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MCGHEE, Richard Dennis, 1940-
CONVERSANT WITH INFINITY: A STUDY OF
WORDSWORTH'S LATER POETRY.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1967
Language and Literature, general

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1967

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

CONVERSANT WITH INFINITY: A STUDY OF
WORDSWORTH'S LATER POETRY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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Norman, Oklahoma

1967

CONVERSANT WITH INFINITY: A STUDY OF
WORDSWORTH'S LATER POETRY

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CONVERSANT WITH INFINITY: A STUDY OF
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Towards a More Generous Criticism

If there is any poetry in English literature which has suffered at the hands of critics, without at the same time having been closely examined or perhaps even read, it is the "later" poetry of William Wordsworth. It may be that one's evaluation of its merits will not be substantially changed after examining Wordsworth's later poetry, but it is certain that one's understanding of the reasons for his evaluation will be greatly improved-- "greatly," because any understanding is infinitely different from no understanding. Most of the commentators on Wordsworth's poetry have marked a "falling off" or "decline" in his poetic career (although they may vary as to the time when it occurred), and most of them have deplored that decline; however, there are two qualifications to this statement which need to be made: few, if any, of the critics who dismiss Wordsworth's later poetry as of little value or merit are either explicit about the particular demerits of the poetry (although they are loud and voluble in pointing out the demerits of Wordsworth's physiological condition, domestic habits, political and religious affiliations) or about the particular qualities of individual poems; yet, there have been a few courageous readers of Wordsworth's later poetry who have (sometimes surprisingly to themselves) discovered valuable qualities in particular poems written during his "universally acknowledged" period of decline.

We may find in Matthew Arnold's essay on Wordsworth in 1879 the note which will be repeatedly sounded by critics and readers who follow him:

Wordsworth composed verses during a space of some sixty years; and it is no exaggeration to say that within one single decade of those years, between 1798 and 1808, almost all his really first-rate work was produced. A mass of inferior work remains, work done before and after this golden prime, imbedding the first-rate work and clogging it, obstructing our approach to it, chilling, not unfrequently, the high-wrought mood with which we leave it. To be recognized far and wide as a great poet, to be possible and receivable as a classic, Wordsworth needs to be relieved of a great deal of the poetical baggage which now encumbers him. . . .¹

Arnold set out to relieve Wordsworth "of a great deal of the poetical baggage" which seemed to him to clog his approach to Wordsworth's "really first-rate work." Arnold did his job so well that readers now find themselves unable to get beyond Arnold's choices and discover for themselves what Arnold thought was second-rate poetry.

By looking briefly at the comments of several influential critics who have passed judgment on Wordsworth's poetry, we may discover how widespread is the conviction that there was not only a change in Wordsworth's poetic career but that there was in fact a decline or even decay. In such influential works as literary histories ("influential" in the sense that they are very often the sources for students looking for guides to taste), we find such comments as this by George Sampson:

The long remaining years of his career (1814-1850) added little to his best verse. The days of full, spontaneous creation were over.²

Or we find Samuel C. Chew devoting only one paragraph out of a thirteen page essay to what he calls Wordsworth's "Last Phase." This paragraph covers all the poetry Wordsworth composed or published between 1820 to the end of his life.³

Basil Willey, making every effort to find something worthwhile in Wordsworth's later career, comments that "Men cannot live by gleams alone, and though Wordsworth may have been a worse poet as he grew older, it has been argued (by a Dean, it is true) that he was a better 'man.'"⁴ And, turning from an historian of ideas who tries to be sympathetic to a "new critic" who finds it very hard to be sympathetic to much of the poetry he finds in any of Wordsworth's career, we read in F.R. Leavis's "reevaluation" of Wordsworth's achievement that as early as 1805, with the "Ode to Duty," Wordsworth's earlier powers of "fine and sensitive organization" had ceased to inform and control his pen.⁵

If we go to a long study which has some claims to being a kind of guide for students of Wordsworth's poetry, we will find that there is hardly any mention of his career after 1814; Carl Woodring tells us in his book on Wordsworth that "common agreement makes 'Laodamia,' composed at Rydal Mount in 1814, Wordsworth's last major poem."⁶ Now, even though Woodring allows the adjectival "major" in his description, he does not allow much mention of the poetry which follows. The conclusion which will be drawn by students who follow Woodring's guide is that there is no need to go any further in their examination of Wordsworth's poetry, since it is only minor in relation to his earlier poetry; yet these same students will read the verse of Samuel Daniel, Edmund Waller, Abraham Cowley, John Pomfret, Matthew Prior, and so forth. If such a detailed study as Woodring's, which focuses only on Wordsworth, can relegate to the shades the later poetry of Wordsworth, we may imagine what a general study of nineteenth-century English and European culture will do with it; Morse Peckham, usually sympathetic to Wordsworth's achievement, dismisses his later poetry with the old clichés: The high tide of his vision receded after 1805 and

he regressed to embracing more commonplace orientative drives, became Christian and timid. . . . 7

Nearly all of the commentators whom I have mentioned thus far have merely assumed a kind of decline in Wordsworth's poetic career. There are others who not only assume a decline but also attempt to find reasons for that decline and castigate the poet for what seem to them to be various kinds of "betrayals," of nature or art or humanity or self or whatever, depending upon their particular prejudices. We may begin with that idol-breaker, Aldous Huxley, and his notorious essay on "Wordsworth in the Tropics," In this essay we find Huxley using Wordsworth as his whipping-boy for criticizing contemporary society's "soft" and "unreal" attitude toward nature:

. . . Less openly, Wordsworth asks us to make the same falsification of immediate experience. It is only very occasionally that he admits the existence in the world around him of those "unknown modes of being" of which our immediate intuitions of things make us so disquietingly aware. Normally what he does is to pump the dangerous Unknown out of Nature and refill the emptied forms of hills and woods, flowers and waters, with something more reassuringly familiar--with humanity, with Anglicanism. . . . 8

Huxley thus seems to be condemning all of Wordsworth's poetry in terms of what he determines to be a false notion of reality, especially prominent in Wordsworth's religious beliefs in his later career. But it is very 'difficult to take seriously Huxley's criticism of Wordsworth (although, of course, we may take seriously the main point of his essay--that there are vast Unknowns in man's environment), especially when we notice such charged language as "less openly," "falsification," "admits," "pump" and "refill," and the purring irony of such phrases as "with humanity, with Anglicanism." It is this kind of criticism which not only contributes to a general

disregard of Wordsworth but which encourages a widespread deracination and withering of our cultural roots.

Herbert Read, unlike Huxley, finds much of Wordsworth's poetry interesting and important. But he feels it necessary to apologize for much other of Wordsworth's poetry by means of a psychological formula that makes Wordsworth into something of a schizoid:

By way of baldly announcing my theme, I might say that these two Wordsworths were Man and Mask--not Youth and Age, not Energy and Decay, but rather Reality and Myth.⁹

In his efforts to explain Wordsworth's uneven achievement in poetry, Read resorts to his theory that there is "an horizontal rift in character"; however, he assumes as obvious that there was a "vertical division in time" between Wordsworth's earlier and later career:

. . . In the obvious sense there was the Wordsworth of the poems published in 1807; there was the Wordsworth who lived for another forty-three years, forty-three years devoid of poetic vitality, but filled with another activity which is that of the mind seeking compensations for its defunct emotions. . . .¹⁰

Unlike so many other of Wordsworth's disparaging critics, Read takes time out to present his analysis of a "very nearly great poem," "Laodamia." But he does so only to prove that there was at work in the Wordsworth of this period a "process of inhibition" (which he earlier describes as "obsessions, fixed ideas, inhibitions, and repressed psychological factors generally").¹¹

Two readers have devoted entire books to the study of Wordsworth's poetic decline, assuming that there is a change in his career which can be called a "decline" and then proceeding to discover reasons for that decline. In 1935 Willard L. Sperry took the theme and title for his study from a remark

made by H.W. Garrod in his own book on Wordsworth in 1923:

. . . Professor Garrod says that the last forty years of Wordsworth's life are 'the most dismal anti-climax of which the history of literature holds record.' ¹²

Sperry then proceeded to examine the years of the "anti-climax" and present evidence for explaining them:

. . . I have examined the reasons usually alleged for Wordsworth's poetic decline: his premature old age, his break with Coleridge, his defection from republicanism, his profession of Toryism and Anglicanism, his affair with Annette Vallon, and the hostile criticism for which Francis Jeffrey was the spokesman. . . . Since none of these causes seems to me adequate to account for the effect, I have advanced in the eighth chapter some further reflections on the problem. I am persuaded that the answer to the riddle of Wordsworth's anti-climax lies somewhere within the area which in this chapter I have tried to define. ¹³

Nevertheless, some twenty-eight years after Sperry's book had published to the world the reason (or reasons) for Wordsworth's "anti-climax," there has appeared a study even longer than Sperry's, one which sets out to describe, perhaps definitively, the causes for "Wordsworth's decline in poetic power." In his book, Carson C. Hamilton offers these "Various Considerations and Conclusions" to his study:

. . . Whereas I hold him blameworthy, it may be better to accept all matters pointed up in this study as matters of course and to praise Wordsworth for the reasonable and accomplished life he lived with family and friends, for the numerous good qualities he displayed, such as patriotism (if we do not say jingoism) and personal independence (if we do not say willfulness), for the national honors and many other distinctions he earned and was awarded, including recognition for a large body of later poetry that, except for occasional work permanently stimulating, is much below his highest level but yet entitles him to our respect if not admiration. . . .¹⁴

Thus, in the tone of a Huxley and with the confidence of a Sperry, Hamilton

arrives at a conclusion which differs from Basil Willey's (and Dean Inge's) only in his failure to share in Willey's generosity. Hamilton's final, and most damning, evaluation of Wordsworth's later career comes in this one sentence: "What was betrayed in Wordsworth was integrity."¹⁵ And this is an evaluation which is distinctly contradicted by David Perkins' study of Wordsworth and The Poetry of Sincerity, in which Perkins concludes his examination of "The Late Poems" with this statement:

. . . Wordsworth's own massive integrity forced him to search amid the shocks of experience for final, all-embracing answers, and the frustration of this search once, at least, brought him to be 'sick, wearied out with contrarieties,' and despairing. But the very high integrity that drives so urgently toward a settlement can create a temptation to settle prematurely.¹⁶

Thus Perkins feels that not only was Wordsworth not betrayed in his integrity, but that indeed it was his very integrity ("massive integrity" or "sincerity") which caused his decline.

In an earlier study Perkins had discussed Wordsworth's symbolism as it revealed the poet's "withdrawal . . . from all feeling whatsoever." However, Perkins is not unsympathetic in his analysis when he observes that something "deep-seated and pathetic" is involved in this withdrawal: "Wordsworth seems finally to have felt that for the sake of peace he would sacrifice all."¹⁷ In terms of my own reading, Perkins' observation seems to confirm what I feel is happening in Wordsworth's later poetry; however, I would not go on to say with Perkins that for Wordsworth "to care was too much trouble."¹⁸ In fact, I suggest that "caring," and at the same time learning to "sacrifice," are the two major qualities which characterize the poetry Wordsworth wrote between 1814 and 1820.

Other readers than Perkins and I have been less gentle in their evalua-

tions of Wordsworth's later poetry. Joseph Warren Beach has analyzed the developing pattern of Wordsworth's changing attitudes towards nature insofar as they affected his aesthetics;¹⁹ his conclusions do not constitute evaluations in the way so many other critics' conclusions do, but they do provide such a hostile critic as Hoxie Neale Fairchild with materials for supporting his argument that Wordsworth so far fell off from his poetic achievement about 1815 that he seems to bid "farewell to the visionary gleam, to poetry, almost to life itself, in the last stanza of the poem 'Composed Upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty.'"²⁰

Fairchild uses this stanza from this poem as one more example for developing his point that "the later work is not merely inferior to that of his best period but falls below a much less lofty standard."²¹

Fairchild is primarily concerned with examining Wordsworth's religious ideas, and he bases his evaluations on his understanding of the ways those religious ideas determined Wordsworth's poetry. Newton P. Stallknecht finds that the reason for the "flaw in Wordsworth's philosophy" lies in Wordsworth's betrayal of his faith in democratic principles.²² Taking a very different, though an intensely argued, approach to Wordsworth's poetry, Geoffrey Hartman spends three hundred and twenty-three pages of his book in developing a theory of psychological growth as the means of understanding Wordsworth's major poetry, and then he concludes his study with a fourteen page "Epilogue," intended to point out the nature of Wordsworth's "leaner years" of achievement through a brief examination of The White Doe of Rylstone (written in 1807).²³ Thus Hartman omits from the domain of his subject almost all of that vast area of Wordsworth's career lying between 1807 and 1850; it seems to me that it was inevitable for Hartman to do so, since his assumptions of

value in Wordsworth's poetry lie in that same area of naturalistic development which provided Wordsworth himself the values which inspired him to write his poetry until he reached the dead-end of such development and began to question himself about the ultimate sources for his imaginative powers. Consequently, like Wordsworth himself, Hartman arrives at a dead-end when he comes to The White Doe of Rylstone, and since he is unwilling or unable to sympathize with Wordsworth's attempts to resolve his spiritual dilemma, Hartman terminates his study.

In spite of this long list of critics and readers who have deplored and ignored Wordsworth's later poetry, we may be encouraged when we discover that there have been quite a few bold individuals who have dared to put into print their approving commentaries on Wordsworth's later works. Some, like George McLean Harper, have tried valiantly to preserve Wordsworth's reputation as a whole; nevertheless, Harper himself found it sometimes difficult to maintain his otherwise worshipful interest in Wordsworth when he came to the later years:

From results which became visible after a few years, we may surmise that a change was taking place in his attitude towards those institutions, practices, and modes of expression, by which religious feeling is outwardly manifested. I cannot believe that the foundations of Wordsworth's religion were really shaken either in middle life or in old age. . . . In after-years he wrote much besides the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" that may be described as Christian poetry; most of this, however, expresses not so often world-wide or even personal, as Anglican religion, considered with reference to national welfare. Though it is unfortunate that his genius should have thus limited its free play, we must remember that religion, in a far broader sense, was from the beginning, and continued to be always, the subject of his song. . . . Instead of an advance of faith, there was in the main a recession. In fixing his trust upon particular ordinances, he lost some of that generous and open-hearted feeling which is of the very essence of religion. In so far as he became the supporter of a system, he surrendered his freedom. In accepting a tradition he lost the gift of prophecy. . . .²⁴

In the worshipful tradition of Harper, Solomon Francis Gingerich can maintain, with very little of Harper's hesitancy, his sympathetic examination of Wordsworth's poetry from the very beginnings to the concluding efforts. Again like Harper and also like Fairchild, Gingerich analyzes Wordsworth's poetry in terms of his religion; but more intensely than Harper and much more absolutely than Fairchild, Gingerich finds something satisfying in the pattern of Wordsworth's development from an aesthetic based upon conceiving God as an "immanent" and "impersonal force," with whom Nature is coequal, to an aesthetic based upon conceiving God "as a personal entity above Nature, though still working as an active principle through Nature."²⁵

For as long as there will be any kind of interest at all in Wordsworth and his poetry, Edith C. Batho's book on The Later Wordsworth should and probably will constitute a major center of controversy.²⁶ I suspect that this is so because her conclusions are so contrary to what the Whig historians, political Liberals, and all Levellers, have maintained from the days when Wordsworth had to begin earning a living and yet be free to write poetry by accepting the position of Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland (1813). Miss Batho's book accumulates pages and pages of evidence to controvert the widely held opinions that Wordsworth was a toady for the government, a stuff-shirted egotist, a fossilized specimen which had seen better days, and a meekly simple-minded communicant of the Anglican Establishment. But, unfortunately for our immediate purposes, her efforts are mainly directed towards examination of Wordsworth's life as a man, rather than specifically as a poet.

Nevertheless, Miss Batho's study is an encouragement to all who desire

to maintain sympathy for Wordsworth to the end of his life. And so we find in the works of three critics writing some six to thirteen years after the publication of The Later Wordsworth skillfully argued and sympathetically presented examinations of Wordsworth's later poetic development. In Oscar James Campbell's very influential essay on "Wordsworth's Conception of the Esthetic Experience,"²⁷ we may find convincing analyses of the critical positions of such readers as H. A. Fausset, George McLean Harper, Herbert Read, and W. L. Sperry. Campbell objects to these critics' evaluations of Wordsworth's later poetry because he thinks they base their analyses upon false premises and particularly upon the erroneous premise "that Wordsworth during his entire career maintained allegiance to the theories which he held during his great decade and that to the end of his life he made futile efforts to write poems based on a naturalistic esthetic."²⁸ Campbell enforces his objection with an argument which concludes:

. . . When Wordsworth realized that the essential law of Nature was change and that mutability destroyed man's most precious beliefs, he sought not only a religion but also an esthetic norm beyond nature--one that might produce in him through its permanence and stability unchanging peace. This feeling had been an essential part of the esthetic experience as he first conceived it. Indeed, it was its final stage or culmination. Nature, viewed down long corridors of memory, reconciled present personal disharmonies. Thus sublimated it produced first ecstasy and then opened ways beyond that feeling of excitement into deep peace, that "Central Peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation." But by 1805 Wordsworth began to seek permanence and quietude directly, and devised an artistic procedure by which he could attain that end through his poetry. He discovered a principle of thought that triumphed over time and a poetic process that would enshrine it in a work of Art. His philosophy was a kind of Platonism and his form symbolic art.²⁹

Then, that free-lancer of interpretative criticism, G. Wilson Knight, set out to look at Wordsworth's "Art" as symbolic statement and found, apparently

to his own surprise, that The Excursion could exhibit Wordsworth's "noblest strength" as well as his "most pathetic deficiencies,"³⁰ that The River Duddon "is a sonnet sequence of some interest,"³¹ and that "there is some fine poetry in Wordsworth's odes" of his later years, including those "three powerful odes" written in celebration of British national success after Waterloo and also including the "Vernal Ode," which Knight suggests "has a compactness and symbolic force repaying attention."³² (I have found no other critic who has put into print his willingness to admit that the Odes dated 1814, 1815, and 1816, are in any way so "powerful" as Knight implies; also, I have found only two other critics who have ventured to suggest that the "Vernal Ode" is worth serious critical attention: John Jones and David Perkins.)

The third critic whose study helps to create a fresh approach to Wordsworth after the pioneering work of Edith Batho is Jane Worthington, whose doctoral dissertation on the influence of the Latin historians and the Stoic philosophers in Wordsworth's poetry and prose is not seriously dismissed by any critic today.³³ Her arguments are designed to lend force to the opinion that there was an admirable nobility in the austere life of the later Wordsworth. She finds that "one of the chief reasons for the differences between Wordsworth's poems of 1800 and those of 1807 is the full emergence of a Stoic philosophy."³⁴ She also finds that "between 1807 and 1815 Wordsworth continued to write poetry that expressed a Stoical morality,"³⁵ but that The Excursion and The White Doe of Rylstone marked for his sensibility a beginning for his "progress to a height beyond Stoicism."³⁶

Edith Batho's work on The Later Wordsworth describes a man whose life

continued to be interesting and, more important, organically related in his later years to his earlier years. Against this background provided by her work, we may place in perspective the studies of such people as Gingerich, Campbell, Knight, and Jane Worthington: all have been willing to grant a continuity of thought and feeling to Wordsworth's later development, seeing it in terms of immanence become transcendence, naturalism become Platonism, direct experience become symbolic experience, and Stoical naturalism become Stoical Christianity. None, however, ventures to assert that these patterns of development constitute a "decline" in themselves; all seem to be willing to observe, describe, and reveal meaning to the understanding of the reader, whose judgments will be his own as he reads particular poems, of the earlier as well as the later Wordsworth.

We next find that two critics sympathetic to Wordsworth have developed schemes of understanding his pattern of poetic development in terms of a three-fold process (rather than the two-fold ones discussed above). Donald E. Hayden views Wordsworth's career as organically related from beginning to end; he sees it proceeding as (1) a "rejection" of orthodoxy, then (2) an "ambivalence" towards orthodoxy, and (3) finally an "acceptance" of orthodoxy.³⁷ Although Hayden uses Wordsworth's attitudes towards orthodoxy in religious, political-economic, and sexual affairs as his measure of the changes in the poet's career, he does not mean to imply that such orthodoxy constitutes any judgment of the poet's achievement, whatever the particular attitude at the time may be.³⁸ John Jones uses a very similar approach in his scheme of (1) "Solitude and Relationship," (2) "The Poetry of Indecision," and (3) "The Baptized Imagination."³⁹ Jones, however, uses as his measure Wordsworth's changing attitudes towards Nature and the consequent effects it had on the poet's art form. And this,

it seems to me, is more appropriate to an understanding of Wordsworth's poetry, since this approach benefits from the long tradition of discussing Wordsworth's poetry in terms of its handling of nature and human consciousness.

Finally, we may note that two readers of Wordsworth's later poetry have devoted specialized study to particular poems, and they have done so in tones of sympathetic curiosity as well as in the language of disinterested criticism. John Paul Pritchard published a study "On the Making of Wordsworth's 'Dion'" in 1952,⁴⁰ and Stewart C. Wilcox published his study of "Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets" in 1954.⁴¹ Beyond the fact that publication of such studies was something of a break-through in reading Wordsworth's later poetry, there is a further importance to mentioning them in this particular study which I am making. Professor Pritchard's discussion of Dion's being at once Wordsworth's commentary on Napoleon, his partial revelation of his own personality, and evidence of his renewed interest in classical literature, manifests interests in the later Wordsworth which I discuss in my study as Wordsworth's treatment of heroism, internal or spiritual conflict taking symbolic form, and increasing attention to the cultural roots of his own personal history as well as his nation's history. Professor Wilcox's study deserves special attention here because it is so obviously pertinent to my own essay on The River Duddon Sonnets; his discussion of the importance of river imagery in the poetry of Wordsworth does much to support my own position that the river has a symbolic function that has not always been well articulated by critics even when they have recognized it, and his willingness to devote several pages to an examination of several of the individual sonnets has of course encouraged me to think that a larger study would be fruitful. And so, these two essays represent important achievements in so far as

my own interests and critical efforts are concerned.

An Approach to the Poems

In the essays which constitute the central chapters of this study, I have attempted to discover what and how a few of Wordsworth's later poems mean. I do not intend that these examinations and analyses stand as evaluations, except incidentally, but I do hope that any evaluations which may be made of them arise from experiences of critical reading and demonstrated understanding. The reading which is described in these essays is admittedly "interpretative," putting into the language of prose what is the language of poetry, and it is critical in the sense that it asks questions of the poems, hoping to expose to the conscious understanding what are the functions of the various elements of the poems and what are the meaningful relationships of those elements to one another.

If there is a consensus of critical opinion which affirms that there is a period of decline in Wordsworth's middle- or old-age, there is the underlying assumption that there is a period of absolute achievement in his youth or middle-age. As one might well expect, there is no uniform agreement about either the peculiar merits or the particular time-span for this period of major achievement in Wordsworth's poetic career. Some readers want to mark off Wordsworth's period of achievement at 1805, others at 1807, another at 1808, but nearly all agree to go no further than 1814 (although we should not be surprised to find some of these same readers preferring the 1850 version of The Prelude to the 1805-06 version).⁴²

And so, somewhere between the years 1807 (when Poems in Two Volumes appeared) and 1814 (which saw the publication of The Excursion) began what

has come to be known in the best of academic circles as "Wordsworth's decline in poetic power." One must, I suppose, have to be interested in Wordsworth's poetry of the earlier years before he can be encouraged to brave the storms (or some would prefer "swamps") of Wordsworth's later poetry. Therefore, I propose to look briefly at a few of Wordsworth's "great" and not-so-great poems which were written before 1814, and I hope to look through them in order to see whether they do not show us the way into the poems written after 1814. Presuming a reasonably successful endeavor in looking for indications of later poetry in earlier poetry, I then propose to concentrate my attention on three of Wordsworth's poems written (wholly or for the most part) between 1815 and 1820: "Laodamia," the "Vernal Ode," and The River Duddon: A Series of Sonnets.

As long as the theme, or mode, of his poetry was his openness to naturalistic experience, and as long as the subject matter of his poetry was the time of his youth, Wordsworth did not concern himself much with the limitations of the flesh except insofar as the abundance of sense data sometimes confused the young human organism attempting to find its way through this earth. In both the 1805-06 and 1850 versions of The Prelude⁴³ Wordsworth celebrates his childhood openness to naturalistic experience as a "conversation" between his senses and natural objects:

And now it was, that, from such change entire
 And this first absence from those shapes sublime
 Wherewith I had been conversant, my mind
 Seem'd busier in itself than heretofore;

(1805-06; III, 101-104)

And as I paced alone the level fields
 Far from those lovely sights and sounds sublime
 With which I had been conversant, the mind
 Drooped not; but there into herself returning,
 With prompt rebound seemed fresh as heretofore.

(1850; III, 93-97)

In both versions we notice that the poet mentions his past "conversation" with "shapes sublime" or "sights and sounds sublime": he is referring to that time before his coming to Cambridge when he roamed the hills of Cumberland and Westmorland. After coming to Cambridge and thus being divorced from those "shapes sublime" of his native hill-country, and after divorcing himself from the "glitter" and "dazzle" of Cambridge and its relatively urban life, the young man begins to discover the independent nature of his mind; he begins to feel some independence from nature's "shapes sublime." Thus he describes the joy of discovering his independence:

At least, I more directly recognized
 My powers and habits: let me dare to speak
 A higher language, say that now I felt
 The strength and consolation which were mine.

(1805-06; III, 105-108)

At least I more distinctly recognized
 Her native instincts: let me dare to speak
 A higher language, say that now I felt
 What independent solaces were mine, . . .

(1850; III, 98-101)

And so very early in his life (he was about 17 years old) and early in his period of poetic achievement (these passages were written perhaps between 1801 and 1803),⁴⁴ Wordsworth came to recognize his human distinction from his natural environment. This was a necessary step in his development as a poet, for as De Selincourt properly points out, "one of Wordsworth's chief debts to Cambridge was that here first he realized that great source of his poetic inspiration--the 'spiritual presences of absent things.'"⁴⁵

Those "absent things" were of course earthly, or naturalistic, things, and their "spiritual presences" were no more, nor any less, than the poet's quickened memory of them. Thus, although his "converse" is with his own mind, he is still conversant with the things, though shades, of

nature. This mode of conversation with nature, either directly through the senses or imaginatively through memory of such sense experience, continued through Wordsworth's early career to be a primary value in his poetry; its persistence through the 1805-6 version of The Prelude indicates his continuing celebration of its values: speaking in Book XIII of those "higher minds" (l.90) with independent imaginative powers, he describes how

they build up greatest things
From least suggestions, ever on the watch,
Willing to work and to be wrought upon,
They need not extraordinary calls
To rouse them, in a world of life they live,
By sensible impressions not enthrall'd,
But quicken'd, rous'd, and made thereby more fit
To hold communion with the invisible world.

(1805-6; XIII, 98-105)

This experience is not much different from the one described of the boy at Cambridge: both are statements of discovery--that the human mind is first dependent upon nature for its experience, but that it need not be enslaved to nature, and indeed that it may transcend nature's limitations and "hold communion with the invisible world," which in the 1805-06 version seems to be not more than the realm of mind itself, of abstraction, of self-consciousness (which can be felt and reasoned, but not seen):

and hence the highest bliss
Than can be known is theirs, the consciousness
Of whom they are habitually infused
Through every image, and through every thought,
And all impressions. . . .

(1805-06; XIII, 107-111)

However, such independence of imaginative power seems to have led Wordsworth to an experience of lonely despair: what is such a powerful mind to do with all of nature once he has gained a mastery over it?

Before looking ahead to Wordsworth's revision of these lines from The Prelude, we may perhaps find an answer to our question in a speech made by the Wanderer in Book IV of The Excursion; since this passage was composed probably sometime just before Wordsworth completed the 1805-06 version of The Prelude, it is particularly relevant to the question raised by the conclusion to The Prelude of 1805-06:⁴⁶

"Ah! if the time must come, in which my feet
 No more shall stray where meditation leads,
 By flowing stream, through wood, or craggy wild,
 Loved haunts like these; the unimprisoned Mind
 May yet have scope to range among her own,
 Her thoughts, her images, her high desires.
 If the dear faculty of sight should fail,
 Still, it may be allowed me to remember
 What visionary powers of eye and soul
 In youth were mine; when, stationed on the top
 Of some huge hill--expectant, I beheld
 The sun rise up, from distant climes returned
 Darkness to chase, and sleep; and bring the day
 His bounteous gift! or saw him toward the deep
 Sink, with a retinue of flaming clouds
 Attended; then, my spirit was entranced
 With joy exalted to beatitude;
 The measure of my soul was filled with bliss,
 And holiest love; as earth, sea, air, with light,
 With pomp, with glory, with magnificence!

"Those fervent raptures are for ever flown;
 And, since their date, my soul hath undergone
 Change manifold, for better or for worse:
 Yet cease I not to struggle, and aspire
 Heavenward; and chide the part of me that flags,
 Through sinful choice; or dread necessity
 On human nature, from above imposed.
 'Tis, by comparison, an easy task
 Earth to despise; but, to converse with heaven--
 This is not easy:--to relinquish all
 We have, or hope, of happiness and joy,
 And stand in freedom loosened from this world,
 I deem not arduous; but must needs confess
 That 'tis a thing impossible to frame
 Conceptions equal to the soul's desires;
 And the most difficult of tasks to keep
 Heights which the soul: is competent to gain.

--Man is of dust: ethereal hopes are his,
 Which, when they should sustain themselves aloft,
 Want due consistence; like a pillar of smoke,
 That with majestic energy from earth
 Rises; but, having reached the thinner air,
 Melts, dissolves, and is no longer seen.
 From this infirmity of mortal kind
 Sorrow proceeds. . . . "

(Excursion, IV, 103-147)

Thus we may be made to realize that Wordsworth's discovery of his human independence from his naturalistic environment through the imaginative powers of his mind was not enough to sustain him through this period of "sorrow" described by the Wanderer in The Excursion. This inadequacy would continue for as long as his imaginative powers were made to depend upon his sense experience, whether immediate or remembered: thus the paradox that the very escape from the naturalistic limitations of time and space through reliance upon memory and the imagination's control over memory leads the poet to an impasse that is bleak when he begins to exercise that control and discovers that he must abandon his reliance upon sense experience and memory if he ever wishes "to frame / Conceptions equal to the soul's desires." And so, just as he found it easy (perhaps too easy) to give up his reliance upon immediate sense experience for his happiness and turn to his own mind, as he described it in the Cambridge incident of The Prelude, so does he now find it "an easy task / Earth to despise; but, to converse with heaven--/ This is not easy."

And it is "to converse with heaven" that he strives for in his later poetry. This finds its way into the poet's revision of those lines earlier examined from Book XIII of the 1805-06 Prelude; now, in the 1850 version, we find that "higher minds" no longer seek "To hold communion with the invisible world," but rather they are "made more prompt"

To hold fit converse with the spiritual world,
 And with the generations of mankind
 Spread over time, past, present, and to come,
 Age after age, till Time shall be no more.

(1850; XIV, 108-111; my italics)

And although the "highest bliss" that "higher minds" can know remains "the consciousness / Of Whom they are" (ll. 114-115), it is no longer expressed as the absolute which it is in the 1805-06 version:

. . . and hence the highest bliss
 That can be known is theirs, . . .

(1805-06; XIII, 107-8; my italics)

but rather as the relative condition which it is in the revision of the 1850 edition:

. . . and hence the highest bliss
 That flesh can know is theirs--. . .

(1850; XIV, 113-114; my italics)

That is, "flesh" may know only the "highest bliss" of flesh, which is the highest faculty of fleshly being--the mind, the "invisible world" of human self-consciousness and its powers of reason and imagination. But now Wordsworth feels that there is a higher task for "higher minds" and that the regions of eternal being are not to be found in the mind of the poet except insofar as it is capable, through the imagination, of conversing with "the spiritual world," of reaching "From earth to heaven, from human to divine," And this may be accomplished only by being prepared

to relinquish all
 We have, or hope, of happiness and joy,
 And stand in freedom loosened from this world,

(Excursion, IV, 132-134)

to overcome the "Sorrow" that proceeds "From this infirmity of mortal kind,"

and "Hence, amid ills that vex and wrongs that crush / Our hearts" (1850 Prelude, XIV, 124-5), deserve to achieve

that peace
Which passeth understanding, that repose
In moral judgments which from this pure source
Must come, or will by man be sought in vain.

(1850 Prelude, XIV, 126-129)

Thus we may see in his letter to Walter Savage Landon on January 21, 1824, That Wordsworth not only measured the value of poetry in terms of its "religious" statement and so had relinquished his earlier measure of openness to naturalistic experience, but that he stopped to "preach" in prose what he had begun and continued to "practice in poetry: namely, the striving "to converse with heaven," "To hold fit converse with the spiritual world":

. . . This leads to a remark in your last, 'that you are disgusted with all books that treat of religion.' I am afraid it is a bad sign in me, that I have little relish for any other--even in poetry it is the imaginative only, viz., that which is conversant [with], or turns upon infinity, that powerfully affects me,--perhaps I ought to explain: I mean to say that, unless in those passages where things are lost in each other, and limits vanish, and aspirations are raised, I read with something too much like indifference--but all great poets are in this view powerful Religionists, and therefore among many other literary pleasures lost, I have not yet to lament over that of verse as departed. . . .⁴⁷

The Wordsworth of 1824 is not the Wordsworth of 1800; his "soul hath under/-gone/ Change manifold," and though the change may have been "for better" for his soul, it seems in the judgment of posterity to have been "for worse" for his poetry. It may be that his later poetry is like that "pillar of smoke" which the Wanderer described:

That with a majestic energy from earth
Rises; but, having reached the thinner air,
Melts, dissolves, and is no longer seen.

(Excursion, IV, 142-145)

And it may be that the "sorrow" of readers "proceeds" from "this infirmity of mortal kind" in Wordsworth's later poetry; nevertheless, though most will prefer to warm their imaginations at the fire from which the smoke rises, we may find some pleasure in feeling the "majestic energy" which attends the poetry seeking to become "conversant with infinity."

The Wanderer and the Pastor of The Excursion may have found that it was easy for them "Earth to despise" and "to relinquish all / We have, or hope, of happiness and joy, / And stand in freedom loosened from this world," but it was no easy task for the poet William Wordsworth, whose dependence upon the forms and experiences of this earthly realm has become so notorious that he is often cited as the "nature" poet of English literature. And so we applaud his poetry for its beauty of observation, for its imaginative coloring of naturalistic experience, for its humanizing effect upon the stark and sometimes brutal natural world, and so long as he struggles in his poetry to accomplish such effects as these, we are willing to grant him our confidence. But let him begin to question the limitations of such poetry, let him begin to examine into the matter of what the source for his imaginative values is, and we are cautioned to withhold our confidence. And when Wordsworth affirms what millions before him had affirmed and what millions after him would seek to affirm, an experience of conviction that God's realm of eternal and infinite being is the source and goal of human powers, we are told to scoff at the poet's decaying powers and not to bother looking into the hackwork of his later years. But Wordsworth, who lived into the time of Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, and Clough, was enough of a Victorian to be tormented by doubts, by the crisis of spirit which nearly wrecked (and in some cases did wreck) the poetry of men living when

John Henry Newman could become a Roman Catholic while his brother became an "honest doubter,"⁴⁸ when Lyell and Darwin seemed to conspire in destroying all vestiges of belief, and when Karl Marx set out to solve the world's problems with a formula of economics derived from dialectical materialism.

Thus we, who are the children of those "honest doubters," derive pleasure from the admirable efforts of the early Wordsworth to maintain his faith in nature and to discover within himself the resources which he needed to make order out of his world; and perhaps we derive pleasure, in an ironic or even perverse way, from the knowledge we have that even though Wordsworth's early efforts may occasionally succeed as poetry, they are doomed to fail as statements satisfying his own desires for permanent values.⁴⁹ The early Wordsworth did not find it easy "Earth to despise" or to "relinquish" the values of naturalistic existence; indeed, loving the Earth (sometimes with a kind of fearful awe) and holding to her beauties were his first desires. His difficulty lay in trying to escape the experiences of apocalypse, of separation from nature, of visions of eternity, and conversations with infinity. We find him attempting to escape the experience of apocalypse in the Simplon Pass episode of The Prelude,⁵⁰ and we find him puzzled by the mysterious, though purging, experience which he undergoes in his encounter with the old Leech-Gatherer in "Resolution and Independence" (PW, II, 235-240):

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.

(11. 106-112)

This experience has many similarities to the poems which will be the subjects of my studies: the old Man's function points toward those of Proteus in "Laodamia" and the Angel in the "Vernal Ode"; the "stream / Scarce heard" of the old Man's voice becomes a "stream" often heard in The River Duddon. But we notice how quickly, in the very next stanza, the poet escapes this visionary (and nearly apocalyptic) experience:

My 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. 113-116)

In the earlier stanza the poet had tapped the sources of inspiration, but after he rejected or escaped from them, he found himself in the cold and painful world of naturalistic existence (much as Keats did in his "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and "Ode to a Nightingale").

It takes little effort to find poems from Wordsworth's earlier career in which he indicates his tendency to feel himself separate from his naturalistic environment, and usually we may find him attempting to sublimate or escape from such experiences. We find the tendency underlying the drama of "We are Seven," and we find it acknowledged in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (PW, IV, 279-285):

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
 The earth, and every common sight,
 To me did seem
 Apparelled in celestial light,
 The glory and the freshness of a dream.
 It is not now as it hath been of yore;--
 Turn wheresoe'er I may,
 By night or day,
 The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

(ll. 1-9)

In this stanza we find indices of themes and attitudes which will become

major themes and modes of vision in "Laodamia," "Vernal Ode," and The River Duddon: the recovery of that "celestial light," that "glory," and that "dream." In this "Ode" of 1802-04 we find the solution to his problem which Wordsworth would later develop in greater detail in his poetry; there will be a recovery of "light," and "glory," and "dream," but it will be made in spite of mortality and because of his faith in a spiritual realm of infinite being:

What 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;
 We will grieve not, rather find
 Strength in what remains behind;
 In the primal sympathy
 Which having been must ever be;
 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering;
 In the faith that looks through death,
 In years that bring the philosophic mind.

