant handling of the human situation. Although he cannot make "larger personal and social concerns grow out of the presented scene, weighting descriptive poetry with the evoked significances of 'things'" as he does in his maturer poetry,²⁷ Wordsworth nevertheless tackles these concerns. This is of prime importance in the development of the poet. In the first part of the poem, Wordsworth

²⁵See Poetical Works, vol. 1, p.88, ll. 793-801.

²⁶Ibid., p.78, l. 603.

²⁷Wesling, op. cit., p.15.

allows himself to indulge in almost pure descriptive poetry,* and then breaks from this to the subject of freedom and liberty and the human plight. Donald Wesling suggests a very acceptable explanation for this:

To the extent that landscape may be viewed as nature without man, Wordsworth recognizes that it poses a threat to mind and to life. For precisely this reason, neither can he rest purely in description.²⁸

The reason for this recognition is deeply entrenched in Wordsworth's activities in France during his stay there. Wordsworth's frame of mind was very different at the time of composition from what it had been during his summer visit to Europe. In composing the descriptions he hoped to record some of the marvellous sights with which he had been confronted during his 1790 tour of the Alps, but his activities and his friendships coloured his interests to such an extent that his inspiration for the poem flagged. The French Revolution was already well under way and Wordsworth's main concerns were with revolutionary theories and other aspects of the revolution. Annette Vallon, his lover and the mother of his child, was both a Catholic and a Royalist. His closest friend, Michel Beaupuy, was a captain in the French army, and taught Wordsworth nearly all he knew of the doctrines and philosophies

* As I have shown, Wordsworth was, even at this stage, concerned to a certain extent with the human element in poetry. Therefore, I write "almost pure descriptive poetry."

²⁸Wesling, op. cit., p.18.

of the revolution. He came into contact with Royalists, Girondins and Jacobins and generally moved in circles where the main topic of conversation was the revolution.²⁹ He himself was a Jacobin³⁰ and felt so strongly for the ideals of the revolution that he even considered volunteering for military duties.

With this background knowledge, the change of subject-matter in "Descriptive Sketches" is easily understood. Wordsworth came into contact with poverty-stricken peasants, observed the injustices of the 'ancien regime,' discovered the theories and revolutionary doctrines for a new world, and in short, was concerned with subjects far removed from those of landscape and natural scenery. It has been suggested that in borrowing from Ramond de Carbonnières, Wordsworth merely adopted the political implications of his observations of the Swiss.³¹ Meyer asserts that Ramond's political influence may have been overestimated, and that Beaupuy's influence was far greater.³² The sources of influence on Wordsworth were extensive, but it cannot be doubted

²⁹For a full description of Wordsworth's activities in France, see Moorman, op. cit., pp.171-210.

³⁰Hoxie Neale Fairchild gives an interesting description of a typical young Jacobin and includes Wordsworth as fitting the type. See The Romantic Quest (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp.36-42.

³¹Meyer, op. cit., pp.78-81, explains this opinion held by Legouis and Beatty.

³²Meyer, op. cit., p.81.

that, whatever the sources, Wordsworth was deeply involved with the revolution. It is his involvement with and support for the revolution that caused the first major shift in his poetry; a shift that took him from landscape to mankind and from love of nature to love of man.

This is the major development of "Descriptive Sketches," but Geoffrey Hartman, a critic with whom it is extremely difficult to disagree, suggests something more. In his chapter on "Descriptive Sketches" he states that the poem

... is not a portrait of nature, or the projection on nature of an idea, but the portrayal of the 'action' of a mind in search (primarily through the eye) of a nature adequate to its idea. It is already the 'mind of man' which constitutes, however obscurely, the poet's 'haunt and main region.' The eye, the most despotic of the bodily senses in Wordsworth, is thwarted in a peculiar manner. It seeks to localize in nature the mind's intuition of 'powers and presences,' yet nature itself seems opposed to this process, and leads the eye relentlessly from scene to scene.³³

Surely it is agreed today that poetry embodies "itself in symbols, which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind."³⁴ Mill praised Tennyson for his ability to create "scenery, in keeping with some state of human feeling."³⁵

³³Hartman, op. cit., p.107. For the same discussion on "Descriptive Sketches," see "Wordsworth's 'Descriptive Sketches' and the Growth of a Poet's Mind," P.M.L.A., vol. 76 (1961).

³⁴Early Essays by John Stuart Mill, ed. by J. W. M. Gibbs (London, 1897), pp.208-9.

³⁵Review, written in 1835, of Tennyson's Poems Chiefly Lyrical (1830) and Poems (1833),

T. S. Eliot's famous idea of an "objective correlative" is also widely accepted. He states that a poet must find

... a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that 'particular' emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."³⁶

With the acceptance of these critical statements, it must also be accepted that poetry in general deals with the "mind of man." Hartman suggests that Wordsworth is searching for an "objective correlative" and the poem portrays his failure to find one. "Descriptive Sketches" is Wordsworth's first attempt to describe "scenery in keeping with some state of human feeling." Thus, "Descriptive Sketches" does in fact deal with a subject which was to become "the haunt and main region" of Wordsworth's "song:" "the mind of man."

in Early Essays, op. cit., p.242.

³⁶T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," Selected Essays 1917-32 (London, 1932), p.145. The above three quotes are all cited by M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 25.

CHAPTER THREE

'SALISBURY PLAIN'

I

At Windy Brow in April-May, 1794, Dorothy Wordsworth completed a fair copy of a poem which Wordsworth had composed mainly after his solitary wanderings over Salisbury Plain in late July or early August, 1793. Wordsworth called the poem simply 'Salisbury Plain,' but by November, 1794 he had changed the title to 'A Night on Salisbury Plain.'¹ By 1795 Wordsworth had made slight corrections to Dorothy's copy, but the changes were un-substantial and insignificant. However, between 1795 and 1799 Wordsworth developed the narrative which becomes more involved, with the traveller on Sarum's Plain becoming the guilt-ridden sailor of "Guilt and Sorrow." These alterations were so extensive that a new title had to be given to differentiate between the later work and the earlier 'Salisbury Plain.' The new title is 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain.' A great deal of this poem survived in "Guilt and Sorrow" which was prepared

¹For an account of this journey over Salisbury Plain and the incidents leading up to it, see Moorman, *op. cit.*, p.232, and Harper, *op. cit.*, p.146. Single quotation marks are henceforth used to signify a poem which remained in manuscript form until after Wordsworth's death.

for publication in 1841 and appeared in 1842.²

De Selincourt's text of "Guilt and Sorrow" is perhaps as reliable as any in his praiseworthy edition of Wordsworth's poems, but he presents the two earlier poems in the "apparatus criticus" only.³ By so doing he has unwittingly created a misconception in the minds of the readers of Wordsworth's poetry. There is no doubt that both the earlier poems contributed to the published work of 1842, but it is unacceptable that 'Salisbury Plain' and 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain' should be viewed as alternate versions of the same theme, or as mere stages in the composition of "Guilt and Sorrow." While critics have been aware of the relevant facts concerning the composition of the poem, they have, nevertheless, chiefly as a result of de Selincourt's text, viewed the two earlier poems as variants of "Guilt and Sorrow." Moreover, critics have referred to and cited "Guilt and Sorrow" in discussions of Wordsworth's development, as a poem composed mainly in the years 1793-4. Again, de Selincourt's note on the dates of the composition, inserted below the

²For a more descriptive account of the chronology of the composition of 'Salisbury Plain,' 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain' and "Guilt and Sorrow" see Poetical Works, vol. 1, pp.330-4, Stephen Gill, "The Original 'Salisbury Plain: Introduction and Text," in Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies in Memory of John Alban Finch, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth and Beth Darlington (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp.142-151, and Enid Welsford, Salisbury Plain: A Study in the Development of Wordsworth's Mind and Art (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), pp.5-30 and 134-144.

³Poetical Works, vol. 1, pp.94-127.

title of the poem, may have added to this misconception: "[Begun 1791-2.--Completed 1793-4.--A version of stanzas XXIII-L under title "The Female Vagrant" published 1798.--the whole revised and published 1842.]"⁴

John Jones believes that 'Salisbury Plain' is a "version" of "Guilt and Sorrow." He does however, realise the necessity of quoting from the earlier "version" in order to illustrate Wordsworth's thoughts in 1794. His quotation is inaccurate. "Over her brow like dawn of gladness threw," belongs to "Guilt and Sorrow" and for the 1794 version should read "O'er her moist eyes...." Jones quotes from de Selincourt and his slight mistake is excusable only in view of the difficulty involved in piecing together a correct text from words and lines in the "apparatus criticus."⁵

Donald Wesling has made an "incisive contribution to the understanding of Wordsworth."⁶ Nevertheless, his book contains at least one critical error. Wesling states that "Already, the Wordsworthian landscape has taken on the 'visionary dreariness' of portions of 'The Prelude.'" He is referring to the landscape in the poetry of the 1790s, but to illustrate this early example of the

⁴Ibid., p.94.

⁵John Jones, The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954), p.76.

⁶Wesling, op. cit., reviewed by J. R. Watson, in The Review of English Studies: New Series, vol. 22 (1971).

"visionary dreariness" he quotes from the 1842 text of "Guilt and Sorrow."⁷ There is no sound critical basis for this practice. Wesling should have quoted from 'Salisbury Plain' where the parallel lines are very different, but may still have been quoted as an example of "visionary dreariness."

Stephen Gill has done much to prevent any further difficulties, malpractices and critical inconsistencies of this type by publishing a text of the original 'Salisbury Plain.' Realising the difficulties involved in using de Selincourt's "apparatus criticus" he has gone back to the manuscripts and has edited, for the first time, a unified text of 'Salisbury Plain.' (However, not all of the manuscript is extant.) It is now possible to read the poem without the hindrances created by constant reference to a complicated "apparatus criticus."

By publishing this text, Gill hoped to do more than merely facilitate our reading of a hitherto dislocated text. He believes that 'Salisbury Plain' and 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain' "stand, and should be judged, independently of the late poem Wordsworth chose to print."⁸ In his other articles, Gill supports this opinion by unhesitatingly discussing the two poems as completed works worthy of analysis

⁷Wesling, op. cit., p.16.

⁸Gill, "The Original 'Salisbury Plain,'" op. cit., p.142. For the text itself see pp.152-167.

and judgement independent of "Guilt and Sorrow."⁹

In order to find support for Gill's attitude, Wordsworth himself may be cited. In a letter to William Mathews written on May 23, 1794, Wordsworth states: "I have another poem written last summer, ready for the press,...."¹⁰ De Selincourt's note to this is that the poem referred to is "Guilt and Sorrow; or Incidents upon Salisbury Plain." This is incorrect. The poem is 'Salisbury Plain' which Wordsworth regarded as complete and ready for the eyes of the public. By November, 1795 Wordsworth believed that he had written a new poem, which he again hoped to publish: "I have a poem which I should wish to dispose of...."¹¹ The poem is no longer 'Salisbury Plain' to which he had made "alterations and additions so material as that it may be looked on almost as another work,"¹² but rather 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain.' It is clear, although Wordsworth worked on the latter poem until

⁹Stephen C. Gill, "'Adventures on Salisbury Plain' and Wordsworth's Poetry of Protest: 1795-1797," Studies in Romanticism, vol. 11 (1972), pp.48-65. And "Wordsworth's Breeches Pocket: Attitudes to the Didactic Poet," Essays in Criticism, vol. 19 (1969), pp.385-401. Enid Welsford also supports this opinion through her thorough examinations of the two earlier manuscripts. (She prefers to refer to the poems as manuscripts and not completed poems.)

¹⁰Early Letters, p.117.

¹¹Letter to Francis Wrangham, *Ibid.*, p.145.

¹²*Ibid.*

1799 and revised it again over forty years later, that by the end of 1795 there were completed manuscripts of two different poems, poems which were final enough to make Wordsworth desire their publication.

F. W. Bateson and Geoffrey Hartman are two critics who have granted these early pieces the status of completed poems.¹³ In his discussion of Wordsworth in the 1790s, Hartman has realized the necessity to analyse 'Salisbury Plain' as a representative work of the period. To facilitate his textual analysis he went to great lengths:

To get the earliest 'complete' text, I have made my own collations on the basis of the manuscripts reprinted by De Selincourt and checked these as far as possible against the xerox copies at the Cornell University Library. This involves some artifice and the possibility of occasional error (but not, I hope, misrepresentation).¹⁴

Hartman would no doubt have been thankful had Stephen Gill's text of the poem been available to him. Gill has taken a constructive step forward in an attempt to end an unsound critical trend which resulted from the misrepresentation of texts. It is the intention of this present essay to help further a new trend through discussion of the original 'Salisbury Plain' by reference to Gill's text of the poem.

¹³Bateson, op. cit., pp.118-120, passim, and Hartman, op. cit., pp.118-125.

¹⁴Hartman, op. cit., p.367.

II

"An Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches" contain short narrative passages, but Wordsworth's first attempt at sustained narrative is 'Salisbury Plain.' The landscape in the two earlier poems is the central subject-matter and the reader is made aware of it through description. 'Salisbury Plain' sees a change. The landscape now forms an important part of the narrative situation and is used in a particular way to develop the narrative.¹⁵

Wordsworth gives very little information about the traveller. We may assume that he was merely journeying over Sarum's Plain in an attempt to get from one point to another. The only definite piece of background information we have is that "He too had withered young in sorrow's deadly blight."¹⁶ But we do know a great deal about his present situation.

The troubled West was red with stormy fire,
 O'er Sarum's plain the traveller with a sigh
 Measured each painful step, the distant spire
 That fixed at every turn his backward eye
 Was lost, tho' still he turned. In the blank sky
 By thirst and hunger pressed he gazed around
 And scarce could any trace of man descry,
 Save wastes of corn that stretched without a bound,
 But where the sower dwelt was nowhere to be found.
 (ll. 37-45)

¹⁵"Landscape" as it is used in the discussion of this poem, lacks all connotations of an art form, having no connection with painting or the picturesque. "Landscape" includes the whole presented world of the narrative and all its natural elements.

¹⁶Gill, "The Original 'Salisbury Plain,'" op. cit., p.164, l. 405. All further citations of

The traveller is experiencing a horrifying physical and mental ordeal, and the landscape around him serves to intensify our appreciation of his ordeal. He is physically exhausted, thirsty and hungry, but he finds no comfort, because on this plain

No shade was there, no meads of pleasant green,
No brook to wet his lips or soothe his ear,
(ll. 46-7)

From the descriptions of the landscape, we feel that what lies before the traveller is a horrifying "horizontal infinity."¹⁷ Nothing stands up perpendicularly to be of any use to the traveller. The cornfields stretch endlessly into the horizon and create a wasteland in which there is no spiral of smoke, no cottage, no "shepherd's lowly thorn/ Or hovel..." (ll. 59-60) to shelter him from the angry storm. There is nothing at all to break the monotony of the physically unbearable horizontal horror. The last perpendicular structure that the traveller saw was the "distant spire" and from that point onwards he is faced with horizontality. The few protrusions that he encounters, such as Stonehenge and the "dead house," are of little, if any, physical comfort to him. However, this infinity eventually mingles with the finite when, near the end of the poem, again "The city's distant spires ascend...." (l. 394)

the poem are from this text. It should be noted that there is no indication in this poem that the traveller is the guilt-ridden sailor that emerges in 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain' and in "Guilt and Sorrow."

¹⁷Hartman, op. cit., p.119.