(ll. 176-187)

And so we find as early as 1802-04 that Wordsworth begins to develop his spiritual strength for the onslaught of time. After time had begun to overcome the aging Wordsworth, he found that there was strength to be had in his spiritual resources. He describes "the primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be" when he describes the Bee in the "Vernal Ode" and when he follows the course of the Duddon from its birthplace in the mountains down into the sea of eternity; he presents in objective, or rather dramatically symbolic, form "the soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering" when he writes "Laodamia"; and he affirms "the faith that looks through death" when he concludes his sonnet sequence on The River Duddon.

It is such experiences as these I have pointed to in The Prelude

episode of the Simplon Pass, "Resolution and Independence," "We are Seven," and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (and more could be found in such poems as "Ode to Duty," "The World is Too Much With Us," "Elegiac Stanzas: Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle," "Character of the Happy Warrior") that constitute the attempts to evade the implications of apocalypse and to hold on to this solid earth while realizing that it must ultimately be given up. Such experiences as he occasionally admitted into his earlier poetry became the major substance of his later poetry. We may view Wordsworth's earlier poetry as embodying the affirmations of natural values discovered by the human imagination while seeking to escape the full significance of the transcendent values which the poet's imagination occasionally revealed; his later poetry may then be seen as expressions embodying the affirmations of transcendental values revealed to the human imagination while seeking to escape the limitations of human being imposed upon the flesh by the conditions of naturalistic being, i.e., time and space.

"Laodamia," "Vernal Ode," and The River Duddon are products of that time in Wordsworth's life which may be called the "boundary" between his period of absolute achievement and his period of debatable decay. "Laodamia" has many, though often grudging, admirers, and so it seems to me to be a good poem to begin my analysis with: the theory being that those who would never look at the "Vernal Ode" or possibly The River Duddon might be enticed to do so by "Laodamia." "Laodamia" may thus guide us into a severely neglected poem, "Vernal Ode," and so free us to examine without undue prejudice a poem which has cried out for closer examination ever since it was published in 1820, The River Duddon. Thus, "Laodamia"

becomes for this study something of a bridge across the boundary, and yet I fear that it receives less than its due in my reading, for it requires a rigor of the mind which it seems to me cannot be attained except in a dispassionate analysis such as the "new critics" of the scientific era have advocated; although I more or less deplore this instrumental approach to reading the poem, I think it may work to eliminate such prejudices of morality which have heretofore interfered with readings of the poem. I hope, then, that my readings of the "Vernal Ode" and The River Duddon are more human (although not necessarily less scientific) as they generate more speculative approaches to understanding and as they move to conform to the shapes of the poems they attempt to describe. The total effect, it seems to me, of reading "Laodamia," and then "Vernal Ode," and finally The River Duddon, will be to increase understanding of the way Wordsworth found to accommodate himself to the experiences of aging, including a growing dissatisfaction with the limitations of the flesh and a growing intensification of his desire to overcome those limitations by dedicating his powers to the concerns of the spirit.

CHAPTER II

LAODAMIA: POEM OF SACRIFICE¹

"Laodamia" is a poem of sacrifice; the effects of sacrifice are discovered by the imagination in this vision of human suffering, passion, and renunciation. The discovery is communicated through the elements of the poem's design, and these elements are generic, linguistic, and archetypal. The imaginative design made of these elements reveals patterns of thought dealing with questions of identity, communication, and fragmented sensibility. These questions find their answers in the effects which sacrifice has in several areas of human experience: physical, psychological, social, moral, and metaphysical.

The Elements of Design

The poem is of the kind which has traditionally been called a "debate of body and soul." In the usual version of this debate, the interests of the soul (which was eternal) were more significant than those of the body (which was time-bound and subject to dissolution); the soul's interests were, however, dependent upon the success with which the body's desires had been restrained and controlled: if the success was high, the soul was rewarded with a place in heaven, but if the success was low, the soul was punished with a place in hell. In "Laodamia" the eternal soul's interests are represented in the character of Protesilaus, and the mortal body's interests are represented in the character of Laodamia.²

Protesilaus is the "unsubstantial Form" which eludes the grasp of "the impassioned Queen," Laodamia.³ He had successfully restrained his own passions in the interest of his fellow soldiers:

'Yet bitter, oft-times bitter, was the pang
 When of thy loss I thought, beloved Wife!
 On thee too fondly did my memory hang,
 And on the joys we shared in mortal life,--
 The paths which we had trod--these fountains, flowers;
 My new-planned cities, and unfinished towers.

'But should suspense permit the Foe to cry,
 "Behold they tremble!--haughty their array,
 Yet of their number no one dares to die?"
 In soul I swept the indignity away:
 Old frailties then recurred:--but lofty thought,
 In act embodied, my deliverance wrought.

(11. 127-138)

And although Protesilaus had admonished her "to control / Rebellious pas-
 sion," Laodamia gave way to her grief at his return to the land of the dead:

Aloud she shrieked! for Hermes appears!
 Round the dear Shade she would have clung--'tis vain:
 The hours are past--too brief had they been years;
 And him no mortal effort can detain:
 Swift, toward the realms that know not earthly day,
 He through the portal takes his silent way,
 And on the palace-floor a lifeless corpse she lay.

(11. 151-157)

Protesilaus goes to "Climes which the sun, who sheds the brightest day /
 Earth knows, is all unworthy to survey" (11. 106-7), and Laodamia

Was doomed to wear out her appointed time,
 Apart from happy Ghosts, that gather flowers
 Of blissful quiet 'mid unfading bowers.

(11. 161-163)

The judgments made in the poem do not necessarily represent the poet's per-
 sonal estimation of the worth of the two characters, but those judgments
 do necessarily represent the estimations of "the just Gods" in the poem
 itself. The logic of cause and effect is discoverable in the elements of
 the poem's own design, but that design is the product of an imagination

whose discoveries of truth in human experience have led it to affirm a condition which had been affirmed by generations of men: namely, that uncontrolled passion must dwell apart from "affections raised and solemnised" by "lofty thought."

There are three points of view established in the poem,⁴ and no one of them is dominant in any absolute sense. Indeed, it is the relativity established by the varied points of view that makes the poem so capable of extensive statement. Laodamia provides the first point of view, and that is one of passionate self-interest. Protesilaus's point of view is one of dispassionate social concern. And the third point of view is that of an impersonal, but perhaps not disinterested, observer. Without reference to external data, i.e., to the biography of the poet or his other poems, there is no definite norm of judgment in "Laodamia."

The poem opens with the view of passionate self-interest as Laodamia implores the gods to return her dead husband to her "sight," but it becomes more and more clear that she desires him for more than the satisfaction of her sight:⁵

'No Spectre greets me,--no vain Shadow this;
Come, blooming Hero, place thee by my side!
Give, on this well-known couch, one nuptial kiss
To me, this day, a second time thy bride!'

(11. 61-64)

It is not in the nature of things "unsubstantial" to marry with things "substantial" under the conditions of space and time. But, apart from the metaphysical and aesthetic questions raised by this problem, Protesilaus is unable to marry Laodamia again because his point of view is not that of passionate self-interest; he had learned to annul the interests of self while "seeking a higher object": he chose to die so that the rest of the

Greek army would not hesitate to prosecute the invasion, and when the memories of joys and comforts he would be giving up began to press upon him,

'In soul I swept the indignity away:
Old frailties then recurred:--but lofty thought,
In act embodied, my deliverance wrought.'
(ll. 136-138)

Protesilaus admits early in the poem that he was "A self-devoted chief" (l. 48) when he decided to take upon himself the burden of sacrifice to fulfill the prophecy of "the Delphic oracle."

The phrase, "self-devoted chief," is ambiguous, but it does allow the meaning that Protesilaus was a chief who thought highly of himself, of his capacities, and of his own glory; such an attitude of pride in self is hinted at when he describes his decision:

'The wished-for wind was given:--I then revolved
The oracle, upon the silent sea;
And, if no worthier led the way, resolved
That, of a thousand vessels, mine should be
The foremost prow in pressing to the strand,--
Mine the first blood that tinged the Trojan sand.'
(ll. 121-126; italics mine)

If there was any pride in the self-sacrifice it was the pride which can be discovered in any martyrdom, and that is anything but egotism. Thus, a "self-devoted chief" offers himself as the "victim" of the Trojans and in so doing fulfills the oracle--in retrospect, he had to do it, but it required an act of supreme self-mastery. And if we give closer attention to the reading of lines 121-126, just quoted, we discover that he "révolved / The oracle," he gave the prophecy much thought, he turned it round and round in his mind before he acted; we further discover that he did this "upon the silent sea" after the "wind was given," thus suggesting the

conditions often described by mystics (and by poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner") when they enter into communion with the Divine: the silence of meditation and the promptings of a moved spirit. And, finally, he allows the only other condition which should really deter him: he "resolved" to give up his life for the sake of the mission only "if no worthier led the way," thus leaving every possibility for the prophecy to be fulfilled by the man most fit. The mystery of martyrdom and prophecy fulfilled is as applicable and acceptable in the case of Protesilaus as it is in those of Oedipus and Jesus Christ.

Laodamia's passionate self-interest is revealed not only by what she says and does but also by the description of her by the impersonal observer of the poem. From this third point of view, we learn that Laodamia's "faith" in Protesilaus's return to her arises from her "fervent love" (and this is a condition nearly identical to that Wordsworth described in Margaret in the very early "Ruined Cottage").⁶ Laodamia's fervency in love is mentioned by Protesilaus as a quality which is approved by the Gods, but as a quality which needs government:

'Be taught, O faithful Consort, to control
Rebellious passion: for the Gods approve
The depth, and not the tumult, of the soul;
A fervent, not ungovernable, love.'

(11. 73-76)

But the difference between Protesilaus's observation and the impersonal one of this quality of fervency in love is a measure of the major difference between the two basic points of view: where Protesilaus implies judgment and evaluation in his description, the impersonal view accepts the characteristic as one which distinguishes Laodamia's character.

The impersonal voice of the poem seems to be a balance to the judgment of Protesilaus on the character of Laodamia. Whereas Protesilaus is the voice of disembodied, but sympathetic, reason, the impersonal view provides the voice of impersonal, but affectionate, concern for the welfare of Laodamia. It is from this point of view that we see Laodamia's growing excitement in expectation of Protesilaus's coming:

So speaking, and by fervent love endowed
 With faith, the Suppliant heavenward lifts her hands;
 While, like the sun emerging from a cloud,
 Her countenance brightens--and her eye expands;
 Her bosom heaves and spreads, her stature grows;
 And she expects the issue in repose.

(11. 7-12)

The description of her rising passion is not at all disapproving; if the description is anything beyond disinterested observation, it is mildly affectionate: the imagery of brightening sunlight, of growth, of expansion--all imply positive qualities, and the final line suggests a measure of restraint, as though the impersonal speaker were hinting that there are redeeming qualities in Laodamia which perhaps Protesilaus overlooks.

The third point of view sympathises with the emotions of Laodamia to the extent that it seems to participate in them with her:

O terror! what hath she perceived?--O joy!
 What doth she look on?--whom doth she behold?

(11. 13-14)

The impersonal voice seems to assume a view which shifts from a point external to both Laodamia and Protesilaus:

She looked upon him and was calmed and cheered,

(1. 92)

and then to a point identical with that of Laodamia as she views Protesilaus:

The ghastly colour from his lips had fled;
 In his deportment, shape, and mien, appeared
 Elysian beauty, melancholy grace,
 Brought from a pensive though a happy place.

(11. 93-96)

The description of Protesilaus is the kind which Laodamia herself would probably have given, registering the effects which his appearance has on her in such language as "ghastly," "Elysian," "melancholy," and "pensive."

In the only lines which the impersonal observer seems to speak from Protesilaus's point of view, the content is a description of Protesilaus's speech about the "equable and pure" course of love in "Climes which the sun . . . is all unworthy to survey." (11. 97-108) Thus, even in this one instance of identity with Protesilaus, the impersonal speaker's function is to objectify what Laodamia hears. The remainder of the impersonal speaker's lines are all concerned with the appearance, gestures, and judgment of Laodamia, all of which are rendered in language highly sympathetic to her (but without any disapproval of the position taken by Protesilaus); it is this voice which assures us that Laodamia has been judged by "the just Gods" but also that "mortal hopes defeated and o'er thrown / Armour'd by man, and not by man alone." (11. 165-166)

Because the viewpoints of the characters differ in such fundamental ways, the form which this poem takes is similar to that of drama in which conflict and questioning are distinguishing characteristics. In "Laodamia," there is conflict between Laodamia and Protesilaus, or at least between their directions of intention; there is also conflict within each of the characters, within the voice of the impersonal observer, and within the poet himself. These are conflicts of sensation, of emotion, and of thought.

Laodamia desires to be physically reunited with Protesilaus in this world of time and space; he resists her in a manner which reminds us of Milton's angels doing battle in Heaven:

Forth sprang the impassioned Queen her Lord to clasp;
 Again that consummation she essayed;
 But unsubstantial Form eludes her grasp
 As often as that eager grasp was made.
 The Phantom parts--but parts to re-unite,
 And re-assume his place before her sight.

(11. 25-30)

This frustration of Laodamia's will provokes her to require of the Phantom that it confirm its identity by speaking as well as by presenting an image of himself to her sight:⁷

'Protesilaus, lo! thy guide is gone!
 Confirm, I pray, the vision with thy voice.'

(11. 31-32)

He assures her that he is truly who he appears to be; but he goes further than that and tells her that he is "perfect" in his present being:

'Great Jove, Laodamia! doth not leave
 His gifts imperfect.'

(11. 37-38)

She recovers her confidence in the possibility of their physical reunion, for her conception of "perfection" must include the notion of intense passion and physical embodiment:

'No Spectre greets me,--no vain Shadow this;
 Come, blooming Hero, place thee by my side!
 Give, on this well-known couch, one nuptial kiss
 To me, this day, a second time thy bride!

(11. 61-64)

Then she learns that his perfection is not of the kind that she can conceive: it is a perfection of supremely controlled spirit. She wavers in

her confidence, but expresses hope that the merciful Gods (whom apparently she does not understand, either, for the Gods are more "just" than "merciful") will reward her faith in love's potency with the reanimated corporeal form of her husband.

Laodamia's hope for physical reunification with Protesilaus disappears in her statement that "if thou goest, I follow" (l. 91), for she appears now to accept the defeat of her desire for his body and is willing to follow him back into the realms of the dead. He admonishes her with "Peace!" and "She looked upon him and was calmed and cheered." (ll. 91-92) In the middle of the poem, then, Laodamia has learned that Protesilaus's form is truly an "unsubstantial Form" and she has learned to accept it with calm and cheer. She has earned the privilege of witnessing his transfiguration:

The ghastly colour from his lips had fled;
 In his deportment, shape, and mien, appeared
 Elysian beauty, melancholy grace,
 Brought from a pensive though a happy place.

(11. 93-96)

And it is during his transfiguration, or immediately after it, that Protesilaus describes the happy climes from which he has come and the nature of the spiritual love which can be found there:

He spake of love, such love as Spirits feel
 In worlds whose course is equable and pure;
 No fears to beat away--no strife to heal--
 The past unsighed for, and the future sure.

(11. 97-100)

Dramatically, then, the poem comes to rest at this resolution of Laodamia's fervent efforts into a mood of calm acceptance. But this is only the midpoint of the poem, and after Protesilaus shows Laodamia how she may follow his example in the restraint of passionate self-interest for the privilege

of entering the happy climes, Laodamia once again attempts to cling to the phantom of Protesilaus. This time, however, her passions are excited not so much by bodily sensations as by grief at the end of his time with her:

Aloud she shrieked! for Hermes reappears;
 Round the dear Shade she would have clung--'tis vain:
 The hours are past--too brief had they been years;
 And him no mortal effort can detain.

(11. 151-154)⁸

Laodamia's first "failure" in passion had been her inability to resist the appeals of space--the body, and her fruitless efforts to achieve union with Protesilaus's body, or bodily form, are calmed by the unattractive appearance his body takes, and then she is cheered by his message of promised spiritual reunion in the beautiful land where his spirit dwells forever. Laodamia's second "failure" in passion arises from her inability to overcome the limitations of time--the end of the Phantom's three-hour sojourn. And this time she is a victim of her passion of grief, for she dies at Protesilaus's departure:

Swift, toward the realms that know not earthly day,
 He through the portal takes his silent way,
 And on the palace-floor a lifeless corpse She lay.

(11. 155-157)

Space defeated her, and time destroyed her.

The conflict within Laodamia may be seen condensed in this speech she makes just after she has failed to bring Protesilaus to their "well-known couch":

'The Gods to us are merciful--and they
 Yet further may relent: for mightier far
 Than strength of nerve and sinew, or the sway
 Of magic potent over sun and star,
 Is love, though oft to agony distrest,
 And though his favourite seat be feeble woman's breast.'

(11. 85-90)

Laodamia believed that the Gods were merciful when she prayed for the restoration of Protesilaus to her; this belief seemed to be strengthened by the message from Hermes that "grace hath crowned [her] prayer" and "at Jove's command [her] Husband walks the paths of upper air" (11. 20-22); however, Protesilaus himself explains to her that he has been allowed to return only because the Gods are just, rewarding her fidelity and his own "fearless virtue":

'I am not sent to scare thee or deceive;
But in reward of thy fidelity.
And something also did my worth obtain;
For fearless virtue bringeth boundless gain.

(11. 39-42)

But even after this explanation by Protesilaus, and after his warning to her that his "doom is past," Laodamia persists in thinking that "The Gods to us are merciful."

Laodamia's passions have blinded her in hope and so they have deceived her in her reliance upon them; Laodamia's inner conflict is between her heart and her head, with an imbalance in favor of the former. She has learned that "love" can be stronger than the conditions of time and space because her love for Protesilaus has survived his long absence, and, ironically, her love is so powerful that it attempts to overcome no-space and no-time only to be punished by wearing out "her appointed time, / Apart from happy Ghosts." She thought that love was "mightier far / Than strength of nerve and sinew," and she learned this ironically when she tried to grasp Protesilaus's "unsubstantial Form," yet continued to love him after she found she could not hold him; she does not learn enough from this, however, for she might have been saved at this point if she had realized that just as her love had survived the limitations of space, so could it survive

the limitations of time in the realms of eternity which Protesilaus describes to her. Again, she believes that love is "mightier far" than the magic which has power "over sun and star," and her belief is strengthened by the appearance that the laws of the universe were suspended so that a dead man could be returned to the "upper air" as the result of a love-inspired prayer; but what appeared to be a suspension of natural law through the magic of love was in reality the operation of moral law, as justice, for the reward of fidelity and selfless courage, both being qualities of love under control of will.⁹

Finally, Laodamia's inner conflict resolves itself into the struggle between two kinds of love: bodily desires with their "joys of sense" against spiritual perfection with its "finer harmony." It is this struggle which is described in these lines:

for mightier far
 Is love, though oft to agony distrest,
 And though his favourite seat be feeble woman's breast.
(ll. 89-90)

It would appear that when Laodamia offers to return with Protesilaus into the land of the dead (with the clear implication that she would willingly commit suicide), she has overcome her bodily desires; but she has not attained the requisite condition for gaining the privilege of spiritual reunion with Protesilaus: namely, ordered passions and spiritual perfection. Her very gesture of suicide would be an indication that she had not yet gained the necessary control. (Unlike Protesilaus's gesture of suicide, Laodamia's would be for personal satisfaction and contrary to orderly processes of divine law.) The final irony of Laodamia's conception of the powers of love is that she is "feeble" precisely because her uncontrolled love is so "mighty."

The internal conflict of Protesilaus is not in the present tense of the poem's development. His conflict of emotion and will occurred while he was preparing with the rest of the Greeks for the invasion of Troy. At that time, he resolved to give up his life so that the Greek effort would be successful.¹⁰ He describes the circumstances:

'Thou knowest, the Delphic oracle foretold
That the first Greek who touched the Trojan strand
Should die; but me the threat could not withhold:
A generous cause a victim did demand;
And forth I leapt upon the sandy plain;
A self-devoted chief--by Hector slain.'

(11. 43-48)

Protesilaus thus describes in a very brief form the circumstances which called for his act of "fearless virtue" and so merited the return the Gods have granted him to Laodamia. She now seems prepared to accept his sacrifice for the Greeks and calls him "Supreme of Heroes--bravest, noblest, best," but she fails to understand that his sacrifice had involved his giving up of the very kind of love which she is trying to recover; she tries to tempt him, and he reprimands her:

'This visage tells thee that my doom is past:
Nor should the change be mourned, even if the joys
Of sense were able to return as fast
And surely as they vanish. Earth destroys
These raptures duly--Erebus disdains:
Calm pleasures there abide--majestic pains.

(11. 67-72)

The final phrase should be enough to indicate that even though Protesilaus has gained spiritual life and love as the reward for his act of self-renunciation, he has nevertheless lost something, and the possibility for his suffering the pangs of that loss is present even in the land of the fortunate dead. Protesilaus is not dehumanized by his superior moral position; indeed, he is supremely humanized because of that position.

Protesilaus describes in detail the events of his sacrifice, intending perhaps to provide Laodamia with a fuller understanding of and deeper insight into the true nature of his condition and so to provide her with the means of gaining that reunion of their spirits which he also desires (as we detect in these lines: "I counsel thee by fortitude to seek / Our blest re-union in the shades below." (11. 141-2).¹¹ He describes the mental and spiritual battles he fought within himself as he worked out his decision to sacrifice:

'Yet bitter, oft-times bitter, was the pang
 When of thy loss I thought, beloved Wife!
 On thee too fondly did my memory hang,
 And on the joys we shared in mortal life,--
 The paths which we had trod--these fountains, flowers;
 My new-planned cities, and unfinished towers.

'But should suspense permit the Foe to cry,
 "Behold they tremble!--haughty their array,
 Yet of their number no one dares to die?"
 In soul I swept the indignity away:
 Old frailties then recurred:--but lofty thought,
 In act embodied, my deliverance wrought.

(11. 127-138)

The whole intent of Protesilaus's return to his wife is to become her guide to the place of "happier beauty" and "diviner air."¹² He had achieved the condition of spiritual perfection through his act of sacrifice long ago, and now he comes to show his wife the way to achieve that condition so that they may be reunited in eternity.¹³ She mistakes his form for substance, his sojourn for permanence, and his sacrifice for betrayal (as is indicated when she tells him on first seeing him, "I forgive thee" for "Thy matchless courage," 11. 50, 53). And so when Laodamia perishes in the chaos of her grief at his inevitable departure, she in effect rejects the sacrifice he had made and which would have allowed them perfect love in an eternal marriage.¹⁴ Thus, this perfectly ordered spirit whose mission of love has

failed reveals the degree of his perfection in the mode of his departure; it is a passage of intense beauty in its conception of tragic necessity:

The hours are past--too brief had they been years;
 And him no mortal effort can detain:
 Swift, toward the realms that know not earthly day,
 He through the portal takes his silent way.

(11. 153-156)¹⁵

The impersonal voice of description and observation in the poem provides us with a further instance of internal conflict in the poem. This voice probably serves as a vehicle for the reader who wishes to make a judgment of either of the characters in the moral confrontation. I do not see how it could be considered exclusively as the persona or voice of the poet himself, unless we are to deny him any sympathy towards both of the other two characters. It seems that the impersonal voice is intended to correct an expected imbalance in the sympathies of the readers: the great moral weight of the poem lies in favor of Protesilaus if the reader's convictions of right and wrong are based on ordered passions, but it lies in favor of Laodamia if the reader's convictions of right and wrong are based on quantity of sentiment. As I have pointed out earlier, the impersonal voice in the poem provides for a sympathetic description of the gestures of Laodamia, but in such a way that the language indicates the acceptance of her fate. The impersonal observer admits of a balance between emotional sympathy for Laodamia and intellectual sympathy for Protesilaus. Consequently if there is any conflict in the voice of the observer, it probably arises from the desire of the reader to emphasize one sympathy over the other.

The ambiguity of sympathy in the impersonal voice of the poem continues into the conclusion:

--Yet tears to human suffering are due;
 And mortal hopes defeated and o'er thrown
 Are mourned by man, and not by man alone,
 As fondly he believes.--Upon the side
 Of Hellespont (such faith was entertained)
 A knot of spiry trees for ages grew
 From out the tomb of him for whom she died;
 And ever, when such stature they had gained
 That Ilium's walls were subject to their view,
 The trees' tall summits withered at the sight;
 A constant interchange of growth and blight.

(11. 164-174)

This passage is, in terms of the structural development of the poem, a corrective balance to the apparently harsh and unsympathetic judgment of the Gods upon Laodamia (Cf. 11. 158-163). But, in terms of the thematic development of the poem, this passage allows for an evaluation of both characters, not by "the just Gods," but by the audience of readers. And the possibilities for multiple evaluations are many.

Justice has been accomplished, at least in so far as the unemotional Gods of reason and necessity are concerned. But there is another kind of justice--that of feeling and passion; this kind of justice has no determining effect upon the way the universe of things normally operates, but it has a great deal to do with the way the human universe of feelings normally operates. And so an austere and dispassionate fate may deny Laodamia her reunion with Protesilaus; however, nothing denies the reader his privilege of paying a tribute of tears to the suffering of either Laodamia or Protesilaus. The design of the poem is such that the reader can condemn what happens to Laodamia without at the same time holding Protesilaus responsible for it, for to do so is to lament at the way things are for all human life in this world:

And mortal hopes defeated and o'erthrown
 Are mourned by man.

(11. 165-166)

Except that in their blindness of grief (like Laodamia in hers) at the loss of their loved ones, most men are ignorant that they are not alone in their mourning:

And mortal hopes defeated and o'erthrown
Are mourned by man, and not by man alone,
As fondly he believes.

(11. 165-167)

The logic of the poem itself tells us that it is not the Gods who mourn with man at the sufferings of men, for they are "just Gods whom no weak pity moved." (1.160) It is Nature itself which mourns with man for man.¹⁶ Trees grow from the tomb of Protesilaus as a sign that new life may come from this place of his death, just as his own spirit had come from the place of his deathly habitation with a hope of spiritual reunion for Laodamia; the trees grow until "Ilium's walls were subject to their view," and then "the trees' tall summits withered at the sight" (11. 172-173), just as the spirit of Protesilaus failed, through his sacrifice at Troy, to achieve the ultimate reward of eternal reunion with Laodamia.

Also, the trees' growing out of the tomb only to wither at the sight of Ilium's walls may suggest Laodamia's growing to hope when the Phantom of Protesilaus visits her (that is, she grows in a hope which rises above the warning limitations of the grave); it may suggest her withering of spirit when she cannot possess the body (lost to the Trojans beneath the walls of Ilium); and, finally, it may suggest her blight of death when she cannot prevent his departure (to the place of his body's repose beneath the walls of Ilium?). Whatever the growing-withering trees have to say to our understanding, they do tell our emotions that Nature is making a gesture of sympathy for Protesilaus and Laodamia.

The concluding passage not only provides for conflicts of judgment in the reader's mind in allowing for varying interpretations of the symbolic gesture of the trees, but it also allows for variations in judgment through the ambiguity of the parenthetical statement that "such faith was entertained": (1) superstition has it that a knot of trees grew out of Protesilaus's tomb, etc.; or (2) someone's (the reader's, the poet's, Protesilaus's, Laodamia's) faith was of such a high degree that a knot of trees grew out of Protesilaus's tomb, etc. The one interpretation is merely a conventional device for protecting the imaginative insights of the poet; the other is an expression of belief in a sympathetic relationship between man and nature. The internal conflict (or, preferably, balance) of emotional sympathy for Laodamia and of intellectual sympathy for Protesilaus which seems to characterize the voice of the impersonal observer in this concluding paragraph manifests itself in the final image of the poem, with appropriate ambiguity of meaning:

A constant interchange of growth and blight!
(1. 174)

Laodamia grows in passionate hope and is blighted by her failure of will; Protesilaus grows in spiritual perfection and is denied the possibility of eternal reunion with his wife because of her inability to learn the lesson of sacrifice which he had learned at Troy.

The history of the poet's revisions of "Laodamia," and especially of his varying accounts of Laodamia's punishment, indicates that there was a conflict within the poet himself. The passage in question is that between lines 158 and 163, and this is the way it appears in the 1845 edition (which is the standard version):

Thus, all in vain exhorted and reproved,
 She perished; and, as for a wilful crime,
 By the just Gods whom no weak pity moved,
 Was doomed to wear out her appointed time,
 Apart from happy Ghosts, that gather flowers
 Of blissful quiet 'mid unfading bowers.

Originally, 1815-1820, the poet had written the passage this way:

Ah, judge her gently who so deeply loved!
 Her, who, in reason's spite, yet without crime,
 Was in a trance of passion thus removed;
 Delivered from the galling yoke of time
 And these frail elements--to gather flowers
 Of blissful quiet 'mid unfading bowers.

And then, later, in 1827, he allowed this judgment of her by the Gods:

By no weak pity might the Gods be moved;
 She who thus perished not without the crime
 Of Lovers that in Reason's spite have loved,
 Was doomed to wander in a grosser clime
 Apart from happy Ghosts, that gather flowers
 Of blissful quiet 'mid unfading bowers.

E. De Selincourt, in his notes on the poem, has commented on those varying accounts of Laodamia's judgment in this way:

W.'s last reading is a compromise between the positions taken up in the previous two; if the second was too severe upon his heroine, the first was clearly both un-Virgilian and also inconsistent with the ethos of the poem.

(PW, II, 519-520)

If we are looking for a moral reason in Wordsworth's change of texts, then De Selincourt's explanation about the final version's being a "compromise" is perhaps a correct one. However, if we are looking for an aesthetic reason, De Selincourt's suggestion is insufficient as an explanation, and if his suggestion of "compromise" were sufficient, then

Wordsworth's critics could point to this poem as another piece of evidence in their charge that he has declined into his poetic senility by this time: because "compromise" is well enough in politics, questionable in morality, but unacceptable in aesthetics.

The final version is not simply a "compromise" on the part of an ir-resolute poet. It may very probably indicate that the poet was undergoing a conflict of some kind during the time he was composing the lines, but if that is so, then it seems to me that he was experiencing the sufferings of Laodamia and the efforts at restraint achieved by Protesilaus. As an aesthetic achievement, however, the final version is definitely and absolutely an improvement over the two earlier ones." In the version of 1815-20, Wordsworth allowed his impersonal speaker in the poem to make an overt appeal to the reader "to judge her gently who so deeply loved," and this resulted in a crude kind of attempt to recover emotional sympathy for a character whose only defense should be her own. In the version of 1827, Wordsworth allowed his impersonal speaker in the poem to make an overtly general observation about the moral law: "By no weak pity might the Gods be moved." In the final version, this has been refined into an observation about what has happened in the poem: "By the just Gods whom no weak pity moved." The change is from a didactic statement about a universal moral condition stated in the subjunctive mood to a descriptive statement about a specific moral condition stated in the declarative mood. The final version, then, is more objective and places more emphasis upon the internal action of the poem, leaving any external judgment that might be made on the characters up to the reader himself.

The element of conflict, or struggle, is present in the generic form

of "Laodamia," in the structure of a "debate between the body and the soul"; it is a characteristic arising from the juxtaposition of at least three points of view in the poem; and it is a dominant note in the tone of the poem as it grows out of the drama of the situation. The quality of conflict is present in the poem at its most basic level of language; here the conflict arises from the irony and the ambiguity of the diction, of the similes, of the metaphors, and of the symbols evoked by the imagery.

"Sacrifice," the second word of the poem, carries a denotative meaning of homage or propitiation to the gods, and, in this sense, it becomes heavily ironic for Laodamia, who is making this sacrifice as the poem opens. She intends through this gesture to gain the good will of the gods, and this she appears to do when she is granted a visit by her dead husband. But, as it turns out, the "gift" of Protesilaus's visit is made as a reward for her fidelity to Protesilaus's memory, not to the Gods, and certainly not because she has offered up any specific and symbolic token through traditional and sacramental ritual. The irony which develops is that her real sacrifice is of that very husband for whose presence she thinks she is making the ritualistic sacrifice: Laodamia makes a "sacrifice" for his return, is unable to sacrifice her passionate self-concern to the requirements of self-government, sacrifices her chance for spiritual reunion with Protesilaus, and sacrifices herself to the passions of the flesh and time in her death of grief. The sacrifice without irony is Protesilaus's, for when he gave his life for the sake of others, he achieved the perfection of spirit which such an act deserves; the only hint of irony in Protesilaus's sacrifice is to be found in the failure of his mission to show Laodamia how she can be united with him in eternity.

Other examples of possible ambiguity and irony in the diction of the poem can be found in the phrase "slaughtered Lord," with its denotation of murdered ruler and its connotation of sacrificed Redeemer; in the various references to "faith" and "fidelity," with their denotations of constancy of allegiance and connotations of spiritual devotion (the conflict arising when Laodamia's faith is a constant allegiance to the Protesilaus of this world and should become a devotion to the Protesilaus of the spiritual world); in the phrase, "his vital presence," referring to the appearance of Protesilaus and questioning whether the form he presents is a living one, but the connotation of necessary becomes more and more significant as we discover that it is through this "unsubstantial Form" that Laodamia must learn to rejoin her husband. And, finally, in the words "annulled," "bondage," and "fetters" at lines 149-150, we discover the implications of a marriage which has been made between the spirit and the flesh in a single "self," which must be "annulled" if the spirit wishes to escape the "bondage" of the flesh established through the "fetters" of the passions; and so Protesilaus, who uses these words, is turning the concept of marriage which Laodamia holds into the concept of divorce, thus pointing the way to the true and eternal marriage of two pure spirits.

The concept of struggle towards release, or towards fulfillment, is indicated by the simile at lines 9-10:

. . . like the sun emerging from a cloud,
Her countenance brightens. . . .

Besides describing the physical changes in the appearance of Laodamia, the simile suggests the possibility for rebirth of the soul from the obscuring

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Besides describing the physical changes in the appearance of Laodamia, the simile suggests the possibility for rebirth of the soul from the obscuring

clouds of mortality.¹⁷ But, of course, this is exactly what Laodamia does not achieve. There are only two other similes in this poem of metaphors: one comes when Protesilaus describes the nature of spiritual love:

He spake of love, such love as Spirits feel
In worlds whose course is equable and pure;
(ll. 97-98)

and significantly the intention of the simile is to point out to a distraught and passionate wife what could be the nature of their love together; I say "significantly" because Laodamia could understand spiritual love only in terms of passion, and Protesilaus's explanatory simile does not really communicate. The other simile is used in describing the judgment of the Gods on Laodamia at line 159:

She perished; and, as for a wilful crime,
By the just Gods whom no weak pity moved,
Was doomed to wear out her appointed time.
(ll. 159-161)

The effect of this simile is to indicate the impersonal and unqualified strictness of the justice meted out by the Gods to Laodamia (as well as to Protesilaus). Laodamia's punishment would have been no different if she had deliberately murdered herself (as she had threatened to do earlier in the poem), for, indeed, to relinquish control of the passions is (according to the moral laws described by Protesilaus) "a wilful crime."

There are only three similes in this poem, but there are very many metaphors, indicating the degree of identity in the poem between concreteness and abstraction, between sensations and concepts, between nature and supernature.¹⁸ The metaphor of "fruitless hope" suggests the close identity between nature (as a tree, perhaps) and the quality of experience conducing to supernature (hope): showing a relationship which becomes more explicit in the symbol of the trees growing out of Protesilaus's tomb at

the end of the poem. When the poem says that Laodamia's "eye expands," it is using a metaphor which is so close to literal statement that an unwary reader might pass it by as unexceptional in its description; but, literally, her eye does not "expand," for only the iris of the eye expands in states of intense excitement or under conditions of little light: Laodamia is both intensely excited and surrounded by darkness ("before the rising morn"). When Hermes tells Laodamia that Protesilaus has been allowed three hours in which to walk "the paths of upper air," he indicates the similarity between the upper world and lower world, and this is an identity which is carried further by the description of the happy climes given by Protesilaus at lines 97 through 108.

Various negative qualities are identified, through metaphor, in the experiences of this world: Laodamia's description of the "shades forlorn / Of night" (ll. 3-4) may be intended for the lower world, and if so, she attributes to it the qualities which one whose affections were anchored in the upper world would consider undesirable; but the "shades forlorn / Of night" may also describe her own environment, since she is making her sacrificial vows "before the rising morn." The palace to which Protesilaus returns is a "sad abode," and by extension so is this world a sad abode for Laodamia, (l. 36). That very earth whose destruction of "raptures" is so much approved by Protesilaus becomes an object of fear and perhaps hate for Laodamia because of "the malice of the grave" (ll. 70-71, 58). The passions of this world are characterized as "rebellious," and the years which measure the time of this world weigh down human souls, (ll. 74-83). The bright sun of this world is "unworthy to survey" the climes of "happier beauty" from which Protesilaus has come (ll. 104, 107-108). The Greek fleet preparing to invade Troy's beaches "lay enchained" at Aulis before

the "wished-for wind was given" and Protesilaus prepared to release his fellow invaders from the chains of prophecy and himself from the chains of fleshly existence (ll. 120-126); the encumbering and enchaining characteristic of this world is further established through the metaphors of the soul's "bondage," of passion as a "dream opposed to love," of the "dream opposed to love" as "fetters," and of the "self" as a marriage arrangement made between the spirit and physical passions (ll. 146-155). Finally, in the image of Laodamia's being condemned "to wear out her appointed time" is an extension of the metaphor which identifies time as a heavy burden to be endured in this world: the irony of this judgment becomes clear when we realize that it was her very inability to endure the cessation of the time limitation placed on Protesilaus's visit that proved the undoing of Laodamia; she must "wear out" the portion of time assigned to her and apparently may then enter into eternal union with the spirit of Protesilaus.