The journey over the plain results not only in physical hardships, but affects the traveller's state of mind as well. The "distant spire" is the traveller's last link with the human world. The fact that the spire probably belongs to Salisbury Cathedral strengthens the idea that it is a symbol for the presence of humanity. It is not simply a random city building, but the spire of an ancient cathedral bringing to mind centuries of human presence. (Wordsworth's use of Stonehenge, though more developed, follows the same idea.) After that sight, he "scarce could any trace of man descry." (l. 43) When he shouts to what he thinks might be a shepherd, the only answer he gets is the sound of the wild wind, but no human contact is made. The traveller is completely alone with a terrible solitude:

He stood the only creature in the wild
 On whom the elements their rage could wreak,
(ll. 66-7)

The physical and mental state of the traveller is a result of the natural elements on the plain. Wordsworth has created an active landscape that affects humans. The wild wind, the stormy rains, the endless wastes and the uninhabited landscape are the causes of the traveller's physical hardship and mental distress. We sympathize with the traveller who has become a victim of his natural surroundings, and it follows therefore that we sympathize with the vagrant woman. For on reading of her presence in the "dead house," we are immediately

aware that she too must have experienced some of the horrors of the plain.

We learn a great deal more about the female vagrant. She relates how from her happy childhood home she was cast out together with her father. She did not suffer for long, finding contentment once again in marriage and the mothering of three children. Then war broke out and her husband sailed to America to join the British forces there. The vagrant and her children followed him there, where tragedy befell her once again. Her husband was killed in the war and her children died of "fiery fever." She returned to England and since then has wandered; a beggar-woman with no fixed abode and no comforts for her sorrow.

It is through this tale that Wordsworth hoped "to expose ... the calamities of war as they affect individuals."¹⁸ It is not the present intention however, to discuss the political and social implications of this tale, but to draw attention to the use of landscape within the narrative. The vagrant woman begins the story of her life and immediately Wordsworth draws our attention to its setting, which is an obvious contrast to the wild and terrifying landscape of the present setting on Salisbury Plain. It is the "seat beneath the thorn" (l. 235), the "garden stored with peas and mint and thyme" (l. 236) and "the church-inviting bell's delightful chime" (l. 238) that create an awareness

¹⁸Early Letters, p.145.

of her childhood happiness. The landscape too is a lush one: "long grass overgrown" (l. 240) and "The hazel copse with teeming clusters brown" (l. 242). At this time even snowfalls and storms have no unpleasant effects. The snow merely whitens the fields and the storm is described as coming "unheeded." But when the girl and her father are cast out from their home and their situation becomes distressful then the elements become menacing; they are "Turned out on the cold winds" (l. 261).

Wordsworth has depicted the vagrant's happy childhood by making the reader aware of the pleasant surroundings in which she lived. It is as if the landscape itself generates a feeling of felicity and contentment. Campbell and Mueschke suggest that the horror of the plain has been created to no purpose and that the atmosphere at the beginning of the woman's story is incongruous with it.¹⁹ On the contrary, the direct contrast created by the pleasant atmosphere has a purpose. In its blatancy it serves to intensify our understanding of the woman's present plight and immediately heightens our feelings of pity for her. It has become possible, through the juxtaposing of different landscapes, to understand the significance and depth of the human situation in this poem.

¹⁹Oscar James Campbell and Paul Mueschke, "'Guilt and Sorrow:' A Study in the Genesis of Wordsworth's Aesthetic," Modern Philology, (Feb., 1926), p.302.

A similar contrast in setting occurs near the end of the vagrant woman's tale, which to some might appear incongruous.²⁰ The presented world of the vagrant's tale is filled with sorrow and despair. From the happiness of her childhood we are led into a world of bloodshed, pain and suffering; a world in which she lost both husband and three children. We are brought to the moment where the vagrant is in a state of total despair and utter desolation. This climax in the vagrant's tale may be equated with the world outside her story; Salisbury Plain too is desolate and forlorn. The "Agony and Fear" of the vagrant's experiences may be paralleled with the agonising terror of the plain outside. However, at that point in her story, she pauses and we learn, through a shift in point of view to the traveller, that the scene outside is changing favourably. The traveller saw, while she was

Living once more those hours that sealed her doom,
 ... the smiling morn
 All unconcerned with their unrest resume
 Her progress through the brightening eastern gloom.
 (ll. 326-9)

The horror of the plain and the horror of the vagrant's world are combined to create the height of intensity of feeling in this poem, and it is at this point that relief comes. Although the woman is unaware of the bright rising sun, it is still nevertheless, a beautiful sight. The landscape is no longer active in her distress and nature's hostility

²⁰ eg. Meyer, op. cit., pp.148-9.

is softened. The fading of nature's hostility is a result of a mutual act of redemption. The hostile, starless night with the moon hidden in the clouds has been redeemed by the presence of humanity; humans who bring to the plain emotions and sympathies.²¹ As mentioned, part of the horror experienced by the traveller was caused by the uninhabited landscape where there was no possibility for human contact and comfort. In the same way that human sympathies and emotions redeem the harsh landscape, so does the landscape redeem the desolation experienced by the vagrant woman, for when she eventually looks out at the pleasant morning scene

... The sight
O'er her moist eyes dawn of gladness threw
That tinged with faint red smile her faded hue.
(ll. 336-8)

What follows, at this point, is a description of the new landscape:

They looked and saw a lengthening road and wain
Descending a bare slope not far remote.
The downs all glistered dropt with freshening rain;
The carman whistled loud with chearful note;
The cock scarce heard at distance sounds his throat;
But town or farm or hamlet none they viewed,
Only were told there stood a lonely cot
Full two miles distant. Then while they pursued
Their journey, her sad tale the mourner thus renewed.
(ll. 343-351)

Meyer feels that this type of description destroys the effectiveness of the narrative "by diverting the reader's attention to the charms of the countryside through which his characters are walking." Meyer goes on to suggest that this stanza meets the

²¹Gill, Wordsworth's Breeches Pocket,"
op. cit., p.397.

requirements of the eighteenth-century landscape school in the same way as "An Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches" do. He feels that Wordsworth has reverted to the method of cataloguing "agreeable rural sights and sounds," and this causes the poem to fail artistically.²² Although Meyer's observations are not incorrect, his evaluations of the facts are unjust. Wordsworth creates a bright and cheerful landscape, in his already experienced manner, which tells of a fresh new dawn. This landscape is not yet fully active on the vagrant woman. Even though "her faded hue" has been "tinged with faint red smile," she continues her sad tale regardless of her pleasant surroundings. However, at the end of her tale--the oral expression of her grief--she finds herself in a landscape from which "night's thin gloom" has been scattered, where the sun is "a show/More gorgeous still" (ll. 397-8) and from where "The city's distant spires"--that image which ends the terror of the horizontal infinity--can be seen ascending. The woman's actual painful wanderings ended on Salisbury Plain; a wild and horrifying landscape, whereas the verbal expression of these wanderings end in a landscape full of brightness, cheerfulness and freshness. Is the reader not asked to see that with the end of her story the vagrant too will experience a new dawn? Wordsworth seems to express a belief that with friendship and

²²Meyer, op. cit., p.149.

human contact comes comfort. With the expression of her grief, the vagrant's burden has been lightened. There is no suggestion that the woman will experience a lasting comfort or that there is a great amount of hope for her, but this bright new day does bring a glimmer of hope and a great deal of comfort, even if only temporary. For the didactic purposes of the poem, Wordsworth cannot offer her too much hope and consolation. "Her soul" must remain "for ever widowed of delight." (l. 404) This is not to say that Wordsworth sees no hope for the future. As Enid Welsford suggests, Wordsworth's hope is in the "educational labours of rational and benevolent men." She feels that for Wordsworth "the sun that rose over Salisbury Plain and dispelled the terrors of the night was the Sun of Reason." Thus there is an expression of hope; the poem ends with the conquest of despair.²³

This interpretation of the presence of a pleasant landscape in a poem which is essentially filled with sorrow and unpleasantness rests on the belief that all through the poem Wordsworth has used his landscape to highlight the feelings and emotions of his characters. The landscape, whether active or not, creates the atmosphere for the poem and serves to intensify our understanding of the human situations within that landscape. The contrast of different landscapes works in the same way as in the contrasting

²³Welsford, op. cit., p.20.

of "night and day, past and present, war and peace, domesticity and vagrancy, hope and despair, love and cruelty;...." Salisbury Cathedral versus Stonehenge sums up all of these contrasts.²⁴

The landscape has also been utilised in the unification of the poem. The passage of time is very artfully handled, and it is "conveyed by a most careful ordering of detail."²⁵ We meet the traveller for the first time at sunset; "The troubled West was red with stormy fire." Then as he moves further into the horror of the plain "The Sun unheeded sunk" (l. 73), but in the sun's place there is

No moon to open the black clouds and stream
From narrow gulph profound one friendly beam;
(ll. 103-4)

For three hours he wandered in the terrifying darkness "beneath night's starless gloom." (l. 110) We learn that "At length, deep hid in clouds, the moon arose." (l. 118) The phrase "At length" suggests a further passage of time. The woman tells her story as the rest of the night passes by unnoticed by either of the occupants of the "dead house." The next indication we have of the world outside is when the woman pauses and the traveller notices the sun rising bringing with it "the smiling morn." The poem begins at the end of a day and ends with a bright new day. The later title of the poem now

²⁴Ibid., p.18.

²⁵Gill, "Wordsworth's Breeches Pocket,"
op. cit., p.395.

appears very apt; 'A Night on Salisbury Plain.'²⁶ Wordsworth has shown little originality in depicting the passage of time by reference to the movements of the sun and moon, however, in using the natural elements in the landscape, he has created a vivid setting (in time and place) for the events of the poem.

'Salisbury Plain' is not without its faults and no attempt has been made to claim a place for it amongst Wordsworth's great works. But from this discussion it becomes clear that the poem is important for an understanding of Wordsworth's development. With this poem Wordsworth moves away from scenic descriptions. His subject-matter is no longer the landscape with all its sights and sounds, but man and his emotions. That is not to say that the element of landscape description disappears altogether. On the contrary, Wordsworth has learnt to control his landscape, to use it as a tool in the development of his narrative. The landscape is adjusted and manipulated to suit the poet's needs, and this practice Wordsworth had previously avoided. But a greater innovation is found in his choice of the narrative form. Wordsworth has

... for the first time created real characters drawn from the world he knew and permitted them to describe in their own words the experiences

²⁶The obviously careful detailing of the passage of time suggests the possibility of viewing the poem as a katabasis or Night Journey. See Hartman, op. cit., p.123 and pp.367-8.

they had known and the emotions they had felt. These characters, anemic and faltering though they be, are a marked improvement upon the pathetic creatures of "An Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches." The soldier's widow and her two children of "An Evening Walk" and the Grison gypsy of "Descriptive Sketches"--Wordsworth's first portraits of fellow beings in distress--were conceived in the older style, as mute and static parts or adjuncts of the scenery he was describing. They do not speak for themselves, and their sufferings never seriously engage our sympathies.²⁷

The suggestion then is that Wordsworth has found new subject-matter for his poetry, in the form of real men and their emotions. Hartman believes though, that the humanitarian emphasis in 'Salisbury Plain' "does not succeed in being central." He feels that "Wordsworth still has to discover man as a subject for his imagination." As far as Hartman is concerned "the landscape is more intriguing than its people."²⁸ The latter statement may be true, but surely it cannot be denied that the central subject-matter of the poem is the human characters depicted in it. It is through these characters that Wordsworth makes us aware of the human calamities brought about by warfare, a despotic government and a callous society. Wordsworth's concern is with humanity in the most universal sense and his final desire expressed in the poem is conclusive. He hopes that

²⁷Meyer, op. cit., p.151. Although Meyer is referring to "Guilt and Sorrow" and therefore talks about two "real characters" who "speak for themselves," his observations on the new developments hold true for 'Salisbury Plain' too.

²⁸Hartman, op. cit., p.118 and p.124.

... not a trace
 Be left on earth of Superstition's reign,
 Save that eternal pile which frowns on Sarum's
 plain.²⁹

(ll. 547-9)

'Salisbury Plain' highlights a further development in the poet, for here Wordsworth begins using his imagination in a typically Romantic way. In later years, Wordsworth came to believe in the modifying, creative and associative powers of the imagination. Like Dugald Stewart, "Wordsworth describes the imagination as a mode of dissection and recombination."³⁰ He says "These processes of imagination are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses." The object then appears to the mind "like a new existence."³¹ Coleridge and Wordsworth agree that the imagination has the power "To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine."³² They believed, together with Schiller, Schelling, Hegel, Blake and others, that the imaginative work of the artist is to reconcile and to integrate.³³ Hazlitt's theory of the imagination is akin to the general interpretations of this poetic faculty. He believes that

²⁹The emphasis is my own.

³⁰Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, op. cit., p. 181.

³¹Cited by Abrams, Ibid.

³²Cited by Abrams, Ibid.

³³M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton & Co., 1971), p.316.

... the creative imagination is in one of its modes an associative faculty. Not only is it the poet's means of perceiving, which enables him to "image" vividly the "truth" of the objects on which he fixes his attention; not only is it a combining factor which in the act of artistic creation allows him to bring about a coalescence, as Coleridge called it, of subject and object; it is also the faculty by means of which he calls up the correspondences between these impressions which were obtained by his senses and which were hoarded by his memory.³⁴

As an attempt to unify and coalesce, 'Salisbury Plain' fails. Wordsworth's great ability (as shown in his maturer works) to shape and create by "consolidating numbers into unity" is absent here, but the early 'Salisbury Plain' does show a certain amount of aggregation, association and evocation. This is a result of the interplay between the characters and the landscape. Through the use of his imaginative faculty Wordsworth has created a landscape that affects humans and humans that redeem the landscape. These "objects" then appear to the mind "like a new existence." Coleridge's comments on the poem are extremely pertinent. What impressed him most was

... the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the 'atmosphere,' and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre....³⁵

³⁴André de Villiers, "The Dramatic Theory of William Hazlitt: 'Imagination' in Criticism" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Rhodes University, 1964), p.14.

³⁵Biographia Literaria, Chap. iv, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Selected Poetry and Prose, ed. by Elisabeth Schneider (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1951), p.237.

Coleridge noted that in "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth describes what he was beginning to do in this early poem. Coleridge explains that for Wordsworth "manly reflection, and human associations had given both variety, and an additional interest to natural objects, which in the passion and appetite of the first love they had seemed to him [Wordsworth] neither to need or permit."³⁶ In 'Salisbury Plain' we notice that Wordsworth is already learning to observe nature "not as in the hour/Of thoughtless youth;" (ll. 89-90).³⁷ The "dizzy raptures" and the "aching joys are now no more," (ll. 84-5). 'Salisbury' shows that Wordsworth observes nature while

... hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.

(ll. 90-3)

In 'Salisbury Plain' the "sad music of humanity" is always heard; not only does it "chasten and subdue" the listener, but also taints and changes observed nature. Wordsworth has learnt that the world consists of objects that are half-perceived and half-created. 'Salisbury Plain' is partially an observed world and partially a created one. Just as nature was once for Wordsworth "all in all," so was the description of observed nature "all in all" for his poetry. Wordsworth has learnt that the act of seeing involves both perception and creation; similarly, in 'Salisbury Plain,' he has learnt that poetry involves perception and creation.

³⁶ Ibid., p.236.

³⁷ Poetical Works, vol. 2, p.261.