There are several images in the poem which take on symbolic qualities as they are repeated or utilized in significant contexts of meaning. The sun and its light come to symbolize the natural world, and the simile comparing Laodamia's brightening countenance with the sun breaking from clouds enforces the notion that Laodamia's deepest allegiance is to nature. We should note that the world of Protesilaus's spiritual repose is not described as a place devoid of light by anyone except Laodamia; indeed, the place below is hinted to be one of extreme beauty and intense light (ll. 103-108, 162-163). It is perhaps a place of great illumination (for the mind and spirit) but not a place of disturbing heat.¹⁹

The beach and walls of Troy come to assume something like symbolic significance in that they mark the place where Protesilaus's blood is shed

in sacrifice and the city whose people were sacrificed by a prince whose carnal desires were greater than his sense of responsibility and restraint. Both the beach and the walls mark off dividing lines: on the boundary of the Trojan shore Protesilaus divides his selfish desires from his selfless love of others, and the sight of the Trojan walls withers and blights the summits of trees commemorating the deaths which have divided Laodamia from Protesilaus.

The "knot of spiry trees" which grows out of the tomb of Protesilaus deserves closer examination as an image with symbolic significance. The language used to describe the growing trees in the conclusion to the poem is so nearly related to (or identical with) that used to describe Laodamia in the first three stanzas that we must assume some specific meaning is intended by the trees. Laodamia is described as perhaps looking up to heaven while she prays for Protesilaus's return:

'With sacrifice before the rising morn
Vows have I made by fruitless hope inspired;
And from the infernal Gods, 'mid shades forlorn
Of night, my slaughtered Lord have I required;
Celestial pity I again implore;--
Restore him to my sight--great Jove, restore!'

(11. 1-6)

We note that she acts in darkness, holds to a hope that is "fruitless," and looks up to heaven as she implores "celestial pity": her hope is "fruitless" specifically because the "Lord" whose return she desires is "slaughtered," and so her "fruitless hope" arises from the circumstances of a "slaughtered Lord."²⁰

Laodamia's gesture of looking up to heaven is closely described in the next stanza, and her looking up affects her in such a way that she appears to "grow":

So speaking, and by fervent love endowed
 With faith, the Suppliant heavenward lifts her hands;
 While, like the sun emerging from a cloud,
 Her countenance brightens--and her eye expands;
 Her bosom heaves and spreads, her stature grows;
 And she expects the issue in repose.

(11. 7-12)

At the height of her growth in anxious expectation, Laodamia perceives something which is both terrifying and joyous: the appearance of the Phantom of Protesilaus:

O terror! what hath she perceived?--O joy!
 What doth she look on?--whom doth she behold?
 Her Hero slain upon the beach of Troy?
 His vital presence? his corporeal mould?
 It is--if sense deceive her not--'tis He!

(11. 13-17)

And, as the event will develop, it is this Phantom of Protesilaus which is the immediate cause for the physical "withering" and death of Laodamia.

The trees, in growing out of the tomb of Protesilaus, grow out of darkness and reach toward the heavens; at the summit of their growth, they, like Laodamia, view a scene of Troy and wither at the sight:

Upon the side
 Of Hellespont (such faith was entertained)
 A knot of spiry trees for ages grew
 From out the tomb of him for whom she died;
 And ever, when such stature they had gained
 That Ilium's walls were subject to their view,
 The trees' tall summits withered at the sight;
 A constant interchange of growth and blight.

(11. 167-174; my italics)

Phrases and words are exact repetitions in this passage of those in the opening passage describing Laodamia. The "faith . . . entertained" here is similar to the "faith" which endows Laodamia's "fervent love" in stanza two; in the line "Her bosom heaves and spreads, her stature grows," there is an anticipation of the description of the trees as gaining a view of

Ilium's walls "when such stature they had gained." There is much emphasis upon "sight," "eye," "perceived," "look on," and "behold" in the opening lines of the poem; there is an equal emphasis upon the experience of sight in the concluding lines: "view" and "sight." Both Laodamia and the "knot of spiry trees" see something associated with Troy, the place where Protesilaus met his death. And both are "withered" at the sight.

And so the thematic implication of this identity of Laodamia and the trees may be nature's sympathetic reenactment of Laodamia's growing-blighting experience with the teacher of moral law. The sympathy for Laodamia by nature is appropriate because she had represented all that human being holds dear in this world of nature, and so nature provides a form of growing trees to embody the spirit of a human soul which had sacrificed its chance for eternal repose in favor of the processes of naturalistic passions. The trees are symbols of natural values, commemorating a human sacrifice for their sake; the walls and beach of Troy are symbols of the limitations to natural values, representing the place where a human sacrifice had been made for supernatural values.

"Laodamia" is based upon incidents described by Virgil in his Aeneid vi, by Ovid in his Heroides xiii, and by Euripides, in his Iphigenia in Aulis; it uses many figures from classical stories, such as Jove, Mercury (or Hermes), Hercules, Aleestis, Medea, Aeson, Hector, the Delphic oracle, and the Parcae; it refers to many places which were important to classical literature, such as Troy, Thessaly, Aulis, the Hellespont, Elysium, the river Styx, and Erebus. The references to characters and places from classical stories involve both the natural world and the supernatural world of events, with the hope that the limitations of the natural world could be overcome and the values of the supernatural world invoked to sanctify the

values of the natural.²¹ In "Laodamia," the means of achieving the interpenetration of these two realms of being is through the human act of sacrifice: Laodamia's long-suffering love for her departed husband was a sacrifice which merited the gift of his return to "guide" her to a higher kind of sacrifice and thence to an eternal reunion with his spirit; Protesilaus's decision to lose his life for the sake of others resulted in a sacrifice which merited the gift of spiritual repose in a place where there are "No fears to beat away--no strife to heal."

Although the poem uses allusions to classical figures and classical places, its basic appeal is through archetypal situations and actions. The use of classical literature reenforces the timeless quality which classical art suggests, and the archetypal situations provide the framework itself of the very timelessness which the classical allusions reenforce. Those archetypal situations are ones which describe rebirth, heaven and hell, woman, hero, and god.²² Laodamia believes that the appearance of Protesilaus's Phantom from the realms of the dead represents his rebirth into the life of the natural world:

What doth she look on?--whom doth she behold?
Her Hero slain upon the beach of Troy?
His vital presence? his corporeal mould?
It is--if sense deceive her not--'tis He!

(11. 14-17)

'And he, whose power restores thee, hath decreed
Thou should'st elude the malice of the grave:
Redundant are thy locks, thy lips as fair
As when their breath enriched Thessalian air.

'No Spectre greets me,--no vain Shadow this;
Come, blooming Hero, place thee by my side!'

(11. 57-62; my italics)

It is possible for Laodamia to believe that Protesilaus could be reborn into

her world because she believed the stories of similar rebirths, or recoveries, from the dead:

'Did not Hercules by force
Wrest from the guardian Monster of the Tomb
Alcestis, a reanimated corse,
Given back to dwell on earth in vernal bloom?
Medea's spells dispersed the weight of years,
And AEson stood a youth 'mid youthful peers.'

(ll. 79-84; my italics)

The words "blooming" and "bloom" indicate Laodamia's conception of these returns from the dead as processes of blossoming, of birth. The hard lesson which Laodamia has to learn is that Protesilaus is not being reborn into her world, that he has already been reborn--into a world of timelessness--because he has given up the world of Laodamia.

The poem describes the place where the human soul can find repose; it is a heaven of love and beauty, and it can be discovered through the "virtue" which is courage, restraint, strength, and selflessness. Protesilaus describes this heaven to which he is inviting Laodamia:

He spake of love, such love as Spirits feel
In worlds whose course is equable and pure;
No fears to beat away--no strife to heal--
The past unsighed for, and the future sure;²³
Spake of heroic arts in Graver mood²⁴
Revived, with finer harmony pursued;
Of all that is most beauteous--imaged there
In happier beauty; more pellucid streams,
An ampler ether, a diviner, air,
And fields invested with purpureal gleams;
Climes which the sun, who sheds the brightest day
Earth knows, is all unworthy to survey.

(ll. 97-108)

And we notice that this heaven is a place where the experiences and forms of the natural world are to be found, except in a "graver mood / Revived, with finer harmony pursued."²⁵ It is later described as a place where the "happy

Ghosts . . . gather flowers / Of blissful quiet 'mid unfading bowers."

This is the kind of heaven which should have satisfied Laodamia, but she is unable to earn the privilege of entering. Instead, she must "wear out her appointed time, / Apart from happy Ghosts" in the hell of an isolation whose only implied characteristics are those of time, unhappiness, and possibly darkness without flowers.

This "hell" to which Laodamia's spirit is assigned is not very much different from the earthly existence she lives without Protesilaus. That is one of darkness, "fruitless hope," fright, agony, and loneliness; without Protesilaus, the life of Laodamia in this world appears to be more hellish than the one assigned to her in the nether world; however, the one assigned to her by the "just Gods" could be forever, depending upon how long "the appointed time" is.

The figure of the hero,²⁶ Protesilaus, communicates between the world of the redeemed dead and the world of the impassioned living.²⁷ To Laodamia, Protesilaus is "her Hero slain upon the beach of Troy," (l. 15), the "Supreme of Heroes--bravest, noblest, best!" with "matchless courage" (ll. 49-50), but her attitude has been one of hurt and disappointment that he gave his life up for others rather than return to her:

'Thy matchless courage I bewail no more,
Which then, when tens of thousands were deprest
By doubt, propelled thee to the fatal shore;
Thou found'st--and I forgive thee--here thou art--
A nobler counsellor than my poor heart.'

(ll.50-54; my italics)

The broken rhythms contribute to the tone of hesitating admiration, ambiguous praise, and pleasure in his return; the conceptual content of this passage is that Laodamia cannot understand how he had to be the one to die when there were so many thousands of others who were in doubt and that she

had felt betrayed when he chose to follow the counsel of his own heart (as influenced by a spiritual ideal) rather than the counsels (of love) of her "poor heart." Even Laodamia recognizes the heroic qualities in Protesilaus which had made him worthy of heaven:

'But thou, though capable of sternest deed,
Wert kind as resolute, and good as brave.'
(11. 55-56)

These are the measure of that loving restraint (or restrained love) which Protesilaus is attempting to persuade Laodamia to adopt, and since she ascribes these qualities to his character before his death, she provides us with the insight which she should herself have: namely, that restraint upon passions is a necessary precondition for attaining salvation.

The relationship of the passionate woman tempting the hero to abandon his own quest for spiritual ideals and remain with her in the fulfillment of their love is a recurring situation in the world's literature. It is found in Andromache's appeal to Hector in the Iliad vi; in the relationship of Odysseus to Calypso and later to Circe in the Odyssey v and x; in the attraction of Dido to Aeneas in the Aeneid iv; in Cleopatra's hold over Antony; and perhaps in the hold of His Mother over Jesus Christ. Indeed, the situation described in "Laodamia" of the Woman-at-Home and the Wandering Hero is a universal and recurring one in the world's literature.

The Design of Thought

The generic, linguistic, and archetypal elements which have gone into the imaginative design of "Laodamia" work together to communicate particular patterns of thought: these patterns deal with questions of identity, communication, and fragmented sensibility. These are questions which have probably always concerned artists of all times in all cultures, but they

are questions which have become acutely obvious for men of Western culture in the last three or four hundred years; they are questions which were not unknown to the young William Wordsworth,²⁸ and they are questions which the middle-aged William Wordsworth continued to be concerned with in his poetry.

Protesilaus describes the time when he was able to discover who he was, and how, in making his discovery, he achieved a perfect recovery of sensibility and manifested a capacity for full communication. Laodamia's failure to achieve the restraint which Protesilaus tries to teach her may indicate that Protesilaus has failed to achieve effective communication with his wife, but there is sufficient evidence in the poem to show that the failure was not one which should be attributed to Protesilaus. Rather, the failure is Laodamia's: she learns by degrees what Protesilaus's return means, but she fails to achieve that "deliverance wrought" by "lofty thought/
In act embodied" (ll. 137-138; my italics). The problems of identity, communication, and fragmented sensibility receive their most acute forms in the questioning gestures made by Laodamia, and as far as there is sympathy for her plight by the reader, there is incomplete satisfaction derived from the answers provided by Protesilaus.

The picture we have of Protesilaus when he appears from the realms of the dead is that of an "unsubstantial Form" which eludes the grasp of the "impassioned" Laodamia; Protesilaus is "unsubstantial," but he is perfect:

'Great Jove, Laodamia! doth not leave
His gifts imperfect.'

(ll. 37-38)

We then discover the various attributes of this perfect, but unsubstantial, form. He may be perceived by the eyes and the ears, but not by the sense touch; to the eyes he presents an image of "Elysian beauty":

'Redundant are thy locks, thy lips as fair
As when their breath enriched Thessalian air.'
(ll. 59-60)

Those fair and "roseate lips" darken when Laodamia tries to clasp Protesilaus; after she abandons her efforts to hold him and after she is "calmed and cheered" by his admonition of "Peace!" his form undergoes a kind of transfiguration:

The ghastly colour from his lips had fled;
In his deportment, shape, and mien, appeared
Elysian beauty, melancholy grace,
Brought from a pensive though a happy place.
(ll. 93-96)

The phases of Protesilaus's change in appearance parallel those of Laodamia in the early portion of the poem; Laodamia had brightened in form as she grew in hope at the return of Protesilaus, and Protesilaus brightens in hope as Laodamia seems to be accepting his true spiritual nature. The last image of Protesilaus in the poem is that of a "dear Shade" who "through the portal takes his silent way." (l. 156)

The appearance of Protesilaus's form to the sight of Laodamia is one of physical beauty, and it is a beauty suggesting abundant life. However, this vision of physical beauty is the effect of intellectual beauty; when Laodamia requests Protesilaus to speak in confirmation of his being, he replies with an explanation of how he achieved his form of intellectual beauty and how she may also achieve such a form. He prepares her for his explanation by first describing briefly the conditions calling for his sacrifice:

'Thou knowest, the Delphic oracle foretold
That the first Greek who touched the Trojan strand
Should die; but me the threat could not withhold;

A generous cause a victim did demand;
 And forth I leapt upon the sandy plain;
 A self-devoted chief--by Hector slain.'

(11. 43-48)

The pattern of history was revealed and could be realized only when the fit man came to recognize himself as the one chosen to fulfill the prophecy; Protesilaus was the man, but his discovery of identity was not easy. Laodamia was not fully convinced by Protesilaus's attempts to persuade her that she must "control / Rebellious passion," and so Protesilaus proceeds to exemplify the very process of self-discovery which he underwent before he could fulfill the prophecy: he withdrew from the revelry of his comrades and

then revolved

The oracle, upon the silent sea;
 And, if no worthier led the way, resolved
 That, of a thousand vessels, mine should be
 The foremost prow in pressing to the strand,--
 Mine the first blood that tinged the Trojan sand.

'Yet bitter, oft-times bitter, was the pang
 When of thy loss I thought, beloved Wife!
 On thee too fondly did my memory hang,
 And on the joys we shared in mortal life,--
 The paths which we had trod--these fountains, flowers;
 My new-planned cities, and unfinished towers.

'But should suspense permit the Foe to cry,
 "Behold they tremble!--haughty their array,
 Yet of their number no one dares to die?"
 In soul I swept the indignity away:
 Old frailties then recurred:--but lofty thought
 In act embodied, my deliverance wrought.'

(11. 121-138)

He achieved his "Elysian beauty" and "melancholy grace" through a sacrifice of self-interest, through a restraint upon his earthly pleasures, through a "lofty thought / In act embodied."²⁹

Laodamia knows herself only in so far as she is the beloved wife of Protesilaus, and she seeks to achieve her integration of being and to assert

her identity as the bride of Protesilaus. This Protesilaus knows, and so his task is to show Laodamia how she may succeed: her success depends upon her understanding the true nature of her husband's spiritual condition and upon her ability to respond to his instructions concerning restraint of passions. She comes to understand his true spiritual condition, but she cannot achieve the necessary control over her passions to succeed in attaining the harmonized sensibility required for eternal union with her husband.

Laodamia is in spiritual, intellectual, and physical darkness when the poem begins. When she first glimpses the approaching form of Protesilaus, Laodamia is frightened and then calmed by the wand of Hermes. The physical darkness has been mitigated by the presence of her husband's bright form: she attempts to clasp the "unsubstantial Form" of her Lord. After she fails to comprehend the physical form, Laodamia calls for confirmation of her vision, and when Protesilaus speaks, Laodamia's intellectual darkness begins to lift.³⁰ He describes the sacrifice which led to his spiritual condition, and she seems to understand when she asserts that she will "bewail no more" his "matchless courage"; but Laodamia's understanding is short-lived, because even though Protesilaus had emphatically stated that he was a "Spectre" (ll. 38-39), Laodamia persuades herself that "No Spectre greets me--no vain Shadow this" (l. 61) and tries again to effect a physical union with her husband (ll. 62-64). This fails, she is reprimanded, she persists in hope, she wavers and offers suicide, but is "calmed and cheered" by her husband's command to "Peace" and by his transfiguration (ll. 67-96). She has done what he instructed her to do:

'Be taught, O faithful Consort, to control
Rebellious passion: for the Gods approve
The depth, and not the tumult, of the soul;

A fervent, not ungovernable, love.
 Thy transports moderate; and meekly mourn
 When I depart, for brief is my sojourn--'
 (11. 73-78)

She seems to have achieved this condition of control in her "calmed and cheered" reaction to his bidding of "Peace"; she remains quiet and restrained for the next fifty-four lines of the poem and has apparently overcome her initial condition of spiritual darkness. But time overtakes her and surprises her into betraying her appearance of control (11. 151-157). Laodamia saw and heard how to achieve spiritual beauty: she received the content of her husband's communication, seemed to harmonize her faculties, but failed to achieve the realization of her spiritual identity. Laodamia was able to communicate with Protesilaus, but she was not able to enter into full communion with him.

As a poem of sacrifice through self-renunciation, "Laodamia" attempts to answer questions about human identity in a world where the answers are not easily discovered. The answer of "Laodamia" is effected through the imaginative recreation of an incident in which time opens up to receive a vision from eternity, in which the darkness of this world is illuminated for awhile by the light from beyond, in which a conversation is carried on with infinity, in which hopes are kindled from the ashes of lonely, agonizing, and self-defeating love. The message of restraint brought to Laodamia by Protesilaus is the message of spiritual insight achieved through the harmonizing balance of intellect, emotion, and sensation. This, it seems to me, is the message which Wordsworth had been attempting to communicate throughout his poetic career, although it has begun to take a different mode in his later years. It represents his view that Imagination is "but another name for absolute strength, / And clearest insight,

amplitude of mind, / And reason in her most exalted mood." (1805-06 Prelude, XIII, 168-170) These are the very qualities of Protesilaus's spiritual condition described in "Laodamia."

In the 1850 edition of The Prelude the intellectual love of 1805-06 has become explicitly that same "spiritual love" (1850 Prelude, XIV, 188) which identifies Protesilaus as the truth communicated by the poetic Imagination to earth-bound human souls.³¹ That the message of spiritual, or intellectual, beauty achieved through the discipline of the emotions and the senses by "Reason in her most exalted mood" continued to be a consistent attitude in the poetry of Wordsworth can be seen in the concluding lines of The Prelude, in both the 1805-06 and the 1850 editions:

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
 A lasting inspiration, sanctified
 By reason and by truth; what we have loved,
 Others will love; and we may teach them how;
 Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
 A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
 On which he dwells, above this Frame of things
 (Which, 'mid all revolutions in the hopes
 And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
 In beauty exalted, as it is itself
 Of substance and of fabric more divine.³²

(1805-06, XIII, 442-452; 1850,
 XIV, 444-454)

Wordsworth's Designs of Sacrifice

In order to achieve the spiritual insight which could be called "reason in her most exalted mood," Wordsworth sought to achieve the harmonizing balance of intellect, emotion, and sensation which Protesilaus represented in "Laodamia." One mode of achieving such a balance is through restraint exercised upon the various faculties which are attempting to assert their independent superiority, and in the poetry of this time, Wordsworth reflects this desire for restraint through his repeated use of the theme of sacrifice.

Between 1814 and 1817, Wordsworth composed many poems whose subjects or themes were concerned with sacrifice or self-renunciation. In "Artegal and Elidure" (PW, II, 14-22), Wordsworth describes Artegal as a king whose passionate unconcern for the welfare of his people leads to his being deposed in favor of his brother Elidure; Artegal becomes a "humbled Exile," chastened by the hardships of "Dire poverty" and "many dangers," so that when Elidure offers to restore the throne to him, Artegal hesitates to accept what he thinks is a "strange sacrifice," but does so in the end and becomes "Earth's noblest penitent."

"The Brownie's Cell" (PW, III, 97-100) describes the life and remains of one of those "World-wearied Men" who sacrificed their worldly pleasures and renounced their selfish desires in order to assert some higher value: they withdrew to the wilderness, "with a new ambition raised" so "That God might suitably be praised." One of these appears to his neighbors as a frightening and perhaps ghostly figure, somewhat as Protesilaus appears to Laodamia at first:

From year to year this shaggy Mortal went
 (So seemed it) down a strange descent:
 Till they, who saw his outward frame,
 Fixed on him an unhallowed name;
 Him, free from all malicious taint,
 And guiding, like the Patmos Saint,
 A pen unwearied--to indite,
 In his lone Isle, the dreams of night.
 (11.51-58)

This strange being wrote down his vision of redemption, as did St. John on the isle of Patmos, and offered it to the men of the world, and so does Protesilaus bring a message of redemption to Laodamia.

The poem "Composed at Cora Linn: In Sight of Wallace's Tower" (PW, III, 199-102) pays homage, as does nature herself, to the dead heroes who

sacrificed themselves for the sake of their countrymen: Wallace for Scotland and Leonidas for the Greeks. And in the "Effusion In the Pleasure-Ground on the Banks of the Bran, Near Dunkeld" (PW, III, 102-105), Wordsworth attacks those very characteristics of this worldly life which Protesilaus condemns through his sacrifice and which he bids Laodamia to overcome: those "Vain pleasures of luxurious life, / For ever with yourselves at strife." When the poet cannot discover the true appearance of Nature's freshness and beauty in the scene of "such indignity," he withdraws, like the "world-wearied man" of "The Brownie's Cell," back "into the wilderness" where he thirsts for "redress."

In the sonnet beginning "While not a leaf seems faded," (PW, III, 26-27) Wordsworth describes the hint of values to be achieved through the sacrifice by nature of her summer pleasures: those higher values discovered at the cost of summer sun and flowers are those of Winter's "nipping air" and "nobler cares than listless summer knew"; winter represents the disciplining force upon the passions of summer, with the result that it is a "season potent to renew . . . the instinctive joys of song"--all of which describes a process akin to that described in "Laodamia" where "heroic arts in graver mood [are] revived, with finer harmony pursued."

In "Dion" (PW, II, 272-278) Wordsworth describes a hero who failed to achieve the perfection of spirit which sacrifice and self-renunciation allow: Dion failed because he was unable to balance the strictness of his wisdom with a continuously strong will and a generously tolerant love; he, for his failing, is visited by a phantom from the nether world and hence given warning of his approaching fate--she is sent to him to "brush away / The spots that to [Dion's] soul adhere" just as Protesilaus is allowed to visit Laodamia to show her how to achieve her spiritual salvation.

Dion, like Laodamia, dies as a sacrifice for the very thing which he should have given up: for Laodamia, it was her passion of love, but for Dion it was his strictness of mind.

The "Ode:1814" (PW, III, 143-148) pays homage to the poet's "martyred Countrymen" whose souls have, like Protesilaus's, gone to the "realms where ever-lasting freshness breathes." Their sacrifice was of the kind that Protesilaus made to achieve his perfection of spirit; these men

Had power as lofty actions to achieve
 As were performed in man's heroic prime;
 Nor wanted, when their fortitude had held
 Its even tenor, and the foe was quelled,
 A corresponding virtue to beguile
 The hostile purpose of wide-wasting Time--
 That not in vain they laboured to secure,
 For their great deeds, perpetual memory,
 And fame as largely spread as land and sea,
 By Works of spirit high and passion pure!

(ll. 140-149)

This image of heroic sacrifice is communicated as a vision to the poet himself: it appears first as "a glorious Form" who "sought the regions of humanity," much in the manner as Protesilaus's appearance to Laodamia. It then appears as a splendid procession in which homage is paid to the martyred souls, but such visions are quick to disappear (as is Protesilaus), and so the poet vows to memorialize their sacrifice in "never-dying song": thus Wordsworth indicates the intent of much of his poetry composed during these years.

Wordsworth describes the grotesque experience of a martyred corpse disinterred "to warn the living" in a poem entitled "Feelings of a French Royalist, on the Disinterment of the Remains of the Duke d'Enghien" (PW, III, 149). This "meek, loyal, pious, brave" Prince had been murdered and buried in "a pit of vilest mould": his corpse is recovered, and the "Reliques" of

his former being serve as the message of truth "redeemed out of the hollow grave." And so, again, Wordsworth writes of a martyr who returns from the dead to speak the truth to men grown blind in their worship of the things of this world; however, the pun on the risen corpse seems tactless and does not at all succeed in the same way as, for example, the description of the corpse rising to the surface of the lake succeeds in Prelude V, 426-459. This poem on the disinterred corpse of the Duke d'Enghien attempts to transform a literal event into a symbolic statement without the benefit of the transforming powers of the imagination.

In a sonnet "Occasioned by the Battle of Waterloo" (PW, III, 149-150), homage is again paid to those "Heroes!--for instant sacrifice prepared." The willingness of these "heroes" to become sacrifices may be historically questionable, but such examples are aesthetically questionable on at least two counts in this poem: (1) there are too many of them and so have no individuality, no personal sense of devotion to cause, no personal histories to involve the reader in the values of the life which must be sacrificed, and no sense of struggle to discover true purpose such as we find in Protesilaus; (2) the diction of the phrase, "for instant sacrifice prepared," is crude and unfortunately ambiguous in this age of dried food products prepared for instant consumption.

In the "Ode" composed on "The Morning of the Day Appointed for a General Thanksgiving. January 18, 1816" (PW, III, 155-163), the poet describes himself making sacrifice before dawn, hailing the coming of a light just as does Laodamia; he describes how "There is a radiant though a short-lived flame, / That burns for Poets in the dawning east," and how there came "from a holier altar" "The quickening spark of this day's sacrifice." Unlike Laodamia, the poet requests to know how he may achieve the "internal conquests" through

"outward service" which constitutes sacrifice:

What offering, what transcendent monument
 Shall our sincerity to Thee present?
 --Not work of hands; but trophies that may reach
 To highest Heaven--the labour of the Soul;
 That builds, as thy unerring precepts teach,
 Upon the internal conquests made by each,
 Her hope of lasting glory for the whole.
 (11. 169-175)

The outward service of Thanksgiving is the manifestation of the "joy" and "strength of love" gained from "internal conquests" made amid "silence deep, with faith sincere."

The poet describes his role as teacher to his child, Dora, in "'A little Onward Lend thy Guiding Hand" (PW, IV, 92-94): his relationship to his child is much like that of Protesilaus to Laodamia in that he conceives of his role as that of a "natural leader," as a "happy guide," intent on showing his child the way to gain, by perseverance, "the top / Of some smooth ridge, whose brink precipitous / Kindles intense desire for powers withheld / From this corporeal frame." He describes himself as her guide "through woods and spacious forests" but also through the pages of "classic lore" and "Holy Writ" so that she may learn how to "calm the affections, elevate the soul, / And consecrate our lives to truth and love."

And, in the "Invocation To The Earth" (PW, IV, 267-268), Wordsworth describes a "Spirit" who comes from "regions where no evil thing has birth," and who comes to speak to the Earth, to wash away the "stains" of the Earth which has been a prison of "martyrs" and "Victims unlamented," and which was the "False Parent of Mankind"; Earth itself is the altar upon which so many lives have been sacrificed, and now the time has come to redeem it "by peace and love, / And merciful desires." The recovery of an earth where there is

"peace and love" is of course the desire of the poet who wrote the "Prospectus" to The Recluse (PW, V, 3-6) in the years between 1798 and 1814:

Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields--like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main--why should they be
A history only of departed things,
A mere fiction of what never was?

(ll. 47-51)

In so many of his poems composed between 1814 and 1817, Wordsworth describes his attempts to discover those "groves Elysian, Fortunate Fields," and in "Laodamia" he allows Protesilaus to present his vision of "Paradise." Protesilaus is Wordsworth's embodiment of the man of imagination, of "the discerning intellect" who is attempting to accomplish an eternal reunion with Laodamia, who is Wordsworth's embodiment of passionate love: this attempt at eternal union reminds us of those lines in the "Prospectus" to The Recluse which express the poet's conception of the way Paradise may be regained:

For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.
--I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation--and, by words
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted--and how exquisitely, too--
Theme this but little heard of among men--
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish--this is our high argument.

(ll. 52-71)

The renewed marriage of Protesilaus and Laodamia fails, and so the recovery, or "creation" of Paradise is not achieved for them as a place of eternal union. This may reflect Wordsworth's failure to succeed in restraining his love for the passing experiences of nature and this world, or it may reflect his loss of faith in the redeeming powers of his imagination. Whatever the answer may be to the question why the passions cannot gain paradise through the imagination in "Laodamia," there is nevertheless a continuing investigation by Wordsworth in the poems of this period: an investigation into the possibilities for reconciling the faculties of the human mind into an Imagination which can redeem this earth and instruct mankind in the beauty and divinity of the human mind.³³

CHAPTER III

VERNAL ODE: POEM OF APOCALYPSE

Wordsworth's "Vernal Ode" (PW, III, 308-312) is a poem which describes an apocalyptic experience; it describes a visionary discovery of evidence for an eternal paradise in which there are "No wintry desolations, / Scorching blight or noxious dew" (ll. 25-26), and it describes a naturalistic discovery of evidence for a paradise of "golden years" (l. 131) which once existed on earth but no longer remains except in traces. The poem looks through and beyond nature to a vision of eternity, becoming conversant with infinity, and then it turns to look directly at and through nature to a discovery of permanence in the living forms of this world.

As in "Laodamia," there is a visitation from a supernatural being to a natural being, and, again as in "Laodamia," there is a message of hope brought from the regions beyond to the regions of nature: the hope is that man may recover the permanence of repose after the afflictions of time's wearisome changes. Protesilaus described the region of the fortunate dead, from which he came to visit Laodamia, as though it were a translation of the beauties of nature into the timelessness of eternity; the angel of apocalypse in the "Vernal Ode" points to the beauties of nature which surround the poet and tells him that there he will find the image of infinity and eternity: the "native habitations" of the angel are

"Buried in glory, far beyond the scope
Of man's inquiring gaze, but to his hope
Imaged, though faintly, in the hue
Profound of night's ethereal blue,"

(ll. 28-32)

Unlike Protesilaus, however, the angel of the poet's apocalyptic vision does not attempt to instruct him in the ways he may attain that eternal abode

which is imaged in nature; rather, the angel glories in the beauties of earth's nature and implies that the capacity for discovering the image of infinity and eternity in nature is sufficient for recovering paradise.

After his "spiritual eye" (l. 3) has beheld the visitation of infinity's angel, the poet does indeed discover with his natural eye those very evidences of paradise in the forms of nature which lie about him. And the focus for his observations is a murmuring "vagrant Bee" (l. 90); his eye had shown him the glories of the heavens in the "form and rich habiliments of One / Whose countenance bore resemblance to the sun" (ll. 5-6), and after he heard the heavenly music of the angel, the poet hears the tiny music of the softly murmuring "vagrant Bee." The poet's visionary experience has encompassed nearly the whole of creation, from the highest to the lowest: the spiritual eye and ear discover the ideal, and the natural eye and ear discover the realized form of the ideal in nature. Unlike Laodamia, the poet of the "Vernal Ode" seems to understand the significance of his visionary experience well enough so that he can benefit from it.

The genre of "Vernal Ode" is, of course, that slightly amorphous but sublime one of the ode, and this seems to be appropriate in English for singing highest themes; it is, for example, the form of Milton's "Morning of Christ's Nativity," a poem which may have been lingering in Wordsworth's thoughts while he composed "Vernal Ode"--the promise of redemption made in the dead of winter through the chastening forms of winter's elements is a nice counterpoint in "The Morning of Christ's Nativity" for the not dissimilar theme of hope for "endurance and repose" (l. 47) through the blossoming forms of spring's elements in the "Vernal Ode." Wordsworth has combined the tradition of the ode with that of the bucolic eclogue in his "Vernal Ode." Wordsworth's poem contains not only the rural setting of "An April

sky, / When all the fields with freshest green were dight" (ll. 1-2) and a "hawthorn-tree" beneath which the drowsy poet sights the bee, but also a reference to the "venturous heifer [which] drinks the noontide breeze" (l. 13). Very aptly, then, Wordsworth has combined the visionary mode of the ode with the naturalistic mode of the pastoral into a statement which may be described as both apocalyptic and naturalistic.¹

Naturalistic Apocalypse

As early as 1793 Wordsworth had described in poetry his feeling of being able to perceive evidences of paradise in the forms of nature and of being able to look through the forms of nature into the regions of infinity. In the 1793 quarto edition of Descriptive Sketches (PW, I, 42-91), Wordsworth describes the hints of paradise and glimpses of infinity which come to a Swiss cowherd in the early spring, and it is a scene which contains many of the images and much of the same language which may be found in "Vernal Ode," composed some twenty-four or twenty-five years later. We notice the imagery of the dawning sun, of the "vernal breeze," of the humming bee, and, finally, of the mountain peak which is illumined by an angel-like setting sun:

When warm from myrtle bays and tranquil seas,
Comes on, to whisper hope, the vernal breeze,
When hums the mountain bee in May's glad ear,
And emerald isles to spot the heights appear,
When shouts and lowing herds the valley fill,
And louder torrents stun the noon-tide hill,
When fragrant scents beneath th'enchanted tread
Spring up, his little all around him spread,
The pastoral Swiss begins the cliffs to scale,
To silence leaving the deserted vale,
Up the green mountain tracking Summer's feet,
Each twilight earlier call'd the Sun to meet,
With earlier smile the ray of morn to view
Fall on his shifting hut that gleams mid smoking dew;
Bless'd with his herds, as in the patriarch's age,
The summer long to feed from stage to stage;

O'er azure pikes serene and still, they go,
And hear the rattling thunder far below'

--'Tis morn: with gold the verdant mountain glows,
More high, the snowy peaks with hues of rose.
Far stretch'd beneath the many-tinted hills,
A mighty waste of mist the valley fills,
A solemn sea! whose vales and mountains found
Stand motionless, to awful silence bound.
A gulf of gloomy blue, that opens wide
And bottomless, divides the midway tide.

--No vulgar joy is his, at even tide
Stretch'd on the scented mountain's purple side.
For as the pleasures of his simple day
Beyond his native valley hardly stray,
Nought round its darling precincts can he find
But brings some past enjoyment to his mind,
While Hope that ceaseless leans on Pleasure's urn
Binds her wild wreathes, and whispers his return.

Oft as those sainted Rocks before him spread,
An unknown power connects him with the dead.
For images of other worlds are there,
Awful the light, and holy is the air.
Uncertain thro' his fierce uncultur'd soul
Like lighted tempests troubled transports roll;
To viewless realms his Spirit towers amain,
Beyond the senses and their little reign.
And oft, when pass'd that solemn vision by,
He holds with God himself communion high,
When the dread peal of swelling torrents fills
The sky-roof'd temple of the eternal hills,
And savage Nature humbly joins the rite,
While flash her upward eyes severe delight.

--When the sun bids the gorgeous scene farewell,
Alps overlooking Alps their state upswell;
Huge Pikes of Darkness named, of Fear and Storms,
Lift, all serene, their still, illumin'd forms,
In sea-like reach of prospect round him spread,
Ting'd like an angel's smile all rosy red.

(ll. 442-459, 492-499, 512-519,
542-555, 562-567.)

In the key passage which describes the cowherd's communion with God (ll. 542-555), the concept that the forms of earth's nature give back the "image" of infinity and eternity, and perhaps of lost paradise, is described very much like that in "Vernal Ode." However, in Descriptive Sketches, Wordsworth attributes to the solid, though transient, forms of nature those qualities

of divinity which tended to associate him in his thought with an eighteenth-century current of pantheism; the Rocks are "sainted," the light is "awful," the air is "holy," the "swelling torrents" produce a "dread peal," the hills of nature's "temple" are "eternal," and "savage Nature" herself joins with the man in the rite of worshipping the immanent God.

This concept of God in nature is weakened by the lines describing the actual experience of communion:

Uncertain thro' his fierce uncultur'd soul
 Like lighted tempests troubled transports roll;
 To viewless realms his Spirit towers amain,
 Beyond the senses and their little reign.
 (ll. 546-549)

For in these lines the experience of God's presence seems possible only by an annihilation of nature's influences or by a negation of the images communicated by the senses. This precarious faith in nature as an embodiment of God's being is one which Wordsworth seems to hold to throughout Descriptive Sketches, but it is a faith which is slowly eroded in his life until he can assert that nature has her own distinct divinity, not necessarily to be identified with the God of Jews and Christians:

And I have felt
 A presence that distrubs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

("Lines Composed a Few Miles Above
 Tintern Abbey," ll. 93-102; PW, II,
 259-263.)

But when this nature with its own qualities of divinity fails to satisfy the poet's imagination, he realizes the inadequacy of nature alone to provide human life with the visions of eternity he so anxiously desires; and this is

the substance of those lines Wordsworth penned while describing in The Prelude his crossing the Alps:

Imagination! lifting up itself
 Before the eye and progress of my Song
 Like an unfather'd vapour; here that Power,
 In all the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,
 Halted, without a struggle to break through.
 And now recovering, to my Soul I say
 I recognize thy glory; in such strength
 Of usurpation, in such visitings
 Of awful promise, when the light of sense
 Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
 The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode.
 There harbours whether we be young or old.
 Our destiny, our nature, and our home
 Is with infinitude, and only there;
 With hope it is, hope that can never die,
 Effort, and expectation, and desire,
 And something evermore about to be.