CHAPTER FOUR

LYRICAL BALLADS, 1798

I. ANOMALY

A joint venture by Coleridge and Wordsworth resulted in the publication of a small volume of poetry in September, 1798. The volume was entitled Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems. Its immediate impact on contemporary men of letters was insignificant, but it was later to be hailed as marking the beginning of a great literary revolt, whose effects have not ceased to be felt to this very day. Such a view of the little volume may be justified, but it is incorrect to suggest that the poems themselves, the lyrical ballads--not always lyrical and seldom ballads¹--are the reason for Wordsworth's fame as a great literary revolutionist. Believers in the revolutionary qualities of the Lyrical Ballads find M. H. Abrams's suggestion difficult to digest. He believes that Wordsworth "was more thoroughly immersed in certain currents of eighteenth-century thinking than any of his important contemporaries," and that the main propositions of the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads demonstrate the many similarities

¹Alun R. Jones and William Tydeman, eds., Wordsworth: Lyrical Ballads; A Casebook (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1972), p.15. Jones suggests that the real ballads are "Goody Blake and Harry Gill,"

between Wordsworth's critical theories and eighteenth-century theories.² A more trenchant realisation results from a confrontation with Robert Mayo's assertions. He has proved conclusively, from a study of the magazine verse of the 1780s and 1790s, that Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads conform to the popular tastes of the time.³

Why then has Wordsworth been labelled the great revolutionary and why is it that his poetry is hailed as expressing new literary trends? Mainly because his poetry is apocalyptic; it tells of an exciting new world and reiterates the ideas and concepts of the French Revolution. The magnitude of the experience of this Revolution is felt in Wordsworth's poetry. But this makes Wordsworth a rebel in a political sense only and makes him no more of an innovator than any of his contemporaries. This same Revolution moulded and shaped the poetry--and literature in

"The Thorn" and "the Idiot Boy." Those that approximate ballads, or are at least narrative or anecdotal, are "The Female Vagrant," "We are seven," "Simon Lee" and "The last of the Flock." There are also a few songs, for example: "The Mad Mother" and "The Complaint of a forsaken Indian Woman." Two of the poems that are lyrical but not ballads are "The Tables turned" and "Lines written in early spring."

²Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, op. cit., p.103.

³Robert Mayo, "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads," P.M.L.A., vol. 69 (1954), pp.486-522. (Also in Casebook, supra.) See also John E. Jordan, "The Novelty of the Lyrical Ballads," in Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, op. cit., pp.340-358.

general--of all the major Romantics. The French Revolution, with its new ideas--today clichés--of liberty, equality and fraternity, said farewell to the "ancien regime" and welcomed the start of a new age. Southey was quick to note the significance of this enormous event: "Old things seemed passing away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race."⁴ His "Joan of Arc" was inspired by the Revolution and contains explicit references to it. Blake was influenced by the Revolution too and his poetry of the 1790s embraces visions of the great apocalypse.⁵ All of Godwin's major works attempt to portray the possibility of a new world. Although Political Justice and Caleb Williams suggest individual and often eccentric ideas, his philosophy was very much in line with the new spirit of the age. Then there was the Pantisocratic movement which idealized a new utopian life on the banks of the Susquehanna River. It was perhaps symptomatic that this utopia never materialized.

So Wordsworth's poetry does not stand alone in its manifestation of the influence of the French Revolution. Hazlitt realised this too, but nevertheless noted that the French Revolution had affected

⁴Cited by M. H. Abrams, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," in Romanticism Reconsidered: Selected Papers from the English Institute, ed. by Northrop Frye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p.31. Abrams discusses the apocalyptic nature of Romantic literature at great length in his latest book. In the discussion, he reiterates many of the ideas proposed in the earlier article. See Natural Supernaturalism, op. cit., Ch. 6: "Revelation, Revolution, Imagination, and Cognition."

⁵Abrams, "English Romanticism," op. cit., p.40.

Wordsworth in a different way. Wordsworth's poetry during the period of the Lyrical Ballads was "one of the innovations of the time," says Hazlitt, because Wordsworth's "Muse...is a levelling one."⁶ The French Revolution attempted, amongst other things, to break down social barriers and to rid society of class distinctions. In this spirit, Hazlitt feels, Wordsworth revolts against literary tradition and treats all subjects as equal in forming material for poetry. This is the reason Wordsworth's poetry includes not only, says Hazlitt, "peasants, pedlars, and village-barbers," but also "convicts, female vagrants, gipsies... idiot boys and mad mothers."⁷ If this is revolutionary, if Wordsworth's "levelling" of poetic subjects is the great innovation of the period, what is to be said of the magazine verse, which, Mayo has so correctly asserted, is similar in almost every respect? In Lyrical Ballads we note a new basis for choosing poetic subjects, but Wordsworth is not the great innovator.

Abrams is correct in stating that in the Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth took to extremes tendencies which already existed.⁸ The poetic standard displayed in doing so, however, is insufficient as a basis on which to claim for Wordsworth the status of great poet. In fact the greatness of Lyrical Ballads

⁶Cited by Abrams, "English Romanticism," op. cit., p.27.

⁷Ibid., pp.62-3.

⁸Abrams, "English Romanticism," op. cit., p.62.

has been exaggerated; they are not the innovation they are made out to be, nor are they Wordsworth's major claim to fame. They are anomalous in the major strain of Wordsworth's development. Wordsworth moved from the landscape description of "An Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches" to 'Salisbury Plain' which portrays mankind through the intricate detailing of landscape. The subsequent Lyrical Ballads break away from this pattern of development. They are, as Helen Darbishire says, "stark human studies."⁹ There are, broadly speaking, no poems that seriously attempt to present mankind within his natural surroundings. The landscape or the natural elements are employed to a minimum in the development of the narrative or in the portrayal of an idea. This is not in keeping with Wordsworth's great poetry. As Danby states: "Lyrical Ballads does not contain much then that could qualify Wordsworth for the title of 'nature-poet.'"¹⁰ This title may be regarded as a misnomer, but Wordsworth is the great poet of nature. He is remembered for poems like "Tintern Abbey," the "Immortality Ode," the "Leech-gatherer" poem, "The Prelude" and "The Excursion," all poems in which the landscape, nature and the natural elements are essential in the development of the theme. John Wilson, as early as 1802, recognised

⁹Helen Darbishire, Wordsworth. No. 34 in "Bibliographical Series of Supplements to the British Book News" (London: Longmans & Green, 1953), p.25.

¹⁰John F. Danby, The Simple Wordsworth: Studies in the Poems, 1797-1807 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p.97.

Wordsworth's greatness, which he believed lay in his ability to fuse in poetry external nature and mankind. He noticed Wordsworth's talent in his use of the "scenery of Nature." Wilson states in his letter to Wordsworth:

We must have all have been sensible that, when under the influence of 'grief,' Nature, when arrayed in her gayest attire, appears to us dull and gloomy, and that, when our hearts abound with joy, her most deformed prospects seldom fail of pleasing. This disposition of the mind to assimilate the appearances of external Nature to its own situation, is a fine subject for poetical allusion, and in several poems you have employed it with a most electrifying effect. But you have not stopped here, you have shown the effect which the qualities of external Nature have in forming the human mind, and have presented us with several characters whose particular bias arose from that situation in which they were planted with respect to the scenery of Nature.¹¹

Wilson has, in reading the Lyrical Ballads, discovered and expressed clearly exactly where Wordsworth's greatness lies, but his observations, as Wilson himself states, are only relevant to "several poems" and "several characters." Lyrical Ballads may be divided into smaller groups of poems. Firstly Coleridge's contributions, which, although they fill at least one third of the volume, are irrelevant to this present essay. Then there are those poems which were written by Wordsworth in the Quantock Hills at Alfoxden. Dorothy and her brother took up residence there

¹¹Wilson's letter to Wordsworth, May, 1802; reprinted in Jones and Tydeman, Casebook, op. cit., p.59. John Wilson subsequently became Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University and was also associated with Blackwood's Magazine under the nom de plume of "Christopher North."

in July, 1797 and this move brought Coleridge and Wordsworth together,¹² a meeting which allowed the seeds to be sown for the Lyrical Ballads. Wordsworth was now more settled than he had perhaps ever been. He had more or less recovered from the depression and insecurity that had attacked him in the years that followed the French experience and the Vallon affair. In the pleasant surroundings of the Quantocks, Wordsworth was free to devote himself to his great ambition--to be a poet. On one of their famous walks together, Coleridge, with Wordsworth's assistance, planned and began composing "The Ancient Mariner." On another walk, the two discussed the plan for a small volume of poetry, which they wished to publish anonymously, and which they hoped would bring in the funds they required in order to execute their plan of a trip to Germany. The volume was to consist of two types of poems; one type would be "supernatural" or "at least Romantic" and the other "matter-of-fact," whose "subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life, the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them." Coleridge's responsibility was the former type, and Wordsworth was to supply the "meditative and feeling mind" for the "matter-of-fact" poems.¹³

¹²For a factual and interesting account of this historic meeting of two great minds, see H. M. Margoliouth, Wordsworth and Coleridge, 1795-1834 (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp.1-21.

¹³Cited by Moorman, op. cit., p.374.

II. THE ALFOXDEN POEMS

The majority of Wordsworth's poems written in March, April and May, 1798 were included in the Lyrical Ballads and were composed with the above plan in mind. Thirteen of the nineteen poems written by Wordsworth for the volume were composed after the plan had been formulated and with the specific purpose of inclusion in the Lyrical Ballads.¹⁴ These poems are the "stark human studies" Miss Darbishire refers to; they are the result of Wordsworth's attempt "to enter into the minds and hearts of simple people so as to render their thoughts and feelings with naked truth." Miss Darbishire goes on to say that it is in these poems that "Wordsworth had turned his back on his personal life and had made something like a strenuous voyage of discovery, a sort of arctic expedition, into a region where life was reduced to its elements, the outward trappings to their simplest: his aim to penetrate the heart of man...."¹⁵ Wordsworth himself hoped that his poems would show "a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human

¹⁴The poems that fall into this group are: "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," "Lines written at a small distance from my House...", "Simon Lee, the old Huntsman," "Anecdote for Fathers," "We are seven," "Lines written in early spring," "The Thorn," "The last of the Flock," "The Mad Mother," "The Idiot Boy," "Expostulation and Reply," "The Tables Turned;..." and "The Complaint of a forsaken Indian Woman."

¹⁵Helen Darbishire, The Poet Wordsworth. The Clark Lectures, 1949 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), p.45 and p.61.

incidents,"¹⁶ His concern was with the "persistence of essentially normal states of mind in situations of emotional stress or even mental derangement."¹⁷ This concern explains why the poems are mainly about the poor, the misguided, the abandoned, the criminal and the insane. These thirteen poems are concerned with mankind and with the understanding of human nature. In order to come to grips with humanity in the most elemental condition, Wordsworth has to strip his poetry "of every excrescence, of all ornament and superfluity," "of embroideries and old mythologies of eighteenth-century convention and to walk naked."¹⁸

In doing so, he has given us poems such as "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," a straightforward account of the effect of curses on simple people. To understand human nature Wordsworth has to delve into every pertinent aspect of it, and in this poem he deals with superstition as an important element in the lives of the people around him. The narrative develops in true ballad style, with little detail of the natural scene. We are given as much information as is necessary to create sympathy or lack of sympathy, respectively, for Goody and Harry. In "Simon Lee, the old Huntsman," Wordsworth contrasts youth and age. This human predicament, the loss of youth and the burden of old age,

¹⁶Advertisement to the Lyrical Ballads in W. J. B. Owen, ed., Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads, 1798 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), (1st ed. 1967), p.3.

¹⁷Owen, op. cit., p. xxxi.

¹⁸Jones, Casebook, op. cit., pp.16-17.

is highlighted and the contrast brought to a climax in the episode at the end of the poem. The young narrator removes the root of the tree, which was nothing more than "A stump of rotten wood" (l. 84), but which was causing Simon unending toil.¹⁹ The result of this action is that it brings tears to both the old huntsman and to the speaker. Simon Lee weeps for gratitude and as Jones feels, "for the passing of youth and strength."²⁰ "The tears into his eyes were brought" (l. 97) at the sight of the root being severed with one easy, "single blow." Through this act Simon realises his plight as an old, weak, helpless man. The speaker mourns too and the reason suggested is that "the gratitude of men/Has oftner left me mourning." (ll. 103-4) But our feeling is that the speaker has realised the tragic implications of this episode: man will grow old and weak. The compassion for the old man created by an understanding of his tragic plight causes the speaker to mourn. "Simon Lee, the old Huntsman" is about men; it deals with human nature and tackles a tragic human predicament.

In "We are seven" Wordsworth presents us with a further incident from "ordinary life." The logical and rational mind of the adult cannot fathom how the young girl still believes that there are seven brothers and sisters, when

¹⁹Owen, Lyrical Ballads, op. cit., p.60.
All further references to the Lyrical Ballads of 1798 are from this edition.

²⁰Jones, Casebook, op. cit., p.20.

'... two are dead!
 'Their spirits are in heaven!"
 (p.65, ll. 65-6)

If the adult is puzzled, more so the child. She has not learnt the meaning of death. Although she knows her brother and sister are buried "'Beneath the church-yard tree'" (l. 32), she cannot understand why their absence should decrease the number of the family. Just as

'... two at Conway dwell,
 'And two are gone to sea,
 (ll. 25-6)

and they still number among the members of the family, so be it with the two who "in the church-yard lie." (l. 31) Hartman suggests that "the thought of separation is not even able to arise in the girl so that the number of siblings remains to her the same--an immortal, ever-unbroken set.... However much counting is done, it will always be 'seven in all.'"²¹

In "Anecdote for Fathers" there is another confrontation between adult and child. There is a certain amount of natural description of the places for which the child is asked to state his preference:

My thoughts on former pleasures ran;
 I thought of Kilve's delightful shore,
 My pleasant home, when spring began,
 A long, long year before.
 (ll. 9-12)

and at Liswyn farm there are "woods and green-hills warm." (l. 41) However, the interest does not lie in the scenery nor in the differing qualities of the two

²¹Hartman, op. cit., p.144. He suggests that the thought of absolute separation is prevented by Nature, but the "proximity of birth and death" and the closeness of the living to the dead seem more likely reasons. (See pp.145-6)

places described. Wordsworth's intention is "to point out the injurious effects of putting inconsiderate questions to Children, and urging them to give answers upon matters either uninteresting to them, or upon which they had no decided opinion."²² The adult in the poem learns something profound from this dialogue with the young child. His knowledge of human nature has been enriched and his understanding of children significantly developed. This poem is a further example of Wordsworth's concern with humanity and mankind.

This concern may be traced throughout the thirteen poems written at Alfoxden after the Lyrical Ballads had been planned. There are nevertheless some exceptions to the method already suggested. In "The Thorn" we again consider a human situation. The woman in the poem has been deserted by her lover, who left her pregnant with his child. The child is either still-born, dies soon after birth or is killed by the mother. Whatever the case, the woman mourns deeply and the reader is presented with her miserable, forlorn and wretched world. This poem differs from the rest, for although it is made from the same "elementary feelings" and "essential passions of the heart," its excellence lies in its

fusion of the elements, the human passion and the natural scene, so that each expresses itself in and through the other: the misery and love of the woman, and the bleakness yet beauty of the tree, pond, and mound. We see the wild desolate scene through the human passion, whilst the stark

²²Cited by Owen, op. cit., p.134.

human passions are lifted into permanence, even beauty, by the setting of earth, air, and sky.²³

Miss Darbishire's precise comments suggest adequately that "The Thorn" is an exception. Here Wordsworth has used his landscape to create atmosphere and to develop the character of the woman and more important, the character of the narrator. Stephen Parrish states that the poem is not "about an abandoned mother and her murdered infant, as nearly all critics have supposed, nor a poem about the maternal passion." It is a poem

first, about a tree, and second, about a man. It was intended to be a psychological study, a poem about the way the mind works. The mind whose workings are revealed is that of the narrator....