(Prelude, 1805-06; VI, 525-542)

In the episode found in the Descriptive Sketches, the vision of infinity is imaged in the forms of nature and God's presence is detected there, yet fully discovered only by transcending nature: we note that perhaps the ambivalence of Descriptive Sketches may arise from Wordsworth's attempt to objectify the experience of apocalypse in the Swiss cowherd, who is a "natural" man in nature; such an experience is thoroughly private and personal, but the young poet Wordsworth was writing for an audience not yet prepared for such poetry. By the time of "Tintern Abbey," first published as the concluding poem of Lyrical Ballads in 1798, Wordsworth felt the confidence which came with the spirit of literary rebellion and he located his primary source of inspiration in the divinity of nature herself; and he expresses the experience as his own, not another's. It is also in his own voice that he admits, in The Prelude passage he wrote in 1804, his realization that infinity is discovered by human imagination transcending the nature which had seemed to be its home; this experience is so subjective and so far from the attempt

at objectivity in Descriptive Sketches that it assumes some of the very mystery which it attempts to communicate: at this stage in his career, Wordsworth became acutely conscious of the imagination as a power which discovers ideal values (such as permanence, beauty, love, etc.) and as a power which is a function of specifically human being.

Just as in Descriptive Sketches he had attempted to make the apocalyptic experience acceptable by attributing it to another person, Wordsworth hesitates to locate the power of ideal-making in the subjective processes of his own imagination; in "Tintern Abbey" he attributed it to an interworking process of mind and nature:

Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear--both what they half-create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

(11. 102-111)

And in Prelude VI he immediately translated his visionary experience of apocalypse into a visionary experience of nature as an image of eternity:

The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
And in the narrow rent at every turn
Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
The rocks that muttered close upon our ears

.
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.

(1850; 11. 624-630, 639-640; somewhat
different in 1805-06, 11. 556-562,
571-572.)

Thus we see how Wordsworth attempts in several poems of his early career

to describe his vision of infinity and eternity as objectively as he can and as naturalistically as he can. In the "Vernal Ode," a poem of his middle age, Wordsworth again describes his vision of eternity and infinity as objectively as he can and again as naturalistically as he can, but he seems to me to be able to do it without the sense of ambiguity, and possibly compromise, which characterize his earlier attempts.

The poet does not claim that his vision of the angel come from regions of infinity is an objectification of an internal experience, but his poem does implicitly deny that the experience is an hallucination:

Beneath the concave of an April sky,
 When all the fields with freshest green were dight,
 Appeared, in presence of the spiritual eye
 That aids or supersedes our grosser sight,
 The form and rich habiliments of One
 Whose countenance bore resemblance to the sun.

(ll. 1-6)

The Angel comes of its own power into the "presence of the spiritual eye" which can perceive images of infinity but not, as in the apocalyptic vision described in Prelude (1805-06) VI, 525-542, at the expense of the natural eye: the "spiritual eye" "aids or supersedes our grosser sight" and thus works with, and not against, natural experience. Such a distinction between "spiritual eye" and natural eye indicates Wordsworth's conception of the imagination as a faculty much like Coleridge's conception of it; Coleridge also conceived of the operation of a power of the mind which could perceive values of the spirit and which was to be distinguished from that other power of the mind which operates at the level of sense experience and perceives the material shapes of the external world:

The imagination, then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation

in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.

(J. Shawcross, ed. Biographia Literaria, Vol. I, Chapter XIII, p.202, ll. 5-15.)

And so Wordsworth's Angel in the "Vernal Ode" is perceived by what Coleridge would call the "secondary imagination," and, indeed, Coleridge would have concurred with Wordsworth in attributing this faculty of the human mind with the power to perceive the intent of divinity in the affairs of men and the world.

Although the implication seems to be that the Angel is "really" there and that one needs only exercise his visionary powers of the "spiritual eye" in order to see the Angel, Wordsworth describes the Angel itself in terms of the forms of nature: the vision of apocalypse is achieved through an alliance of the spiritual and the natural eyes. The actual perception of the Angel as a spiritual being depends upon the capacity in the poet to perceive the beauties of nature, and so the process of visionary perception is dependent upon the process of naturalistic perception, with the product being a unity and an ideal achieved through the dissolving, diffusing, and dissipating powers of an imagination that finally recreates.

The Angel is first described in terms of sunset, for some of the features of the sun are revealed only in the evening when the "grosser sight" of man function in aid of the spiritual sight because at that time much of the sun's light is subdued:²

The form and rich habiliments of One
Whose countenance bore resemblance to the sun,
When it reveals, in evening majesty,
Features half lost amid their own pure light.

(ll. 5-8)

We notice that there is no attempt to identify the Angel with the sun itself as there may have been in Descriptive Sketches; the simile suggests that nature shares with infinity certain characteristics which can be revealed to mortal man only at times of twilight, when the extreme light of day fades into the extreme darkness of night: such a harmony of light and darkness which is achieved at sunset in the spring suggests the possibility that Wordsworth feels in his declining age that such visions of eternity are most possible, for in this period of his life he can hold onto his love for the light of nature and yet look beyond into the darkness which threatens to annihilate that light. It seems to me that this description of the Angel in terms of an evening sun achieves a meaningful ambiguity of suggestion which succeeds on the critical level as it does on the emotional and sensory level: the poet is describing a personification of spiritual powers and thus is trying to give it objective status, but he does it in such a naturalistic way that one suspects he is in fact describing an evening sun;³ this is psychologically acceptable (or perhaps imaginatively acceptable would be a better way of putting it) because the faith in eternity and infinity which the poet is looking for is easily described in the natural phenomenon of a setting sun which will rise again the next day, and it is acceptable on a broader scale because the season in which the experience takes place is spring, a season of promise after a season of desolation.⁴

The poet again compares the angel with a form of nature:

Poised like a weary cloud, in middle air
 He hung,--then floated with angelic ease
 (Softening that bright effulgence by degrees)
 Till he had reached a summit sharp and bare,
 Where oft the venturous heifer drinks the noontide breeze.

(ll. 9-13)

We should notice how, with subtle ease, the poet merges his concept of

spiritual being with his observation of natural form. He compares the Angel with a "weary cloud" and so manages to merge a concept with a vital image, for the cloud is characterized as something with a life of its own; this allows for a transference of a perceptible form to a spiritually vital ideal (which has come into the "presence of the spiritual eye") from an element of nature (which provides the substance of perception to the primary imagination of "our grosser sight"). And then, as the Angel floats to rest upon a "summit sharp and bare," the poet uses a very strange term to describe the character of the motion: the Angel (?) floated with "angelic ease." This is of course the language of a simpleton: anyone knows that angels will, when and if they do float, float with "angelic" ease; but it seems to me that Wordsworth is again succeeding in creating an image whose meaning extends in two directions, towards seeing an Angel in terms of a floating cloud and towards seeing a floating cloud as an Angel. And it seems to be this latter meaning which comes through if we allow the subtlety of the poet's imagination and see it transferring, in language as in experience, the qualities of angels to the motions of nature.⁵

Wordsworth next describes the descent of the Angel to the highest point of the natural scene:

Upon the apex of that lofty cone
 Alighted, there the Stranger stood alone;
 Fair as a gorgeous Fabric of the East
 Suddently raised by some enchanter's power,
 Where nothing was; and firm as some old Tower
 Of Britain's realm, whose leafy crest
 Waves high, embellished by a gleaming shower! (ll. 14-20)

In this scene, which reminds me of Blake's "glad day" etching of Orc on the mountain top, Wordsworth calls the visiting Angel "the Stranger." Now, this would not be especially worth further examination, but we recall some lines from "Resolution and Independence" (PW, II, 235-240) which are similar and

which thus makes us think that Wordsworth continues to retain some of his older values and older notions of imaginative experience; the poet of "Resolution and Independence" is wandering about a lonely moor in his despondency when he comes upon an ancient leechgatherer, and while the old man speaks of his "employment hazardous and wearisome," the poet goes into a kind of imaginative trance:

And the whold 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. 109-112)

Earlier, the poet described his feeling that his coming to this lonely place where he meets the old man might have been "by peculiar grace, / A leading from above, a something given," (ll. 50-51), and he compares the old man whom he encounters with a "huge=stone" that lies "Couched on the bald top of an eminence" and also with a "motionless" cloud (ll. 57-58, 75). Thus, all these coincidental similarities between the old Leech Gatherer of "Resolution and Independence" and the Angel of "Vernal Ode" lead me to compare the functions of the two as an indication of the changes which have occurred in the poetry of Wordsworth.

And, of course, the major change is that of "grace" from nature in "Resolution and Independence" to that of "grace" from beyond nature in "Vernal Ode"; in the earlier poem the poet goes out to meet a human agent of natural grace, but in the later poem the Angel of supernatural grace descends to the visionary eye of the poet. The "Vernal Ode" is concerned with discovering evidences of infinity and transcendental permanence in the beauties of the mutable world, whereas "Resolution and Independence" was concerned with discovering sources of inspiration for a lagging spirit of imagination.

But in both poems the poet attributes to an objective agency what intermittently in his career he had recognized as a function of his own mind: value-making or value-discovering. And in "Vernal Ode" he affirms that although values originate from beyond, they are nevertheless discoverable by the integrated functions of the human mind: to the "grosser sight" of sensation through the forms of nature and visitations of eternity and infinity to the "spiritual eye."⁶ (The word "Stranger" itself should be considered as Wordsworth's utilization of the same concept, or superstition, which Coleridge had used in "Frost at Midnight," where the ash on the grate is called a "stranger" and is intended to portend the arrival of some absent friend; thus the Angel in "Vernal Ode" is a "stranger" whose visitation prophesies the existence of realms of infinity.)

By describing the newly alighted Angel as being "Fair as a gorgeous Fabric of the East / Suddenly raised by some enchanter's power, / Where nothing was" (ll. 16-18), Wordsworth allows the appearance of the Angel to communicate something of the suspension of natural law which is involved, but he also succeeds in suggesting that the visitation is achieved through the imaginative powers of man himself; and specifically through his own powers of creative imagination. But he immediately turns from the suggestion of magical creation to the suggestion of naturalistic embodiment:

and firm as some old Tower
Of Britain's realm, whose leafy crest
Waves high, embellished by a gleaming shower! (ll. 18-20)

Such an image brings home to "Britain's realm" the magical "Fabric of the East" and so makes indigenous the experience of vision. The poet attributes supernatural qualities and then very natural qualities to the Angelic visitation. From being like a "Fabric" built from aery nothingness, the Angel

appears with the being of a very solid British mountain peak whose waving forest covering is showered in the gleaming light of the setting sun.

When Wordsworth tells us how the Angel proceeded to touch the strings of his "golden harp," we may feel somewhat uneasy, but we should be prepared to accept the image because the poet has gone to such delicate lengths to present the vision of a natural scene for embodying his vision of supernatural grace. The deepening shadows of the setting sun often result in a scene of twilight purple, and so it is not difficult to perceive in the opening image of the second stanza in the "Vernal Ode" a suggestion of music growing out of the poet's heart in response to a beautiful sunset: the Angel's purple wings are (like?) the empurpled clouds, and the golden harp which rests beneath the purple wings is (like?) the sun diffused in bars of golden light through the purple clouds of evening. The identification of the Angel's appearance with the evening sunset is but another approach in the strategy of the poet for achieving objectification of his vision and thus for discovering ideals external to his own personal experience. To say that Wordsworth is deliberately trying to objectify his internal experience of imaginative vision in this first image of stanza two is not to contradict my earlier statement that the poem does not claim that the angel's visitation is an objectification of internal experience. The poem does not reveal such an attempt except in its imaginative transference of qualities, through language, from one realm of being to another realm of being; it is the critic who can reveal Wordsworth's process of objectification, and the critic can do this only by recalling the poet's earlier accounts of similar experiences and by placing the poem in a tradition of calling upon the muse for inspiration.

The Angel of apocalyptic vision prepares to sing for the poet:

Beneath the shadow of his purple wings
 Rested a golden harp;--he touched the strings;
 And, after prelude of unearthly sound
 Poured through the echoing hills around,
 He sang--

(ll. 21-25)

It is tempting to think that the reference to a "prelude of unearthly sound" which "Poured through the echoing hills around" could serve as substantial reason for Mrs. Wordsworth to entitle Wordsworth's poem on the growth of his mind The Prelude; certainly the music of The Prelude was "earthly," but it was of a kind never before heard on earth, and it was of a kind which "poured through the echoing hills." However, it is suggestive that just as the Angel plays a "prelude of unearthly sound" before singing the song of eternal promise, so has Wordsworth written a "prelude" of his imagination's natural growth before he writes his grand philosophical song with its promise of paradise recovered, a song never completed but hinted at in The Excursion, the burden of whose theme is similar to that of the Angel's song in the "Vernal Ode": that there is evidence in the beauties of nature for the existence of an eternal and infinite realm beyond death and for the repose of weary human souls.

The song which the Angel sings is the same song which the spring occasions in the human heart just after the deadening experience of winter.⁷

"No wintry desolations,
 Scorching blight or noxious dew,
 Affect my native habitations." (ll. 25-27)

That realm of infinity from which the Angel has come cannot be communicated to the poet except in the language of finite being, of mortality (just as the land of the fortunate dead could not be communicated except in the language of the senses by Protesilaus to Laodamia). The Angel begins with a contrast of his eternal habitation with the world of nature, presenting the

negative aspects of nature which are not present in eternity. But he proceeds to assure the poet that there is in the things of time and space an image of eternity and infinity:

"Buried in glory, far beyond the scope
Of man's inquiring gaze, but to his hope
Imaged, though faintly, the hue
Profound of night's ethereal blue." (ll. 28-31)

Eternity's regions of repose are not discoverable to the unaided gaze of man's "grosser sight"; in order to perceive them, human sight must be aided by the quality of "hope," and then the "spiritual eye" may perceive an image of that buried glory "though faintly, in the hue / Profound of night's ethereal blue." This is exactly what the poet is in the process of doing as he undergoes his visionary experience on the evening of an April day.

Just as the poet has described his apocalyptic vision in terms of natural phenomena, so does the Angel describe the regions of infinity in terms of nature's forms and processes. The poet now exploits what seems to be a kind of cosmic irony: the "grosser sight" of mortal vision cannot perceive the realms of infinity without the aid of "hope" and the "spiritual eye," but the Angel depends upon the untrustworthy character of mortal vision as a source for his imagery describing the promise of infinity. For to human sight, unaided by the "spiritual eye" of the telescope or mathematical computation, the heavens present a scene which appears stable, permanent, infinite, and perhaps eternal. The Angel, himself like a great star, advises the poet to discover "in the aspect of each radiant orb" the testimony of "Love and Grace divine":

"And in the aspect of each radiant orb;--
Some fixed, some wandering with no timid curb;
But wandering star and fixed, to mortal eye,
Blended in absolute serenity,

And free from semblance of decline;--
 Fresh as if Evening brought their natal hour,
 Her darkness splendour gave, her silence power,
 To testify of Love and Grace divine."

(11. 32-39)

And so the Angel is counselling the poet on how to perceive God's promise and is himself a witness of the very kind which he advises the poet to look for. There is a kind of subtle irony in the fact that the Angel is the very kind of evidence which he advises the poet to search for; there is irony because the Angel, in admitting that the senses may be misled by the appearances of permanence in the heavens, is revealing the doubt which may attend any such vision of supernatural visitation as the Angel himself represents.

But the Angel is quick, in acknowledging the true impermanence of such heavenly phenomena as he had used to exemplify his eternal habitations, to assure the poet that such appearances are nevertheless symbolically useful as God's language of vision:

'What if those bright fires
 Shine subject to decay,
 Sons haply of extinguished sires,
 Themselves to lose their light, or pass away
 Like clouds before the wind,
 Be thanks poured out to Him whose hand bestows,
 Nightly, on human kind
 That vision of endurance and repose.'

(11. 40-47)

And so it seems to me that the Angel includes in his defense of the symbolic appearances of heavenly phenomena a defense for the poet who experiences visions of infinity through the transient forms of nature. That the Angel singing to the poet's "spiritual eye" may only be a transitory, though symbolic, image is a truth which is unconsciously revealed by the Angel to the poet in the imagery of "bright fires," which are "subject to decay," and "clouds," that "pass away . . . before the wind." Wordsworth, in allowing

the Angel to reveal the possibility of its own doubtful nature, is consciously revealing the limitations of his own belief in the experience of the apocalyptic vision, and these are limitations which are imposed by the very nature of which he is a part: limitations of veracity in sense experience, of the dissolving flesh, and consciousness which can turn in doubt upon itself as reason opposed to faith or necessity opposed to desire.

The limitation which is imposed by the thought of death upon the hopeful soul of man is acknowledged by the Angel, but only as a condition of being a part of the creation in time:

'--And though to every draught of vital breath,
Renewed throughout the bounds of earth or ocean,
The melancholy gates of Death
Respond with sympathetic motion;
Though all that feeds on nether air
Howe'er magnificent or fair,
Grows but to perish, and entrust
Its ruins to their kindred dust; . . .'

(11. 48-55)

If we recall that the Angel had descended to mount the "summit sharp and bare" where "oft the venturous heifer drinks the noontide breeze," we may discover in the Angel's song about the condition of death some indication of the interrelationship which the poet is establishing between the spiritual ideal and the natural reality: the Angelic ideal descends to a summit of Earth's nature and sings a song of springtime hope; the "venturous heifer" often ascends to that same summit to drink in "the noontide breeze," a most ethereal substance but a most life-giving substance and at the same time a potent symbol of spirit (as acknowledged, for example, in lines 29-31); and so at a summit of nature do the heavenly and the earthly meet. The heavenly descension brings, as a response of "sympathetic motion," the promise of eternal life to the earthly ascension of beings which drink

"every draught of vital breath" and feed on "nether air." And so, before the explicit promise of some kind of immortality for the dying forms of nature, the poem has suggested in its imagery that the point of material death is also the point of spiritual life: that point being the extremity of nature, on a mountain summit in the evening of the day, of the year, and, by extension, of one's life.

But, in spite of the condition of death which limits one's faith in the care of Nature and God for human life, there is abundant evidence for belief in the "ever-during care" which is expended on the living beings of the earth, not the least being that Angels of apocalyptic assurance descend to linger amid the beauties of the natural creation:

'Yet, by the Almighty's ever-during care,
Her procreant vigils Nature keeps
Amid the unfathomable deeps;
And saves the peopled fields of earth
From dread of emptiness or dearth.
Thus, in their stations, lifting tow'rd the sky
The foliaged head in cloud-like majesty,
The shadow-casting race of trees survive:
Thus, in the train of Spring, arrive
Sweet flowers;--what living eye hath viewed
Their myriads?--endlessly renewed,
Wherever strikes the sun's glad ray;
Where'er the subtle waters stray;
Wherever sportive breezes bend
Their course, or genial showers descend!
Mortals, rejoice! the very Angels quit
Their mansions unsusceptible of change,
Amid your pleasant bowers to sit,
And through your sweet vicissitudes to range!'
(ll. 56-74)

And so the argument for God's love as revealed in the abundance and plenitude of life from the deeps of the oceans to the heights of the atmosphere is based on the old notion of His proliferation of being according to the principle of plenitude; but not only do we find Wordsworth erecting a chain of being extending from some inorganic form up through the angels to God

Himself, but we find him imagining the angels leaving heaven to sit with man in earth's "pleasant bowers" and to range through his "sweet vicissitudes." There is a possibility for irony in this admission by the Angel that "the very Angels quit / Their mansions unsusceptible of change" in order to sit among men and range through life's "sweet vicissitudes": it is obviously ironical in its being spoken by the very agent whose mission it is to describe the regions of infinity which lie beyond the "sweet vicissitudes" of earthly life, but it is further ironical in that it is the last statement made by the Angel before the poem devolves into stanza four and centers upon the poet himself. Even though there is hope for a region of eternal repose and even though the poet has experienced that hope in his vision of the Angel, that very experience leaves him with the lingering suspicion that perhaps this world is, in its beauties and sweetness, more desirable than the regions of spiritual desire.

We are left, as is the poet himself, at the end of stanza three with the feeling that an apocalyptic vision of the infinity which lies beyond the boundaries of earthly nature and the eternity which lies beyond time and natural process is self-defeating when it depends upon the forms of nature it is supposed to transcend for its communication to mortal beings. We are left at this point as was Laodamia at the point when Protesilaus was forced to depart from her: in a condition of helpless desire for the substantial things of this world. But unlike Laodamia, the poet of the "Vernal Ode" knows how to benefit from his vision, and although he questions the mode of his perception, he does not doubt the values of spirit which derive from that perception.

Apocalyptic Naturalism

If at the conclusion of stanza three there is an admission of attraction by an Angel to the loveliness of earthly nature, there is in the opening of stanza four a declaration by a pastoral poet that nature speaks to him in her own voice of permanence amid mutability and of the beauties of creation which remain from the paradise which once existed on earth. To make such a declaration is an admission by the poet on his part that he has learned something from his experience of naturalistic apocalypse: he has learned that in nature is to be discovered the voice of infinity and eternity. What had been an experience of supernatural vision is transformed into an experience of natural vision: the ideal was seen to descend to earth in the form of an Angel, and the poet has caught at it as a reenforcement of his personal and subjective attraction to the lovely forms of earthly nature.

Whereas an Angel served as the focus for the poet's imagination in the first three stanzas of the "Vernal Ode," a simple and less sublime "vagrant Bee" serves as the symbolic center for the poet's imagination in the last two stanzas. The poet denies that there has been any loss of significance in coming from the being at the summit of creation to the being at the base where it is on a level with the mundane vision of the pastoral poet. Indeed, the poet questions whether he deserved such a vision as he has just experienced with the visitation of the Angel:

O, nursed at happy distance from the cares
 Of a too-anxious world, mild pastoral Muse!
 That, to the sparkling crown Urania wears,
 And to her sister Clio's laurel wreath,
 Prefer'st a garland culled from purple heath,
 Or blooming thicket moist with morning dews;
 Was such bright Spectacle vouchsafed to me?

And was it granted to the simple ear
Of thy contented Votary
Such melody to hear!

(11. 75-84)

There seems to be some question about who that Angel of the first three stanzas really was. For Wordsworth himself, there seems to have been some question, since he originally attributed the song of the Angel to Urania and he originally experienced the vision of Urania's visitation and song in the very same attitude which he later, and finally, describes his being in when he hears the murmuring song of the "vagrant Bee":

Forsake me not, Urania, but when Ev'n,
Fades into night, resume the enraptur'd song
That shadowed forth the immensity of Heaven
In music--uttered surely without wrong
(For 'twas thy work) though here the Listener lay
Couched on green herbage mid the warmth of May.)

(MS.1; 11. 1-6)

The Angel was definitely a Muse, and so the poet has combined the tradition of the classical pagans with the tradition of the modern Christians in attributing his inspiration to an Angel.

But that Angel, whether he was Urania or not (and we notice that the poet refers to the Angel in the masculine gender at lines 10, 12, 21, 22, and 25), has come to earth and left behind an admission of earth's attraction to him; the result is that the poet is left to address the "mild pastoral Muse," Thalia, as the muse most appropriate to grant him the inspiration he requires. Wordsworth has very correctly perceived the inappropriateness for a poet whose songs have been concerned with the beauties of this world to receive his inspiration exclusively from the Muse of heroic and heavenly poetry; instead, he has divided his sources of inspiration between heaven and nature, between the infinite and the finite, between the ideal and the natural, between the angelic Urania and the pastoral Thalia. The

result is a twin origin for the poem, which is both sublime as an ode and mundane as a pastoral. The disappearance of the angelic Urania leaves the poet free to declare his final allegiance to the pastoral Thalia. And it is under her sweet influence that he lies couchant listening for the music of nature:

Him rather suits it, side by side with thee,
 Wrapped in a fit of pleasing indolence,
 While thy tired lute hangs on the hawthorn-tree,
 To liex and listen--till o'er-drowsed sense
 Sinks, hardly conscious of the influence--
 To the soft murmur of the vagrant Bee.

(ll. 85-90)

Again we detect Wordsworth's strategy for protecting his visionary experience; just as he had described the Angel's visitation in terms which nearly identified the Angel with natural forms, so the poet describes his condition of natural vision preparatory to interpreting the song and symbolic meaning of the Bee as a "fit of pleasing indolence" in which the "b'er-drowsed sense / Sinks" and is "hardly conscious of the influence" which descends upon him: his trance-like experience in perceiving the meaning of nature puts him in that border condition he describes in "Tintern Abbey" as

that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the 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,
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things. (ll. 41-49)

He has undergone the visionary experience of apocalypse in the first three stanzas of "Vernal Ode" and so has achieved "that serene and blessed mood" of the spiritual ideal represented by the Angelic visitation; he is now prepared to bring the mystery down from the heavens, lead his affections

gently on, and observe the burden of the mystery in this earthly life.⁸

One tiny creature has survived the changes and chances of time without having fallen victim to the threats of evolutionary transformation; the bee has survived with an "ancestry / Mysteriously remote and high" (ll. 117-118), coming into the present with a message from the remote past just as the Angel had come into the present from the eternal future (and just as Protesilaus came into Laodamia's present from the immediate past and eternal future). The murmur of the Bee tells the poet's "Soul" of its having survived the coming and going of nations and regions:

--A slender sound! yet hoary Time
Doth to the Soul exalt it with the chime
Of all his years;--a company
Of ages coming, ages gone;
(Nations from before them sweeping,
Regions in destruction steeping).

(ll. 91-96; my italics)

Listening to the soft murmuring of the tiny Bee, the poet hears the chiming of ancient Time, and the sound he hears is registered on his "Soul." This is of course a parallel to the earlier assertion that the Angel had appeared to the poet's "Spiritual eye," except that now Wordsworth is allowing himself the justly won freedom to assert that a natural form communicates directly to his soul without having to associate it with sanctifying powers of God's descending grace.

The Bee has a message of permanence for the poet's Soul to hear amid the mutability of nature, just as the Angel had a message of infinity for the poet's sublime mood. The Angel had left a region of "endurance and repose" where mansions are "unsusceptible of change" and come down to earth in the springtime to announce the hope for rebirth in eternity and infinity which the spring announces in time's regions of finite being on earth. And so does the Bee speak to the poet of coming from a place where it had been

safe through the vicissitudes of winter's desolating changes:

But every awful note in unison
 With that faint utterance, which tells
 Of treasure sucked from buds and bells,
 For the pure keeping of those waxen cells;
 Where She--a statist prudent to confer
 Upon the common weal; a warrior bold,
 Radiant all over with unburnished gold,
 And armed with living spear for mortal fight;
 A cunning forager
 That spreads no waste; a social builder; one
 In whom all busy offices unite
 With all fine functions that afford delight--
 Safe through the winter storm in quiet dwells!

(ll. 97-109)

Unlike the Angel's dependence upon the frailties of human perception for describing the symbols of infinity in the elements of the sky, where there appears to be a promise of permanence overhanging the mutability of the finite earth, the Bee's message of endurance and survival is based upon the imagination's perception of the life-history of the bee as a laboring to create its own protection against winter's storms. The Bee has built "waxen cells" of safety and repose from out of "buds and bells" of nature; and from those same natural forms, she has sucked the treasure of honey which keeps her nourished through the long winter months and strong to emerge singing into the springtime month of April. This is of course the poet's indirect way of saying that his own devotion to the beauties and pleasures of mutable nature will provide him with the sustenance of faith which will make his imagination strong to endure through his poetry and possibly to survive into the springtime of eternity beyond the limitations imposed by mortality: such is the indirect, though fairly obvious, symbolic import of the Bee's message, since it is made the parallel focus of the Angel's message of direct though self-doubting promise.

The poet now questions, at the beginning of the final stanza, whether

or not the Bee may not be subjected to the direct observation of his visionary powers:

And is She brought within the power
Of vision?

(11. 110-111)

And as the Bee hovers over a flower, descends and ceases to murmur, we have a scene which reminds us of the descent of the Angel to the mountain summit in stanza one; here, in the final stanza, the poet neatly balances the descent of the Angel with the descent of the Bee, and he further achieves a balance by describing in reverse the appeal made by the phenomena to his modes of perception: the Angel appeared first to his sight and then to his hearing; the Bee appeared first to his hearing and now to his sight:

And is She brought within the power
Of vision? --o'er this tempting flower
Hovering until the petals stay
Her flight, and take its voice away!

(11. 110-113)

In this moment of suspended sound and hovering vision, the poet perceives the evidence of paradise lost in the mysterious ancestry of the humble, humming Bee:

Observe each wing!--a tiny van!
The structure of her laden thigh,
How fragile! yet of ancestry
Mysteriously remote and high;
High as the imperial front of man;
The roseate bloom on woman's cheek;
The soaring eagle's curved beak;
The white plumes of the floating swan;
Old as the tiger's paw, the lion's mane
Ere shaken by that mood of stern disdain
At which the desert trembles--Humming Bee!
Thy sting was needless then, perchance unknown,
The seeds of malice were not sown;
All creatures met in peace, from fierceness free,
And no pride blended with their dignity.
--Tears had not broken from their source;
Nor Anguish strayed from her "Tartarean den;

The golden years maintained a course
 Not undiversified though smooth and even.

(11. 115-132)

As he observes with his visionary imagination the characteristics of the Bee which link it with all of creation, which give the bee the symbolic importance attributed by Wordsworth to the natural processes in the ravine of the Simplon pass ("Characters of the great Apocalypse, / The types and symbols of Eternity"), the poet is observing a force of nature working to lay up another store of treasured honey which will again see it through the vicissitudes of winter's storms, and so in sympathetic response to the activities of the Bee may the poet be preparing his place in eternity.

It is interesting to note that when Laodamia demanded sound from Protesilaus in order to verify her vision of him, he responded with a long message from infinity and she failed to benefit by her experience; this process is repeated, with one important difference, in the poet's receiving the song of the Angel as a verification of his vision of her in the "Vernal Ode" and experiencing some doubt about the authenticity of his vision; the difference comes when we find a continuation of the poem, in which this process of vision-sound is reversed and we have sound (of the murmuring bee) followed by vision (of the bee's remote and high ancestry). It is as though Wordsworth trusted his faculty of sight less than his faculty of hearing, and this would support the observation in the "Vernal Ode" that the appearance of stability in the heavens is misleading to the senses but that the perception of nearly timeless continuity in the bee's vibrating wings is authentic in its registration on the poet's "Soul." The forms of nature, as perceived by the sight, must support the experience of intuitive perception of spirit, as symbolized by the less palpable hearing, not vice versa--as Laodamia had demanded and as the Angel represented;

Wordsworth's intuited values are not forced upon the forms of his natural experience, but rather his natural experience testifies to his intuited values.

The intuition of "golden years" which existed in the high and remote mystery of the past reminds us of the regions whence Protesilaus's Shade came to visit Laodamia; in "Vernal Ode,"

The golden years maintained a course
 Not undiversified though smooth and even;
 (ll. 131-132)

and in "Laodamia," Protesilaus

spake of love, such love as Spirits feel
 In worlds whose course is equable and pure;
 No fears to beat away--no strife to heal--
 The past unsighed for, and the future sure.
 (ll. 97-100)

In addition to similarities of situation (a supernatural visitation) and conception of paradise in eternity and infinity, "Laodamia" and the "Vernal Ode" are alike in their techniques for suggesting symbolic relationships between human or superhuman beings and natural beings: in "Laodamia," we saw how Wordsworth described the trees growing from Protesilaus's tomb at the conclusion of the poem in language which repeated images used in the opening section of the poem to describe Laodamia; in the "Vernal Ode" Wordsworth concludes the poem with a description of the Bee which reminds us of the attributes of the Angel described in the opening sections of the poem. The Bee is "brought within the power / Of vision" just as the Angel was; she is described as alighting upon a flower just as the Angel was in his descent to earth's summit; our attention is directed to the Bee's wings just as it had been earlier with regard to the "purple wings" of the Angel; the Bee's "ancestry / Mysteriously remote and high" of course echoes the

idea of the sources of angelic being which are also "mysteriously remote and high." The color of "roseate bloom" which tints the wings of the Bee suggests one of the phases of color involved in the setting sun with which the Angel had been described, and it also reminds us of the "roseate lips" and "Elysian beauty" which characterized the appearance of Protesilaus's Shade. The bee is compared to a "soaring eagle" and a "floating swan," both of which animals are qualified by present participles which remind us of the Angel's floating from the upper regions down to the "summit sharp and bare." And, finally, the last mentioned image of a "summit sharp and bare" associated with the descending Angel is echoed in the description of "the eagle's curved beak" and the "sting" of the "humming Bee."

Wordsworth's description of the Bee in language and imagery which tends to identify the Bee with the Angel seems to me to reenforce the notion that he was attempting to communicate his apocalyptic vision of eternity and infinity as an experience of the naturalistic imagination. Also, the repetition of images, languages, symbols, and situations in "Vernal Ode" which earlier appeared in "Laodamia" suggests Wordsworth's continuing effort to discover supernatural sanctions for his apocalyptic visions and naturalistic observations.

Earlier in his poetic career, Wordsworth had occasionally mentioned the presence of the murmuring bee in contexts significant for their descriptions of vestiges in nature of the "golden years" and paradise lost. These include the same episode from Descriptive Sketches which I have looked at earlier in connection with the apocalyptic experience amid the forms of nature. In that same episode, Wordsworth describes the idea of natural man in a paradise which lingers amid the shapes and superstitions of the Swiss Alps: there, where is heard "the solitary heifer's deepen'd low"

(1. 438) in the springtime "When hums the mountain bee in May's glad ear"
 (1. 444), the Swiss cowherd is seen to ascend the mountain tops and toil
 for survival, but

Far different life to what tradition hoar
 Transmits of days more bless'd in times of yore.
 Then Summer lengthen'd out his season bland,
 And with rock-honey flow'd the happy land.
 Continual fountains welling cheer'd the waste,
 And plants were wholesome, now of deadly taste.
 Nor Winter yet his frozen stores had pil'd
 Usurping where the fairest herbage smil'd;
 Nor Hunger forc'd the herbs from pastures bare
 For scanty food the treacherous cliffs to dare.
 Then the milk-thistle bad those herds demand
 Three times a day the pail and welcome hand.
 But human vices have provok'd the rod
 Of angry Nature to avenge her God.
 Thus does the father to his sons relate,
 On the lone mountain top, their chang'd estate.
 Still, Nature, ever just, to him imparts
 Joys only given to uncorrupted hearts.

(11. 474-491)

This "far different life" which the father describes in his stories to his children reminds us of the message brought to the poet's "Soul" by the murmuring Bee: the Swiss father's story had the sanction of "tradition hoar" where the murmuring Bee sounds the chimes of "hoary Time"; in the "happy land" described by the Swiss father there flowed "rock-honey" and "continual fountains," and there "plants were wholesome, now of deadly taste"; this "happy land" foreshadows both the regions of Protesilaus and the Angel as well as the "golden years " when the Bee made its honey without need of its sting and before "The seeds of malice" were sown. And just as "Nature, ever just, to him imparts / Joys only given to uncorrupted hearts" in the Swiss Alps of Descriptive Sketches (11. 490-491), so do the "just Gods" impart the joys to Laodamia's faithful heart, and so do heaven and earth impart visions of eternal and infinite truth to the poet of the "Vernal Ode."

Once in The Prelude of 1805-06 (and, with slight but perhaps significant

differences, also in the version of 1850), Wordsworth described his childhood experiences of beauty as though he were discovering, or conversing intuitively, with those eternal forms of Beauty which persist through the changes of earth's natural processes (or, as he put it in the 1850 version, with those pristine forms of beauty which appeared at the time of creation):

Yes, I remember, when the changeful earth,
 And twice five seasons on my mind had stamp'd
 The faces of the moving year, even then,
 A Child, I held unconscious intercourse
 With the eternal Beauty, drinking in
 A pure organic pleasure from the lines
 Of curling mist, or from the level plain
 Of waters colour'd by the steady clouds.

(1805-6; I, 586-593; 1850; I, 559-566)

Then he tells how his visionary imagination moved among nature's forms of beauty and gathered up their treasures of loveliness for his future spiritual nourishment; he compares this beauty-gathering experience to the nectar-gathering motions of a bee among flowers:

The Sands of Westmoreland, the Creeks and Bays
 Of Cumbria's rocky limits, they can tell
 How when the Sea threw off his evening shade
 And to the Shepherd's huts beneath the crags
 Did send sweet notice of the rising moon,
 How I have stood, to fancies such as these,
 Engrafted in the tenderness of thought,
 A stranger, linking with the spectacle
 No conscious memory of a kindred sight,
 And bringing with me no peculiar sense
 Of quietness or peace, yet I have stood,
 Even while mine eye has mov'd o'er three long leagues
 Of shining water, gathering, as it seem'd,
 Through every hair-breath of that field of light,
 New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers.

(1805-6; I, 594-608; 1850, I, 567-580)

Thus Wordsworth, looking back to the paradise of his childhood that he had lost in his maturity but which he sought to recover, saw his own personal experience of discovering beauty in nature in terms of a bee's gathering nectar from flowers; just as that bee's treasure of nectar would become

honey for physical nourishment, so would the young Wordsworth's experience of physical beauty in earth's nature become spiritual nourishment for the mature Wordsworth, cut off by his maturity of human being from the immediate sources of beauty in nature which were so open to his childhood innocence of being. And, finally, the appearance of the Bee in the "Vernal Ode" works as a symbolic extension of that experience described in the 1805-06 Prelude: the vision of beauty in the finite being of his mature years will become the nourishment for his spirit in its infinite being after death.

The murmuring Bee appears in two significant contexts of The Excursion, both describing experiences of evidence in nature for the promise of eternity and for surviving the vicissitudes of finite life into the repose of infinite life. In Book Three of The Excursion, "Despondency," (PW, V, 75-108), the Poet, the Solitary, and the Wanderer leave the cottage of the Solitary and begin their journey into a Valley; as they leave the cottage, they are greeted by the murmuring of the Bee:

A humming Bee--a little tinkling rill--
 A pair of falcons wheeling on the wing,
 In clamorous agitation, round the crest
 Of a tall rock, their airy citadel--
 By each and all of these the pensive ear
 Was greeted, in the silence that ensued,
 When through the cottage-threshold we had passed,
 And deep within that lonesome valley, stood
 Once more beneath the concave of a blue
 And cloudless sky. . . .