Hartman's discussion of "The Thorn" suggests a similar belief as to what is central in the poem.²⁴ Both these critics make a sound claim for a new reading of the poem, but neither refute Helen Darbishire's accurate observations, for it cannot be denied that the poem's development hinges on the careful scenic details and descriptions of the natural elements in the poem. Although "The Thorn" uses a method first developed in 'Salisbury Plain,' it conforms, nevertheless, to the main aim of the Lyrical Ballads: to trace "the primary laws of our nature."

²³Darbishire, The Poet Wordsworth, op. cit., p.44.

²⁴Stephen Maxfield Parrish, "'The Thorn: Wordsworth's Dramatic Monologue," in Wordsworth: A Collection of Critical Essays. Twentieth Century Views, ed. by M. H. Abrams (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p.76, and Hartman, op. cit., pp.146-8. (Parrish's article was first printed in English Literary History, vol. 24, No. 2 (1957), pp.153-163.)

The poems written rapidly in the Quantocks contain a few slight intimations of Wordsworth's view of nature. For instance, in "Lines written in early spring" Wordsworth asserts calmly yet firmly that man is bound to nature:

To her fair works did nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
(ll. 5-6)

The poem suggests a belief which Wordsworth was to state even more explicitly in "Tintern Abbey," that there is life within nature.²⁵ He says

And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes (ll. 11-12)

and later

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.
(ll. 17-20)

Because Wordsworth realises the power of nature and feels the life within her, he knows and can lament "What man has made of man."

There are at least three poems which state explicitly Wordsworth's belief in the educative powers of nature. In "Lines written at a small distance from my house..." Wordsworth calls his sister out into the open spaces to feel the fresh spring air and to mingle with nature. She is to leave all her books inside and give herself up to idleness. They cannot allow this happy moment to pass by, for

²⁵Piper too notes here the belief in another life within nature. See The Active Universe, op. cit., p.145.

Love, now an universal birth,
 From heart to heart is stealing,
 From earth to man, from man to earth,
 --It is the hour of feeling.

One moment now may give us more
 Than fifty years of reason;
 Our minds shall drink at every pore
 The spirit of the season.

(p.56, ll. 21-28)

Further on Wordsworth mentions "the blessed power that rolls/About, below, above." (ll. 33-4) This is blatantly similar to the motion and the spirit, which, in "Tintern Abbey," "rolls through all things." Wordsworth is already suggesting a view of nature which is only fully developed in subsequent poems.

Both "Expostulation and Reply" and "The Tables Turned," which are written "on the same subject," claim importance for the practice of indolence. Indolence may be termed a "wise passiveness" if practised within nature's bounds, because

'The eye it cannot chuse but see,
 'We cannot bid the ear be still;
 'Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
 'Against, or with our will.

(p.103, ll. 17-20)

Wordsworth claims that knowledge gained from books is inadequate; it is not enough to "drink the spirit breath'd/From dead men to their kind." (ll. 7-8)

On the contrary, he believes that

One impulse from a vernal wood
 May teach you more of man;
 Of moral evil and of good,
 Than all the sages can.

(p.105, ll. 21-4)

He feels it is enough of murdering to dissect and "Enough of science and of art." (l. 29) He says, rather

Close up those barren leaves;
 Come forth, and bring with you a heart
 That watches and receives.

(ll. 30-2)

Although these poems deal more with nature than any of the others, they are still concerned with common incidents, taken from everyday life. They are still aimed at furthering the understanding of human nature and man's predicament in a human world.

III. PRE-ALFOXDEN POEMS

There is another group of poems distinguishable in Lyrical Ballads; those composed by Wordsworth before the conception of his and Coleridge's plan for the volume. This group includes the "Yew-tree" lines, "The Female Vagrant," "Lines written near Richmond...", "Old Man travelling" and "The Convict." A full discussion of "The Female Vagrant" is unnecessary in view of the previous discussion of 'Salisbury Plain' from which the 1798 poem is an extract. It is interesting to note that for the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth excluded the description of the traveller and all the details of the plain, so that what has been said about the use of landscape in that poem does not hold in a discussion of "The Female Vagrant." Wordsworth may have excluded these details in order to shorten the poem for the small volume, or because the poem as a whole was incomplete. By stripping the poem of its scenic descriptions and details of setting, Wordsworth has left us with the

bare facts of the vagrant's story.²⁶ "The Female Vagrant" becomes a further human study; it gives us the tragic story of a human in distress. In the fulfillment of his commitment to the plan of the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth has destroyed the major effect of his early poem. In order "to walk naked," Wordsworth has disrupted his development: that development in his ability to link man with nature and to fuse the qualities of the landscape with a human situation. This ability is Wordsworth's major claim to fame and Lyrical Ballads contain very few poems that show this ability.

The "Yew-tree" poem, begun in 1787, the bulk of it written in 1795 and completed in 1797, is very different from most of the Lyrical Ballads. It is the last of the poems, composed before Lyrical Ballads, that deal with man in relation to nature and the effects of nature on man. It falls into the pattern which began in "An Evening Walk" and which developed significantly in 'Salisbury Plain.' The "Yew-tree" poem is also connected with "Tintern Abbey," because they both develop through the confrontation of man and nature. What was composed

²⁶ Throughout all the revisions of the Salisbury Plain poems, the only part that remained constant was the vagrant's story. During the composition of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth was still revising parts of 'Salisbury Plain' with which he was dissatisfied. In May, 1798 he wrote to Cottle: "I say nothing of Salisbury Plain till I see you. I am determined to finish it, and equally that you shall publish." (See Poetical Works, vol. 1, p.331). With all his determination, Wordsworth did not finish the poem (at least not until 1842) and thus chose to publish in Lyrical Ballads, the vagrant's story with which he had always been satisfied.

between the "Yew-tree" poem and "Tintern Abbey," the bulk of the Lyrical Ballads, is an exception in this pattern of development.

There are two contrasting scenes presented in the poem. The differing landscapes are suggested in the lengthy title: "Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite, on a desolate part of the shore, yet commanding a beautiful prospect." Wordsworth first describes the locale of the yew-tree seat. From the title, we know that it stands on the desolate part of Lake Esthwaite's shore. It is a "lonely yew-tree" being "far from all human dwelling." (ll. 1-2) There is "No sparkling rivulet" and the "boughs" are "barren." (ll. 3-4) Later on the "boughs" are described as being "gloomy" and the "rocks" are "barren." The isolation of the spot is increased by the removal of all human "visitants:"

His only visitants a stragglng sheep,
The stone-chat, or the glancing sand-piper;
(ll. 23-4)

and the undergrowth, which is merely "thinly sprinkled o'er," (l. 26) adds to the desolate scene. Wordsworth gives the reader some background information as to "Who he was/That piled these stones" and built the seat in the yew-tree. The characterization of the man is developed and intensified through the description of the natural scene. The solitary had by choice broken away from society, severing all human contacts. Just as the scene is barren and desolate so is the solitary's own life. He himself realised that the scene was "An emblem of his own unfruitful life." (l. 29)

He loved the spot and nourished "a morbid pleasure" by seeing his life in terms of his surroundings. It is as if the self-willed outcast is subjecting nature to his own morbid state of mind. But Wordsworth suggests that the desolate scene need not essentially have this effect on his mind. He tells the traveller, though he finds himself in a desolate and forlorn part of the landscape,

Yet if the wind breathe soft, the curling waves,
That break against the shore, shall lull thy mind
By one soft impulse saved from vacancy.

(ll. 5-8)

The outcast cannot be "saved from vacancy" because his heart had not "kept pure" "the holy forms/Of young imagination." (ll. 44-5) His visions take their source from the faculty of fancy and thus he mourns "to think that others felt/What he must never feel." (ll. 39-40) If this man had allowed himself to observe all of nature and had not been so concerned with himself, if he had allowed himself to be "Fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (Prel. Bk. I, l. 302) and had not been "In youth, by genius nurs'd," (l. 13) then perhaps he might now be "saved from vacancy" and would not be a "lost man."

The "beautiful prospect" in the distance has no salvation for the outcast. He realises that there is beauty in the scene just as Wordsworth does, and just as the traveller no doubt will. But the solitary cannot "sustain/The beauty still more beauteous." (ll. 33-4) He is not like other men who while gazing at the lovely scene can feel true joy and feel a loveliness

within all "The world, and man himself." (l. 37)
 The solitary is not capable of transcendence. Because of his general unpreparedness for the world, because he has "sustained his soul" with the "food of pride" (l 20) and is unable to "suspect, and still revere himself,/In lowliness of heart" he suffers the consequences. The beautiful scene evokes in him feelings of "mournful joy;" he knows what he should feel, or could feel, but cannot. He has to live with outward nature constantly subjected to his inner state of mind. Wordsworth knows that man can manage the opposite. If man "be one whose heart the holy forms/Of young imagination have kept pure" and has had the correct youthful preparation for going forth into the world, then the beautiful scene described in the poem will evoke firstly a feeling of sincere joy at the sight of the prospect, and secondly a feeling of joy for the world and all of humanity.

Wordsworth takes no pains to hide the obvious didacticism of the "Yew-tree" poem. He has a message and a warning to all humans, addressed to them through the traveller or any stranger who might see the lines left in the yew-tree seat. Wordsworth is condemning the solitary for cutting himself off from society, for breaking all ties with the human world. He is concerned with the right way of seeing nature, but first and foremost with man's correct place in the world. The solitary's crime is that he has severed all connections with his fellow human beings and by so doing has left forever the realms of

humanity and become a mere aspect of a landscape.²⁷ The parallel between the description of the solitary and that of the desolate scene, serves to show how the solitary has become more aligned with the landscape than with humanity. Wordsworth's intention in describing the desolate spot is not only to highlight the unfruitfulness of the solitary's life, but also to show to what extent the solitary is removed from real life. Just as the yew-tree locale is distant from the beautiful prospect and isolated from all other lovely scenes, so is the solitary distant from the human scene and isolated from society. The bees keep away from the trees and sparkling rivers do not wend their way to this spot in order to "spread the verdant herb." In the same way, no form of human being can penetrate into the life of the solitary, because of his self-willed removal from society.

The "Yew-tree" poem is about man and describes a human predicament. Wordsworth's message is to humanity in general and the statement he makes in the poem is intended to be universal. In order to moralise he has to draw from a narrated incident or a set of circumstances and this he provides by describing one man within a particular landscape. Wordsworth is once again using his landscape, firstly to assist in characterization and furthermore to create a specific case for a general statement. Hence my assertion that this poem follows naturally from 'Salisbury

²⁷Wesling, op. cit., p.75. His analysis of the poem (pp.74-8) assisted greatly in the formulation of my ideas.

Plain' where the landscape was employed in characterization, in creating atmosphere and in formulating a particular incident from which he may move to general criticism of war, the penal code and society at large.

In the "Yew-tree" poem we are presented with an immutable landscape, with only the tree itself growing a little wilder since the death of the solitary. There is a structuring of the views relating to this constant scene. Firstly, we understand the attitude of the solitary to this spot and its view. Then the poet finds the seat, bringing a different attitude to and a new appreciation of the scene. Lastly, the traveller will rest at the spot and will also be influenced by his surroundings and the distant scene. Thus we are presented with at least three visitations to one scene. This is very similar to the method of "Tintern Abbey" wherein we are told of the poet's first visit to the Wye banks, his present visit, five years later, and a later visit to the same scene in the imaginations of either Dorothy or himself. The "Tintern Abbey" scene remains constant, but attitudes towards it and the appreciation of it change. In "Lines written near Richmond, upon the Thames, at Evening," an early poem composed in 1789, we notice the same technique. The constant scene here is the River Thames: "fair stream! for ever so;" (p.102, l. 21) and the visits to this one scene are many. The poet describes the scene from his point of view, then commends the reader to "see how dark the backward stream!" (l. 5) He also gives us the effect of "Such views" on "the youthful

bard" (l. 9) and later mentions Collins's visit to the same spot. The poet's invocation to the Thames is that she remain forever as she is so that

... other bards may see,
As lovely visions by thy side
As now, fair river! come to me.
(ll. 18-20)

Although Wordsworth's reflections on the Thames result in a lesser profundity than is found in the "Yew-tree" poem or in "Tintern Abbey," the method in all these poems suggests a strong link.

Geoffrey Hartman²⁸ discusses the "Yew-tree" poem as an "Inscription," calling it by the name Charles Lamb used when referring to it in a letter to Coleridge. Hartman traces the development of inscriptions in order to understand the genre of the "Yew-tree" poem. Although there are many similarities in form between Wordsworth's poem and preceding inscriptions, Wordsworth has overstepped the limits of the genre and created "an independent nature-poem." The inscription does not evoke, "it points to the landscape," whereas "To develop as a free-standing form the nature-lyric had to draw the landscape evocatively into the poetry itself." This is what the "Yew-tree" poem achieves; "it incorporates or even creates the setting." The poem begins as an inscription and involves a commemorative and elegaic act. Not only is there a visible monument within the poem but also a greater monument created by the poet. Wordsworth

²⁸Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry," in From Sensibility to Romanticism, op. cit., pp.389-413.

believed that his verse should be a "speaking monument." With Hartman's observations on the inscription-quality of the "Yew-tree" poem and the new limits to which the genre has been taken, we can more easily accept the link between the "Yew-tree" poem and "Tintern Abbey." We can also add to this chain a new link; "Michael." In this poem we are again presented with a monument (the "heap of stones") and the story relating to it.²⁹ The story, as will be seen later, develops by drawing on the landscape.

IV. POST-ALFOXDEN: "TINTERN ABBEY"

"We have been shivering on the brink.... Let us now
take the plunge."

Darbishire

"Tintern Abbey" was composed on the ramble back to Bristol after Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy had visited the Wye valley. The poems for the Lyrical Ballads had already been submitted to the publishers in Bristol. So "Tintern Abbey" was written after the plan for the volume had been executed, and was only included in the volume as an afterthought. "Tintern Abbey" is certainly very different from the bulk of the Lyrical Ballads and, as mentioned earlier, is similar to only one other poem, the "Yew-tree"-also composed without conforming to any premeditated plan.

²⁹This paragraph draws freely from Hartman's general observations and conclusions, while the citations may be found on pp.399-401.

While being an exception in the Lyrical Ballads, "Tintern Abbey" is nevertheless the poem, in this volume, that conforms most with accepted poetic traditions. As W. J. B. Owen points out, "Tintern Abbey" is a "meditative poem in blank verse, frequently concerned with the natural scene and the philosophical inferences of the poet from what he sees and hears." This type of poem "had something like a century of tradition to its name when Wordsworth came to handle it in the nineties." Owen states that eighteenth-century poets, such as John Philips, Thomson, Akenside and Cowper, all wrote poems of this type.³⁰

Wordsworth's greatness lies in the fact that he has taken to new limits the meditative poem. The lengthy title might suggest that the poem is about Tintern Abbey and the River Wye, but it is about "growing up."³¹ The speaker, in this poem Wordsworth himself, tells of at least four stages in his development. This development is expressed constantly by discussing himself in relation to nature, and more specifically in relation to the Wye valley landscape.³² At the deepest level the poem is concerned with humanity and the mind of man (even if it is only the poet's mind). But in dealing with a very human subject,

³⁰Owen, op. cit., pp. xxiii-xxiv.