(ll. 1-10)

After they come upon a peculiar formation of rocks in "a semicirque of turf-clad ground" in the Valley, the old Wanderer is moved to exclaim at the evidences there of "power intelligent" and "design" in a natural "chronicle" expressing "purposes akin to those of Man, / But wrought with mightier arm than now prevails." (ll. 50-91) He then breaks into an apostrophe to "Contemplation" which raises man through the forms of nature to a vision of

The vernal cuckoo shouted; not for him
 Murmured the labouring bee. . . .
 (11. 399-409)

For this man without the faculty for hearing the prophecy of nature there was a continuous vision of flux and change, suggesting that because he lacked the sense of hearing he was denied that mode of perception which Wordsworth most valued as best capable of intuiting the mystery of life and the ideal of infinity:

When stormy winds
 Were working the broad bosom of the lake
 Into a thousand thousand sparkling waves,
 Rocking the trees, or driving cloud on cloud
 Along the sharp edge of yon lofty crags,
 The agitated scene before his eye
 Was silent as a picture: evermore
 Were all things silent, wheresoe'er he move.
 (11. 409-416)

But, in the absence of the faculty needed to discover permanence amid the flux of natural creation, this deaf man "duteously pursued" his "round / Of rural labours" with "the solace of his own pure thoughts" to sustain him; such faithful laboring is a human repetition of the Bee's laboring in "Vernal Ode" to build its shelter against the ravages of winter's storms, and just as the Bee is rewarded with survival into a springtime rebirth so is the deaf man rewarded with access to the means of perceiving that prophecy of infinity and eternity previously denied him; he discovered in books the "familiar voice" of men like Moses, St. Paul, Newton, Milton, and Wordsworth himself, all men whose capacity for perceiving infinity found expression in the language of infinity, in the symbolic recreation of experience which is poetry and mathematics:

books
 Were ready comrades whom he could not tire;
 Of whose society the blameless Man
 Was never satiate. Their familiar voice,

Even to old age, with unabated charm
 Beguiled his leisure hours; refreshed his thoughts;
 Beyond its natural elevation raised
 His introverted spirit; and bestowed
 Upon his life an outward dignity
 Which all acknowledged. The dark winter night,
 The stormy day, each had its own resources;
 Song of the muses, sage historic tale,
 Science severe, or word of holy Writ
 Announcing immortality and joy
 To the assembled spirits of just men
 Made perfect, and from injury secure.

(ll. 439-454)

And so just as the deaf man of The Excursion, Book VII, can compensate for his inability to discover the whisperings of immortality and eternity amid the "agitated scene" of silent mutability by turning to the written word as a symbolic reconstruction of sight and sound, so can Wordsworth's reader compensate for his own incapacity to experience the evidences of infinity, eternity, and permanence amid the flux of nature and the artificiality of contemporary urban life by turning to Wordsworth's written word of apocalyptic vision in the "Vernal Ode." There he can recall with the poet those "golden years" when "We were not mocked with glimpse and shadow" (l. 133) as we seem now to be; he can recall the time when "Bright Seraphs mixed familiarly with men" (l. 134) and feel that one such Angel did descend for William Wordsworth to compose once again a vision of "a universal heaven" harmonizing the mutable earth and the immutable stars. (l. 135)

Wordsworth's Poems of Apocalypse

In the three years preceding his composition of the "Vernal Ode," and in the three years following, Wordsworth was much concerned with the experience of apocalypse, of prophetic revelation, of uncovering the appearances of things to view the infinite and eternal realities beneath. Although he was not always and primarily interested in exploring the

themes of eternity and infinity, paradise or heaven, in the poems of those years, he very often employed the experience of apocalypse as a means for communicating his themes: such a means provided him with a mode of perception which allowed him to present as public statement what is a personal and subjective evaluation of experience.

In six of the poems which utilize this mode of perception during the three years before "Vernal Ode," Wordsworth describes visitations from the realms of the dead or the supernatural, often disguising the visitations as dreams. In "Laodamia" (1814), he describes the return of Protesilaus from the dead to his beloved wife, Laodamia, whose reception of Protesilaus is made in an attitude of "repose" (l. 12) that suggests her consequent vision may be a dream. In the poem "Composed at Cora Linn, in Sight of Wallace's Tower" (1814), the poet apostrophises the river Clyde as the place along whose banks moves the ghost of the hero Wallace:

Along thy banks, at dead of night,
Sweeps visibly the Wallace Wight;
Or stands, in warlike vest,
Aloft, beneath the moon's pale beam,
A Champion worthy of the stream,
Yon grey tower's living crest! (ll. 19-24)

But this ghost, unlike that of Protesilaus or the vision of the Angel in "Vernal Ode," does not speak; indeed, the ghost of Wallace leaves the poet in a state of questioning, of speculation:

But clouds and envious darkness hide
A Form not doubtfully descried:--
Their transient mission o'er,
O say to what blind region flee
These Shapes of awful phantasy?
To what untrodden shore? (ll. 25-30)

In "Dion" (1816), however, the apparition of "A Shape," a "sullen"

Spectre" appears to the heroic Dion with a warning of Dion's impending death:

He hears an uncouth sound--
 Anon his lifted eyes
 Saw, at a long-drawn gallery's dusky bound,
 A Shape of more than mortal size
 And hideous aspect, stalking round and round.
(ll. 64-68)

We notice that the ghost in "Dion" appears of its own will (or at least distinct from the will of Dion) to "the visionary eye" much in the same manner as the Angel "Appeared, in presence of the spiritual eye" in the "Vernal Ode." Also, as in the "Vernal Ode," the ghost in "Dion" is compared with natural forces:

A woman's garb the Phantom wore,
 And fiercely swept the marble floor,--
 Like Auster whirling to and fro,
 His force on Caspian foam to try:
 Or Boreas when he scours the snow
 That skins the plains of Thessaly,
 Or when aloft on Maenalus he stops
 His flight, 'mid eddying pine-tree tops!
(ll. 69-76)

And, again as in the "Vernal Ode," the transition implied between the natural and the supernatural is achieved through the borderline images of animated natural forms, in this case of classical personifications.

In 1816 Wordsworth composed many poems concerning the war with France, and he very often embodied his views in the form of apocalyptic vision. In the "Ode: Who rises on the banks of Seine," he describes the transformation of Revolutionary France from a fair and joyous maiden into an abhorred creature; the effect of the poem is that of revelation, in which the appearance of good gives way to reveal the evil beneath and in which the horrid enemy of man and nations is seen as a cosmic threat to God himself:

Melt, Principalities, before her melt!
 Her love ye hailed--her wrath have felt!
 But She through many a change of form hath gone,

And stands amidst you now an armed creature,
 Whose panoply is not a thing put on,
 But the live scales of a portentous nature;
 That, having forced its way from birth to birth,
 Stalks round--abhorred by Heaven, a terror to the Earth.
 (11. 13-20)

The poet acknowledges his role as visionary prophet in this ode:

I marked the breathings of her dragon crest:
 My Soul, a sorrowful interpreter,
 In many a midnight vision bowed
 Before the ominous aspect of her spear.
 (11. 21-24)

If the poet called upon a redeemer to slay the dragon of Napoleonic France in the "Ode: Who rises on the banks of Seine," he receives his answer of redemption in the form of a vision in the "Ode:1814"; this time, the vision occurs as a form of dream in which the poet's "Fancy, keeping unreluctant watch, / Was free her choicest favours to dispense" (11. 3-4):

through a portal in the sky
 Brighter than brightest loop-hole, in a storm
 Opening before the sun's triumphant eye--
 Issued, to sudden view, a glorious Form!
 Earthward it glided with a swift descent:
 Saint George himself this Visitant must be.
 (11. 19-24)

And, like the Angel in the "Vernal Ode," this "Visitant" speaks in "A thrilling voice":

'Though from my celestial home,
 Like a Champion, armed I come'
 On my helm the dragon crest,
 And the red cross on my breast;
 I, the Guardian of this Land,
 Speak not now of toilsome duty;
 Well obeyed was that command--
 Whence bright days of festive beauty.'
 (11. 29-36)

The poet then envisions the rituals of thanksgiving which achieve those "bright days of festive beauty." This transformation of the earth from its

corrupt state of death and mutability into a place where the days are bright with "festive beauty" is the theme of another poem Wordsworth composed in 1816, and again the poem is presented as apocalypse, as "pure vision" (1.36), in which a mysterious Spirit is heard to call on the Earth to prepare for her transformation: this is the "Invocation To The Earth."

And, finally, again in 1816 Wordsworth wrote of the visionary experience of apocalypse in a sonnet "Occasioned by The Battle of Waterloo": this time, he describes the character and responsibilities of the visionary poet:

The Bard--whose soul is meek as dawning day,
 Yet trained to judgments righteously severe,
 Fervid, yet conversant with holy fear,
 As recognizing one Almighty sway:
 He--whose experienced eye can pierce the array
 Of past events; to whom, in vision clear,
 The aspiring heads of future things appear,
 Like mountain-tops whose mists have rolled away--
 Assoiled from all encumbrance of our time,
 He only, if such breathe, in strains devout
 Shall comprehend this victory sublime;
 Shall worthily rehearse the hideous rout,
 The triumph hail, which from their peaceful clime
 Angels might welcome with a choral shout!

The character of this Bard reminds us of the character of Protesilaus and his qualities echo those which Protesilaus admonished Laodamia to cultivate; the poet who desires to "converse with holy fear," as he does with the Angel in the "Vernal Ode" and with Protesilaus in "Laodamia," who desires to "pierce the array / Of past events," as he does through the Bee in the "Vernal Ode" and through the Shade of Protesilaus in "Laodamia," must discipline his fervid spirit with severe judgment. This is what Wordsworth is doing in his poetry in these years: he retains the ideals of his imaginative spirit, but he realizes the limitations which define the character of earthly nature; he disciplines his imaginative insights by restricting them to the form of sanctified vision and he uses this form to overcome

the acknowledged limitations of natural being.

In the time during and following the composition of the "Vernal Ode," Wordsworth continued to describe his imaginative insights as apocalyptic visions, or revelations. The disciplining of the spirit in order to achieve the realms of infinity is the theme of "The Longest Day" (1817), in which the poet instructs his daughter, Dora, to look beyond the appearances of beauty in nature into Eternity:

Now, even now, ere wrapped in slumber,
Fix thine eyes upon the sea
That absorbs time, space, and number;
Look thou to Eternity!

(ll. 45-48)

We notice that he deliberately avoids the notion of dream as a protection for his visionary experience, admonishing Dora to look to Eternity "ere" she is "wrapped in slumber," and just as he describes his apocalyptic experience in "Vernal Ode" as a naturalistic insight, so does Wordsworth use a natural image as the symbol for his conception of Eternity in "The Longest Day," the sea.

He again uses a natural image as symbol for the apocalyptic vision in the "Lament of Mary Queen of Scots" (1817). In this poem the moon breaking through the clouds affects the imprisoned Queen with a "soul-awakening gleam," causing her to think she is experiencing a supernatural visitation:

Smile of the Moon!--for so I name
That silent greeting from above;
A gentle flash of light that came
From her whom drooping captives love;
Or art thou of still higher birth?
Thou that didst part the clouds of earth
My torpor to reprove!

(ll. 1-7)

The condition of Queen Mary in receiving the "Bright boon of pitying Heaven" (l.8) is very nearly identical to that of Laodamia receiving, as Heaven's

boon, the shade of Protesilaus; Mary, like Laodamia, feels the "hopelessness and fear" even as she experiences the visitation; and, also like Laodamia, Mary has been deeply attached to the beauties and pleasures of this world, but she, unlike Laodamia, learns with apparent profit to her eternal soul that such attachments must be given up:

Born all too high, by wedlock raised
 Still higher--to be cast thus low!
 Would that mine eyes had never gazed
 On aught of more ambitious show
 Than the sweet flowerets of the fields!

(11. 29-33)

and so she is able to bid "Farewell" to any "desire of human aid / Which abject mortals vainly court," (11. 57-58) and look to heaven as the support for her burden (1. 61-63). And this is what the poet tries to do in the "Vernal Ode"; however, in that poem, Wordsworth translates the religious experience of apocalypse into the naturalistic experience of apocalypse. That the naturalistic apocalypse is more congenial to Wordsworth should be inferred from the facts that he has resorted to protective disguises for his poems which embody religious apocalypse: in "Laodamia" he uses the mythology and story of classical literature; in "Lament of Mary Queen of Scots" he has the protection of an historical character; and, even in "Vernal Ode" he expresses doubt about the extent of veracity in his vision of the Angel before he turns to his accustomed observation of earth's natural creatures. And so, although Wordsworth often invokes the ideals of orthodox Christianity in his later poetry, he just as often seems to do so as a part of his conscious effort to discipline his poetic imagination; and at the same time that he does turn to orthodox Christian ritual and ideal, Wordsworth often allows himself the freedom of personal doubt which we discover in "Vernal Ode" and in the protective strategies of "Laodamia" and the "Lament of Mary

Queen of Scots."

In "The Pass of Kirkstone" (1817), Wordsworth describes his vision of what the earth could be like if men would discipline their lives according to a principle of "duty"; in such a world of ordered passions, men would reap "the rich bounties of constraint" (l. 58). It is that world of paradise on earth, of a natural heaven, which is revealed to the poet in "The Pass of Kirkstone":

My Soul was grateful for delight
 That wore a threatening brow;
 A veil is lifted--can she alight
 The scene that opens now?
 Though habitation none appear,
 The greenness tells, man must be there;
 The shelter--that the perspective
 Is of the clime in which we live;
 Where Toil pursues his daily round;
 Where Pity sheds sweet tears--and Love,
 In Woodbine bower or birchen grove,
 Inflicts his tender wound.
 --Who comes not hither ne'er shall know
 How beautiful the world below.

(ll. 61-74)

This is a natural world redeemed by "Toil," "Pity," and "Love" as qualities of "Duty" and disciplined imagination;⁹ in such a world as this is to be found beauty, "Hope," "Joy," and "Faith," which, like the Angel in the "Vernal Ode," exclaims "from yonder opening cloud, / To hill and vale" that

'Whate'er the weak may dread, the wicked dare,
 Thy lot, O Man, is good, thy portion fair!'

(ll. 83-86)

This poem, like so many of this period in his career, expresses once again Wordsworth's continuing effort to chant the "spousal verse" of the "great consummation" between the "discerning intellect of Man" and "this goodly universe"; such a consummation he envisioned as a wedding of the disciplined Imagination and the living Nature "in love and holy passion," with the

offspring being "Paradise, and groves / Elysian, Fortunate Fields--like those of old / Sought in the Atlantic Main." (From The Recluse, "Prospectus," ll. 47-58) The product of this great marriage is the vision of apocalypse and the song of nature's prophet.

In the "Ode to Lycoris" (1817), the poet announces himself as "a bard of ebbing time" (l. 10), whose submission to the disciplining of time has nearly led him to prefer the Twilight to the Dawn, and Autumn to the Spring (ll. 22-23), but the knelling of time cannot completely annihilate the vision of nature's "resplendent miracle" (ll. 35-36), for

something whispers to my heart
That, as we downward tend,
Lycoris! life requires an art
To which our souls must bend;
A skill--to balance and supply;
And, ere the flowing fount be dry,
As soon it must, a sense to sip,
Or drink, with no fastidious lip.
Then welcome, above all, the Guest
Whose smiles, diffused o'er land and sea,
Seem to recall the Deity
Of youth into the breast:
May pensive Autumn ne'er present
A claim to her disparagement!
While blossoms and the budding spray
Inspire us in our own decay;
Still, as we nearer draw to life's dark goal,
Be hopeful Spring the favourite of the Soul!
(ll. 37-54)

The "Ode to Lycoris" may serve as Wordsworth's affirmation of the naturalistic apocalypse which he experiences in the springtime vision of the "Vernal Ode." In spite of, or indeed because of, the chastening effects which time has on the poet's imagination, his poetry strives for that "finer harmony" of "heroic arts in graver mood" which Protesilaus describes in "Laodamia"; and yet, such art does not deny the values of nature's springtime miracles. As he tends downward towards death, the poet hears a whispering in his heart

which reminds us of the soft murmuring of the Bee in the "Vernal Ode"; his heart whispers to him that living is itself subject to those same principles of discipline which art requires of imagination, and such living attempts, as does art, to strike a balance between vitality of spirit and restraint of judgment. The wintertime of aging supplies the motive of restraint through judgment; but it is the springtime which supplies the vitality of spirit, and since the springtime of life is slipping into the dark past, the poet must exercise his power of imagination to recover those values of hope and promise which spring offers to the heart. And so the "bard of ebbing time" continues to find inspiration in "blossoms and the budding spray" brought by "hopeful Spring, the favourite of the Soul."

In 1818 Wordsworth wrote "The Pilgrim's Dream; or, The Star and the Glow-Worm," a poem which is curiously like the "Vernal Ode" of 1817 in theme, structure, and mode of apocalyptic perception. The theme of "The Pilgrim's Dream" is, like that of the "Vernal Ode," concerned with the promise of immortality discovered in the forms of nature through the imagination (here described as dream). As in the "Vernal Ode," there are heavenly figures descending to earth, there is a sleeping apprehension of the meaning in a lowly creature of nature, and there is a voice of an Angel: a bright Star appears in all its pride to taunt the relatively dim luster of a Glow-Worm, but just as the poet in the "Vernal Ode" may question the complete reality of his apocalyptic Angel on the basis that appearances are deceiving, so does the Glow-Worm declare that the bright Star's appearance depends on conditions of nature which the Glow-worm's natural light on earth is not subject to when perceived by an earth-bound human being:

'Exalted Star! the Worm replied,
'Abate this unbecoming pride,
Or with a less uneasy lustre shine;

Thou shrink'st as momentarily thy rays
 Are mastered by the breathing haze;
 While neither mist, nor thickest cloud
 That shapes in heaven its murky shroud
 Hath power to injure mine.'

(ll. 33-40)

And just as the insights gained from subjecting the Bee to the "spiritual eye" seem to replace, or at least verify, the insights similarly gained from the Angel in the "Vernal Ode," so does the light of the Glow-worm replace the light of the Star in the vision of apocalypse which the pilgrim has in "The Pilgrim's Dream":

Across the welkin seemed to spread
 A boding sound--for aught but sleep unfit!
 Hills quaked, the rivers backward ran;
 That Star, so proud of late, looked wan!
 And reeled with visionary stir
 In the blue depth, like Lucifer
 Cast headlong to the pit!

Fire raged: and, when the spangled floor
 Of ancient ether was no more,
 New heavens succeeded, by the dream brought forth;
 And all the happy Souls that rode
 Transfigured through that fresh abode
 Had heretofore, in humble trust,
 Shone meekly 'mid their native dust,
 The Glow-worms of the earth!

(ll. 50-64)

Such a vision represents Wordsworth's continuing efforts to balance his vision of apocalypse with his devotion to nature, and in fact this particular poem reveals his desire to translate into eternity and infinity the very nature which is now in time and space. The man Wordsworth may have been expected to take an attitude toward the concept of The Second Coming and the Great Apocalypse described in the Revelation of St. John, for after all this was an era of reawakening for the Christian Church in England, and Wordsworth's very dear friend, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, was a very important force in shaping the directions which that reawakening took.¹⁰ And, in this otherwise insignificant little poem of "The Pilgrim's Dream," Wordsworth

affirms an attitude which he has held throughout most of his life: namely, that imagination may discover values which lie beyond nature but it may not annihilate that nature in its efforts to reach those values. Rather, the imagination "marries" those ideal values to this goodly earth: this marriage is sometimes presented as effected by the descent of heavenly powers to earth, where paradise is recovered; and it is sometimes presented as effected by the ascent of earthly powers to heaven, where a "finer harmony" of being is discovered in the "graver mood" of eternity and infinity. But whether heaven descends or earth ascends, the condition of the new creation describes a time when

Bright seraphs mixed familiarly with men;
 And earth and stars composed a universal heaven!
 ("Vernal Ode," ll. 134-135)

The revelation of first and last things is made to the poet again in the evening, as it was in the "Vernal Ode," and the transiency of that vision is the theme of Wordsworth's poem "Composed Upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty" in 1818. This vision of beauty in the sunset seems to "sanctify one closing day, / That frail Mortality may see-- / What is?--ah, no but what can be!" And, again as in so many of these poems, that vision reveals an earthly paradise:

Time was when field and watery cove
 With modulated echoes rang,
 While choirs of fervent Angels sang
 Their vespers in the grove;
 Or, crowning, star-like, each some sovereign height,
 Warbled, for heaven above and earth below,
 Strains suitable to both.
 (ll. 9-15)

What the poet has been describing is a scene of nature illuminated and beautified by the rays of an extraordinarily splendid sunset, and so the sanctification at first seems to be a natural sanctification. But in the midst of

this "exquisitely clear" vision of gold and "gem-like hues," the poet is stricken at the unearthly wonder of it:

Thine is the tranquil hour, purpureal Eve!
 But long as god-like wish, or hope divine,
 Informs my spirit, ne'er can I believe,
 That this magnificence is wholly thine!
 --From worlds not quickened by the sun
 A portion of the gift is won;
 An intermingling of Heaven's pomp is spread
 On ground which British shepherds tread!

(11. 33-40)

And so, for a moment, it seems to the poet that Heaven has descended in the form of a splendid sunset, as it did in the "Vernal Ode," yet the poet will allow that only a "portion of the gift is won" from "worlds not quickened by the sun": the rest of it is "won" from natural forms of beauty by the human imagination. Such visions "were wont to stream before" the poet's eye in the springtime of his "blissful infancy," but now after the chastening of time he must win them. "This glimpse of glory" is a reward of the poet's faithful imagination which can still awaken him to the beauties of this world by bringing to it the light taken from those "golden years" described in the apocalyptic vision of the "Vernal Ode."

The experience of naturalistic apocalypse is the subject of a sonnet "Composed During a Storm" in 1819. Feeling the despondency which perhaps he felt in "Resolution and Independence," the poet has attempted to find relief in prayer (l. 2), but when that fails, he goes out into a mid-day storm; the tumultuous soul plunges into tumultuous weather and seems to identify with the external form so that when the storm ceases, the effect of the natural tranquillity sinks sympathetically into the tumultuous spirit of the poet and calms it with a vision of peace:

He raised his eye
 Soul-smitten; for, that instant did appear

Large space (mid dreadful clouds) of purest sky,
 An azure disc--shield of Tranquillity;
 Invisible, unlooked-for, minister
 Of Providential goodness ever nigh!

(11. 9-14)

Aside from such reminders as the "concave of an April sky" and the descending Angel in the "Vernal Ode," this sonnet contains an echo of the theme which we have found in the "Vernal Ode." That theme is the rescue which nature makes of the human soul in its quest for security when its recourse to heavenly or supernatural powers has not fully succeeded: in the "Vernal Ode" the poet turns with greater conviction to the Bee after the vision of the Angel, and in the sonnet "Composed During a Storm" he finds peace in the vision of tranquil nature after his failure to find it in prayer.¹¹

CHAPTER IV

THE RIVER DUDDON: POEM OF PILGRIMAGE

The series of thirty four sonnets which compose The River Duddon ("which together may be considered as a Poem")¹ traces the course of the River Duddon from its rise in the mountains to its sinking into the sea; the poet denies the inspiration of alien streams in favor of a "native Stream" (1,9) which can serve as an analogue, or symbol, of his own life, reflecting in its flowing waters the life of the poet who walks along its banks. In the "Conclusion," Wordsworth is able to make this comparison of his own life's desires with the River Duddon's flowing into the "Deep" of the sea:

And may thy Poet, cloud-born Stream! be free-
The sweets of earth contentedly resigned,
And each tumultuous working left behind
At seemly distance--to advance like Thee;
Prepared, in peace of heart, in calm of mind
And soul, to mingle with Eternity!

(XXXVIII, 9-14)

In these sonnets memorializing his love for the River Duddon, Wordsworth is also memorializing his sacrifice of "the sweets of earth" for the "peace of heart" and "calm of mind / And soul" which he hopes to find in "Eternity." He engages in an act of spiritual purgation as he imaginatively traces the course of the river in one symbolic day: from the morning time of birth,

I seek the birthplace of a native Stream--
All hail, ye mountains! hail, thou morning light! (I, 9-10)

to the placid noontime of maturity,

And seldom hath ear listened to a tune
More lulling than the busy hum of Noon (XIX, 10-11),

Mid-noon is past;--upon the sultry mead
No zephyr breathes, no cloud its shadow throws, (XXIV, 1-2)

and, finally, to the evening of old age and impending death:

The Kirk of Ulpha to the pilgrim's eye
 Is welcome as a star, that doth present
 Its shining forehead through the peaceful rent
 Of a black cloud diffused o'er half the sky . . .
 . . . there to pace, and mark the summits hoar
 Of distant moon-lit mountains faintly shine,
 Soothed by the unseen River's gentle roar.

(XXXI, 1-4, 12-14)

A day's journey along a river's banks is a life's pilgrimage through nature into eternity and infinity; as in "Laodamia," the sacrifice of "the sweets of earth" will gain the repose of eternity, and as in the "Vernal Ode," the mode of vision is naturalistic apocalypse. Each sonnet marks, as "a speaking monument" (III, 3), one more step along the journey, and each sonnet functions as a revelation of the changing relationship between the poet and nature as he develops from a child of nature into a pilgrim of eternity.

Sonnets I-XI: The Morn of Youth

The first eleven sonnets of The River Duddon describe the course of the river from its "birthplace" in "the clouds," through primeval forests of "darkest green," over "dizzy steeps," under the protecting branches of "green alders," "ashes," "birch-trees," and "sheltering pines," into the "old remains of hawthorn bowers" where there is a natural paradise of birds and bees and flowers, to the "stepping-stones" which mark the point of transition from childhood to youthful maturity. These sonnets delineate a general tendency to ponder the past, the ancient past, from the beginnings of time to the present vestiges of past time: from

Thousands of years before the silent air
 Was pierced by whizzing shaft of hunter keen! (II, 13-14)

to present questioning:

But, where, oh! where
Is traceable a vestige of the notes
That ruled those dances wild in character?-- (XI, 9-11)

And so, while journeying through a space marked out by the River Duddon, Wordsworth is journeying through a time marked out by his imagination; and while Wordsworth is journeying along the rivers of space and time, we can observe how his attitude toward nature is developing. This river of process and change, with its reflecting surface and tranquil depths, is like a man's life, reflecting the glitter and shadow of his natural environment, and at the same time containing a past with depths which extend beyond individual memory.²

Sonnet I is a prologue of rejection and invocation, introducing the primary theme of the River Duddon and the poet's love for it; but Wordsworth's rejection of other themes and other loves introduces a secondary theme of rejection, or purgation and renunciation, which assumes more prominence as the poet moves towards the conclusion of the poem, where there is the final and major renunciation of "the sweets of earth." In Sonnet I, Wordsworth rejects, without bitterness, as themes for his poem those very subjects which he has used occasionally throughout his career:

Not envying Latian shades--if yet they throw
A grateful coolness round that crystal Spring,
Blandusia, prattling as when long ago
The Sabine Bard was moved her praise to sing;
Careless of flowers that in perennial blow
Round the moist marge of Persian fountains cling;
Heedless of Alpine torrents thundering
Through ice-built arches radiant as heaven's bow. (I, 1-8)

He is thus rejecting the themes of classical literature, of oriental paradises, and of Alpine adventures; of his own "Laodamia," "Dion," and Virgil's Aeneid, which Wordsworth had been translating; of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and his own later poem, "The Armenian Lady's Love"; of his Descriptive Sketches

"taken during a Pedestrian Tour among the Alps." Wordsworth cannot describe "flowers that in perennial blow" stand along the rivers of the mysterious East because his theme is concerned with the flowers which blossom and then die, with the mutable nature which has inspired his poetry and has been reflected in his life. Also, he cannot heed the thundering rivers of the Alps which flow "through ice-built arches radiant as heaven's bow" because his theme is concerned with the warmth and growth which a more temperate nature has allowed in his life.

And so he will seek "the birthplace of a native Stream," the River Duddon. The area of the Duddon's birthplace is also the general area of Wordsworth's own birthplace, the northern counties of Westmorland, Cumberland, and Lancashire. After his invocation to the mountains and to the morning lights, to the place and the time of the river's birth, Wordsworth again defines his theme in terms of a rejection:

All hail, ye mountains! hail, thou morning light!
 Better to breathe at large on this clear height
 Than toil in needless sleep from dream to dream. (ll. 10-12)

In the vigor of his youth, the poet much prefers "to breathe at large" atop clear mountain heights than to waste away his life "in needless sleep": he will not give his life to the "toil" of dreams. This man of the mountain heights lets his imaginative life loose to wander among the realities and solidities of nature's life while he still has the breath of life within himself, for there will be a time when he must submit to needed sleep, and then this life of nature will have seemed like a "dream" itself or like a fleeting awakening between dreams.

It is his hope that his poetry which commemorates the River Duddon will reflect in its form and content the qualities of the river itself:

Pure flow the verse, pure, vigorous, free, and bright,
 For Duddon, long-lived Duddon, is my theme!
 (ll. 13-14)

This same "long-lived Duddon," so "pure, vigorous, free and bright" will flow "in silence with unfettered sweep!" (XXXII, 8) into "that receptacle vast / Where all his unambitious functions fail" (XXXIII, 7-8), and so will this be reflected in the form and content of Wordsworth's poem.

Having announced what his theme is to be and what his hopes are for embodying it in his verse, the poet turns to look directly at the object as it is in itself and as it once was in itself. Sonnet II apostrophizes the River Duddon as a "Child of the clouds!" and this sonnet is a birthday hymn in celebration of the river's nativity. As a "child of the clouds" the River Duddon comes into being as does the child of the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," "trailing clouds of glory." Also, the metaphor of "child of the clouds" allows the poet to transfer to an element of nature the connotative value of human life, and, typically, Wordsworth's observation of the river's birth is accurate in that the waters of the earth appear to find their "beginnings" in the clouds which release their burdens in rainfall.

This pure birth of water occurs atop a mountain and "remote from every taint/ Of sordid industry"; this seems to be somewhat ambiguous as a description of the effects which growth and maturation will have on the river (and on human life), for the implication is that souls (of rivers or of men) are not born with the "taint" of original sin which underlies the tenets of the faith which the "senile" and "orthodox" Wordsworth is supposed to be clinging to in his "old age." But that is not the ambiguity; the question arises from the phrase, "sordid industry," which apparently

results in the "taint" that soon attaches itself to growing phenomena of nature: is this "industry" supposed to refer to the normal endeavour to survive? If so, the "taint" occurs as a quality derived from existence in nature (thus, one falls from the clouds in a pure and clean condition, like rainwater, but contact with the earth and movement through it results in the accumulation of dust and filth so that one's purity is clouded and obscured by mortality); or is this "industry" only a neutral function of things in nature and is only "sordid" in some particular aspects? and if so the poem may be referring to the benefits which a mountain birth has in that it is isolated from the ill effects (or "sordid" effects) of urban and industrialized life, where the endeavours to survive are unnaturally clouded and obscured by the dirt and filth of human refuse or human misuse of natural products.

This subject of industrialism and its ill effects upon the English countryside and upon English morality was of continuing interest to Wordsworth, as we may see by looking at his statements on it in 1800, 1809-12, and 1817, all being dates nearly contemporaneous with his work on The River Duddon. George McLean Harper comments that "among the sources of distress and moral degradation," Wordsworth denounces "the evils of industrialism and their false palliatives." He then quotes from a letter which Wordsworth wrote in 1800:

Recently, by the spreading of manufactures through every part of the country, by the heavy taxes upon postage, by workhouses, houses of industry, and the invention of soup-shops, etc., super-added to the increasing disproportion between the price of labour and that of the necessaries of life, the bonds of domestic feeling among the poor, as far as the influence of these things has extended, have been weakened, and in innumerable instances entirely destroyed. . . . The domestic affections will always be strong amongst men who live in a country not crowded with population, if these men are placed above poverty.³

Then, sometime during the years between 1809-1812, Wordsworth composed these lines spoken by the Wanderer in Book VIII of The Excursion:

"--An inventive Age
 Has wrought, if not with speed of magic, yet
 To most strange issues. I have lived to mark
 A new and unforeseen creation rise
 From out the labours of a peaceful Land
 Wielding her potent enginery to frame
 And to produce, with appetite as keen
 As that of war, which rests not night or day,
 Industrious to destry! With fruitless pains
 Might one like me now visit many a tract
 Which, in his youth, he trod, and trod again,
 A lone pedestrian with a scanty freight,
 Wished-for, or welcome, wheresoe'er he came--

The foot-path faintly marked, the horse-track wild,
 And formidable length of plashy lane,
 (Prized avenues ere others had been shaped
 Or easier links connecting place with place)
 Have vanished--swallowed up by stately roads
 Easy and bold, that penetrate the gloom
 Of Britain's farthest glens. . . .

Then, in full many a region, once like this
 The assured domain of calm simplicity
 And pensive quiet, an unnatural light
 Prepared for never-resting Labour's eyes
 Breaks from a many-windowed fabric huge;
 And at the appointed hour a bell is heard,
 Of harsher import that the curfew-knoll
 That spake the Norman Conqueror's stern behest--
 A local summons to unceasing toil!
 Disgorged are now the ministers of day;
 And, as they issue from the illumined pile,
 A fresh band meets them, at the crowded door--
 And in the courts--and where the rumbling stream,
 That turns the multitude of dizzy wheels,
 Glares, like a troubled spirit, in its bed
 Among the rocks below. Men, maidens, youths,
 Mother and little children, boys and girls,
 Enter, and each the wonted task resumes
 Within this temple, where is offered up
 To Gain, the master-idol of the realm,
 Perpetual sacrifice. . . .

--Call Archimedes from his buried tomb
 Upon the grave of vanished Syracuse,
 And feelingly the Sage shall make report
 How insecure, how baseless in itself,

Is the Philosophy whose sway depends
 On mere material instruments;--how weak
 Those arts, and high inventions, if unpropped
 By virtue.--He, sighing, with pensive grief,
 Amid his calm abstractions, would admit
 That not the slender privilege is theirs
 To save themselves from blank forgetfulness!"

(PW, V, 268-272; Book VIII, 87-99, 105-111,
 165-185, 220-230.)

And Edith Batho quotes from a letter Wordsworth wrote to Daniel Stuart on
 April 7, 1817:

. . . I see clearly that the principal ties which kept the different classes of society in a vital and harmonious dependence upon each other have, within these thirty years, either been greatly impaired or wholly dissolved. Everything has been put up to market, and sold for the highest price it would buy. Farmers used formerly to be attached to their landlords, and labourers to the farmers who employed them. All that kind of feeling is vanished. In like manner, the connexion between the trading and landed interests of country towns undergoes no modification whatsoever from personal feeling, whereas within my memory it was almost wholly governed by it. . . . All this moral cement is dissolved; habits and prejudices are broken and rooted up, nothing being substituted in their place but a quickened self-interest, with more extensive views and wider dependencies, but more lax in proportion as they are wider. The ministry will do well if they keep things quiet for the present, but if our present constitution in church and State is to last, it must rest as heretofore upon a moral basis. And they who govern the country must be something superior to mere financiers and political economists.⁴

But whatever the "taint" which accrues to "sordid industry," this "child of the clouds" in The River Duddon is free from it--at least for awhile. One of the "honours" which the new-born river derives from its nativity high in "the lofty waste" (and the word "waste" might be tempting as suggesting not only an empty, desolate, and uncultivated area, as Wordsworth probably intended, but also the potential and ultimate quality of all earthly nature: namely, a process of "waste," of ruin, devastation, and worthlessness, as Wordsworth perhaps did not consciously intend) is the care of the "handmaid Frost"; Wordsworth seems to be describing the care

which Nature bestows upon newly born lives (whether human or not, although I believe the final evaluation which he is making is concerned with the human as it is reflected by or revealed through non-human phenomena of nature), and he chooses an appropriate image for personification in "Frost," since frost is a form which the water takes when it derives from the "earthly" process of earth-bound forms rather than from the "heavenly" process of condensation in free-floating clouds. Thus, an agency of earth is made to care for a "child of the clouds." "Frost" is concerned with decorating the "cradle" of the new-born river in "spangled tissue quaint," suggesting earth's homage to the heavenly qualities of the new being by reflecting in earthly nature the forms of stars which mark the regions of heavenly nature.

But very quickly, in the conclusion of the sonnet's octave and at the point critical for turning into the sestet, the poem points out that the birthday hymn actually sung at the nativity of the river was not done so by human voice. For in historical, and not psychological or mythological or symbolic, time, when there was an actual birth, the poet who sung the birthday hymn was "the whistling Blast." Wordsworth may stand viewing what appears to be the birth of the River Duddon from one of the numerous little rills which are flowing from the rocks of the mountains in the Lake Country, but what he is doing is viewing a "symbolic" birth, or rebirth, or nativity process which can be caught in his imagination and made into the product of art's monument. He knows this, of course, and when he addresses the "child of the clouds" in Sonnet II, he is capturing in his art what must have been the hymn of the wind at some remote time in the prehistoric past. And so now, at the conclusion of the octave, there is a kind of shock in the revelation of the events of the deep past when

--to chant thy birth, thou hast
 No meaner Poet than the whistling Blast,
 And Desolation is thy Patron-saint!
 She guards thee, ruthless Power! . . . (II, 6-9)

but that was an event of the past which has been repeated throughout the ages up to the very moment of the human poet's observation: "Desolation is thy Patron Saint!" And we are a little shocked to realize the sudden transformation which has occurred in the nature of the river, from being a "child of the clouds" free from the "taint / Of sordid industry," into being a "ruthless Power" celebrated in natural verse by the natural poet of wind, "the whistling Blast," and protected by a "Patron-saint" of natural process which is at least neutral in its attitude towards living things but apparently just as hostile, for this is "Desolation" whom Nature has appointed to watch over this new-born River Duddon:

She guards thee, ruthless Power! who would not spare
 Those mighty forests, once the bison's screen,
 Where stalked the huge deer to his shaggy lair
 Through paths and alleys roofed with darkest green;
 Thousands of years before the silent air
 Was pierced by whizzing shaft of hunter keen! (II, 9-14)

This sestet of Sonnet II is an apocalypse, a revelation of the past, similar to the visionary experience described in the last two stanzas of the "Vernal Ode," for again the poet is able to see into the deep and usually dark past through an imaginative apprehension of a natural object-- a Bee in the "Vernal Ode" and a river in this sonnet. Certainly the efforts of this little river to survive its birth on earth by devastating all the obstacles to its growth have resulted in the "taint / Of sordid industry," and, as if that were not enough, the efforts of another natural phenomenon to survive seem very similar to the ruthlessness of this river,

for our introduction to man in the history of this river is made under conditions of devastation and desolation:

Thousands of years before the silent air
Was pierced by whizzing shaft of hunter keen! (II, 13-14)

Apparently the "whistling Blast" ceased once the river grew strong enough to make its own "music" of desolation, and, indeed, apparently the crush and roar of devastation has ceased so that there can be "thousands of years" of silence; then the process of devastation begins all over again when man, as a "hunter keen," breaks the silence with his weapons of death. Thus, Wordsworth's imagination has again allowed us to perceive the near identity of the River Duddon and human life; at least, the River's history reflects human history, or human understanding of natural history takes the form of human experience. In either case, the initial processes of nature (which seem to have continued from a deep and remote past into the very present) contain ambiguous qualities of purity, loftiness, cool but sparkling beauty, and tremendous, overwhelming powers of blasting, desolating destruction.