³¹Lionel Trilling, "The Immortality Ode," in English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. by M. H. Abrams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p.125. I have borrowed his phrase to describe "Tintern Abbey," for it too is about "growing up."

³²Albert Gérard's "Dark Passages is an extensive and informative study of the landscape in "Tintern

Wordsworth does not embody his ideas in characters outside of nature as he does in the Alfoxden poems. In those poems the general idea comes across through the confrontation of humans or through the description of human situations. In "Tintern Abbey" the ideas are expressed in the confrontation of man with nature; the inter-relationship between the poet and the landscape is the source of most of the meaning in the poem.

The importance of the first section of the poem, the description of the Tintern Abbey landscape, should not be underestimated. Gérard summarizes some opinions that are basically opposed to his own. Hartman, in The Unmediated Vision (New Haven, 1954),

views the landscape description at the beginning of "Tintern Abbey" as so perfectly naturalistic, so empty of any further meaning, that there is nothing in it to account for the high intellectual tenor of the strong emotion it is alleged to awaken in the soul of the poet. It is beautiful in itself, it is described for its own sake, and it has no ulterior, symbolic meaning.³³

John Danby suggests that the first section should be seen as a fault in the poem. He feels that "The itemizing of the landscape detail at the beginning of 'Tintern Abbey' is strangely inert." Surely the details we are shown are delicate and unobtrusive signs of a humanisation of nature. Yet Danby believes that "The plots of cottage-ground, with their hedgerows..., the orchard-tufts and wreaths of smoke, are scarcely

Abbey." See English Romantic Poetry: Ethos, Structure, and Symbol in Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp.89-117.

³³Ibid., pp.91-2.

central to the mood and matter of the poem, scarcely in fact relevant."³⁴ On the other hand, J. Benziger stresses the importance of the Wye landscape in the poem, because in it Wordsworth discovered "the 'objective correlative' for his philosophy of that period." Benziger points out how "the world of man, of pastoral farms and plots of cottage ground, merges gently, through orchard and hedgerow, into nature's copse and woodland. And the world of organic nature, by way of the lofty cliffs, merges gently with the inorganic quiet of the sky." Thus there is a deeper meaning embedded in the objective elements of the landscape; "to Wordsworth the landscape of the Wye declared the unity of the universe."³⁵ Having come to grips with these views, Gérard concludes that critics tend to apprehend either one of Wordsworth's "two voices" and the result is a mass of contradictory interpretations. Gérard agrees that the "two voices" are present in the opening landscape description, but that too much of a dichotomy has been created by this. He feels that Hartman's view on the one hand, and Benziger's on the other, are complementary, "for only that which is genuinely naturalistic can also be genuinely symbolic: it is just because it is self-contained and matter-of-fact that the Wye landscape appears to be 'a living part in that unity of which it is the representative.'"³⁶ A closer

³⁴Cited by Gérard, *op. cit.*, p.94.

³⁵J. Benziger, "Tintern Abbey Revisited," *P.M.L.A.*, vol. 70 (1950), pp.154-162. Benziger's statements are cited by Gérard, *op. cit.*, p.93.

³⁶Gérard, *op. cit.*, p.95.

look at the landscape in the poem will clarify what Gérard believes and more important, will show how Wordsworth has used the Wye landscape as an integral part of "Tintern Abbey."

The first 23 lines of the poem are blatantly reminiscent of Wordsworth's two early descriptive poems. As Wesling points out, the observation of the outer landscape in "Tintern Abbey" serves to remind us of the Wordsworth who made a visit to this same spot five years previously.³⁷ Wordsworth is "itemizing the landscape detail" as he did in his early poems. Again we are presented with matter-of-fact description of rolling waters, "mountain-springs," hills, cliffs and woods, as if the primary intention is to expose the beauty of the "wild green landscape." The landscape description in "Tintern Abbey" once again suggests

Wordsworth's interest in the Picturesque. Mention of the hermit and the vagrants supports this belief, and more so, the fact that Wordsworth probably took along Gilpin's Tour of the Wye (1771) on his visit to the same scene. Moorman and Wesling both suggest that Wordsworth borrowed from this Gilpin work for his opening descriptions.³⁸ But this passage is only reminiscent of Wordsworth's early descriptive habits and is not exactly similar to anything he wrote in "An Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches." The description is not intended merely to make the reader aware of the

³⁷Wesling, op. cit., p.22.

³⁸Moorman, op. cit., p.402, and Wesling, op. cit., p.22.

landscape with which the poet was confronted, nor is it at all feasible that the reader is expected to see in the landscape the reason for Wordsworth's subsequent high pitch of emotion and deep profundity of thought. Rather, the passage as a whole is an excellent piece of exposition forming an intrinsic part of the whole poem. While Wordsworth describes the landscape, he also arranges the detail in such a way as to create a "suitable emblem of the oneness he wanted to convey."³⁹ In the passage we see how Wordsworth's imagination succeeds in imposing harmony, order and unity on the observed scene.⁴⁰ These abstract qualities, which emerge through the arrangement of the finer details of the objects in the landscape, and not the objects themselves, are of prime importance in the passage.

In the first two lines, Wordsworth repeats the word "five" three times, and this, "combined with the dragging rhythm, creates a felt sense of the weight of time as man experiences it."⁴¹ But the repetition of the same number also hints at the regularity and unity of the observed scene. When Wordsworth describes the waters, he tells us that they flow from "mountain-springs" and the sound he hears is an "inland murmur." He succeeds in subtly connecting flowing water with 'terra firma;' the description suggests an interrelationship between water and land.

³⁹Gérard, op. cit., p.100.

⁴⁰Geoffrey Durrant, William Wordsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p.35.

⁴¹Ibid., pp.34-5.

A look at the landscape as Wordsworth sees it from "under this dark sycamore" will reveal more connections of this type. The orchards he sees are not clearly defined within the "plots of cottage-ground," but "lose themselves" in the woods and copses. There is a unity in the very colour of the landscape. The "unripe fruits" are probably green which allows for the orchards' "green and simple hue." Because of the greenness little distinction can be made between different areas of the scene; there is no disturbance to "The wild green landscape." The farmlands, whether orchards or not, are "Green to the very door." The hedgerows too do not, as might be expected, form distinctive patterns, but are "little lines/Of sportive wood run wild."⁴²

These fusions are created by the description of the external objects only, but a oneness at a higher level is created as well. The "steep and lofty cliffs" seem to surround the scene, and besides being able to "impress/Thoughts of more deep seclusion," they also add a certain microcosmic dimension to the scene.⁴³ It is these vertical protrubrances which "connect" the whole landscape, of which they are a part, "with the quiet of the sky." Wordsworth has portrayed a vision of the universe in which heaven meets earth, land merges with water and farmlands mingle with hills and woods. Nor are humans left out of this universal unity. Just as the cliffs manage to fuse landscape and sky, so the "wreathes of smoke," also vertical in

⁴²Ibid., p.35.

⁴³Gérard, op. cit., p.97.

appearance, give notice of the presence of vagrants and hermits. The significance of these conventional figures "goes beyond the mere picturesque."⁴⁴ Because the vagrant dwellers live in the "houseless woods" and the hermit in a natural cave, they contribute greatly to the unity created in the description of the scene, for these humans live "in intimate communion with nature."⁴⁵ The inclusion of humanity is stressed by the very presence of the poet in the landscape. He is not an observer standing outside the scene, but is an important and essential part of it.

The importance of the landscape lies in the fact that it embodies an experience of order, unity and harmony. It is the "power of harmony" which is largely responsible for "that blessed mood" in which "We see into the life of things." Wordsworth not only tells us that he has

... learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth,...

but proves it to us in the poem. It is clear from Wordsworth's description of the Wye landscape that nature is no longer for him "An appetite: a feeling and a love." He has developed the ability to bring to natural objects "a remoter charm,/By thought supplied." A greater significance is revealed in nature because he no longer observes purely with the outward eye. Wordsworth has discovered his imaginative powers; he has realised that the eye and ear both perceive and

⁴⁴Ibid., p.102.

⁴⁵Ibid.

half-create "all that we behold/From this green earth."
 A joint effort of perception and creation results in
 the type of landscape description we are presented
 with at the beginning of the poem. While there is "a
 strict adherence to matter of fact,"⁴⁶ the description
 nevertheless reveals an experience of nature which has
 the power to lighten

... the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world.

Wordsworth shows that he is a "moral being," chastened
 and subdued by the "still, sad music of humanity,"
 who desires to "see into the life of things." This
 momentary glimpse of truth, this flash of insight into
 the very life of things, comes when our

... affections gently lead us on,
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 (ll. 43-7)

The near-suspension is a prerequisite for this mood.
 It occurs when there is a mingling of bone and blood,
 of awakesness and sleep and of body and spirit. This
 unity of self which is essential for profound revelation
 is a gift of the "forms of beauty" described in the
 opening passage. These "forms of beauty" conjure up
 the emblem of unity, order and harmony so that we be-
 come aware that it is the fusion of nature and humanity
 which results in the feeling of oneness in Wordsworth,
 which in turn is the experience necessary for the under-
 standing of truth. Wordsworth recognises that the

⁴⁶From a letter written by Coleridge, cited
 by Gérard, op. cit., p.100.

"anchor" of his "purest thoughts" are "In nature and the language of the sense." (l. 109) But his "purest thoughts," his most "elevated thoughts" and his understanding "Of something far more deeply interfused" (l. 97) stem from the unity of the universe. The dwelling place of the "sense sublime" is

... the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.
(ll. 98-100)

The "motion" and the "spirit" whose presence Wordsworth feels in the universe,

... impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things....
(ll. 101-3)

Wordsworth receives a further gift from the Tintern Abbey landscape. Since his first visit to the Wye valley,

These forms have not been to me,
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration:-
(ll. 24-31)

Wordsworth is explaining that in his absence from the valley, the scene and his experience of it had become what he later called a "spot of time."

There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount,
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
(Prel. Bk.xii, ll. 208-218)

This passage undoubtedly echoes phrases and feelings expressed in "Tintern Abbey." The poet tells of the heavy and "more deadly weight" which may depress one, the "fretful stir/Unprofitable, and the fever of the world," (ll. 53-4) which "Have hung upon the beatings of my heart." (l. 55) Wordsworth looks to the Wye River for renovation and nourishment. The experience of the Wye landscape has become a "spot of time" so that by turning "to thee/O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods," (ll. 56-7) Wordsworth is lifted from his state of depression. He hopes too that his present visit to the same scene will provide "life and food/For future years." (ll. 65-6) In other words, a further "spot of time" has been created by this second visit. He hopes that Dorothy's experience will also become a "spot of time" for her, so that in future years, if she suffers "solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief," (l. 144) she will remember her brother and their experience of the Wye landscape, and she will be healed.

"Tintern Abbey" stands today as one of the finest Romantic poems and is even perhaps amongst the best in the English language. Within the body of Wordsworth's poetry it is at the high-point of his poetic achievement, for in it Wordsworth has turned old into new, traditional into revolutionary and the common into the rare. He gives us landscape description, but at the same time creates in the landscape an emblem of extreme significance. He uses the conventional hermit and vagrant, yet their presence in the landscape

goes far beyond the conventional. The poem as a whole outlines Wordsworth's development both as man and poet and simultaneously explains ideas and tendencies that are of major importance in his poetry. The "spot of time" pattern and the idea of communion with nature become vital in the poetry that follows "Tintern Abbey." Having taken old habits to new limits and having introduced fresh material into the body of his poetry, Wordsworth, in "Tintern Abbey," bids farewell to the past and welcomes the future.

CHAPTER FIVE

"MICHAEL"

In January, 1801 the second edition of Lyrical Ballads appeared. It included many new poems which Wordsworth had composed in the interval between the first edition and the second. "Michael: A Pastoral Poem" took the place of honour at the end of the second volume, just as "Tintern Abbey" was placed at the end of the first edition. The poem was composed at Dove Cottage in Grasmere between October and December, 1800. It is a narrative poem, and as in Wordsworth's first narrative poem, 'Salisbury Plain,' the meaning of the story emerges through the juxtaposing of man and nature. An understanding of the ideas expressed in "Michael" depends on the realisation that the setting of the poem is highly significant and that man has a particular relationship to that setting.

Wordsworth, speaking "in propria persona," tells us that while he was still a boy he heard the story of Michael, and it caused him to think "On man, the heart of man, and human life." (l. 33)¹ He relates

¹All references to the poem are from Poetical Works, vol.2, pp.80-94. I pay little attention to manuscript versions of the poem as the various changes have little if any thematic effect. Stephen Parrish, in his discussion of the "Pastoral Ballad," makes extensive reference to the earlier manuscripts of the poem. See "'Michael' and the Pastoral Ballad," in Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, op. cit., pp.50-75.

the tale "For the delight of a few natural hearts;" (l. 36) not without hope that they too will be led on to think of man and humanity. But, "with yet fonder feeling," he writes this poem

... for the sake
Of youthful Poets, who among these hills
Will be my second self when I am gone.
(ll. 37-9)

So once again Wordsworth is intent on creating a "speaking monument" of his poem. But the monument is created in conjunction with an object in the landscape. The object might easily pass unnoticed unless attention is drawn to it, and this is what Wordsworth does in the poem. He makes a monument out of "a stragglng heap of unhewn stones!" (l. 17)² By committing to paper the story that "appertains" "to that simple object" (l. 18), Wordsworth makes the story eternal. The heap of stones can be regarded as an everlasting object and therefore visitors to the scene, especially poets, will by seeing the object, recall the story and will think "On man, the heart of man, and human life."

The heap of stones has a greater significance in the poem, for it is connected with Wordsworth's obsession for continuum. From a letter to Thomas Poole, we learn that Wordsworth intended to portray Michael as being "agitated by two of the most powerful affections of the human heart; the parental affection,

²As mentioned earlier, I take the idea of the heap of stones as a type of monument from Hartman, "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry," op. cit., p.401.

and the love of property, 'landed' property, including the feelings of inheritance...."³ The heap of stones, the unfinished sheep-fold and the spot where these objects are to be found, are central in the portrayal of these affections. Michael had decided to erect a sheep-fold and for that purpose had collected the unhewn stones. The sheep-fold was to be constructed by both Michael and his young son, Luke. But Luke had to be sent away to the city in order to repay debts incurred by a relative for whom Michael had been the guarantor. Michael is aware of the possible repercussions of Luke's journey. He fears that Luke's absence from the fields will cause a break in the established pattern of their life.⁴ So before Luke leaves, Michael takes him to the site of the heap of stones with the intention of creating a covenant with him, which will bind the young man to the farmlands and to the long family line. At the spot, Michael tells Luke the history of their farm and family, expressing vividly his desire for continuum. When he describes how they played together as father and son, he moves to a generalisation:

... in us the old and young
Have played together, ...
(ll. 354-5)

Their life together has been an example of a continuous bond. Just as Michael has been "A kind and good Father" (l. 362) to Luke, so were Luke's grandparents to Michael.

³See Poetical Works, vol.2, pp.478-9.

⁴Durrant, op. cit., p.82.

This parental love can be traced to their forefathers, all of whom lived and loved on the same farm. Michael expresses his wish that Luke should live as they did, that he should inherit the land as he himself did and that he should toil, as they all have, to keep the land free.

The construction of the sheep-fold is meant to symbolise the continuous task of Michael and his son. It also suggests something about their relationship to animate and inanimate nature: they are to erect a structure, out of stones and on nature, which will assist them in caring for and safeguarding their sheep. The fact that Michael is prepared to build such a structure is indicative of his faith in the future. Michael had intended to build the sheep-fold together with Luke. In this way a firmer bond would be created between father and son and a powerful link would be established between the young lad and his ancestral heritage. Now that Luke cannot participate in the building of the fold, Michael requests him to lay the first stone. This act which Luke performs is symbolic of his commitment to the task which Michael himself will complete. Luke has in fact committed himself to the 'natural piety' to which his father wished to bind him.⁵ Although Luke is to journey into an unknown environment, the covenant that now exists between

⁵Ibid. Durrant states that the task of building the sheep-fold was begun by Michael, but, although Michael heaped the unhewn stones, it was Luke who begins the building by laying the first stone. It is clearly a 'rite de passage' for Luke.

father and son, which was established through Luke's symbolic participation in the continuous task, will help Luke "to remain faithful to the purpose for which he has been destined."⁶

According to the story however, Luke does not live up to his father's expectations. Instead, he began

To slacken in his duty; and, at length,
 He in the dissolute city gave himself
 To evil courses: ignominy and shame
 Fell on him, so that he was driven at last
 To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas.
 (ll. 443-7)

Luke never returns home and Michael's hopes for the perpetuation of his family and his farmlands are destroyed. He continues to execute necessary chores and even visits the site of the sheep-fold. The depth of his tragedy is captured in the line: "And never lifted up a single stone." (l. 466) Michael could not commit himself again to that important task, which had become a symbol for the continuity of the family, because the family bonds had been severed. When Michael dies the sheep-fold remains unfinished. His wife dies about three years later and that means the end of the family's presence on their farm. The estate is sold, the cottage pulled down and new ploughs till their land. All Michael's hopes have failed and as a type, sustained by tradition and the dignity of labour, he has become extinct.⁷

Salvesen suggests the importance of memory

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p.83.

in the continuity of time in the poem.⁸ With this notion in mind it is interesting to note that Luke's failure to continue the bond between himself and his father, and between man and his inherited land is a failure of memory. Luke is unable to exercise his memory in a typically Wordsworthian way, nor in the way Michael suggests he should. During the farewell scene at the sheep-fold, Michael begs Luke to remember him, this moment and this spot.

When thou art gone away, should evil men
Be thy companions, think of me, my Son,
And of this moment; hither turn thy thoughts,
And God will strengthen thee: amid all fear
And all temptation, Luke, I pray that thou
May'st bear in mind the life thy Fathers lived,
Who, being innocent, did for that cause
Bestir them in good deeds.

(ll. 405-412)

A variation of the "spot of time" syndrome is discernible here. If Luke will remember this moment, he can be saved from "evil courses: ignominy and shame." He may be "renovated" and lifted from fear and temptation. Moreover, by remembering this moment and all that it involves, Luke will renew, by an act of the imagination, the bond between parent and child. He may again take his place in the age-old family line, and by remembering the laying of the corner-stone can again feel a part of the continuous task of man. As we know, Luke fails. His failure is a result of the fact that this spot and the land in general "cannot retain its hold on Luke's imagination."⁹ In the 1800

⁸Salvesen, *op. cit.*, pp.147-152.

⁹Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, *op. cit.*, p.265.

version of these lines, Michael's advice to Luke is:

... let this sheep-fold be
 Thy anchor and thy shield; amid all fear
 And all temptation, let it be to thee
 An emblem of the life thy Fathers lived,¹⁰

It is as if the sheep-fold, because of its symbolic nature, is the source for the "spot of time." Memory of the fold involves the continuity of time, task and family. We see here a striking development in Wordsworth's poetic technique. At first Wordsworth describes the sheep-fold as a 'spot in place,' a spot around which a detailed story evolves. The technique is that of centroversion, as Hartman calls it, and is similar to the Stonehenge description in 'Salisbury Plain' and to descriptions in "The Thorn."¹¹ The 'spot in place' is not important merely because everything else in the tale converges upon it, but because the description of it is so charged with imagery and symbolism that it becomes an important part of the meaning in the poem. We are made aware, at the beginning of the poem, of the 'spot in place' quality of the heap of stones. It is "to that simple object" that there "appertains/A story." (ll. 18-19) Wordsworth remembers the story by remembering the spot, and future visitors will recall the story (the poem) by seeing the spot.

So in "Michael" Wordsworth exhibits two of his major techniques through the use of one object.

¹⁰Poetical Works, vol.2, p.92. As Salvesen suggests, these lines were probably changed "because of the slight mixing of metaphors." (p.151)

¹¹Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, op. cit., p.121.

The sheep-fold is an example of the earlier method of creating a 'spot in place' and is also used to create a highly important "spot of time," the neglect of which results in the tragedy of the story. The "spot of time" idea only became a significant poetic technique in "Tintern Abbey" and the "spot of time" in "Michael" is reminiscent of that poem. In "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth begs Dorothy to remember their visit to the Wye, the sights they saw and the experience they had. Furthermore, he says:

If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations!
("Tintern Abbey," ll. 143-6)

The similarity to Michael's exhortations are obvious:

... should evil men
Be thy companions, think of me, my Son,
And of this moment;...
(ll. 405-7)

The importance of memory combined with the idea of "spots of time" is now plainly felt, and remains important for Wordsworth in the following years. The greatness of "Michael" lies in the fact that Wordsworth managed to develop a scene which becomes at once a 'spot in place' and a "spot of time."

As in the opening passage of "Tintern Abbey," the setting in "Michael" suggests a microcosmic quality. The scene to which Wordsworth brings his readers is not a common one and is not known by many people. To reach the spot you have to "turn your steps" "from the public way." (l. 1) Having come "around that boisterous brook" you notice that the mountains enclose

a valley. But it is described as a "hidden valley," adding to the idea of seclusion. The solitude felt in this scene is similar to that experienced by the solitary in the "Yew-tree" poem, for the only "visitants" to this scene are "a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites/That overhead are sailing in the sky." (ll. 11-12) It is, as Wordsworth aptly states, "in truth an utter solitude." (l. 13) Wordsworth's intention to create a microcosm becomes quite clear if we look at a related fragment which de Selincourt suggests may have been intended as part of an introduction to the poem. Wordsworth describes a spot

Shut out from man, some region--one of those
That hold by an inalienable right
An independent Life, and seem the whole
Of nature and of unrecorded time.¹²

The microcosmic quality of the setting is strengthened by the fact that the tale he tells of the inhabitants of the valley led him to think about humanity in general; "On man, the heart of man, and human life." The tale, therefore does not portray the tragedy of one man only. Michael, although very much an individual with specific characteristics, hopes and desires, is not a limited character within the bounds of a limited story. On the contrary, his hopes are man's hopes, his struggles are those of humanity and his aspirations embrace the aspirations of all mankind. The universality of the theme in the poem is expressed implicitly in the opening lines. The "bold ascent," the uphill "struggle" and the face to face affrontal with the mountains are

¹²Poetical Works, vol.2, pp.479-480.

not part of a description adding a merely local colour, but intimate that the poem "is concerned with man's endless struggle against the forces that pull him down and sooner or later reduce all life to a dead level."¹³

Hartman too insists on the universality of vision in "Michael." First he states that Wordsworth is "not less than prophetic" in his understanding of the effects of the Industrial Revolution. Wordsworth realizes that

Industrialization is causing great changes, changes affecting also the minds of men;.... The Industrial Revolution, in his eyes, is divorcing man from the earth as effectively as a debased supernaturalism. He sees that what is happening is indeed a revolution, cutting men off from their past, and their imagination from its normal food.¹⁴

Later, Hartman explains that the universal aspect of the poem does not stem only from this prophetic vision of the effects of the Industrial Revolution. In fact, he states that "The changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution are only the occasional cause for the disaster." Universality is created because

the story touches on a kind of loss and suffering which occurs in some form to everyone.... The 'universal' aspect of the loss suffered by Michael is of a hope which has attached itself to a person and seems to die with that person.¹⁵

There can be no doubt that Wordsworth has succeeded in creating a world within his chosen landscape. The world he has created is peopled not with individual

¹³Durrant, op. cit., p.76. The emphasis is my own.

¹⁴Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, op. cit., p.262.

¹⁵Ibid., p.264.

characters, but with mankind in general. The image we are left with, after viewing this world, is not only of Michael's loss, but of "a suffering that shares the nature of infinity."¹⁶

The portrayal of Michael's relationship with his natural surroundings suggests that he is in many ways the epitome of Wordsworthian man. Michael, living in close communion with nature, has become very much a part of his natural surroundings. Although to a lesser extent, he is like the Leech-gatherer and the Old Cumberland Beggar who seem to blend with nature. Michael shows a great understanding of the elements. He was "watchful more than ordinary men" (l. 47) and had "learned the meaning of all winds,/Of blasts of every tone." (ll. 48-9) When he felt the warning of an approaching storm he did not hurry to a shelter, but thought first of his sheep and scampered up the mountains to tend them. The extent to which Michael feels at home in nature is beautifully expressed in the following lines:

... he had been alone
Amid the heart of many thousand mists,
That came to him, and left him, on the heights.
(ll. 58-60)

Michael's feelings towards nature are described in terms that are reminiscent of Wordsworth's early appreciation of nature, as described in "Tintern Abbey." Wordsworth tells us how Michael was affected by his

¹⁶Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 1st ed., 1961, p.184.

natural surroundings. He says that the objects in the landscape

... had laid
 Strong hold on his affections, were to him
 A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
 The pleasure which there is in life itself.
 (ll. 74-7)

But the aged Michael has not the youthful spirit with which the young Wordsworth approached nature. The following lines reveal with clarity Michael's relationship with nature:

And grossly that man errs, who should suppose
 That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks,
 Were things indifferent to the Shepherd's thoughts.
 Fields, where with cheerful spirits he had breathed
 The common air; hills, which with vigorous step
 He had so often climbed; which had impressed
 So many incidents upon his mind
 Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear;
 (ll. 62-9)

Although Michael has a "feeling of blind love" towards nature, he is nevertheless a mature observer of nature. The natural objects do not affect him in a purely subjective way. While incidents are "impressed" on his mind, he also exercises his mind in thinking on the natural objects in the landscape. His is a mind that "perceives and half-creates" and this is ample evidence that Michael is typical of Wordsworthian man.

The question might arise as to how Wordsworth could involve so perfect a human in so painful a tragedy. This should not be a problem if one realises that Michael's tragedy was caused by external forces. The fact that Luke had to leave the farmlands was the result of circumstances. The fact that Luke disappears forever is the result of Luke's own failure and not Michael's. Michael's loss is the result of a human

predicament and his suffering does not greatly affect his attitude towards nature. Nature in fact provides some consolation for him.

... Among the rocks
 He went, and still looked up to sun and cloud,
 And listened to the wind; and, as before,
 Performed all kinds of labour for his sheep,
 And for the land, his small inheritance.
 (ll. 455-9)

Michael's long contact with nature has provided him with a "natural resilience" to suffering and despair. His "habit of fortitude" results in "inalienable sources of vigor" and his love of nature brings him comfort.¹⁷ It can be said that after Michael's loss he remains

A lover of the meadows and the woods,
 And mountains; and of all that we behold
 From this green earth;...
 ("Tintern Abbey," ll. 103-5)

Michael's consistency suggests an "immemorial covenant between man and the land." After Luke's failure, we almost expect Michael to give up the ghost, for it should be remembered that it was Luke who caused Michael's heart to be born again. But "Michael does not hasten the end, and abides his time without abandoning the land even in imagination."¹⁸ He lives for seven more years and, although he suffers, his faith in nature never dwindles. He eventually dies, as the Old Cumberland Beggar did, "in the eyes of Nature." When the whole estate passes "into a stranger's hand" everything is changed. Two objects remain; the

¹⁷Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, op. cit., p.265.

¹⁸Ibid.

sheep-fold--the symbol of the covenant between man and the land--and the old oak tree, a natural object telling of the perpetuity of nature.

CHAPTER SIX

RESOLUTIONS

After the various editions of Lyrical Ballads had been published--the last in 1805--Wordsworth's next major publication was Poems in Two Volumes in 1807. These volumes included poems that had been written in Wordsworth's productive 1802-1803 period, and many were composed in the 1806-1807 spurt of poetic energy.¹ The 1807 publication includes two poems that illustrate clearly Wordsworth's arrival at full poetic maturity. "Resolution and Independence" was composed between May and July, 1802 and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"² was begun in 1802 and completed in 1804. These two poems both ask questions and suggest answers; pose problems and provide solutions; describe despair and explain a consolation. Both poems use man and nature as subject-matter; their theme, however, is neither man nor nature, but the mind of man or the human imagination. While both poems discuss a loss and a gain, there is nevertheless an absence of the powerful optimistic mood of "Tintern Abbey." Although man and his relation to nature still form the main subject-matter for Wordsworth's poetry, the greatness of this

¹This latter period extended into 1808.

²Hereafter referred to as the "Immortality Ode."

relationship is limited. "Resolution and Independence" and the "Immortality Ode" both express vividly Wordsworth's doubts and his means of consolation. Moreover, they suggest a slightly different position for man and nature in Wordsworth's poetry. For the sake of chronology I analyse "Resolution and Independence" first.

I. "RESOLUTION AND INDEPENDENCE"

Like "Tintern Abbey" and "Michael," "Resolution and Independence" opens with a description of the landscape which at one and the same time creates the setting for the poem and embodies meaning. Through this description we understand that Wordsworth is experiencing troubled times:

There was a roaring in the wind all night;
The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
(ll. 1-2)

It has become clear by this stage in Wordsworth's poetic development that he does not describe nature without the description having any relevance to his own state of mind. Just as the happiness suggested in the following description of the landscape reflects Wordsworth's own happiness, so the storm mentioned in the first two lines of the poem mirrors the uproar and uneasiness experienced by the poet. But by morning the storm has ended:

But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
The birds are singing in the distant woods;
Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of
waters.

II

All things that love the sun are out of doors;
 The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;
 The grass is bright with rain-drops;- on the moors
 The hare is running races in her mirth;
 And with her feet she from the plashy earth
 Raises a mist; that, glittering in the sun,
 Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.
 (ll. 3-14)

In stanza III Wordsworth leaves no doubt that this pleasant morning caused him to feel happy and consoled after the "roaring in the wind." He says

My old remembrances went from me wholly;
 And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.
 (ll. 20-1)

Even though the "opening landscape works by incremental detail and catalogue,"³ which reminds one of Wordsworth's early descriptions, there is the possibility of consolation in such a landscape. For the restoration of balance to Wordsworth's mind there must be some expression of unity in the natural scene. However slight, there exists such a unity in this scene. The sounds of the Stock-dove, the Jay and the Magpie mingle together and become a part of the "pleasant noise of waters" which fills the air. There is a possible interplay of land and air when the "sky rejoices" in the earthly birth of the morning. The grass is covered with raindrops, which of course come from the sky. The hare, "from the plashy earth/Raises a mist" and the mist follows the hare "wherever she doth run." Wesling compares the detailing of natural objects in the opening stanzas with a short poem, "Written in March," which Wordsworth had composed two months before

³Wesling, op. cit., p.49.