In Sonnet III we are still with the new-born river, but this time the poet has explicitly assumed the offices of the bard and has located the birth in the present time. He now allows his human voice to take over where the "whistling Blast" of the wind has ceased, and the result is that the character of the River Duddon is being slightly and gently transformed by the softening influence of the human voice: we shall see and hear this transformation as it is reflected or embodied in the poems which follow. But having taken the task of celebrating the river's nativity, the poet wonders how he will do it; he wonders how he will represent the features of a river whose birthplace he cannot easily discover, but in his questions he

is revealing to us the paradoxical nature of his art form:

How shall I paint thee?--Be this naked stone
 My seat, while I give way to such intent;
 Pleased could my verse, a speaking monument,
 Make to the eyes of men thy features known. (III, 1-4)

First of all, the artist desires to create a form which appeals primarily to the senses of sight and hearing, a form caught in the phrase, "a speaking monument." But we notice some further characteristics of his concept of poetic creation: in this sonnet, the poet indicates that he will stop his motion and sit upon a "naked stone," where he will "give way to such intent" as he expresses in his desire to paint the river; this is another example of what Geoffrey Hartman has called Wordsworth's typical use of "the halted traveler,"⁵ but it is interesting to us primarily because it allows us to see that even in his "senility," Wordsworth continues to assert his faith in meditation, in the recollections made in tranquillity, in "wise passiveness" and moments of pleasant idleness; and this is interesting not only because it indicates a continuation of those qualities which most readers have found so attractive in the younger Wordsworth, but also because it is indicated very early in this sonnet sequence, suggesting perhaps that Wordsworth is recapitulating in the history of the river's growth his own growth as a poet.

When the poet remarks that he will sit and "give way" to his intention to "paint" the river's features, he is revealing his sense of a spontaneity and even inevitability in his powers as an artist. It is as though the poet were the agency of an independent urge to creation, of a power which may manifest itself from within the human form but which transcends it, and so associates the poet with the river which was also the

agency or manifestation of such a power (an indication of which occurs in the phrase "thy lot is cast" in Sonnet II, 2, where the river is shown to be the product of either chance or a transcendent power which can "cast" objects). Yet, the poet speaks in such a tone that we detect a feeling of slight control over this power of expression, for he chooses to "give way to such intent," as though the man keeps the power under some restraints (as Protesilaus urges Laodamia to do in "Laodamia," perhaps reflecting Wordsworth's increasing emphasis upon restraints in his everyday life) and the poet relaxes the restraints and releases the power in the form of expression. But what he desires to express in giving way to his intent is the form of the river, and that requires that he shape his expression according to his observation of the river's features; hence, the liberated powers of creativity can achieve expression only by assuming the forms in nature as observed by the poet. If he can so shape his powers according to his observations, the poet can "Make to the eyes of man [the river's] features known."

A concern with time, and specifically with the past, marked the theme of Sonnet II, and a concern with space marks the theme of Sonnet III. In Sonnet II, Wordsworth was reaching back to the time when the river was born; in Sonnet III, he is reaching out to discover the place where the river might have found, and is finding, its birth. The similarity among the variety of streams which might actually be the young Duddon occasions the following simile, in which the inanimate river is compared with animate lambs:

But as of all those tripping lambs not one
 Outruns his fellows, so hath Nature lent
 To thy beginning nought that doth present
 Peculiar ground for hope to build upon. (III, 5-8)

The octet of Sonnet III thus ends on a note of little hope, since Nature has not left any evidence for discovering the birthplace of the river. This has again an ambiguity of meaning which seems to me typical of Wordsworth's developing attitude towards Nature, for she is seen at once as being of little positive aid to human desires and also as being very generous in her plenitude of forms: she does not mark the spot for the poet's observation, and so she does not easily satisfy his sense of sight with a magnificent scene or an overwhelming sound as she might with, for example, a towering white cascade of water over a treacherous precipice set in a lush valley; but she does provide his senses with several young streams which trip along like innocent lambs through the mountain vales, leaving to the poet's imagination the task of providing the meaning which her forms do not easily admit of themselves.

We notice that those efforts by the "handmaid Frost" to beautify the newly born river's cradle "with spangled tissue quaint" in Sonnet II have not survived into Sonnet III:

To dignify the spot that gives thee birth
 No sign of hoar Antiquity's esteem
 Appears, . . . (III, 9-11).

Nature's processes are indeed transitory, and the beautiful lacework of frost which decorated the cradle of the little Duddon has not survived to show the poet where that birthplace is. And neither is there any sign of the birthplace which would have derived from "modern Fortune's care" (III, 11). This questioning and questing of the poet in Sonnet III for the birthplace of the River Duddon, which was a "child of the clouds! remote from every taint / Of sordid industry," is not extremely unlike the questioning and questing of the shepherds and the Magi for the birthplace of

Christ, nor is it extremely unlike the continuous questioning and questing of all pilgrims (especially in times of doubt and darkened faith) who desire to achieve communion with their beginning and their ending.

If we may be allowed to allude to those quests and questionings after the birth of a god in discussing these sonnets, we may also perhaps be allowed to suggest that Wordsworth's solution to his problem of finding the birthplace of the Duddon in Sonnet III is not unlike that of so many questers. Wordsworth's solution to his problem is found in his imaginative perception of form amidst the apparent chaos of nature's plenitude, for he discovers qualities in one particular stream which only human imagination could discover, but those are qualities which derive from an interaction between nature and man:

Yet thou thyself hast round thee shed a gleam
Of brilliant moss, instinct with freshness rare;
Prompt offering to thy Foster-mother, Earth! (III, 13-14)

His imagination has, first of all, attributed to the river functions which are normally attributed to animate life: those of purposiveness, growth, and filial affection. The image of a "round" and "brilliant" "gleam" suggests the aureole usually associated with supernature, or divinity; however, this image is qualified by the natural substance of which it is made, "moss": a natural image with supernatural qualities or a supernatural image with natural qualities--a symbol perceptible to human imagination involved in nature. The idea of spontaneity is communicated through the word "instinct," an adjective modifying "moss" and qualifying that image of a brilliant aureole of moss with the attribute of compressed power or force under the restraint of form; thus, aided by the human imagination working within the forms of nature, the great and potentially ruthless Power of the river

has expressed itself in this image of "a gleam / Of brilliant moss, instinct with freshness rare."

Since the poet sees in the beautiful scene evidence of the high birth which his river must have had, he must be remarking in the phrase "with freshness rare" that the rest of the natural scene is lacking in this "freshness" and that nature is perhaps a neutral, or even black or gray, substance whose colors, forms, and meanings derive from the workings of supernatural agencies and human perception; nature is perhaps a mass of power, potential of significant form, beauty, and meaning. And that earthly nature is not the immediate source of form, beauty, and meaning which derive from the poet's observation of the River Duddon may be seen in the concluding line of Sonnet III:

Prompt offering to thy Foster-mother, Earth!

The Duddon's "real" mother is something other than the Earth; apparently, the "real" mother may be discovered in the heavens as manifested in the clouds from which the Duddon seems to flow. But once on earth, the river becomes the foster-child of Earth's Nature, and the poet who desires to erect a "speaking monument" to describe the Duddon's features must follow the course of development of a fosterling, not knowing the historically "real" source of its being and so not knowing the substance of its inheritance which it brings to its encounter with the forms and forces in its new earthly and natural environment. To describe the effects of this encounter is the burden of the poet in his consequent verse.

The supernatural source of this river may not necessarily be "good," for the form which it takes once it is on earth is suggestive of that being which has proven so malevolent to the welfare of man--the serpent. This is

the suggestion conveyed by the octave of Sonnet IV, and it is a suggestion which is reenforced by a subtle allusion to Milton's Paradise Lost. The poet bids farewell, although it is a hesitant and concerned farewell, to the infancy of the river:

Take, cradled Nursling of the mountain, take
This parting glance, no negligent adieu! (IV, 1-2)

And so, just as in Sonnet II when the poet was a "whistling Blast," this river which at first seems so innocent undergoes a "Protean change" and assumes a shape which conveys imaginatively to the human poet suggestions of that same "ruthless Power" celebrated by the "whistling Blast" in Sonnet II, except that the potential malevolence of the river has undergone the transformations which human imagination effects in its mythological creations and results in a more "humanized" and subtle form of "ruthless Power":

A Protean change seems wrought while I pursue
The curves, a loosely-scattered chain doth make;
Or rather thou appear'st a glistering snake,
Silent, and to the gazer's eye untrue,
Thridding with sinuous lapse the rushes, through
Dwarf willows gliding, and by ferny brake. (IV, 3-8)

This flowing, meandering substance born of the clouds and fostered by the earth begins to grow from its infancy in the mountain's "lofty waste," to overcome the obstacles which it meets in its course by going around them and by gliding through them, rather than by destroying them under the care of "Desolation" as in the pristine ages of darkness. The nature which the river is reflecting in this sonnet is a potentially malevolent nature, and just as in the beginning of man's mythological history there was a threat by an evil form of nature to the security and welfare of human life in the

paradise of nature's sympathetic form, so is there in the beginning of an individual human life a threat by nature to his security and welfare in an otherwise sympathetic and fostering earth: this is the first temptation, the first real test of survival which qualifies the young soul to continue on its pilgrimage.

This ambiguity of nature as being both protective and potentially destructive, as cradling the young river and then forcing it to assume the shape of "a glistening snake, / Silent" and "untrue" to human sight, is subtly reenforced by the allusion to Milton's Paradise Lost in the phrase "with sinuous lapse" (l. 7). De Selincourt points out in his notes to the poem that this phrase is "a combination of two Milton phrases: 'sinuous trace' of the snakes, P.L. vii. 481, and 'liquid lapse of murmuring streams,' viii. 263." (PW, III, 506) De Selincourt however, does not suggest the thematic effect which these allusions have in Wordsworth's poem. The context for the "sinuous" of this phrase occurs during Raphael's explanation to Adam of the processes taking place on the sixth day of the Creation, at which time certain creatures were taking form:

These as a line thir long dimension drew,
 Streaking the ground with sinuous trace; not all
 Minims of Nature; some of Serpent kinde
 Wondrous in length and corpulence involv'd
 Thir Snakie foulds and added wings. . . . (Paradise Lost, VII, 480-
 485; my italics)⁶

This context of creation seems to me to convey to Wordsworth's context of growth the identical notion of creation, of good which is possible from a form which seems to threaten evil. Raphael goes on to assure Adam that even though "The Serpent suttl'st Beast of all the field" may be "Of huge extent somtimes, with brazen Eyes / And hairie Main terrific," it is

nevertheless "Not noxious, but obedient at [Adam's] call." (PL, VII, 494-498) And so even though the River Duddon, whether it is only a symbol of natural flux and process or a more complex one of natural flux and process reflecting human life and possibly even poetic human life, appears in the octet of Sonnet IV as a form potentially malevolent, it may nevertheless be controlled because it is at this time still "obedient" to human command.

The last word of the allusion, "lapse," occurs in the context of Milton's Paradise Lost, VIII, 263, as a part of a phrase used by Adam to describe to Raphael his own perception of the creation at the dawn of his existence:

About me round I saw
Hill, Dale, and shadie Woods, and sunnie Plaines,
And liquid Lapse of murmuring Streams; by these,
Creatures that livd, and movd, and walk'd, or flew,
Birds on the branches warbling; all things smil'd,
With fragrance and with joy my heart oreflow'd. (PL, VIII, 261-266;
my italics)

And we notice that, just as Wordsworth cannot be certain of the birthplace and source of the River Duddon, so is Adam at this time ignorant of his source and of his birthplace:

My self I then perus'd, and Limb by Limb
Survey'd, and sometimes went, and sometimes ran
With supple joints, as lively vigour led;
But who I was, or where, or from what cause,
Knew not. (PL, VIII, 267-271)

And so Wordsworth is combining in the phrase "with sinuous lapse" Milton's notions of an Angelic account of divine Creation and an Adamic account of his prelapsarian perception of natural creation, and in both the Miltonic and the Wordsworthian contexts there is the awareness that the ultimate significance of the serpentine form is malevolent and that the specific act of malevolence will begin with a temptation.

Milton's incomparable account of that temptation should only linger in the mind as a kind of appetizer for Wordsworth's allusion in Sonnet IV, otherwise Wordsworth's device will fail by virtue of its success--the Miltonic grandeur will annihilate the Wordsworthian suggestion:

Starts from a dizzy steep the undaunted Rill
 Robed instantly in garb of snow-white foam;
 And laughing dares the Adventurer, who had clomb
 So high, a rival purpose to fulfil;
 Else led the dastard backward wend, and roam,
 Seeking less bold achievement, where he will! (IV, 9-14)

The serpentine river suddenly plunges over a precipice and presents an appearance of beautiful innocence, but it throws out a challenge for "the Adventurer" to follow its course; now this challenge, following immediately upon the description of the serpentine shape of the river, suggests to me a kind of temptation which nature, or the river as a process of nature reflecting the forms and substances of creation, holds out to man to join with her in overcoming the obstacles which earth throws up to all life in its endeavors to survive. And, typically, this temptation is ambiguous as potentially destructive and potentially creative: if one reads the temptation "literally," he will, if he acquiesces to it, plunge over the precipice with the waters of the river and be destroyed; but if one reads the temptation "symbolically" (or "obliquely"), he may follow nature as his guide and benefit from her care so that he may "fulfil" a "purpose" which "rivals" that of Nature herself. And since, of course, Wordsworth shows us in the poem itself how he has done this very thing in following the River Duddon to its termination, we may wait to see what that "rival purpose" turns out to be; also, since we shall follow this poet Adventurer as he moves in pilgrimage towards the fulfillment of a great "purpose" which rivals nature's own, we may safely reject the alternative to accepting the

challenge; if one does not accept the challenge, which may seem like a nineteenth-century version of the Temptation, of nature, he may move away from her and in cowardly fashion imitate the seventeenth-century serpent:

Else let the dastard backward wend, and roam,
Seeking less bold achievement, where he will. (IV, 13-14)

And this suggests to me Wordsworth's own challenge to men who refuse to take up the challenge of following to its ultimate conclusions their investigation of man's true relationship to natural process; they may take the way of the cynical naturalist and plunge to annihilation in identification with natural process or they may run "backward" in time to seek the "less bold achievement" of completely rejecting nature for some outworn creed which promises them spiritual salvation; or, and this is the way which Wordsworth advocates in this poem as well as in most of his other poetry, men may follow along with the processes of nature, acknowledging in them the laws which govern human existence while residing in this foster home, but finally transcending them as insufficient for satisfying the human imagination when it is freed of its natural limitations in the infinite realm of the eternal spirit.

Our poet takes up the challenge and proceeds to follow the River Duddon along its course through the nature of its "Foster-Mother, Earth." This journey is made by the poet without the companionship of another human being, and the feeling of loneliness persists throughout this sequence. In Sonnet V Wordsworth describes himself as a "sole listener" to the voice of the river in the first two lines and he refers to nature as "lonely Nature" in the final line: later in the sequence he will express his longing for the companionship of "The One for whom my heart shall

ever beat / With tenderest love" (XXV), and he will occasionally observe the lives of others in the human scene along the river banks--but he will not himself join in their society, even though he feels the urge to do so in Sonnet XIII, until he reaches the land of the dead in the graveyard of Sonnet XXXI.

Alone in the "unfruitful solitudes" of a scene of "sullen moss and craggy mound" at some distance from the river, the poet hears the "clear voice" of the flowing waters as it is carried to him by the wind:

Sole listener, Duddon! to the breeze that played
 With thy clear voice, I caught the fitful sound
 Wafted o'er sullen moss and craggy mound--
 Unfruitful solitudes, that seemed to upbraid
 The sun in heaven!-- (V, 1-5)

It is "unfruitful," in one sense, because the waters do not flow through this area to nourish the vegetation; it is "unfruitful," in another sense, because the heaven-born waters of spiritual meaning do not inspire this natural waste with living forms; and it is "unfruitful," in yet another sense, because the waters of heavenly inspiration are not present to encourage the reflecting powers of the poet. But, typically, Wordsworth's keen sense of hearing saves him from these "unfruitful solitudes," for he hears the flowing waters of the River Duddon even when he cannot see them, just as he feels the existence of spiritual being without being able to see evidence for it in the waste of a nature isolated from the waters of life; Wordsworth associates this experience of sound with the experience of feeling and seeing when he interprets the "clear voice" of the river as seeming "to upbraid / The sun in heaven," apparently for its excessive heat and blinding light--the waters which have come from heaven continue to manifest the source of their birth by reflecting the sun on their surface.

This sign of its heavenly birth will be softened by the shades of its earthly sojourn, and these will seem to assume the protective functions which had been carried out by the Frost in Sonnet II:

--but now, to form a shade
For Thee, green alders have together wound
Their foliage, ashes flung their arms around;
The birch-trees risen in silver colonnade. (V, 5-8)

The scene is no longer that of a rigorous "lofty waste" or "unfruitful solitudes," but rather one of abundant vegetation, protecting and loving. The scene created at this point is no longer that of a "cradle," but rather it is one of a natural temple made up of living trees, whose forms and colors create the impression of a living architecture: a green in motion and a silver in "colonnade."

To this place of natural worship has come a family whose "ruddy children" emphasize this youthful phase of the river's course:

And thou hast also tempted here to rise,
'Mid sheltering pines, this Cottage rude and grey;
Whose ruddy children, by the mother's eyes
Carelessly watched, sport through the summer day,
Thy pleased associates:--light as endless May
On infant bosoms lonely Nature lies. (V, 9-14)

The river, in Sonnet IV, had issued a temptation as a challenge in its form of a serpent to the Adventurer along its banks, and here, in Sonnet V, it has again issued a temptation--this time with less tone of challenge and malevolence. The temptation at this time is an offer to provide an environment for sustaining human life, and it is accepted so that a "Cottage rude and grey" is built beneath "sheltering pines" alongside the river. It is a primitive habitation which seems to have risen effortlessly in this happy spot of nature, and indeed Wordsworth describes its appearance as a

kind of "growth," the Cottage having risen alongside the river just as any form of vegetation would.

In this poem of solitude, where natural forms provide a bower of sheltering and protecting shade, the children who sport alongside the river as its very "associates" are under the guardianship of Nature as much or more than they are under the "careless" eyes of their mother. Indeed, this mother whose "eyes / Carelessly watched" them "sport through the summer day" may only be the human embodiment of Nature as a "Foster-mother" just as the children are possibly human embodiments of the youthful phases through which the river is passing. Whatever the possible implications of the relationship between the river and the careless family may be, there can be no doubt that the relationship is a mutually beneficial one in which both the children and the river participate. It is in fact a relationship which we would expect to exist in the paradise of our dreams; there we could expect to find man perfectly at home in his natural environment throughout an eternal springtime of happiness. This is suggested not only by the scene of the children playing so unselfconsciously and safely alongside the river, but it is also hinted at in the final words of the sonnet:

--light as endless May
On infant bosoms lonely Nature lies. (V, 13-14)

Just as "lonely Nature lies" "light as endless May / On infant bosoms," so does Nature, in the forms of children and trees, lie reflected on the infant bosom of the young River Duddon as it flows through this time of childhood innocence and under the guardianship of a careless but protecting Foster-mother.

In Sonnet VI the poet assumes once again a very close relationship

with the river. He seems to assume that same association with the river which the children had enjoyed in Sonnet V. And just as those children had sported alongside the river in a kind of blissful paradise, so does the poet journey with the river through a natural paradise in Sonnet VI. That the little family of Sonnet V could not easily be anything but a natural expression of a benevolent natural process, not yet divorced from the source of its being, can be seen by noticing the meaning of the first line of Sonnet VI:

Ere yet our course was graced with social trees
It lacked not old remains of hawthorn bowers. (VI, 1-2)

If the poet and the river have not yet encountered "social trees," then the trees of Sonnet V could not be considered "social," even though there was a little "society" of people living beneath their shade. Wordsworth must mean by this phrase, "social trees," that they have not yet come upon trees which have been cultivated by men, since, in a rudimentary sense, the trees of Sonnet V are "social" with one another (they "wound" their foliage together and "flung their arms around" one another); however, there was no indication at all that men had anything to do with the growth of those trees, and, in fact, the trees seem to be taking care of the human life found there.

In this little paradise, with its "old remains of hawthorn bowers" (suggesting the possibility that here is evidence of the paradise which existed long ago as described in myth), the poet hears the music of birds and the "hum of bees," smells the tempting fragrance of lovely flowers, and sees the beautiful forms of "the sundry flowers, / Fed by the stream with soft perpetual showers." This place which is so pleasing to the senses

of hearing, smelling, and seeing, is "old," is fed by "perpetual" waters, and produces "all kinds" of flowers which "alike seemed favourites of Heaven." It is a paradise, like the paradise of myth, in which one would expect to discover expressions of love.

In Sonnet V the trees seemed to love one another, the children were loved by the mother, and they were loved by the river if not by Nature herself. In Sonnet VI Wordsworth exclaims, in the language of affection, at the loves of the birds for one another, of the bees for the flowers and they for the bees, of the flowers in their fragrances of seduction, and, finally, of Heaven for all the flowers (with the possibility that the phrase "All kinds" may refer to all creation). This is a scene of lushness in which there is no hostility and in which there is only love, expressed in the imagery of sexual attraction.

Ere yet our course was graced with social trees
 It lacked not old remains of hawthorn bowers,
 Where small birds warbled to their paramours;
 And, earlier still, was heard the hum of bees;
 I saw them ply their harmless robberies,
 And caught the fragrance which the sundry flowers,
 Fed by the stream with soft perpetual showers,
 Plenteously yielded to the vagrant breeze.
 There bloomed the strawberry of the wilderness;
 The trembling eyebright showed her sapphire blue,
 The thyme her purple, like the blush of Even;
 And if the breath of some to no caress
Invited, forth they peeped so fair to view,
 All kinds alike seemed favourites of Heaven. (VI, 1-14; my italics)

This is a long way from the austerity of the mountains which formed the Duddon's birthplace, and so is it a long way from the bleakness of the ocean where will be the Duddon's conclusion. It is the atmosphere of innocent love which will inspire several of the sonnets which follow.

The affection which the poet feels for the lovely forms of nature is

obvious in Sonnet VI, and just as obvious is the seductive attractiveness which those forms of nature seem to present to the poet. If Nature was the Foster-mother, the nurse, for the river and the poet in their beginnings, she has begun to be like a mistress coyly tempting the river and the poet to love her, to marry with her and create things of beauty from her. This should remind us of Wordsworth's intention to chant "the spousal verse / Of this great consummation" between "the individual Mind" and "the external World," as he announced it in the "Prospectus" to The Recluse.

This theme of sexual love is continued into Sonnet VII, where Wordsworth rejects the kind of love which is cut off from nature in favor of that kind which finds its strength and nourishment in nature. Wordsworth seems to be commenting not only on the notion of sentimental and artificial courtship as opposed to a calm and natural courtship, but also on the humanistic tradition as opposed to the naturalistic tradition as guides to poetic inspiration. This finds expression, in a sense, in his personal life: he gave up his sentimental and foreign attachments to Annette Vallon and married the woman who had been the object of his long and calm courtship, Mary Hutchinson; also, he rejected what he thought was the artificial tradition of most eighteenth-century English poetry in favor of a more primitive and "natural" tradition which could comprehend his own experiences amid the forms and forces of nature in northern England. His mistress of foreign passion he rejected in favor of his spouse of natural affection.⁷

The coy and seductive characteristics of the flowers in Sonnet VI have tempted the poet to become one of them so that he can share in the pleasures which they must derive from their relationship to the earth which gives them their being. This reminds him, in Sonnet VII, of the courtship which is divorced from nature:

'Change me, some God, into that breathing rose!
 The love-sick Stripling fancifully sighs,
 The envied flower beholding, as it lies
 On Laura's breast, in exquisite repose; (VII, 1-4)

or he would be one of those birds which, in Sonnet VI, "warbled to their paramours":

Or he would pass into her bird, that throws
 The darts of song from out its wiry cage. (VII, 5-6)

The birds in the paradise of Sonnet VI, however, were in no cage (although one may again detect a possible ambiguity about the character of Nature, for here is a hint that the "bowers" of Sonnet VI's natural scene can become "wire cages" which Nature constructs to imprison living things), but the passions of love are strong enough to blind a man to the dangers which attend all relationships that deny a man his individuality and his natural freedom. This "Love-sick Stripling" of Sonnet VII is the victim of his fancy, not the master of his imagination:

Enraptured,--could he for himself engage
 The thousandth part of what the Nymph bestows;
 And what the little careless innocent
 Ungraciously receives. (VII, 7-10)

This image of passion, of blind passion, is a bold statement to come from the usually austere Wordsworth. A young lover desires to be a flower which lies "in exquisite repose" on his beloved's breast; this is not bold, but the implications of the following lines are. For that which "the Nymph bestows" upon the flower, if not the imprisoned bird, is her breast, which "the little careless innocent / Ungraciously receives"; the "love-sick Stripling" is not so careless, nor so innocent, nor would he be ungracious

if he could receive but a "thousandth part" of that breast. Thus, when Wordsworth rejects this desire with the phrase "Too daring choice!" (VII, 10), we are tempted to accuse him of excessive prudishness; however, this seems to me to be unjust to the subtlety of Wordsworth's thought in this sonnet.

Wordsworth is not rejecting the love which expresses itself in sexual union (indeed, the sexual connotations of the imagery in the final lines of the sonnet are perhaps in some ways more bold than those of the earlier lines); he is rejecting the unnatural blindness of artificial conventions and at the same time the slavery of the passions. This freedom will allow him to be able to make the final sacrifice of the "sweets of earth" in the conclusion of The River Duddon. He rejects the breast of a woman for the breast of the earth, the wire cage for the banks of the Duddon:

There are whose calmer mind it would content
To be an unculled flowerlet of the glen,
Fearless of plough and scythe; or darkling wren
That tunes on Duddon's banks her slender voice. (VII, 13-14)

Wordsworth has rejected human love as his basic inspiration, as the source of his spiritual nourishment (expressed metaphorically as potential physical nourishment from the breast of his lover) as daring too much, as risking the loss of his freedom. He has chosen Nature as his inspiration, as the source of his spiritual nourishment, as securing his freedom; however, this freedom is not of the kind which licenses irresponsibility and aimless wandering. He chooses to keep his roots in the soil of his birth, alongside the banks of the river, just as "an unculled flowerlet" keeps its roots in the soil of its birth; he may be rooted in the soil, but he is not a slave to the fears of annihilation by "plough and scythe." No one but the

Duddon may hear him, but he prefers to be like the "darkling wren / That tunes on Duddon's banks her slender voice" than to be a captive bird singing from its "wiry cage" to please its enslaving mistress.

The theme of freedom in nature is continued into Sonnet VIII. The thoughts of darkness and natural freedom have stimulated the poet's imagination to speculate on the condition of the Man who first followed the river banks he now treads.

What aspect bore the Man who roved or fled,
 First of his tribe, to this dark dell--who first
 In this pellucid Current slaked his thirst? (VIII, 1-3)

Did that Man freely wander into this place? or did he flee to it in hopes of finding in it some protection from an object of fear? Free or not, this was the first Man to come into this place. Wordsworth has taken us back to the past once again, but this time he has taken us to when the beginnings of human society were forming. The River Duddon has changed its aspect from what it was when it was born in the mountains, the poet has changed from what he was in his youth, and so may the human race have changed from what it was when first it appeared on earth. Wordsworth contrasts in the first three lines of Sonnet VIII the image of darkness ("this dark dell") with the image of transparency ("this pellucid Current"), indicating that the River Duddon has come from regions of light into a region of darkness; it may be that this first Man is like the Man first driven from Paradise into the region of darkness, just as the course of the river suggests the actual life of every man's growth from bright innocence into darkened guilt. The poet does not do any more than "poetically" suggest that this Man is the historical embodiment of that mythical Man driven from Paradise, but since the sonnet does follow close upon descriptions of natural paradises and

temptations by love, the suggestion is not out of place, at any rate.

Wordsworth further speculates upon the emotional and mental condition of this Man:

What hopes came with him? what designs were spread
 Along his path? His unprotected bed
 What dreams encompassed? Was the intruder nursed
 In hideous usages, and rights [sic] accursed,
 That thinned the living and disturbed the dead? (VIII, 4-8)

Were his hopes those of recovering his former home? of paradise? What did he make of his new home? what were the "designs" which he made of his new environment? Or are these "designs . . . spread / Along his path" references by Wordsworth to the traps and pitfalls placed along the path of human life by some sinister force? If so, the "designs" are plots to destroy or enslave man by some force alien to his welfare: is that force God, Satan, or Nature? He made his bed in his new home without the protection of his old gods (or God), and did he dream of returning to his former home someday? or did he have nightmares of what lay before him in this dark environment he now finds himself in? In such a condition of darkness, he may have carried out savage rites of human sacrifice, hoping to propitiate the gods of darkness. But these are only the questions of a poet whose imagination seeks to know the forms of human experience in its endeavors to cope with a natural environment which sometimes seems hostile to human welfare. The capacity to envision the past, however, is dimming:

No voice replies;--both air and earth are mute. (VIII, 9)

The maturing man gets further and further away from the sources of his being just as the aging race of men gets further and further away from the sources of its being; he is losing his ability to communicate with nature, to share

in the being of other natural forms, as he could in Sonnets V, VI, and VII. Man can no longer learn from the "air and earth" the answers to the questions which always plague him: questions about where he came from and where he is going, about freedom and necessity, about dreams and hopes, about the right ways to worship his gods. In olden days, men could hear a "voice" speaking to him, instructing him and comforting him and admonishing him.

The "air and earth are mute," but there remains one further possibility for discovering answers to the poet's questions--the river. If this is a river of time, the poet may search through the records and relics of man's past in quest of his answers. Or if this river is a principle of continuity, of process and mutability, of permanence reflecting change, the poet may go to the philosopher for rules of logic and systems of metaphysics for his answers. Or, this river might be his own life-stream as it flows through this natural home of his Foster-mother, Earth: if this is so, he need only look into his own heart to discover the consolation he needs for his failure to know with certainty the answers to his questions. Surely that first Man had "slaked his thirst" in the "pellucid Current" of this river after his descent "to this dark dell," and so also may the poet now "slake his thirst" for knowledge by looking into the "soft record" of this River Duddon:

And Thou, blue Streamlet, murmuring yield'st no more
 Than a soft record, that, whatever fruit
 Of ignorance thou might'st witness heretofore,
 Thy function was to heal and to restore,
 To soothe and cleanse, not madden and pollute! (VIII, 10-14)

By looking into his own soul, as that soul has been shaped by and in turn reflects its natural environment, the poet discovers that its function

was, as it is now, "to heal and to restore, / To soothe and cleanse, not madden and pollute!" This should remind us of Wordsworth's feeling at the conclusion of The Prelude that his poetry might have restorative powers:

The last and later portions of this gift
 Have been prepared, not with the buoyant spirits
 That were our daily portion when we first
 Together wantoned in wild Poesy,
 But, under pressure of a private grief,
 Keen and enduring, which the mind and heart,
 That in this meditative history
 Have been laid open, needs must make me feel
 More deeply yet enable me to bear
 More firmly; and a comfort now hath risen
 From hope that thou art near, and wilt be soon
 Restored to us in renovated health;
 When, after the first mingling of our tears,
 'Mong other consolations, we may draw
 Some pleasure from this offering of my love.

(Prelude, 1850; XIV, 415-429; 1805-06,
 XIII, 411-247).

And, of course, Wordsworth's "offering" of love was a poem describing his own life. He asserts that the River Duddon will heal and restore, and he may say this because the river comes from the regions of heaven and so brings with it the glimmer of hope for man that he may return to that home of infinity in eternity from which he came--whether it is the earthly or the heavenly Paradise; and so the poetry which describes that river of life will bring the glimmer of hope which restores faith and heals the sickness of doubt: Milton's poetry followed the river of life back to mythological Man, and Wordsworth's poetry follows the river of life as it flows through one man's being--his own.

This poet who can find in the river, as in his life, powers of healing and restoration is growing, like the river, into the full powers of his manhood. Sonnet IX is a "speaking monument" at that point in the river, as in life, where the transition is made from youth into manhood. At this point

in the river's course is a "zone" where there are stones set across the river for crossing by foot; it is apparently a piece of natural art, or at least a design made from natural objects.

The struggling Rill insensibly is grown
 Into a Brook of loud and stately march,
 Crossed ever and anon by plank and arch;
 And, for like use, lo! what might seem a zone
 Chosen for ornament--stone matched with stone
 In studied symmetry, with interspace
 For the clear waters to pursue their race
 Without restraint. (IX, 1-8)

Wordsworth describes the river as though it were the unselfconscious child grown to a condition of selfconsciousness; it is a "struggling" current which "insensibly" reaches the proportions of "a Brook." Up to this point, the river has been crossed over by artificial devices of "plank and arch," but now there is a natural bridge which is immersed in the water itself, but in such a way that the water is not prevented from proceeding to its destination. Indeed, the stepping stones seem to provide a means for the river's becoming sensible of itself, and this is what his poetry does for Wordsworth's own life.

The sestet of the sonnet states the thematic function of these stepping stones:

How swiftly have they flown,
 Succeeding--still succeeding! Here the Child
 Puts, when the high-swoln Flood runs fierce and wild,
 His budding courage to the proof; and here
 Declining Manhood learns to note the sly
 And sure encroachments of infirmity,
 Thinking how fast time runs, life's end how near! (IX, 8-14)

The first seven sonnets have described that swiftly flowing current of the River Duddon from its birthplace in the mountains, down to this bridge devised by man out of the forms of nature. But before this child crosses

over to the side of "declining Manhood," he will participate in the ritual of mating. For the child, the river is the swelling passion of life; for the aging man, the river is the swift current of time racing towards the sea of death; but for the young lovers, the river is a "dizzy flood" reflecting the whirlpools of passion and the myriad circles of eternity as they attempt to cross over the river of life and time on these stepping stones of love.

Sonnet X memorializes that joint struggle to cross over the river by two human beings in love with one another. This sonnet differs from Sonnet VII, which also concerns itself with the theme of love, in that it describes the human courtship in the midst of the natural environment, not isolated and alienated from nature as the one was in Sonnet VII. Also, this sonnet describes the acceptance of human love which comes at the appropriate time in life. If "Declining Manhood" watches the swift passage of time in the river's current in Sonnet IX, the pair of lovers in Sonnet X do no such thing:

Not so that Pair whose youthful spirits dance
 With prompt emotion, urging them to pass;
 A sweet confusion checks the Shepherd-lass;
 Blushing she eyes the dizzy flood askance;
 To stop ashamed--too timid to advance;
 She ventures once again--another pause!
 His outstretched hand He tauntingly withdraws--
 She sues for help with piteous utterance. (X, 1-8)

The emotions which Wordsworth is trying to describe here are not greatly unlike those of fear and anxiety which he described just before his marriage to Mary Hutchinson in "Resolution and Independence": in that poem there is a greater degree of genuine feeling, and in this sonnet there is only a gesture of such feeling. Nevertheless, both poems reflect the character of the emotions of love and desire which Wordsworth felt attended courtship,

and both poems express the poet's fears for the welfare of those involved in the courtship. In "Resolution and Independence" Wordsworth succeeds magnificently in communicating his own subjective experiences of anxiety turned into resolution and independence on a day of lonely wandering; in this Sonnet Wordsworth fails successfully to communicate the dread which he feels as he watches the young lovers playfully struggle to cross the stepping stones. He may "fail" because he succeeds in showing the apparent playfulness and lack of genuine fear in the lovers, using such words as "sweet confusion," "blushing," "dizzy flood," "ashamed," "timid," "ventures," "tauntingly" and "piteous" in such a conventional way to describe such a conventional experience. But Wordsworth wants to say something further than that these lovers may succumb in their love to one another:

Chidden she chides again; the thrilling touch
Both feel, when he renews the wished-for aid;
Ah! if their fluttering hearts should stir too much,
Should beat too strongly, both may be betrayed. (X, 9-12)

On one level, he is suggesting that the girl will be betrayed into giving up her virginity and the boy into giving up his independence; but on another level, Wordsworth wants us to realize in our minds the scene of their attempt to cross the river and see that if they become too excited, they will fall into the river. Apparently the river is not very deep at this point, although it may be rushing past the stones fairly swiftly; nevertheless, and in spite of the possible ludicrousness of the situation, the situation is capable of symbolic statement: that unrestrained and over-excited passions can result in the kind of betrayal which Laodamia experienced, death and dissolution in the stream of time and natural process. Thus, when the poet very self-consciously points to the joy of "the frolic Loves" at the sight of these young lovers struggling to accomplish their

love, he is again suggesting the ambiguity of nature in the affairs of men:

The frolic Loves, who, from yon high rock, see
The struggle, clap their wings for victory! X, 13-14)

We know that the poet is self-consciously using personifications of Love here because he so acknowledges it in Sonnet XI. He describes the joy of nature at the sight of human struggle, although it is a struggle of love. The ambiguity resides in the significance of that joy expressed by Nature in the form of those "frolic Loves" on "yon high rock": the joy may be neutral, arising only from the pleasure at viewing the "struggle" as an expression in form of natural energy; or it may be sympathetic, arising from the pleasure of realizing that a successful courtship will result in an increase of life; or, and this is possible because of the poet's observation on the chances for "betrayal," it may be hostile, arising from the pleasure of recovering through death the substance of human life to the flux of natural process.

If the experience of human love in modern life is capable of betrayal and subject to the frolics of natural passions, the poet who wishes to describe it must labor under a burden of creating fictions to communicate his vision, fictions which were once accepted as satisfactory explanations of the mysteries of life but are no longer available to the man of imagination for his work of art. Wordsworth laments the loss of such poetic faith, or he at least asserts his own faith in the previous existence of beings who are no longer discoverable on earth, in Sonnet XI. These beings are the "tiny Elves" whom he calls "frolic Loves" in Sonnet X; it was these agencies of nature which were supposed to be responsible for the betrayal of men by nature, for it was these "tiny Elves" who substituted changelings for infants at their births--all of which is nature sporting with the products

of passion.

The man of imagination may not be able to discover the living forms of those "tiny Elves" in these iron times of little faith, but he may nevertheless perceive in the forms of existent nature the impressins of their former being:

No fiction was it of the antique age:
A sky-blue stone, within this sunless cleft,
Is of the very footmarks unbereft
Which tiny Elves impressed;-- (XI, 1-4)

In this darkened world of unbelief there is a "sky-blue stone" containing the signature of the spirit-world, as though a piece of the sky had dropped into the "sunless cleft" alongside the River Duddon. Perhaps these were the gods whom the first Man encountered and eventually worshipped with hidious rites of sacrifice, as Wordsworth speculates in Sonnet VIII. Probably not, but these "tiny Elves" themselves perform rituals of celebration in a place of darkness which should remind us of similar behavior by the first Man described in Sonnet VIII: just as those rituals of Sonnet VIII involved, perhaps, the taking of human life, so do these rituals of the Elves involve the taking of human life:

--on that smooth stage
Dancing with all their brilliant equipage
In secret revels--haply after theft
Of some sweet Babe--Flower stolen, and coarse Weed left
For the distracted Mother to assuage
Her grief with, as she might!-- (XI, 4-9)

We are far from the paradisal scenes described in Sonnets V and VI, in which there was a contented mother who "carelessly watched" over her happy children, not a "distracted Mother" grieving over the "coarse Weed" left to her in substitute for her "sweet Babe--Flower stolen," and in which there

was a beautiful garden of love, not a "stage" for "secret revels." If this is the kind of fiction which was once held to be a true account of human experience, it is ominous that Wordsworth can still discover traces of it in the forms of nature along the banks of the River Duddon.

He has seen the tracks of the Elves impressed on a "sky-blue stone," and now he questions whether the music for their dances might not have left any traces he can discover:

--But, where, oh! where
Is traceable a vestige of the notes
That ruled those dances wild in character?--
Deep underground? Or in the upper air,
On the shrill wind of midnight? or where floats
O'er twilight fields the autumnal gossamer? (XI, 9-14)

Evidence of vision leads him to seek for evidence of hearing, just as he has been so led in the "Vernal Ode" and just as he has described Laodamia led by her vision in "Laodamia." And just as in those two poems, Wordsworth is left hanging in air without a conviction of his experience; the more subtle sensation of hearing will lead him to the more palpable one of seeing, but it does not seem to work in the reverse direction. He was led by his sense of hearing in Sonnet V to his vision of paradise in that sonnet and in Sonnet VI; in Sonnet XI, his sense of sight leads him to desire a satisfaction for his hearing, but that is all. In fact, the river "chides" him on in the next sonnet; he has been diverted from the proper object of his study, the river of his own life as it reflects the world of nature. But the questions he asks point in the direction of his declining manhood: the music of antiquity has died away, but Wordsworth goes on to look for it in the remains of nature until he reaches the "midnight" of his day, after the "twilight" of his life.

Sonnets XII-XXVI: The Noontime of Maturity

The first eleven sonnets of The River Duddon have described the course of the river from its birthplace in the clouds atop the mountains down through the primeval forests and a natural paradise, on to the natural bridge of stepping stones which marked the point of transition from childhood to youthful maturity, when one begins to be conscious not only of self as distinct from environment but also of the transiency of time and its accompanying anxiety of hope for repose in eternity and infinity. The next fifteen sonnets develop this theme of growing consciousness as it takes form in the poet's discovery of self as distinct from nature and of his hope for eternity as distinct from his explorations in time.

Wordsworth's scheme of growth is manifested in several ways on various levels of meaning: the poem began in the "morning light" of Sonnet I, and it grows in form with the passing of the day to "the busy hum of Noon" in Sonnet XIX and on beyond "Mid-noon" in Sonnet XXIV; the river itself grows from "a cradled Nursling" in Sonnet IV, to a "Brook of loud and stately march" in Sonnet IX, to the "Lordly Duddon" in Sonnet XIX, and then to "the pastoral River" in Sonnet XXIII; there is a more subtle suggestion of growth in the pattern of imagery deriving from variations on the references to sheep, from the youthful and vigorous unselfconsciousness of "tripping lambs" in Sonnet III to the placid repose of "timorous flocks . . . calmly couching" in Sonnet XVII and "the unshorn flock" gathered for washing in Sonnet XXIII.

Transcending (or more simply, at another level of meaning than) these patterns of growth from morning to noon and from lambs to sheep is a pattern of spiritual growth, expressed in two ways: from descriptions of

himself as a travelling "Adventurer" in Sonnet IV, the poet changes to references to himself as a "pilgrim" seeking repose in Sonnet XXIV; and from expressions of sympathetic delight at the natural paradise described in Sonnets V and VI, the poet changes to expressions of humble awe at the "sacred Religion" of Christianity found in the Seathwaite Chapel described in Sonnet XVIII. And so this middle section of The River Duddon, from Sonnet XII to Sonnet XXVI (whose limits may seem somewhat more arbitrary than its center), reveals the poet's growth into a consciousness that this earth is not enough to satisfy his soul of Imagination and that perhaps the religion of his forefathers, won from out of the dark and frightening depths of pagan time, might guide him into eternity and infinity after his natural guide, the Duddon, has taken him as far as it can in space and time. And unlike the natural paradise which he has described in the first section of this poem, the paradise which Wordsworth now consciously seeks is a heavenly one: he begins to leave behind him the hope for recovery of a Paradise such as Milton had described in Paradise Lost, and he begins to turn his "spiritual eye" towards a paradise such as Dante envisioned in his Divine Comedy.

Repeating the theme of rejection, or renunciation, which he first introduced in Sonnet I, Wordsworth responds to the chiding stream in Sonnet XII by moving on beyond "the faery chasm" of Sonnet XI and at the same time moving on beyond the themes of his recent poetry. He sees reflected and "portrayed in miniature" in the clear waters of the River Duddon all those images, those "objects immense," which had given shape and substance to his poetry of nature, and he realizes that these must be left behind as "toys" of his "fancy." The river is the form which process takes as both time and space, and when it is reflected in the form of poetry (as it seems to me

that Wordsworth often hints a close similarity, if not identity, between the river and his own life as it appears in his poetry), the images of objective nature take on qualities of the imagination:

On, Loitering Muse--the swift Stream chides us--on!
 Albeit his deep-worn channel doth immure
 Objects immense protrayed in miniature,
 Wild shapes for many a strange comparison!
 Niagaras, Alpine passes, and anon
 Abodes of Naiads, calm abysses pure,
 Bright liquid mansions, . . . (XII, 1-7)

The "wild shapes" of "Niagaras" and "Alpine passes" should remind us not only of the Descriptive Sketches but also of The Prelude, especially Book VI, in which Wordsworth describes his passage through the Simplon Pass of the Alps:

Downwards we hurried fast,
 And, with the half-shaped road which we had missed,
 Entered a narrow chasm. The brook and road
 Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy strait,
 And with them did we journey several hours
 At a slow pace. The immeasurable height
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
 And in the narrow rent at every turn
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
 The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light--
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
 Characters of the great Apocalypse, . . .

(Prelude, 1850, VI, 619-638; 1805-06, VI, 551-570)

And so Sonnet XII of the River Duddon sequence seems to be renouncing, or rejecting as no longer satisfactory, the very themes and images which Wordsworth had described in The Prelude as evidence for his becoming a poet.

We notice that those images in the sonnet are nearly identical with the ones described in the passage quoted from The Prelude: "loitering Muse" / "with them did we journey several hours At a slow pace"; "swift Stream" / "raving stream"; "deep-worn channel" / "a narrow chasm," "immeasurable height," and "the narrow rent"; "Objects immense" / "immeasurable height," "the unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens"; "Wild shapes for many a strange comparison" / "all [were] like workings of one mind, the features Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree; Characters of the great Apocalypse"; "Niagaras, Alpine passes" / "The stationary blasts of waterfalls," "a narrow chasm," "a narrow rent," "torrents shooting from the clear blue sky." Thus it seems to me that when the poet says these images of Sonnet XII are "Objects immense portrayed in miniature" in the waters of the River Duddon, he is also saying that these are like the images "portrayed" in his poetry, as in The Prelude.

Just as the Prelude passage describes the natural phenomena of the Simplon Pass as bodying forth the workings of an eternal and infinite Mind, so does Sonnet XII go on in its sestet to assert that the river, like poetry, embodies forms of nature which will survive those forms which exist outside the river's waters:

fashioned to endure
 When the broad oak drops, a leafless skeleton,
 And the solidities of mortal pride,
 Palace and tower, are crumbled into dust!-- (XII, 7-10)

The reference to the "Palace and tower," those "solidities of mortal pride" which "are crumbled into dust," points forward to Sonnet XXVII which, with its theme of dissolution and mutability, initiates the final section of the poem, and this final section will emphasize the purging of the "solidities

of mortal pride," so that the poet can be "prepared, in peace of heart, in calm of mind / And soul, to mingle with Eternity" (XXXIII, 13-14). And so, just as he had seemed to perceive the workings of an eternal Mind embodied in the processes of nature in The Prelude, Wordsworth is discovering in The River Duddon sequence evidence in his own poetic achievements of his own hope for infinity and eternity; it is his mind which transforms the transient images of nature into the eternal forms of poetry just as it was his mind which perceived eternity in the natural processes of the Simplon Pass. It is his own mind which is the eternal Mind, and because he now knows this he can continue his pilgrimage with a renewed sense of independence, leaving behind his old affirmations "without regret."

The Bard who walks with Duddon for his guide,
 Shall find such toys of fancy thickly set:
 Turn from the sight, enamoured Muse--we must;
 And, if thou canst, leave them without regret! (XII, 11-14)

After he asserts his intention to leave behind his old affirmations, the poet feels the impulse to turn from his lonely journey into the community of human society. He looks away from the river (and there is an increasing tendency in this section to look away from the river), notes the fields spread out before him, and expresses his attraction to the scene of human community:

Hail to the fields--with Dwellings sprinkled o'er,
 And one small hamlet, under a green hill
 Clustering, with barn and byre, and spouting mill! (XIII, 1-3)

And just as the "swift Stream" had chided him to move on his journey from the "Faery Chasm" in the two previous sonnets, so now does "Gay June" seem to call him from thoughts of joining the little community which he views in

Sonnet XIII:

A glance suffices;--should we wish for more,
Gay June would scorn us. (XIII, 4-5)

Wordsworth's poetry is nearly all a poetry of lonely or isolated individuals found amidst a living Nature, and in very little of it do we find any expression of attraction to the pleasures and joys of social living; there is a little of it, however, and it is just enough to indicate a longing for companionship and an intense consciousness of separation. Usually, as in this sonnet, "a glance" will suffice the poet's longing. We discover in this sonnet a possible reason that a slight "glance" usually suffices: the poet is afraid that too much human companionship will drive away the loveliness of nature, will drive away the warm happiness of his springtime and summertime youth.

In the spring and summer of his life, the poet journeys close to the processes of nature. But in the wintertime, he will not hesitate to depart from his accustomed journey through nature and join in the merriment of a happy human community:

But when bleak winds roar
Through the stiff lance-like shoots of pollard ash,
Dread swell of sound! loud as the gusts that lash
The matted forests of Ontario's shore
By wasteful steel unsmitten--then would I
Turn into port; and, reckless of the gale,
Reckless of angry Duddon sweeping by,
While the warm hearth exaltes the mantling ale,
Laugh with the generous household heartily
At all the merry pranks of Donnerdale! (XIII, 5-14)

There is a tendency in Wordsworth's later poetry, as it is hinted in this sonnet, to associate the ravages and desolation of winter with apocalypse, with the revelation of last things (or with the revelation of first things

as in Sonnet II of this sequence), but at the same time with the purgatorial experience which prepares the soul for the disciplined realm of infinity and eternity. In Sonnet XIII, the roaring of "bleak winds" echoes the "whistling Blast" which accompanied the birth of the river in Sonnet II, except that in this sonnet the wind points to the end rather than to the beginning.

As though he had been sailing the river of life, Wordsworth asserts in Sonnet XIII that he will "turn into port" when the "bleak winds roar." And he will do this regardless of the threats implied in the roaring wind and the "angry Duddon sweeping by"; his allegiance to nature will be invalid in the wintertime of his life. Even though the poet will "turn into port" and seek refuge from nature's ravages amid the "generous household" of humankind, he will eventually have to leave even that refuge. We notice that in the next sonnet he will, with the river, leave the "haunts of men" to continue his journey, and we know that he will continue his journey until he reaches a port in Sonnet XXXII: this port contains a human community where the poet might, like the gliding river, rest for a moment, but it opens into the deep and dark sea of Eternity in Sonnet XXXIII.

Necessarily satisfied with his glimpse of the human community along the banks of the Duddon, the poet gathers his strength in Sonnet XIV and prepares to move on. He salutes the River for its lonely task, noting that its flow, if not its course, is predetermined to move on companionless to its conclusion. Wordsworth is describing his own lonely task and his own feeling of impulse determined by "some awful Spirit." The poet's task, reflected in the form of the river, is more lonely than that of the Shepherd and the Anchorite (and here we see Wordsworth bringing forward the allusion he made to lambs in Sonnet III to combine it with his forthcoming allusions to sheep and at the same time parallel the secular meaning of the

Shepherd with the spiritual meaning of the Anchorite):

O mountain Stream! the Shepherd and his Cot
 Are privileged Inmates of deep solitude;
 Nor would the nicest Anchorite exclude
 A field or two of brighter green, or plot
 Of tillage-ground, that seemeth like a spot
 Of stationary sunshine:--thou hast viewed
 These only, Duddon! with their paths renewed
 By fits and starts, yet this contents thee not. (XIV, 1-8)

And so is the poet Wordsworth not content with his life as a pastoral poet, a "privileged Inmate of deep solitude," nor as a religious poet who sang his hymns of worship to the living Nature, whose fields "of brighter green" and plots of "tillage-ground" had seemed "like a spot / Of stationary sunshine." His own view of these landscapes had "renewed" his spirit "by fits and starts," just as his view of the human community in Sonnet XIII had generated his hope for refuge from the same nature whose scenes of "stationary sunshine" would become angry blasts of "bleak winds" roaring with a "dread swell of sound" through "the stiff lance-like shoots of pollard ash." The river must flow on beyond the fields and plots of "stationary sunshine" so adored by men, and so must the poet follow:

Thee hath some awful Spirit impelled to leave,
 Utterly to desert, the haunts of men,
 Though simple thy companions were and few;
 And through this wilderness a passage cleave
 Attended but by thy own voice, save when
 The clouds and fowls of the air thy way pursue! (XIV, 9-14)

The "awful Spirit" is the principle of gravitation, the formation of the natural landscape, and the character of the water: it is Nature. Just as Nature will impell the river to leave, "utterly to desert," the human community, so will Nature (in the service of God, either as a joyous attendant spirit or as an ironic rebellious demon) impell the poet Wordsworth "utterly to desert the haunts of men." The image is that of the river

leaving behind (from the perspective of the man travelling along its banks) those fields and pastures inhabited by men, though few, and flowing on in loneliness through a wilderness inhabited only by the roar of its own current, or occasionally visited by "the clouds and fowls of the air." Wordsworth's friends and acquaintances, "though simple . . . and few" were dying and drifting away from him, and it may have seemed to him that he was leaving them behind in his continuing existence; however, the image points in another direction by suggesting the drift towards death, when he will leave behind the living whom he has loved. Thus, as he moves through the passage cleaved through the wilderness by the River Duddon, Wordsworth moves through memory and vision along the passages cleaved by his life of imagination through the wilderness of his natural existence and at the same time speaking through the voice of the river the poetry which makes up The River Duddon sequence.

If he had been on top of "a hill known as Pen Crag" (PW, III, p. 507, Note) in Sonnet XIII, where he viewed the "open prospect" of the hamlet's life below him, Wordsworth is at the bottom of a "deep chasm" looking up at a lofty crag in Sonnet XV. He has followed the course of the river through the passage it cleaved through the wilderness down into "this deep chasm," and so has he again followed the river of memory down into the "deep chasm" of time, where he releases his imagination to speculate on the forces responsible for the "gloomy NICHE" left to modern man as a memorial to a past darkened by time. The poet's descent into the dark chasm of the river valley is the physical and symbolic expression of his imaginative descent into the dark abyss of time, searching out answers to his questions about the present forms of nature. In Sonnet XIV he, with the river, was "impelled

to leave" the scenes of "stationary sunshine," and here in Sonnet XV he looks back and up at a point "where quivering sunbeams play" as though he were looking back and up at the place where he was in Sonnet XIV. Having attained this perspective of time, expressed as a perspective of space, Wordsworth can view the "gloomy NICHE" with an objectivity that enables his imagination to discover human meaning in it.

From this deep chasm, where quivering sunbeams play
 Upon its loftiest crags, mine eyes behold
 A gloomy NICHE, capacious, blank, and cold;
 A concave free from shrubs and mosses grey;
 In semblance fresh, as if, with dire affray,
 Some Statue, placed amid these regions old
 For tutelary service, thence had rolled,
 Startling the flight of timid Yesterday! (XV, 1-8)

The natural formation appears to his imagination as a place which had once held an object of worship; it is a capacious niche, a "concave free from shrubs and mosses grey," but it is "gloomy," "blank, and cold." If Nature was once protective enough of man's spirit that she provided him with a place to protect his idol of worship, she has since that time either betrayed him or he has betrayed her because that place of worship is now desolate and gloomy in its blank and cold hostility to human perception. When the Statue fell from its protective cavern high upon a lofty crag down into the wilderness below, the crash and roar of its fall must have startled all that lived to flee from before its destructive course; just as its fall startled the flight of all life in its path, so did it startle "the flight of timid Yesterday," of time--marking the end of one era and the beginning of another.

Wordsworth next asks a series of questions about the possible agents who might have been responsible for the sculpture of (1) the Niche, or

(2) the Statue?

Was it by mortals sculptured?--weary slaves
 Of slow endeavour! or abruptly cast
 Into rude shape by fire, with roaring blast
 Tempestuously let loose from central caves?
 Or fashioned by the turbulence of waves,
 Then, when o'er highest hills the Deluge pass'd? (XV, 9-14)

The first question suggests that the poet may be asking about the Statue, since that is the nearest possible antecedent, but the logic of the sonnet as well as the implications of the following questions point to the Niche as the antecedent for the pronoun "it" in line nine. The "weary slaves / Of slow endeavour" serves as a fulcrum of thought as well as of the poem's structure: it points back as an appositive to the "mortals" who must have taken a long time to carve out of the crag such a capacious cavern, and so it contrasts the relative weakness of men with the violent strength of natural forces to which the phrase points in the remainder of the sestet. The phrase which turns from line nine into line ten also turns from human endeavour into natural endeavour, and it may do this because "weary slaves of slow endeavour" may refer to geological processes as well as to human activity: if this possibility of meaning does exist, then the implications are that principles of geological formation are servants of a more powerful master and that human being as well as non-human being share in the same servitude to the same master and under the same discipline of slow time. But these slow processes give way to a more violent process in another imaginative vision of apocalyptic dimensions: roaring and blasting fires erupting from the center of the earth may have given the cavern its being, or the turbulent ocean waves of an angry Jehovah's "Deluge" may have passed over this region and fashioned this cavern of ancient worship. If it was formed by fire, the cavern was probably a place prepared for worship by pa-

gans; but if it was fashioned by the waters of the Deluge, it was probably intended as a place of worship for God's chosen people. Whatever the intentions of the formation, the product of its operation is no longer serviceable and neither are the faiths alive which may once have inhabited there.

What was only a speculation of the English poet's imagination in Sonnet XV becomes a fact of the imagination for the American Indian in Sonnet XVI, for in this latter sonnet is described the ready acceptance of myth as satisfactory to men's questions about the forms of nature and also in this sonnet is emphasized the living quality of the imagination for primitive men who yet feel their relationship with their past. What was a question in Sonnet IV about the "Deluge" which passed over the earth's "highest hills" becomes a fact for the American Indian in Sonnet XVI; in rebuking the "White Man's ignorance" of the message in nature, the smiling Indian invokes his own story of the "Deluge":

—

Such fruitless questions may not long beguile
 Or plague the fancy 'mid the sculptured shows
 Conspicuous yet where Oroonoko flows;
There would the Indian answer with a smile
 Aimed at the White Man's ignorance the while,
 Of the GREAT WATERS telling how they rose,
 Covered the plains, and, wandering where they chose,
 Mounted through every intricate defile,
 Triumphant.--Inundation wide and deep,
 O'er which his Fathers urged, to ridge and steep
 Else unapproachable, their buoyant way;
 And carved, on mural cliff's undreaded side,
 Sun, moon, and stars, and beast of chase or prey;
 Whate'er they sought, shunned, loved, or deified! (XVI, 1-14)

The act of speculation in Sonnet XV had freed his imagination (in another version of the naturalistic apocalypse, looking through a form of nature into the beginnings of time) to travel through space to America, where there is yet a state of nature such as that which the poet's imagination had

conceived in the remote past of England's history. He discovers that in America the natives still interpret natural phenomena in human terms, acting out in their art their relationship to nature and living out their heritage of faith that nature has been beneficial to their welfare.

This may function as a commentary on the contrasting lack of vitality in the English imagination, as seen in the gloomy, blank, and cold "Niche" of Sonnet XV, for in England there seems to be a tendency to see man and nature as two distinct modes of being, unrelated in any moral way, and so leaving men free to exploit natural resources in a ravage of the earth and allowing cynics to dismiss nature's acts of destruction (perhaps in revenge?) against man as neutral phenomena occurring as consequences of the "laws" of the natural "jungle." Wordsworth is trying, among other things, in this series of sonnets to recover for the English imagination a sense of the moral importance of natural phenomena; in a letter to the American Professor Reed in 1845, Wordsworth emphasizes that what he most values in his poetic "attempts" is "the spirituality with which I have endeavoured to invest the material universe, and the moral relations under which I have wished to exhibit its most ordinary appearances."⁸ Wordsworth is attempting in this particular Sonnet XVI to gain a share in the American Indian's view of nature as humanly significant; it is a view of nature which Alfred North Whitehead says Wordsworth continuously seeks to attain for himself and present to his readers:

. . . Wordsworth in his whole being expresses a conscious reaction against the mentality of the eighteenth century. This mentality means nothing else than the acceptance of the scientific ideas at their full face value. Wordsworth was not bothered by any intellectual antagonism. What moved him was a moral repulsion. He felt that something had been left out, and that what had been left out comprised everything that was most important. . . .

. . . Thus the romantic reaction started neither with God nor with Lord Bolingbroke, but with nature. We are here

witnessing a conscious reaction against the whole tone of the eighteenth century. That century approached nature with the abstract analysis of science, whereas Wordsworth opposes to the scientific abstractions his full concrete experience. . . . He alleges against science its absorption in abstractions. His consistent theme is that the important facts of nature elude the scientific method.
 . . . Wordsworth is the poet of nature as being the field of enduring permanences carrying within themselves a message of tremendous significance. . . .⁹

Still looking away from the river, the poet in Sonnet XVII returns from his imaginative sojourn in America to a contemplation of the English scene before him. His imagination had been freed in Sonnet XVI to wander through space and to a land where the past yet lives in the lives of the present-day American Indian; in his return to the English countryside, the poet feels free to send his imagination back through time in an attempt to recover for the present a sense of the past. He does this by viewing particular forms of nature as present embodiments of past values: the mode is once again that of the naturalistic apocalypse.

He peers into the past, descending in time from the more recent era of Danish influence on into the earlier era of Roman conquest and deeper into the darkness of the Celtic era of habitation:

A dark plume fetch me from yon blasted yew,
 Perched on whose top the Danish Raven croaks;
 Aloft, the imperial Bird of Rome invokes
 Departed ages, shedding where he flew
 Loose fragments of wild wailing, that bestrew
 The clouds and thrill the chambers of the rocks;
 And into silence hush the timorous flocks,
 That, calmly couching while the nightly dew
 Moistened each fleece, beneath the twinkling stars
 Slept amid that lone Camp on Hardknot's height,
 Whose Guardians bent the knee to Jove and Mars:
 Or near that mystic Round of Druid frame
 Tardily sinking by its proper weight
 Deep into patient Earth, from whose smooth breast it came!

(XVII, 1-14)

Images of darkness, fragmentation, and silence combine in this sonnet to create the character of the past which has opened up for a visionary moment in the poet's pilgrimage along the river Duddon's banks. The first image to his view is a "blasted yew" tree, the symbolic remains of the past; from the tree, the poet's vision follows an ascending path to the top of the tree, where the "Danish Raven's croak" provides the bridge to the "wild wailing" of the "Imperial Bird of Rome": thus we notice how his vision develops from a fragment ("a dark plume") of a natural object, to the entire nature object ("yon blasted yew"), to an associated natural object (the Raven atop the yew) which shares in some qualities of the first object (non-human and black), to a sound made by the Raven ("croaks"), to another but higher bird, the eagle, which is flying high into the clouded sky. The ascent through space parallels the descent through time, and both indicate the thematic direction of the poem: towards the conclusion of the river's course and man's life, and back to the ocean of Eternity and Infinity from which the river's waters originated and from which man's own (physical as well as) spiritual being originated.

Yet, after his vision has reached the height of its ascent with the "Bird of Rome," it sheds and fragments with the "wild wailing" that is scattered about the earth below. Thus, the pattern of vision is a continuous ascent, then a breaking apart, and a scattering downwards to the earth below. From the height of imperial pomp, Wordsworth's vision descends to the humble timidity of sheep "calmly couching . . . beneath the twinkling stars"; and from the Roman "Guardians" who "bent the knee to Jove and Mars," his vision "sinks" with "that mystic Round of Druid frame" into "patient Earth, from whose smooth breast it came." The pattern of perception in the sestet (after the fragmentation which occurs in the middle lines) repeats

that of the earlier lines: ascent (to the Camp at the top of "Hardknot's height") and then descent (with the Druid stonehenge sinking "deep into patient Earth").

These parallel patterns of development in the poet's vision in this sonnet are similar to the pattern of spiritual ascent followed by naturalistic descent in the "Vernal Ode." And the patterns of visionary development suggest the poet's tendency to return to nature after the impulse to leave it behind; however, the concluding image of the Druid monuments sinking into the earth points up the growing awareness by Wordsworth that his proper home is not in the nature of this earth. The earth has swallowed up much of the former religions of men (as we found in Sonnet XV), and this is what it is doing with the "mystic Round of Druid frame." For such religions of nature belong to nature, and those men who expressed their worship through such religions have also disappeared into the blackness of time and have sunk into the annihilating medium of Earth. (In De Selincourt's note on this poem, we discover that the "country people" call this Druid circle the "Sunken Church." PW, III, 508.)

In Sonnet XVIII Wordsworth returns not only to the present place (as he had from Sonnet XVI to Sonnet XVII), but also to the present time-- from the ancient past of the Druids to the immediate present of English Christians. Wordsworth has shown in Sonnet XVII the darkness, fragmentation, and silence broken only by "wild wailing," which characterize his view of the pagan past; his return to the present time and the present place in Sonnet XVIII is focused upon a Christian chapel and affirms Wordsworth's conviction that Christianity can redeem that darkness, fragmentation, and silence, of the past, through which the light of its "holy lamp"

penetrates with the purgatorial truth of an eternal spirit. This return from the pagan past, which had been described in the imagery of nature (the yew and its branches; the Raven; the Eagle; clouds, rocks, sheep, stars, a hill, stones, and the Earth), to the Christian present, which is described in the imagery of abstraction, suggests Wordsworth's own efforts to leave his allegiances to nature behind and move on to affirm his faith in an eternal home which transcends nature.

The structure of imaginative movement which is involved in this section of seven sonnets (from XII to XVIII) is a complex one of departure and return on a horizontal plane, of ascent and descent along a vertical plane, of motion into the past and back to the present through the dimension of temporal being. The poet feels the urge to move on in Sonnet XII from his halt in Sonnet XI, but he presently departs (in vision) from the river to the open fields in Sonnet XIII; he returns to the river in Sonnet XIV, but only to do so in a descent from the height of Sonnet XIII into the deep chasm of Sonnet XV; deep in this chasm, his imagination leaps, through speculation on a natural objects, into the past; freed by imaginative speculation, he ponders the distant land of America in Sonnet XVI, only to return to the banks of the Duddon in Sonnet XVII; back in England, he again ponders the past, again released into vision by observing natural objects, where he parallels spatial patterns of ascent-descent in Sonnet XVII; the imaginative descent into the past and vision of descent into the earth in Sonnet XVII prompts Wordsworth's imagination to its contrary notion of return to the present and spiritual ascent to Christianity in Sonnet XVIII. Such patterns of imaginative movement suggest the poet's anxious examination of his past allegiances and his present tendency to renounce the past in his growing conviction that his home is with infinity and in eternity.

The renunciation of his past tends in Wordsworth's case to be a renunciation of the claims which nature has on him. Thus, when he describes the Chapel in Sonnet XVIII, Wordsworth does so in the language of abstraction. This, when compared to the imagery of nature which describes the pagan past in Sonnet XVIII, suggests his purgation of nature to reveal his naked soul. The foster-mother, Earth, which had cared for the river in Sonnet III and whose breast of natural beauty had so attracted the poet in Sonnets VI and VII and into whose bosom the "Sunken Church" of the Druids was sinking in Sonnet XVII, gives way in Sonnet XVIII to "Sacred Religion," who is the "Mother of Love" in these Christian times:

Sacred Religion! 'mother of form and fear,'
 Dread arbitress of mutable respect,
 New rites ordaining when the old are wrecked,
 Or cease to please the fickle worshipper;
 Mother of Love! (that name best suits thee here)
 Mother of Love! . . .

(XVIII, 1-6)

"Sacred Religion" had been the mother of those forms of worship based upon fear which the Romans practiced (and "Whose Guardians bent the knee to Jove and Mars" in Sonnet XVII) and which the Druids had memorialized in their "mystic Round" of stones now sinking into the earth. Although Religion could change her form to suit the pleasure of "the fickle worshipper" in the past when Druids gave way to Romans and Romans to Danes, she may now assert her true nature as the "Mother of Love" and find her home in this valley of the Duddon.

Mother of Love! for this deep vale, protect
 Truth's holy lamp, pure source of bright effect,
 Gifted to purge the vapoury atmosphere
 That seeks to stifle it; . . .

(XVIII, 6-9)

Religion, the Mother of Love, has brought the "holy lamp" of truth

into this valley, and this poet Adventurer who wanders along the banks of the Duddon may see that lamp still burning. He has been guided to the "holy lamp" of truth by the river, which was a "child of the clouds," through wildernesses and deep chasms; viewing the "Seathwaite Chapel" as the residence of the Mother of Love, Wordsworth hopes that it will protect that holy lamp of truth whose light is trying to purge "the vapoury atmosphere / That seeks to stifle it": this must be a statement of his fear that nature seeks to "stifle" the spirit, or the light of religious truth, that strives to purge itself of natural being. Then follow some lines which define what that light of truth is.

Wordsworth discovers the form of spiritual truth in the "good works" of men whose lives have embodied the Love whose Mother is "sacred Religion."

as in those days
 When this low Pile a Gospel Teacher knew,
 Whose good works formed an endless retinue:
 A Pastor such as Chaucer's verse portrays;
 Such as the heaven-taught skill of Herbert drew;
 And tender Goldsmith crowned with deathless praise! (XVIII, 9-14)

This sonnet again reveals the subtle way that Wordsworth makes thematic statements through the metaphorical transference of meaning from one image into another so gradually that it is hardly noticeable. He has, first of all, moved from the immediate present in the octave through a transitional simile to the very immediate past in the sestet. The "truth" whose light is "gifted to purge the vapoury atmosphere" of the valley was only recently embodied in the "good works" of a "Gospel Teacher" named Robert Walker (whose name we know from Wordsworth's very long note on this sonnet; thus do we also know the date of Walker's death--June 25, 1802. PW, III, 510). The immediate meaning of this is that a pious minister served the cause of

religious truth through the example of his "good works" (and Wordsworth appends an extensively documented note to the poem in order to show how pious those "good works" were; PW, III, 510-522); but so far as the sequence of sonnets is itself concerned with meaning, this "Gospel Teacher" could be any one who reports the "good news" of Truth through his "works." And, in what could be a sober pun on the meaning of "works," Wordsworth makes his transition of meaning into the final lines with the idea of "good works" as the point of transition, for he refers to the "good works" of three pious men who were also poets: Chaucer, Herbert, and Goldsmith. The immediacy of the meaning is not so ready, for the works which these men made and which Wordsworth intends as expressions of the ideal Pastor are prose works: Chaucer's Pastor delivers a prose sermon in The Canterbury Tales; Herbert described the duties of the Anglican Priest in his A Priest to the Temple; and Goldsmith lived (and lives) in the hearts of many as the author of The Vicar of Wakefield.

But these men were poets, as is Wordsworth, and we should remember at this point that Wordsworth had also described a Pastor whose function in The Excursion was that of aiding in the restoration of faith in the Solitary, a man whose faith in nature had fallen into despair but whose faith in an eternal soul had not yet been achieved; when the Pastor first appears in The Excursion, he is appealed to by the Wanderer to help relieve the despair into which the Solitary has fallen, and we notice that the language of the appeal is much like that used in Sonnet XVIII with reference to the "holy lamp" of truth:

'--Our cogitations this way have been drawn,
 These are the points,' the Wanderer said, 'on which
 Our inquest turns.--Accord, good Sir! the light
 Of your experience to dispel this gloom:

By your persuasive wisdom shall the heart
 That frets, or languishes, be stilled and cheered.'
 (Excursion, V, 479-484)

We are thus led back to the former reference to "a Gospel Teacher" whose "good works" embodied the truth of religion's "holy lamp," for that Gospel Teacher may as well have been Wordsworth's imagined, but still living, Pastor of 1814 as the Rev. Robert Walker who died in 1802.

The pattern of development is from the immediacy of the past when Robert Walker worked this parish to the remote past when Geoffrey Chaucer created his works of poetry. If we follow this pattern closely we will find ourselves at line twelve beginning to return from the past of Chaucer's fourteenth century, through Herbert's seventeenth century, into Goldsmith's eighteenth century, which is also Robert Walker's century and which is also William Wordsworth's century. The truth of the eternal spirit has been enshrined in Sacred Religion's Chapel of Christianity, but it has also found expression in the works of English poets, from Geoffrey Chaucer to William Wordsworth, whose own "good works" of poetry "protect / Truth's holy lamp Gifted to purge the vapoury atmosphere / That seeks to stifle it."

The awe which Wordsworth feels when he views the Chapel in Sonnet XVIII continues into Sonnet XIX, where he testifies to the experience of joy felt in the vision of "good / That seemed from heaven descending."

My frame hath often trembled with delight
 When hope presented some far-distant good,
 That seemed from heaven descending, . . . (XIX, 1-3)

Just as he had felt the stirrings of his spirit when he saw the Seathwaite Chapel in Sonnet XVIII, so does he tremble "with delight" when he thinks on the promise of eternity which that Chapel represents in concrete form.

Thus, with the Chapel in the background and the experience of spiritual delight immediately present, Wordsworth goes out to compare this spiritual experience with a natural experience based upon his present journey along the Duddon:

My frame hath often trembled with delight
 When hope presented some far-distant good,
 That seemed from heaven descending, like the flood
 Of yon pure waters, from their aery height
 Hurrying, with lordly Duddon to unite; (XIX, 1-5)

Thus Wordsworth is comparing his own experience of heaven descending to promise him "some far-distant good" (that is, the reward of eternity and infinity which comes at the end of this life in nature's time and space) with the River Duddon's reception of waters descending from a tributary stream to merge with it in its flow towards the sea. The transfer of values achieved in this simile allows us to point to the "pure waters" falling into the Duddon from "their aery height" as a naturalistic embodiment of the "far-distant good" (promise of infinity and eternity) "that seemed from heaven descending"; and, since the simile is based on the poet's personal experience, we may suggest that the river is a naturalistic embodiment of the poet's own life.

Having made the transfer of reference, through the simile, from himself to the river, Wordsworth now speaks of the river's relation to the inflowing waters of the tributary stream; and we may read this statement as a metaphorical statement about his own natural being's relation to his spiritual being:

who, 'mid a world of images imprest
 On the calm depth of his transparent breast,
 Appears to cherish most that Torrent white,
 The fairest, softest, liveliest of them all! (XIX, 6-9)

The river's "transparent breast" has received the images of numerous objects from the world of nature, but it cherishes most the waters of this tributary stream whose descent from "aery height" has expressed for the poet his own experience of heaven descending upon himself; thus, Wordsworth seems to be saying about as obviously as he can that he also cherishes most that experience of heaven as compared with the whole world of nature which has been heretofore reflected in his life and in his poetry.