"Resolution and Independence."⁴ The similarity is clear, and even in the short poem there is a suggestion of unity. The "oldest" mix with the "youngest" and the cattle grazing in the fields are "forty feeding like one!"

Wordsworth's joy and delight are short-lived. The problem is that his happiness is not the result of an act of the imagination. Any unity observed in the landscape is incidental and purely a matter of fact. Wordsworth has allowed himself to be subjected to the effects of the natural objects. He hears and sees and his whole perception of nature is as it was when he was a boy. He tells us that he was "as happy as a boy" (l. 18) and that he was "a happy Child of earth." (l. 31) Wordsworth is experiencing "dizzy raptures" and "aching joys" which bring momentary consolation but no permanent renovation. As soon as he begins to think, to exercise his mind ("I bethought me of the playful hare:"), his ecstasy overreaches the point of climax and he sinks into dejection. Wordsworth's experience, as described in the first five stanzas of the poem, shows conclusively that for the mature poet, nature is inadequate as a means for permanent happiness. Although Wordsworth can identify with the hare who races about with joy, can feel "The pleasant season" employing his heart and fares "as these blissful creatures do," his moment of bliss is nevertheless a tentative one. His faith in the one-sided

⁴Ibid.

healing powers of nature is dwindling. He becomes aware that he himself will have to participate actively, even if only through the exercise of his mind, in the renovation of his spirits. No longer can he exist by merely subjecting himself to external forces.

But how can He expect that others should
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all?
(ll. 40-2)

The dejection into which Wordsworth sinks after mounting so high in delight echoes in form his fears concerning the fate of poets.

We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.
(ll. 48-9)

Wordsworth feared the possibility of "Solitude, pain of heart, distress and poverty." (l. 35) At the time of composition, Wordsworth had reason to feel upset. He had decided to effect a settlement with his lover Annette Vallon and to marry Mary Hutchinson. He was understandably distressed by the thought of his approaching meeting with Annette and his daughter Caroline. He was uncertain about his future, still suffering from relative poverty and ill-health. His thoughts and feelings on these subjects may account for the dejection portrayed in the poem, but his greatest worry concerned the fate of poets and more specifically his fate as poet. At the time of composition Wordsworth was in the midst of a period of extreme poetic activity. Nevertheless, the labour and concentration necessary to sustain this activity was causing Wordsworth much suffering. Dorothy records in her Journal the ill-health her brother bore apparently

as a result of his efforts to compose "Resolution and Independence."⁵ In view of this it would not be surprising if Wordsworth was worried and perturbed about his future as a poet. He was distressed too by the fate of other poets. He was thinking of Chatterton, "the marvellous Boy," (l. 43) who committed suicide and Burns who died while very much in his prime. He might have had Collins in mind. He was a poet much loved by Wordsworth and suffered a poet's fate by going "melancholy mad." It is more than likely that Wordsworth had Coleridge in mind too when he spoke of poets whose "gladness" ends in "despondency and madness."⁶ Wordsworth, a poet who wished to devote his whole life to literature, dreaded the time when his well of poetic potential would dry up. He was fully aware of the sad end some poets had met with and feared that he too might reach that same level of unbalance.

These are the thoughts that must have occupied Wordsworth's mind while he "was a Traveller then upon the moor." (l. 15) In that "lonely place" Wordsworth finds relief, a relief which expels from his mind "these untoward thoughts." (l. 53) Peace is brought to Wordsworth's troubled mind through his encounter with an old leech-gatherer. As I have said, a lasting consolation could not be found in nature and I am not suggesting that such a consolation comes by

⁵Dorothy makes a number of references to the writing of this poem. See The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. by E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), vol.1, pp.142, 144, 145, 166.

⁶Moorman, op. cit., p.539.

making contact with a human being. The old leech-gatherer, although very nearly dead, is a human being, but as such he does not bring relief or "independence" to Wordsworth. The poet finds strength not so much because of what the old man says or does but mainly through Wordsworth's perception of the man. It is the way in which the leech-gatherer appears to Wordsworth which offers him peace of mind; resolution and independence. As Mary Moorman says, after stanza VII "the poem, as far as Wordsworth is concerned, becomes visionary in quality."⁷

Just what is it that Wordsworth sees when he encounters the leech-gatherer on the moor? The leech-gatherer seems to have come to Wordsworth "by peculiar grace." (l. 50) He is "A leading from above, a something given." (l. 51) Moorman believes that this is the first time the word "grace" appears in Wordsworth's poetry.⁸ In looking at these three phrases describing the almost supernatural origin of the leech-gatherer, Gérard feels that Wordsworth is beginning to recognise the existence of a transcendent power which he describes, "somewhat obliquely and with considerable caution, as the grace of God."⁹ Gérard hints that too much may be made of this religious source of consolation in the poem. He reminds us that Wordsworth described the manner of his rescue from

⁷Moorman, *op. cit.*, p.541.

⁸*Ibid.*, p.540.

⁹Gérard, *op. cit.*, pp.134-5.

despair and dejection as 'almost' "an interposition of Providence."¹⁰ Furthermore, Wordsworth uses the word "whether" ("Now, whether it were by some peculiar grace,") which suggests a question, an uncertainty as to the origin of the leech-gatherer.¹¹

These three phrases are better explained as being necessary for the development of the idea of "naked simplicity." As Harold Bloom suggests, Wordsworth was trying to create the feeling that "the old man 'was,' as a rock or a shrub 'is,' another part of an ordinary landscape on an ordinary morning."¹² Wordsworth himself, writing about the encounter to Sara Hutchinson, says "'A lonely place, a Pond' 'by which an old man "was," far from all house or home'-- not stood, not sat, but "was"-- the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible."¹³ Just as Wordsworth would have difficulty describing the reason for the presence, or the origin of a clump of grass, so he felt about the leech-gatherer. He was simply "a something given," whose presence must be accepted in the same way that we accept the presence of the natural objects in the landscape.

In fact the old man is compared to natural objects:

¹⁰From a letter to Sara Hutchinson; cited by Gérard, *op. cit.*, p.134.

¹¹Gérard, *op. cit.*, pp.133-5.

¹²Bloom, *op. cit.*, pp.164-5.

¹³Cited by Bloom, *op. cit.*, p.164.

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
 Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
 (ll. 57-8)

Then he is compared to a sea creature:

Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
 Of rock or sand reposes, there to sun itself;
 (ll. 62-3)

Although the sea-beast is a living creature it is more a part of nature than it is a human being. It can be said then that the leech-gatherer is at one and the same time part of the supernatural world and the natural world. To interpret the leech-gatherer is to understand a unity and a connectedness within the cosmos. This is brought about by what Bloom calls the fade-out technique or by the "dissolving of boundaries between objects."¹⁴ The leech-gatherer's age seems to make him a mediator between life and death, sleep and awakesness. The boundaries between these states of existence dissolve in the shape of the leech-gatherer:

Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
 Nor all asleep--in his extreme old age:
 (ll. 64-5)

In the next image which describes the appearance of the old man, the unity of the cosmos is subtly yet precisely portrayed.

His body was bent double, feet and head
 Coming together in life's pilgrimage;
 (ll. 66-7)

"Life's pilgrimage" immediately suggests the all-embracing extent of the image. The old man's feet and head are both "attached" to the earth, so that he appears very much like a mound which is, although

¹⁴Bloom, op. cit., p.164.

rising out of the ground, still firmly connected to it. He is not bending so that his torso is parallel to the earth, nor is he standing vertically so as to be a protrubance from earth into sky, but he is "bent double" forming an unbroken link with the earth. Moreover, the circular nature of his posture mirrors the round earth, and the roundness in turn is that image which best embodies a feeling of unity, perfection and totality.¹⁵ So the leech-gatherer appears to Wordsworth as human, yet part of nature and the supernatural; as alive but at the same time near death and finally as a symbol for the unity of the world. By this stage in the poem there exist all the essential ingredients for a successful "spot of time." But Wordsworth was not only in need of momentary understanding brought about by an act of the imagination, for the rejuvenation of his imaginative powers. The leech-gatherer embodies much more and can offer Wordsworth a more lasting consolation.

A sense of identification between old man and poet is suggested by the fact that they are both travellers upon the lonely moor. But a more significant identification is evoked when we realise that the old man's posture is a result of the hardships he has suffered.

As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.
(ll. 68-70)

¹⁵Salvesen, op. cit., pp.155-6 discusses the implications of the leech-gatherer's circular posture.

The picture presented to us is that of an old man at the end of his tether. Wordsworth is not old and decrepit, but his state of mind makes him feel as if he is at the end of the road. Moreover, the leech-gatherer is poor, and we cannot forget that one of Wordsworth's fears was poverty. In fact all Wordsworth's fears, "Solitude, pain of heart, distress and poverty," (l. 35) may be observed in the character of the leech-gatherer. Wordsworth is given new strength through the realisation that the old man hardly allows these troubles to affect him. Although he carries a "more than human weight upon his frame," he is able "to endure" all the "many hardships" (l. 102) of his life. His occupation, collecting leeches, is a "hazardous and wearisome" one. He has to roam "From pond to pond" and "from moor to moor." (l. 103) His task is made more difficult by the fact that leeches cannot be found in great quantities, but, nevertheless, he perseveres and gains an "honest maintenance." (l. 105) The old man's powers of endurance and perseverance, even though he is aged and poverty-stricken, are a lesson to Wordsworth. This is the "apt admonishment" which gives Wordsworth "human strength." (l. 112) Although the old man is weary and decrepit, although he is pictured as nearly dead, a spiritual vitality still pours forth from his inner self.¹⁶ Wordsworth qualifies this aspect of the old man's character in the following lines:

¹⁶Durrant, op. cit., p.95, and Watson, op. cit., p.89.

Ere he replied, a flash of mild surprise
 Broke from the sable orbs of his yet-vivid eyes.
 (ll. 90-1)

The brightness of the eyes suggest that even in his weary and feeble physical state, the old man still possesses the faculties of the inner mind which Wordsworth rated so highly.

As I have previously stressed, realisation in Wordsworth comes by way of a revelation, and the revelation is always a result of a vision in which there is a noticeable blending of objects, sounds or other natural qualities. In stanza XVI, such blending occurs.

The old Man still stood talking by my side;
 But now his voice to me was like a stream
 Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
 And the whole body of the Man did seem
 Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
 Or like a man from some far region sent,
 To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.
 (ll. 106-112)

The qualities of the man which give Wordsworth strength are revealed to him only after the vision of oneness, which is suggested by the man's appearance and the sound of the words. For the second time, however, Wordsworth's consolation is a fleeting one. No sooner has he received new strength than his "former thoughts returned:"

... the fear that kills;
 And hope that is unwilling to be fed;
 Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
 And mighty Poets in their misery dead.
 (ll. 113-6)

Just as nature alone is inadequate for lasting comfort, so the solitary human figure brings only a feeling of strength which is insufficient for ridding Wordsworth of his fears. However, near the end of the poem,

Wordsworth has another vision and this time there is a connection between man and his landscape, with a further blending of sounds, which leaves Wordsworth very resolute.

Again the vision occurs while the old man is speaking; his words are an inseparable stream of sounds which blend one subject to another. While Wordsworth hears (but does not listen to), this one sound, he imagines the old man to be an eternal fixture in the landscape, continually traversing wearily over the moors. Man has been linked to nature and a permanent comfort can finally be received. In this final visionary act of the imagination, the old man has become a part of nature forever. The final vision is exposed briefly and casually without much explanation for Wordsworth's sudden security and firmness of mind. There is no reason for anything more, for we have progressively come to understand the significance of the old man. His endurance, perseverance, resoluteness and spiritual vitality are already recognised. The glory of the fertile and fresh new day as expressed in the natural scene is always at the back of our minds. What is essential for permanent comfort is the juncture of these two subjects in the poem. It is only through an act of the imagination that this can be achieved and when Wordsworth sees, with his "mind's eye," the old man "pace/About the weary moors continually" (ll. 129-130) then all the qualities of the man and the landscape are brought together in an eternal unity. The encounter with the leech-gatherer

becomes for Wordsworth an important "spot of time." When depressed or in despair he will "think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!" and all the qualities of the man and his situation in the landscape will help Wordsworth to "stay secure." (l. 139) He has become a symbol of the link between man and nature, between the natural and the supernatural, between life and death: he has also become an example of vitality in feebleness, endurance under hardships, perseverance against all odds and most important, an example of resolution and independence.

The Wordsworthian landscape is no longer capable of restoring comfort in the manner previously experienced. At the same time, Wordsworthian man, however much he be in communion with nature, cannot be wholly responsible for rejuvenation and consolation. An equal distribution of healing powers is now to be found in man and nature; and these healing powers take effect more forcefully when there is a mingling of man with nature.

II. THE "IMMORTALITY ODE"

Up to this point I have attempted to discover the place of man and nature in Wordsworth's poetry by observing the human subjects in their natural surroundings. It seems fitting, therefore, to tackle last of all a poem which tells of Wordsworth's own place in and relationship to nature. I have commented briefly on this relationship throughout the thesis and have dealt with "Tintern Abbey" which is, without a

doubt, a poem about Wordsworth's relationship to nature. So the "Immortality Ode" is not alone as a poem exclusively about the poet and his feelings towards nature, but it does, as a poem completed in 1804--four years after "Tintern Abbey" was composed--suggest a slightly different position for the poet in his landscape. The loss which Wordsworth describes in "Tintern Abbey" causes very little pain. The poet is glad that he has grown out of the period of "thoughtless youth." The following lines suggest the optimism and the confidence with which Wordsworth accepted the new period of maturity:

...Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompense....
("Tintern Abbey," ll. 85-8)

In the "Immortality Ode" on the other hand, we feel the severity of the loss. Although Wordsworth is consoled and compensated for his loss, we cannot help lamenting with him over the disappearance of the "gleam," the "glory" and the "dream."¹⁷ Although Wordsworth welcomes the period of the "philosophic mind," (l. 187) there remains a sadness in the knowledge that "meadow, grove, and stream,/The earth, and every common sight," will no longer seem "Apparelled in celestial light." (ll. 1-4)

Like "Resolution and Independence" the "Immortality Ode" asks questions and proposes answers. The questions or problems are stated in the first four

¹⁷"Immortality Ode," ll. 56-7. All references to the poem are from Poetical Works, vol.4, pp. 279-285.

stanzas of the poem. The second section, consisting of stanzas V, VI, VII and VIII, reveals one reply to the questions, a reply which is Wordsworth's negative response to the problem. The third and final section of the poem deals with the poet's positive reaction to the problem.¹⁸ There is a two-year lapse between the asking of the questions and the formulation of the answers. Wordsworth began the poem in 1802 and completed it, according to de Selincourt, in 1804.¹⁹

Wordsworth is troubled by the realisation that he can no longer see as he used to. Once--and it is obvious that the poet is referring to the period of childhood--all the natural objects on earth seemed "Apparelled in celestial light." (l. 4) Everything he saw on earth seemed to be a part of the "glory and the freshness of a dream." (l. 5) But, the poet says, all that has changed: "The things which I have seen I now can see no more." (l. 9) Wordsworth is not suggesting blindness, for he can still see. He sees the rainbow, roses, moon, sun and "Waters on a starry night." (l. 14) He recognises a certain beauty in these natural objects, but nevertheless, he does not see them as he once did. The problem is "That there

¹⁸Bloom, op. cit., pp.171-2. Lionel Trilling divides the poem into two parts, but there is no contradiction with Bloom, because Trilling sub-divides the second part into the negative and positive reactions, or as Trilling puts it: the "despairing" and "hopeful" answers. See "The Immortality Ode," p.125, in Abrams, ed., The English Romantic Poets, op. cit.

¹⁹The evidence adduced by de Selincourt leaves little doubt as to the correct dates of composition and proves that Wordsworth erred when he assigned the poem to the years 1803-6. See Poetical Works, vol.4, pp.463-5.

hath past away a glory from the earth." (l. 18)

In stanza III the poet explains that his disunity with nature caused the grief articulated in the first two stanzas. He was strengthened however, by a "timely utterance." Whatever the "timely utterance" was,²⁰ it gave him a certain amount of relief. He can again appreciate nature. But it should be noted that his visual ability has not been restored. All the images describing his renewed pleasure are images of sound or feeling, not sight.²¹ Most of stanzas III and IV are devoted to descriptions of the sounds of nature, the animals and the shepherd-boy. Wordsworth's tone is ecstatic as he discovers the joy and delight in feeling and hearing beautiful nature. This renewed pleasure is cut short, however, when he notices a single tree:

--But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
(ll. 51-5)

The "something" that has gone has a lot to do with Wordsworth's diminishing visual powers, for he asks

²⁰The choice seems to be between "Resolution and Independence" and "My heart leaps up." Whereas most critics tend to believe that enough evidence can be found to support either choice, Trilling states that the "timely utterance" is "Resolution and Independence," and his explanation is convincing. See Abrams, ed., English Romantic Poets, op. cit., pp.130-2.

²¹Cleanth Brooks, "Wordsworth and the Paradox of the Imagination," in Wordsworth: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by M. H. Abrams, op. cit., p.177. This essay is taken from Brooks's The Well Wrought Urn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1947). It is an excellent analysis of the imagery and symbolism in the "Immortality Ode."

the all important question:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?
(ll. 56-7)

The "timely utterance," if it is "Resolution and Independence," offers Wordsworth strength, but does not reinstate him to his previous position in nature. The words of the old leech-gatherer and his physical appearance teach Wordsworth endurance and perseverance. He is made strong and secure after his encounter with the leech-gatherer, but there is nothing in their meeting which may console Wordsworth for his loss of vision; for the disappearance of the "visionary gleam," the "glory" and the "dream." But the figure of the leech-gatherer, as mentioned, is an image of unbroken continuity. The short "Rainbow" poem, the other possible "timely utterance," also embodies a strong feeling of continuity. The rainbow itself, with its almost invisible blending of colours, is a symbol of continuity. The rainbow is also an arc, touching the earth at beginning and end. This symbol of continuity is strengthened by the fact that "The Child is father of the Man." It is no wonder then that Wordsworth's ultimate consolation, explained in the last three stanzas of the poem, rests heavily on the idea of the continuum that is in life and nature.

At this stage we must discover how Wordsworth attempts to answer the questions posed at the end of stanza IV. He does not really explain "whither" and to "where" the "visionary gleam," the "glory" and the "dream" have gone, but rather tells us how and when

they were experienced. Stanza V deals with the "visionary gleam." The child, the boy and the youth all experience nature with feelings of joy, because their vision is attended by a splendid, glorious light. Wordsworth, making use of the theory of pre-existence, which he does not necessarily believe in,²² explains that we are born with a soul that "Hath had elsewhere its setting." (l. 60) The soul is "our life's Star," (l. 59) an obviously well chosen simile because of its brightness. The infant's previous home before birth is in God's house, and therefore, on arrival into the world we know, the child trails "clouds of glory." (l. 64) The infant does not entirely forget the brightness he has known in his heavenly home; as Wordsworth says: "Heaven lies about us in our infancy!" (l. 66) As the infant grows into a boy, the light begins to fade slightly, but he still possesses the ability to see with clarity.

Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy,
 But He
 Beholds the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy;
 (ll. 67-71)

The youth too, although he is steadily growing out of this glorious period, is still "attended" "by the vision splendid." (ll. 74-5) Adults no longer experience the "visionary gleam;" their sight is attended by "the light of common day." (l. 77)

Stanza VI suggests that the child brings to earth some of the "glories he hath known" (l. 84) in

²²See Poetical Works, vol.4, p.464.

his heavenly home and also remembers "that imperial palace whence he came." (l. 85) Coupled with these pleasures, the child also experiences the pleasures which nature has to offer. But, Wordsworth explains, it seems as if nature, with "no unworthy aim," (l. 81) tries to make the child into an adult and forget all the glories of childhood.

In stanza VII we discover the child's dream-like vision of human life. The child can play all the parts that fill the "'humorous stage'" of life. But he just acts the parts, by exercising his fancy. His whole "vocation" is "endless imitation." (ll. 107-8) Wordsworth makes it clear that for the adult, life is no longer a dream. The adult participates in weddings, festivals and funerals in reality and not merely in dreams. The adult is not required to "fit his tongue/ To dialogues of business, love, or strife" (ll. 98-9) but to hold such dialogues in reality. The adult cannot act any longer, because he is actually one of the "Persons" "That Life brings with her in her equipage." (l. 106) He no longer imitates parts, but becomes the part itself. The grown man has to say farewell to dreams of his childhood.

Wordsworth has not answered the question as to where the gleam, the glory and the dream have gone, but he has told us where they once were and that the adult no longer experiences them. So far he has expressed little sadness at the disappearance of his splendid and blessed childhood, but in stanza VIII he gives vent to his emotional distress. Here, Wordsworth

clarifies why childhood is for him such a blessed state. The child comes from and is still close to the heavenly realm; he is still in touch with the immortal world. Because of this he is an "Eye among the blind;" (l. 112) he is the "best Philosopher" (l. 111) because he can reach the truths "Which we are toiling all our lives to find." (l. 117) Wordsworth laments because, though the child is "yet glorious in the might/Of heaven-born freedom," (ll. 122-3) he nevertheless provokes "The years to bring the inevitable yoke." (l. 125) The child wishes to move out of that glorious state, that near-immortal state in which he "read'st the eternal deep," (l. 113) can discover the truths of life and can see with brightness and splendid clarity. Wordsworth laments at the child's passing into the world where his

... Soul shall have her earthly freight,
 And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
 Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!
(ll. 127-9)

The general sadness of the negative response of the last four stanzas just discussed, fades in stanza IX, which begins with the words "O joy!" This is the indication that what follows in the next three stanzas is an explanation of Wordsworth's consolation and compensation. This consolation depends largely on Wordsworth's memory and the healing powers of the imagination. Although Wordsworth has left his childhood behind, he can still remember it. Wordsworth, the man, exists in the "light of common day," (l. 77) but that does not mean that the "visionary gleam" has fled forever. Although the "visionary gleam" is "so

fugitive" it can be recaptured through the use of memory. Wordsworth says that "The thought of our past years in me doth breed/Perpetual benediction," (ll. 134-5) not because of the simplicity, delight and care-freeness of childhood, but because in remembering his childhood he can bring back the "visionary gleam" and therefore can experience a fleeting flash of insight and understanding. The child moves about in "worlds not realised" (Wordsworth uses the word "realised" in its literal sense) and experiences, in such a world, "obstinate questionings/Of sense and outward things," (ll. 142-3) "fallings from us," "vanishings" and "blank misgivings." (ll. 144-5) These gropings after the truth are "those first affections" (l. 149) the "primal sympathy/Which having been must ever be." (ll. 182-3) The "shadowy recollections" (l. 150) of these affections are for Wordsworth the "fountain light of all our day" (l. 152) and also the "master light of all our seeing." (l. 153) Now we can see why the "Child is father of the Man," for it is the adult who is heir to the child. The adult inherits the "visionary gleam" from the child. By remembering those "first affections," through the "shadowy recollections" of those moments in the child's life, there arise "truths that wake,/To perish never." (ll. 156-7) By recapturing these childhood experiences, Wordsworth can keep in touch with the heavenly realm, the realm of immortality, in which all the answers are to be found. Wordsworth's consolation is in the fact that he has reached the age of the "philosophic mind." His strength lies in his imagination, which

for Wordsworth includes memory and moral and emotional sensitivity. By exercising his imagination, within a moment he can return to his childhood and by so doing experience immortality. Wordsworth makes this clear in the following lines:

Hence in a season of calm weather
 Though inland far we be,
 Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
 Which brought us hither,
 Can in a moment travel thither,
 And see the Children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.
(ll. 162-8)

So Wordsworth still has strength, for

... though the radiance which was once so bright
 Be now for ever taken from my sight,
 Though nothing can bring back the hour
 Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
(ll. 176-8)

he still has memories of that "radiance," "splendour" and "glory." With these memories forever in his mind, he has no real cause to grieve, for he can become (even if only for a moment) a "Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!" (l. 115)²³

III. THE PLACE OF MAN AND NATURE

"Resolution and Independence" is the first of Wordsworth's major lyrics to portray an idea through the recollection of a particular encounter. As Hartman says, the poem "depicts the after-image as a formal part of the structure of experience."²⁴ A number of

²³For my analysis of the poem I am indebted to Trilling, Bloom and Durrant. Though I have made few direct references to their essays on the "Immortality Ode," I acknowledge that they assisted greatly in the formulation of my ideas on it.

²⁴Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, op. cit., p.270.

the poems in Wordsworth's 1807 publication make use of the after-image of an encounter. For example, "I wandered lonely as a cloud" recalls Wordsworth's encounter with "A host, of golden daffodils."²⁵ "The Solitary Reaper" is a reconstruction of the poet's encounter with "Yon solitary Highland Lass!"²⁶ And "To the Cuckoo" makes use of an encounter with a bird. (Although the bird is not seen, the hearing of its call turns it into an encounter of sorts.)²⁷ Although these encounters are set in nature, the natural objects are of secondary importance in the poems. While nature constitutes important subject-matter in the poems, the force of the poems lies in the human emotions that are aroused. The ideas that emerge from these poems are focused on the workings of the human mind and the understanding of human life. "The Solitary Reaper," for instance, is set in natural scenery. Wordsworth sees the solitary lass reaping in a valley. But the natural landscape is not as important as the song she sings and the possible interpretations of it. Nor is the scenery as important as the visual image of the young lass. The interpretations of the song offered in the poem suggest a mingling of the far with the near, the ancient with the present and the profound with the common and familiar. The feeling created is that of continuity, which extends into the eternal and the infinite. The descriptions of the girl make use of

²⁵Poetical Works, vol.2, p.216.

²⁶Ibid., vol.3, p.77.

²⁷Ibid., vol.2, p.207.

the present continuous tense ("ending," "singing" and "bending") which enriches this feeling of continuity. The fact that the poet says

The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.
(ll. 31-2)

strengthens the idea of the eternal existence of the song. Wordsworth is describing a "spot of time" and in so doing has developed ideas that pertain to the human mind and to human life. The natural setting is only a tool in the development of these ideas. I am not underestimating the importance of the landscape in these poems, but I point out that the final meaning of the poem suggests a greater emphasis on aspects of humanity than on nature. Again, in "I wandered lonely as a cloud" the significance of the natural scene should not be overlooked, but what is of prime importance in the poem is the effect the scene has on the poet's mind. The interest of the poem is the mind of man. The scene is important because it tells us something about the human imagination and the workings of the mind. The last stanza of the poem emphasises where the interest lies:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They [the daffodils] flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.
(ll. 19-24)

Unlike these poems and "Resolution and Independence," the "Immortality Ode" does not make use of an after-image nor of an encounter.²⁸

²⁸"Tintern Abbey," although in many ways comparable to the "Immortality Ode," belongs to the

It is Wordsworth's only major attempt at writing a purely dialectical poem. No incidents from the past are recalled in order to illustrate an idea. The meaning of the poem is exposed through careful detailing of basically abstract notions. As such the "Immortality Ode" stands as Wordsworth's most generalised account of the workings of his mind and of his relationship to nature. While much can be learnt about Wordsworth's present attitude to nature, it is important to observe what part nature plays in the development of the poem. The first section of the poem draws heavily on the world of natural objects in order to illustrate what is amiss in Wordsworth's relationship to nature. But in the second section Wordsworth is concerned with tracing the pattern of human development. Images of nature are without a doubt present, but their presence serves only to portray clearly the stages in human development. The subject of the second section is humanity, and what we learn is that when the child becomes a man he loses a natural visionary power that he cannot regain, except fleetingly through the imagination. Even when nature is used, it assumes human metaphors. The youth, we remember, "still is Nature's Priest" (l. 73) and nature later becomes mother-nature, the foster-parent of the child. The picture portrayed in stanza VII is clearly a picture

"encounter" group. The various visits to the Wye and memories of it suggest that use is made both of an encounter and of an after-image. Although there is no human meeting, the whole poem hinges on the various visits to the same spot; visits which are in fact encounters with the landscape.

of humanity. There is not one image of nature in this description of human development and human rôles on the stage of life.

In the third section, however, Wordsworth returns to images of nature. We are made aware of seasons, sea, weather, lambs, birds, flowers, meadows, hills, groves and much more. The fact that these natural objects are present in the section which deals with Wordsworth's consolation is not indicative of the fact that nature has much to do with his consolation. On the contrary, Wordsworth shows his gratitude not for anything in nature, but for certain powers of his own mind. He raises "The song of thanks and praise" for those "obstinate questionings," those "first affections" and those "shadowy recollections." Finally, he says, it is thanks to his own human heart that he now feels the way he does.

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.
(ll. 201-204)

Although Wordsworth states that he still loves nature as he always did ("Forebode not any severing of our loves!") the part nature plays in his life has changed significantly. No longer can nature, purely by its own force, have any major effect on Wordsworth. It seems as if nature has lost that awesome and powerful hold it once had over the poet. Nature for Wordsworth is still beautiful, but its importance in his life has been placed in correct perspective. The following lines perhaps indicate this more sober feeling for

nature:

I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
 Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
 The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
 Is lovely yet;

(ll. 193-6)

He no longer lives beneath nature's "more habitual sway." (l. 192) He has grown into a man and has realised the inevitable separateness between man and nature. Communion with nature is still possible and for Wordsworth still extremely important, but now it is through the tenderness, the joys and fears of his heart that he will manage to make nature meaningful for him. We cannot forget that the flower (here, a symbol for nature) can only provide thoughts for the poet because of the "human heart by which we live."

We have watched Wordsworth's poetry developing for just over a decade, a period which is without a doubt the greatest in his poetical career. Wordsworth's attitude to man and nature is the moving force of that development. At first there was nothing more important than nature as subject-matter for the poet. The result was "An Evening Walk" and the greater part of "Descriptive Sketches." It is clear from that descriptive poetry that nature was for Wordsworth "all in all." Then in 'Salisbury Plain' and poems like the "Yew-tree" there was an attempt to deal with human subjects and nature at one and the same time. But Lyrical Ballads brought a drastic change. These "stark human studies" could find no place for nature and Wordsworth had moved a great distance from his earlier poetry. "Tintern Abbey" and most of the poetry that follows it

reconcile the two major subjects of Wordsworth's poetry. Man is no longer separated from nature and nature is forever necessary for the development of the human ideas. Finally in the poems of 1807, it becomes clear that, although nature is still present in the poetry, Wordsworth's major preoccupation is with humanity and the mind of man. As early as Chapter Three, I mentioned that Wordsworth was learning to use his landscape as a tool for the development of meaning in his poetry. The utilisation of nature becomes more and more evident as the years move on and reaches a climax in the "Immortality Ode" where nature is no longer vested with any significant power. Nature is now more a tool than it had ever been; Wordsworth's driving force is no longer nature but the human mind and the human heart.

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