He goes on to define further the qualities of that descending Torrent of white and pure waters, and not unexpectedly he discovers those qualities in terms of hearing:

And seldom hath ear listened to a tune
More lulling than the busy hum of Noon,
Swoln by that voice--whose murmur musical
Announces to the thirsty fields a boon
Dewey and fresh, till showers again shall fall. (XIX, 10-14)

And so we notice that the human element is once again called upon for describing this experience of heavenly waters descending to merge with earthly waters, for it is the poet's own ears which now, at the Noon of his day's as well as life's journey, listen to the tune of heavenly music in the descending waters of the tributary stream. And just as the stream's "murmur musical / Announces to the thirsty fields a boon / Dewy and fresh," so had the poet's hope, inspired by his experience at Seathwaite Chapel, been "presented some far-distant good, / That seemed from heaven descending." The poem concludes with an image whose meaning can be found in the opening image. And the final phrase, "till showers again shall fall," goes beyond the immediate meaning that the life along the banks of the River Duddon will be nourished by the spray of water caused by the inflow of the tributary stream that falls "from their aery height": it also suggests that, on the

one hand, until the poet who walks alongside the river has reached his destination, he may be inspired by the beauties of nature "imprest / On the calm depth of [the Duddon's] transparent breast"; and, on the other hand, that the soul of man who inhabits the world of nature may be inspired by the joy of heaven's promises to continue his life's journey in hope that he may finally gain the regions of infinity and eternity.

Sonnet XX is a warning that the immediate experience of beauty and wonder amid the forms of earth's nature is only temporary and may indeed be followed by experiences of chaos, shock, and frenzy. The structure of this sonnet is, like so many of this sequence, balanced upon the turn from one major division of the sonnet (this time, a division composed of the first six lines) into the other major division (composed of the next eight lines); often, in sonnets other than Sonnet XX, this turn is accomplished between the regular Petrarchan octave into the regular sestet. In Sonnet XX, however, Wordsworth has reversed the order of the regular Petrarchan divisions, and so he has put the weight of the poem in the second and longer-division. The sestet (or opening six lines) expresses the degree of awe the poet feels in viewing the beautiful plain of Donnerdale, which is nourished by the waters of the Duddon and, we may assume, of the tributary stream flowing into the Duddon (as described in Sonnet XIX); the degree of that awe may be measured by the quality of the simile which the scene suggests to

Wordsworth:

The old inventive Poets, had they seen,
 Or rather felt, the entrancement that detains
 Thy waters, Duddon! 'mid these flowery plains;
 The still repose, the liquid lapse serene,
 Transferred to bowers imperishably green,
 Had beautified Elysium! . . . (XX, 1-6)

If the poets of old had viewed the scene now open to the eyes of Wordsworth,

they would have described Elysium as such a place. Wordsworth himself had described Elysium as such a place of natural beauty, though out of the condition of time, in "Laodamia":

Of all that is most beauteous--imaged there
 In happier beauty; more pellucid streams,
 An ampler ether, a diviner air,
 And field invested with purpureal gleams;
 . . . happy Ghosts, that gather flowers
 Of blissful quiet, 'mid unfading bowers. (ll. 103-106, 162-163)

But that was a paradise for the pagan imagination as expressed through the vision brought to Laodamia by Protesilaus. And so would such a paradise be for "the old inventive Poets" who would describe Elysium in such terms as Wordsworth would use to describe the plain of Donnerdale, for their conception of paradise would be formed by their experiences in nature without the vision of spirit made possible for Christian poets. Such a vision of spirit has been allowed to Wordsworth and has been expressed by him in Sonnets XVIII and XIX; consequently, he can renounce the attractions of the plain of Donnerdale in Sonnet XX and prepare himself for the further trials of his spirit which may be in store for him before he reaches the conclusion of his journey.

One very interesting element in Sonnet XX is the allusion to Milton's Paradise Lost which occurs in the phrase "liquid lapse" at line four. Wordsworth once again describes the Duddon in the language used by Milton's Adam to describe the newly created Eden in Paradise Lost, VIII, 263; Wordsworth had alluded to this episode of Paradise Lost in Sonnet IV, where the river's shape was that of a serpent and where the poem's meaning embodied the temptation made by the river to the Adventurer along its banks to follow its course through nature. Wordsworth had "fallen" to the

temptation, or challenge, made by the river, and he has followed the river's course to this point in the plain of Donnerdale, which manifests the beauties of a paradise. And so, rather than suggesting that this scene would have inspired "the old inventive Poets" to describe Elysium--as he explicitly puts it in the sestet--Wordsworth is himself describing the scene of the Donnerdale plain in the language used by one of those "old inventive Poets," John Milton, to describe the earthly Paradise in Eden. And just as that earthly paradise was eventually lost to Adam and just as the hardships of natural existence lay in store for the ejected Adam, so does Wordsworth realize that he must move beyond this scene of natural beauty into regions rough and harsh; Wordsworth is, in effect, giving up at this point his hopes of recovering the natural paradise which was lost to Adam and described by Milton, and he is affirming his willingness to endure the trials of his natural life to the end that he may discover the heavenly paradise of eternity and infinity which transcends nature and which may be something like the regions revealed to Dante in the Purgatory and Paradise of his Divine Comedy.

The octave of Sonnet XX expresses a determination to endure the shocks and trials which may lie in store for the poet who gives up his opportunity (or hope) to abide in a natural paradise:

But these chains
 Will soon be broken;--a rough course remains,
 Rough as the past; where Thou, of placid mien,
 Innocuous as a firstling of the flock,
 And countenanced like a soft cerulean sky,
 Shalt change thy temper; and, with many a shock
 Given and received in mutual jeopardy,
 Dance, like a Bacchanal, from rock to rock,
 Tossing her frantic thyrsis wide and high! (XX, 8-14)

"These chains" which "will soon be broken" must refer, on the one hand, to

the river's course through the plain of Donnerdale and, on the other, to the mortal condition of the man whose life is reflected in Duddon's waters. With reference to his own mortal condition, Wordsworth is asserting through the phrase "these chains / Will be broken" that his attachments to nature will inevitably come to an end with his death, but more immediately he is asserting that after he has broken his allegiance to the task of discovering paradise on earth (as he had announced it in the "Prospectus" to The Recluse), he will be subjected to further trials of his spirit.

Sonnet XX ends with images of chaos and threat, but Sonnet XXI brings in a "whisper from the heart" to calm that chaos and sooth the anxieties arising from that threat of Sonnet XX. Wordsworth may meet the trials of the future with the strength of spirit which comes from reliance upon values derived from memories of the past (and so reveals the quality of his "conservative" character in this time of his life). We may see in this sonnet and the next (XXI and XXII) another of Wordsworth's transfers of meaning from his own personal experience into the form of the river: we may see the poet's salvation through personal memory contrasted with the pagan's destruction through nature as embodied in the river as impersonal memory, as time.

"A whisper from the heart" steadies the vision of chaos which concluded Sonnet XX:

Whence that low voice?--A whisper from the heart,
That told of days long past, when here I roved
With friends and kindred tenderly beloved;
Some who had early mandates to depart,
Yet are allowed to steal my path athwart
By Duddon's side; once more do we unite,
Once more beneath the kind Earth's tranquil light;
And smothered joys into new being start. (XXI, 1-8)

What was an institutional form of promise of immortality in the Chapel of

Sonnet XVIII and a natural form in the tributary stream in Sonnet XIX, here gives way to a personal communication with the spirits of beloved dead ones through an imaginative recovery of the past.

When we first come upon the opening words, "Whence that low voice?" we may at first think the poet is referring to the sound of the river flowing past because such was the reference to similar "low voices" in Sonnets IV, V, XII, XIII, XIV, and XIX, where the Duddon is heard "laughing," upbraiding the sun in heaven in a "clear voice," chiding the poet to move on his way, sweeping in anger through scenes of winter, moving through a wilderness "attended but by [its] own voice," and murmuring the music of spiritual renewal in its reception of new waters from a tributary stream. But such is not the source of the "voice" in Sonnet XXI; in this sonnet Wordsworth discovers and explicitly presents the strength which he needs for his journey as deriving, not from nature, but from his own memory. It is the light which comes from himself, through his memory of childhood happiness, that makes "tranquil" the light shed on Earth along the banks of the River Duddon. The shift of emphasis from the river as a source of his imagery and values to (1) the human community (in Sonnet XIII), (2) the spiritual community as expressed in Christianity (in Sonnet XVIII), (3) the personal experience of spiritual joy seen as a merging of natural existence with spiritual renewal ("smothered joys into new being start") stands nakedly and without reliance upon nature except as a substance to give body to the form of his experience.

In the last six lines of Sonnet XXI we see Wordsworth's memory of childhood joys taking into its form the substance of the River Duddon itself:

From her unworthy seat, the cloudy stall
 Of Time, breaks forth triumphant Memory;
 Her glistening tresses bound, yet light and free
 As golden locks of birch, that rise and fall
 On gales that breathe too gently to recal
 Aught of the fading year's inclemency! (XXI, 9-14)

The memory which had been the poet's own recovery of his childhood past has become a personification, Memory whose features are extremely like those of the River Duddon. Both the Duddon and this Memory derive from places high in clouds, and the "glistening tresses" of Memory share qualities of substance and motion with the trees which line the banks of the river. If one trusts to his own experience of joy, he may discover life and beauty in nature; but if he begins by trusting in nature as his only guide, he may be betrayed into the destruction of his body and possibly of his soul. We have seen in this sonnet, XXI, how the poet's recovery of joy through his own memory has allowed him to view the life and beauty of the River Duddon as though it were a Maiden like Memory; we may now follow the poet's imagination into Sonnet XXII, where we encounter the myth which accounts for the river's maiden-like appearance and where we also learn the lesson that nature's beauties are ambiguous values which may betray human trust and love.

In Sonnet XXII Wordsworth gives us the traditional account for the river's maiden-like appearance; the story tells us that a "love-lorn Maid" came to the river "at some far-distant time" and saw the reflection of a primrose in its waters, and because she misjudged the appearance of the primrose in the water for the real primrose that hung in the cliffs above, she apparently plunged into the waters and drowned:

A love-lorn Maid, at some far-distant time,
 Came to this hidden pool, whose depths surpass
 In crystal clearness Dian's looking-glass;

And, gazing, saw that Rose, which from the prime
 Derives its name, reflected as the chime
 Of echo doth reverberate some sweet sound;
 The starry treasure from the blue profound
 She longed to ravish;--shall she plunge, or climb
 The humid precipice, and seize the guest
 Of April, smiling high in the upper air?
 Desperate alternative! what fiend could dare
 Prompt the thought?--Upon the steep rock's breast
 The lonely Primrose yet renews its bloom,
 Untouched memento of her hapless doom! (XXII, 1-14)

This sonnet communicates the theme of nature's ambiguity not only in the drama of the story but also in the language of the telling. There are faint hints of the story of Eve in the background of this poem: "some far distant time" points back to the time when the waters were more clear than they were for that pagan goddess Diana; "that Rose, which from the prime / Derives its name" hints at the beginnings of creation; the longing to "ravish" a "starry treasure from the blue profound" is not greatly unlike Eve's longing for the fruit forbidden her by God; the "fiend" who "could dare / Prompt the thought" would not be far to find in Eve's case; and, finally, the promise of April's rose--a form Dante chooses to represent paradise in his Paradiso--remains to memorialize the eternal spring of Eden from which Eve was driven in "her hapless doom." And so it seems to me that there is an ambiguity of reference in the sonnet which lends mythological depth to the "tradition" as Wordsworth gives it.

There is the slightest of ambiguity about the fate of the "love-lorn Maid" because the poet does not state directly what her choice was. But since the primrose continues to blossom as an "untouched memento of her hapless doom," there does not seem to be much room for doubting that the maiden chose to plunge into the river rather than to climb the precipice in order to "seize the guest / Of April." A more significant ambiguity of

meaning occurs in the question asked about the reasons for the maiden's having to choose the real from the appearance:

--shall she plunge, or climb
 The humid precipice, and seize the guest
 Of April, smiling high in upper air?
 Desperate alternative! what fiend could dare
 To prompt the thought? . . . (XXII, 8-12)

The poet does not attempt an answer, but we may deduce from certain previous facts that this "fiend" may be Nature herself, or at least Nature in one aspect of her being--that aspect when she is not viewed in the light of heavenly derived values of eternity. The "fiend" which prompted the maiden in this sonnet to plunge to her destruction was the river Duddon itself in Sonnet IV, where the waters of the newly born river were taking the shape of a serpent in their encounter with the forms of earthly nature. In days of primitive ignorance, man could not discern the real from the appearances of the real (or the eternal form from its reflection in time), and so when the maiden should have climbed to heaven for her reward, she sought it instead in the depths of nature and was annihilated--or perhaps not completely so, since she became a part of that nature whose life is visible to the man of imagination. Through his imaginative comprehension of spiritual and eternal values as well as of natural and temporal values, the poet may be saved from the fate of the "love-lorn Maid" and he may redeem for the eternal spirit a valuable function of the river which was stained at a time when unenlightened humankind misjudged the true values of the river. It is this comprehension of the river's true value to the human spirit which is the thematic burden of the next sonnet, XXIII.

Wordsworth will not be deceived by the appearances of nature: he demonstrated his strength to resist the temptations of nature's ambiguous chal-

lunge in Sonnet IV and again in Sonnets XX and XXI, and in Sonnet XXIII he continues to move along his path of pilgrimage. Instead of the sorrow for pagan errors of judgment which he might have felt in Sonnet XXII, Wordsworth chooses the happiness of natural purgation in the scene of children cheerfully cleansing the stains of the earth from their sheep in the river Duddon:

Sad thoughts, avaunt!--partake we their blithe cheer
 Who gathered in betimes the unshorn flock
 To wash the fleece, where haply bands of rock,
 Checking the stream, make a pool smooth and clear
 As this we look on. (XXIII, 1-5)

This river, this "child of the clouds" which was born high in the mountains "remote from every taint/ Of sordid industry" (II, 1-2), is now a "pastoral River" whose "smooth and clear" waters are used by boys for cleaning the fleece of their sheep. This river has meandered and plunged through the wildernesses, down into the chasms, and across the plains of Earth's nature; it has seen in the reflections of its water the mortal forms of Earth's living inhabitants, and so in a sense it has borne the burden of the taint of earthly mortality after its descent from its birthplace in the mountains. Now, after having passed the Seathwaite Chapel in Sonnet XVIII, where "Truth's holy lamp" was "gifted to purge the vapoury atmosphere" of the valley, after having "trembled with delight" at viewing the hope of eternity in the form of "heaven descending" waters in Sonnet XIX, and after having felt "smothered joys into new being start" in Sonnet XXI, the poet can present a scene of purgation which is charged with spiritual meaning in Sonnet XXIII.

This scene of sheep being washed clean of their earthly stains in the pure waters of the Duddon is a natural occurrence seen in the light of

spiritual meaning, and so it suggests in miniature the theme of the entire sonnet sequence: a purgation of mortality occurring as a pilgrimage through nature to death and eternity. This sonnet, coming towards the end of the section describing maturity, embodies a symbolic statement of the purgation which has been achieved in the poet's spiritual condition up to this point in his journey along the Duddon. Wordsworth is somewhat bold in the imagery of the following section, but perhaps he now feels that he has the spiritual courage to sustain his poetic courage:

And what if Duddon's spotless flood receive
 Unwelcome mixtures as the uncouth noise
 Thickens, the pastoral River will forgive
 Such wrong; . . . (XXIII, 9-12)

The courage is needed because the suggestion is that the river is now functioning not only as a purgatorial element, but also as an embodiment of the Redeemer Himself, whose attributes of spotless Innocence and of Pastoral care and forgiveness are allowed to characterize the River Duddon. Wordsworth does not stop with characterizing the Duddon in terms of the purgatorial function traditionally associated with the Jordan and associated with the river through Eden by Dante in the last five cantos of his Purgatorio; Wordsworth personifies the Duddon as the earthly form of Divinity itself. And if the pastoral River can forgive the stains made in its pure element by happy children washing off the fleeces of their sheep, then surely the rest of us can forgive the tumult of happiness which disturbs the quiet of Nature:

nor need we blame the licensed joys,
 Though false to Nature's quiet equipoise:
 Frank are the sports, the stains are fugitive. (XXIII, 12-14)

In Sonnet XXIII we have reached, with the poet, the climax of the

spiritual adventure through Earth's nature; this thematic climax has coincided with the temporal climax of the poem as a whole--noon, for in Sonnet XXIV "Mid-noon is past." The imaginative courage of Wordsworth's figurative representation of the Duddon in Sonnet XXIII has perhaps exhausted him, for we find his looking for a resting-place in Sonnet XXIV. This sonnet brings us to the end of the section of the poem describing the phase of maturity: it is the resting-place for meditation and contemplation needed for the final period of old age leading to death and eternity. The sonnet on the resting-place marks the end of the middle section of the poem's journey, but it does not mark the beginning of the next phase because Sonnets XXV and XXVI are companion memorials to the same resting-place--in fact, they are the products of the meditation which occurs at the resting-place of Sonnet XXIV. The pause in the journey is marked by three "speaking monuments."

We may take advantage of this pause in the progress of the poet's journey along the Duddon and remark that Wordsworth's imaginative courage (or some might say reactionary fear) in these last seven or eight sonnets (XVIII-XXVI) lends some strength to speculative courage of interpretation (or some might say unlicensed bravado). Thus, we venture to suggest that some benefit of meaning may occur by comparing a few points of these last mentioned sonnets with a few points in Dante's Purgatorio; if the details do not allow such comparison, the over-all development of meaning in The River Duddon does seem to allow for such a comparison: both poems describe a poet's walking along a river's bank, through scenes of earthly nature and according to an earthly time scheme, leading to a vision of eternity and infinity after a purgation of earthly mortality in a river of pure waters at exactly noontime. In the Purgatorio¹⁰ we find the following lines which seem to me to aid us in understanding the direction of Wordsworth's thematic

development in The River Duddon without necessarily being "sources" or conscious influences on Wordsworth while he wrote his sonnets:

Now, when my footsteps, slowly as they fell,
So far within the ancient wood were set
That where I'd first come in I could not tell,

Lo! they were halted by a rivulet
Which ran from right to left, its ripples small
Bending the grasses on the edge of it;

And whatso waters over here we call
Clearest, were cloudy by comparison
With this, which hides not anything at all,

Though darkly, darkly it goes flowing on
Beneath the everlasting shade, which never
Lets any ray strike there of sun or moon.

I stayed my feet, but let my eyes pass over
To see the fresh and various profusion
Of flowery branches on yon side the river!

And there appeared to me--as when the intrusion
Of some new wonder takes one unaware
And throws all one's ideas into confusion--

A lady all alone, who wandered there
Singing and plucking flower on flowerlet gay,
With which her path was painted everywhere.

(Canto XXVIII, 22-42)

Dante and the Lady follow the River through the Earthly Paradise until they come to a place in the forest where Dante beholds Beatrice come as though from heaven (Cantos XXIX and XXX); Dante is purged of his memory of evil and sin in the waters of Lethe:

Into the stream she'd drawn me in my faint,
Throat-high, and now, towing me after her,
Light as a shuttle o'er the water went.

"Asperges me" I heard, as I drew near
The blissful brink, so sweetly as to drown
Power of recall, far more to write it here.

(Canto XXXI, 94-99)

Dante then follows Beatrice deeper into the Earthly Paradise until he comes to a "resting-place" beneath the Tree of Knowledge (Canto XXXII); and, finally, Dante is purged by the waters of Eunoe at high noon in the final canto of the Purgatorio:

More blazing, and with paces tardier,
 The sun was riding the meridian ring
 Whose whereabouts depends on where we are,

.
 The beauteous lady took my hand anon,
 Saying in tones of womanly sweet grace
 To Statius, "Come with him"; and so led on.

.
 From those most holy waters, born anew
 I came, like trees by change of calendars
 Renewed, with new-sprung foliage through and through

Pure and prepared to leap up to the stars.
 (Canto XXXIII, 103-5, 133-5,
 142-145)

Beyond suggesting, through broad analogy, a similarity to Dante's theme of purgation, the pattern of Wordsworth's sequence includes a few details which tease us into closer examination for meaning: the cleansing of the sheep in the pure waters of the Duddon at what must be high noon reminds us of Dante's purgation at high noon; the cleansing of the sheep is followed immediately in Sonnet XXIV with a description of a place for resting, and this reminds us of Dante's rest beneath the Tree of Knowledge immediately after his purgation in the waters of Lethe; and, finally, Wordsworth's thoughts while in the resting-place of Sonnet XXIV lead him to feeling a desire for the companionship of "The One" woman whose love he cherishes and whose absence occasions feelings of guilt in him when he experiences beauties and pleasures of nature (Sonnet XXV), and this reminds us of

Dante's quest for Beatrice and more specifically of the mode of her appearance to him (that is, as though in a chariot drawn from heaven).

I offer no proof-positive (such as letters, memoirs, notes, prefaces, etc.) for showing any conscious debt of imagery or meaning by Wordsworth to Dante in this sequence of sonnets, but I think the comparison is helpful in determining the direction of Wordsworth's thematic development not only in this poem on The River Duddon but also in his life and imaginative career. (and, incidentally, in the development of much of nineteenth-century poetry). That direction is one which leads away from dependence upon the forms of nature for the nourishment of his imagination, except insofar as they aid him in the working out of his spiritual perfection, and it is one which leads through purgation towards an apocalyptic vision of the last things and the first things in eternity and infinity. Still, beyond suggesting this similarity in the theme of purgation, I am not willing to suggest comparison between Wordsworth's River Duddon and Dante's Divine Comedy, either in the quality of the final vision of eternity or in the quality of the poetry communicating that vision.

Before he may move on towards his final vision of eternity and infinity, the poet must rest. In Sonnet XXIV he finds a "Nook . . . Half grot, half arbour" which will afford him a place of temporary repose. After the view of purgation in Sonnet XXIII, there is a feeling of stillness and weakness in Sonnet XXIV, suggesting spiritual as well as physical exhaustion and perhaps even suggesting the humility which accompanies the feeling of exhaustion.

Mid-noon is past;--upon the sultry mead
 No zephyr breathes, no cloud its shadow throws:
 If we advance unstrengthened by repose,
 Farewell the solace of the vagrant reed!

This Nook--with woodbine hung and straggling weed,
 Tempting recess as ever pilgrim chose,
 Half grot, half arbour--proffers to enclose
 Body and mind, from molestation freed,
 In narrow compass--narrow as itself. (XXIV, 1-9)

Nature as well as the poet is seemingly exhausted, when "No zephyr breathes, no cloud its shadow throws"; but Nature appears in a mode here which reminds us of earlier modes in The River Duddon: the "Nook" is like the "Niche" in Sonnet XV, and the temptation to the traveller made by the Nook is like the temptation made to the Adventurer in Sonnet IV. The Niche of Sonnet XV was "gloomy . . . capacious, blank, and cold; / A concave free from shrubs and mosses grey," thus contrasting with the Nook of Sonnet XXIV not only in being inaccessible to human endeavor (it was high up on the chasm's "loftiest crags") but also in its appearance of death and sterility (there was no vegetation growing around it, not even "mosses grey"); the Niche of Sonnet XV had perhaps held a Statue worshipped in ancient days and the Nook in Sonnet XXIV "proffers to enclose" the weary "body and mind" of a "pilgrim" journeying along the bank of the River Duddon: the poet's purgatorial experiences described especially in Sonnets XVII-XXIII have led him to a spiritual rebirth that finds objective form in the "Nook" of Sonnet XXIV, where Nature is clearly seen as a handmaid to the struggling soul of man on earth.

This idea that Nature comes to the aid of the "pilgrim" after his rejection or renunciation of her forms as his permanent home and after his spiritual rebirth is reenforced in the variation on the theme of temptation in Sonnet XXIV from what it was in Sonnet IV. In the earlier sonnet the temptation was made in the form of a challenge by a "laughing" and serpentine river to the Adventurer who followed its course; in the later sonnet

the temptation is made in the form of an invitation to rest and recover strength of body and mind by a "Nook" alongside the river to a "pilgrim." The earlier temptation implied the possibility of destruction, but this later one is explicitly "from molestation freed." The poet can therefore find the refreshment for his body and mind which he has already found for his spirit.

The temptation to rest the weary body is resisted by the "industrious" Fancy, which is ever ready to move on:

Or if the Fancy, too industrious Elf,
 Be loth that we should breathe awhile exempt
 From new incitements friendly to our task,
 Here wants not stealthy prospect, that may tempt
 Loose Idless to forego her wily mask. (XXIV, 10-14)

The Fancy may find food for its nourishment in the surrounding "prospect" of natural forms. Even though the poet's "body and mind" may find repose in this place, his Fancy is ever alert and vigilant against the dangers of "Idless": such is necessary for Idleness may lead to sloth, and sloth to despair, and despair to damnation. Thus, it seems to me, Wordsworth's Fancy, his "too industrious Elf," is a guard to the protection of his spiritual condition. And in this condition of bodily and mental repose, the poet is allowed a few moments of meditation: the products of these moments of thought are shown to us in Sonnets XXV and XXVI, where we can watch the poet's Fancy (as Imagination or Reason in her most exalted mood) operating to protect his weary (and so potentially defenseless) soul from the despair which threatens to overcome him during his moment of repose.

Sonnet XXV expresses the lonely pilgrim's desire for companionship, and this desire intensifies his feeling of loneliness to the point that objects of his environment are ceasing to appear comforting (as they are

in Sonnet XXIV) and are becoming indices of his bitter guilt. His pilgrimage has resulted in the last few sonnets in a revival of his faith in nature as a guide to the human soul sojourning on earth, but as soon as he pauses to rest, the threat of Idleness grows to destroy that faith. First we read of his Fancy's desire for the companionship of "One" (who may be his wife Mary or his sister Dorothy, but more probably his daughter Dora) whose mode of transportation to his side he envisions as heavenly inspired (and in imagery which reminds us of the vision of the Angel in the "Vernal Ode" as well as remotely of Dante's meeting with Beatrice):

Methinks 'twere no unprecedented feat
Should some benignant Minister of air
Lift, and encircle with a cloudy chair,
The One for whom my heart shall ever beat
With tenderest love;--or, if a safer seat
Atween his downy wings be furnished, there
Would lodge her, and the cherished burden bear
O'er hill and valley to this dim retreat! (XXV, 1-8)

We can see in the diction describing his desire the poet's growing sense of distrust for the guardianship of nature: first, he desires a supernatural mode of transportation for his beloved (which is not unearned, in the light of his growing faith in the operation of heaven as encouragement to the human soul--as in Sonnet XIX); however, and secondly, we notice that he hesitates about allowing his beloved to ride in a cloud and that he wishes for a "safer seat" between the wings of the Angel himself; and then, finally, we notice that what had been an attractive place of seclusion from the noonday sun in Sonnet XXIV has become a "dim retreat" (my italics), which isn't astoundingly meaningful but which does point to the growing dissatisfaction with his natural environment that the poet clearly expresses in the concluding lines of the sonnet.

The realities of earth's nature have been hard and rough, and so the poet has journeyed alone in order to save his beloved from as much hardship as he can. The expression of the roughness in nature's course for man is yet another sign of the poet's increasing dissatisfaction with nature; and when he finally realizes that the conditions of nature are such that he must travel his journey alone, he tastes the bitterness of guilt that arises when he does find things of sweetness and beauty in the otherwise rough and long ways of nature:

Rough ways my steps have trod; too rough and long
 For her companionship! here dwells soft ease:
 With sweets that she partakes not some distaste
 Mingles, and lurking consciousness of wrong;
 Languish the flowers; the waters seem to waste
 Their vocal charm; their sparklings cease to please. (XXV, 9-14)

This guilt and bitterness which lead to the death of nature must not be allowed to overwhelm the reposing poet, for such growing despair could lead to the loss of his own soul before Nature can lead him on to his proper conclusion.

But Wordsworth will not be betrayed into the destruction of his soul as was the love-lost maiden in Sonnet XXII destroyed when she could not rightly discern the appearances from the realities of nature. Wordsworth's Fancy comes to his aid in Sonnet XXVI, and it comes in the form of memory of his childhood (just as it had come to restore peace to his troubled soul in Sonnet XXI after the anxiety that ended Sonnet XX):

Return, Content! for fondly I pursued,
 Even when a child, the Streams--unheard, unseen;
 Through tangled woods, impending rocks between;
 Or, free as air, with flying inquest viewed
 The sullen reservoirs whence their bold brood--
 Pure as the morning, fretful, boisterous, keen,

Green as the salt-sea billows, white and green--
 Poured down the hills, a choral multitude!
 Nor have I tracked their course for scanty gains;
 They taught me random cares and truant joys,
 That shield from mischief and preserve from stains
 Vague minds, while men are growing out of boys;
 Maturer Fancy owes to their rough noise
 Impetuous thoughts that brook not servile reins. (XXVI, 1-14)

This sonnet is not only a statement about the discovery of values in nature, but because it comes in The River Duddon sequence where it does (after the growth of despair in Sonnet XXV), it is also a statement about the recovery of values in nature; Wordsworth chooses literally to recover those values by using a sonnet written as early as 1803 or 1804, and so his literal recovery of an early sonnet becomes a symbolic act expressing his spiritual recovery from the despair of Sonnet XXV.

Sonnet XXVI is the final one of this section which I have called "The Noontime of Maturity." This sonnet is appropriately the conclusion to this section because it immediately precedes a sonnet which describes the poet's intense awareness of spiritual strength growing out of bodily decay, and because it contains in its theme and in its image structure a summary of the poet's progress from childhood to maturity. When he says that he fondly "pursued, / Even when a child, the Streams--unheard, unseen," Wordsworth echoes the earliest sonnets of this sequence, when he looked for the obscure beginnings of the River Duddon high in the mountains and specifically when he "caught the fitful sound" of the Duddon's "clear voice" wafted to him over "sullen moss and craggy mound" in his isolation from the River itself in Sonnet V. Describing his pursuit of river Streams "Through tangled woods, impending rocks between," Wordsworth repeats, with variation and concision, the imagery of wilderness and rocky crags

which is found in Sonnets IV, V, VIII, XII, XIV, XV, XX and XXII. Next he describes his childhood delight in the waterfalls that "poured down the hills":

Or, free as air, with flying inquest viewed
 The sullen reservoirs whence their bold brood--
 Pure as the morning, fretful, boisterous, keen,
 Green as the salt-sea billows, white and green--
 Poured down the hills, a choral multitude! (XXVI, 4-8)

And this reminds us of the many images of pools and waterfalls of the preceding sonnets, but especially does it remind us of two particular images: the image of "green alders" and "birch-trees risen in silver colonnade" described in Sonnet V, and the image of the "tributary stream," with its "flood of yon pure waters" that "seemed from heaven descending," "from their aery height / Hurrying, with lordly Duddon to unite" in Sonnet XIX, which concludes with imagery of music much like the "choral multitude" described in this sonnet, XXVI.

When he goes ahead to tell us what he learned from these pursuits of the Streams through nature's "tangled woods," Wordsworth repeats imagery which he had used earlier to describe what he had learned of value in nature during his pilgrimage along the River Duddon:

Nor have I tracked their course for scanty gains;
 They taught me random cares and truant joys,
 That shield from mischief and preserve from stains
 Vague minds, while men are growing out of boys; (XXVI, 9-12)

This should remind us of the "sheep-washing" scene in Sonnet XXIII:

Sad thoughts avaunt!--partake we their blithe cheer
 Who gathered in betimes the unshorn flock
 To wash the fleece, where haply bands of rock,
 Checking the stream, make a pool smooth and clear
 As this we look on. (XXIII, 1-5)

For in this sonnet, XXIII, Wordsworth uses the imagery of "random cares and truant joys" in describing "the turmoil that united / Clamour of boys with innocent despites of barking dogs," and he uses the imagery of innocence "shielded [] from mischief and preserved [] from stains" in describing "the pastoral River" that forgives "such wrong" and "the stains [that] are fugitive."

And then we notice that the "too industrious Elf" of Fancy (Sonnet XXIV) has become a "Maturer Fancy" in the conclusion to Sonnet XXVI, which is also the conclusion to this section on "The Noontime of Maturity":

Maturer Fancy owes to their rough noise
Impetuous thoughts that brook not servile reins. (XXVI, 13-14)

Although Wordsworth's fancy had learned the freedom and vital strength that comes from childhood ramblings through the natural landscape, and although he can look back in memory to those times as sources for his present spiritual strength, he must submit his "Maturer Fancy" to the disciplines of old age which were not necessary or desirable in his youth; indeed, he has been preparing for that time of discipline throughout this journey along the Duddon, needing this restorative of childhood freedom while he reposes in the Nook of Sonnet XXIV and before he moves on to the renewal of his journey in Sonnet XXVIII.

Sonnets XXVII-XXXIII: The Evening of Old Age

The second section of The River Duddon concludes with the poet in a state of reposeful thought, resting from his long journey and recovering the strength of body and mind which he will need to continue his pilgrimage to its end. The third section opens with a sonnet describing a ruined castle, sunk into the earth as a memorial to the death of a Warrior past

and as a symbol of the poet's own consciousness of his mortality; this third section concludes with the poet in a state of thought about reposeful death among the "pastoral graves" of a "wave-washed Church-yard." And so the first noticeable development of thematic emphasis in this concluding section of The River Duddon is that of rest, of repose; while this theme was first introduced in the final sonnets of the middle section as a secondary motif to the major one of anxious thought and searching motion, it becomes the major theme of the last section and, as such, is a symbolic account of the final rest for the body and eternal repose of the soul after the exhausting pilgrimage of life.

There are several patterns of imagery which support the major theme of tendency toward reposeful death in this section. There is an increasing emphasis on imagery of darkness and separation as well as of graves themselves. There is a pattern of imagery which connotes an expansion into spiritual freedom from the narrow enclosure of earthly existence, and this pattern is complemented by one which suggests a growth of spiritual strength out of bodily weakness. And, finally, there is a sustained note of peace and settling calm in the sonnets of this last section of The River Duddon.

The image of the grave is introduced in Sonnet XXVII as "a shapeless heap" of remains "self-buried in earth's mould," is only slightly noticed in the reference to "human clay" in Sonnet XXVIII, but is the object of attention in Sonnet XXIX, where "The passing Winds memorial tribute pay" to "the loyal and the brave, who lie / In the blank earth." Although there is only a hint of the grave in Sonnet XXX's reference to the poet's "journey end," there is a return of emphasis on the grave in Sonnet XXXI's lingering view of the "pastoral graves" which lie in "that wave-washed Church-yard" adjoining "the Kirk of Ulpha." While pacing in that Church-

yard, the poet extracts two "thoughts divine": Sonnet XXXII and Sonnet XXXIII, which do not focus upon images of the grave but which are products of graveyard meditation.

Images of increasing darkness and impending or actual separation are recurrent throughout this last section of the poem. We find "a shadow large and cold" in Sonnet XXVII, which is concerned with the separation effected by Time's unsparing hand" on the inhabitants of the now fallen castle. Sonnet XXVIII describes the poet's renewal of his journey and separation from the resting-place described in Sonnet XXIV: he will leave the Nook behind for other life to rest in, but he will not leave without thanksgiving to the river for its sustenance of such resting-places, including (and so repeating the idea of the river as the stream of memory) that place of spiritual repose--memory, with its "Glad meetings, tender partings, that upstay / The drooping mind of absence." There is a slight note of the idea of separation in Sonnet XXIX, with its references to "these retired domains" and fallen heroes, and there is an even slighter note of descending darkness in its reference to "the blank earth." But the idea of separation is the main theme of the next sonnet, XXX: here the thought of separation from one's "good name" is described as a "divorce" and as a loss of "innocence," while the decision to separate from the river is described as a gain of freedom. This separation from the river has been achieved in Sonnet XXXI, where the poet is "Soothed by the unseen River's gentle roar"; one reason for the river's being "unseen" is that darkness has overtaken the poet in this sonnet, where there is an image of "a black cloud diffused o'er half the sky" and "distant moon-lit mountains [that] faintly shine." The idea of separation appears in both Sonnet XXXII and Sonnet XXXIII: in the former is the idea that the Duddon has left behind

the mountain precipices and the plains of flowers and "blooming thickets"; in the latter is the idea that the poet will leave behind him "the sweets of earth" and "each tumultuous working" of his life.

The theme of liberation, or expansion, into spiritual freedom from the narrow confines of earthly existence is supported by a scheme of imagery which is best seen in its broader outlines, from the "Nook" of "narrow compass" in Sonnet XXIV of the middle section to the "ampler sky" overhead the "Majestic Duddon" as it "expands" into "a region wide" in Sonnet XXXII and then to the Duddon's passage from "the narrow Vale" into "that receptacle vast / Where all his unambitious functions fail" in Sonnet XXXIII, where the poet exclaims that he too will "be free . . . to advance like Thee" and be "Prepared . . . to mingle with Eternity." This theme of expansion and liberation is repeated with variation in less obvious ways in some of the individual sonnets in this section: the land is freed of its "foes" in Sonnet XXVII; the poet leaves his place of repose in Sonnet XXVIII; heroes have fallen to "lie / In the blank earth" in Sonnet XXIX, but they are praised by the chants of "passing Winds" and rushing "Torrents"; the poet is liberated from the loose "chain" that binds him to the Duddon in Sonnet XXX; "the pilgrim's eye" in Sonnet XXXI looks out upon the Kirk of Ulpha and undergoes an experience of vision which the poet expresses in images of height, ascent, and expansion: "a star" shining through the rent of a cloud that is "diffused o'er half the sky," a palm-tree "towering high / O'er the parched waste," an "Indian tree" whose "downward bent" branches form a "boundless canopy," and "the summits hoar / Of distant moonlit mountains."

Images of spiritual strength growing out of bodily decay and weakness also appear in this section, and they seem to complement the theme of the

liberated spirit. Sonnet XXVII describes the "strength" which comes with peace and which enables even "the weakest" to withstand "all other strength." The poet rises refreshed in spirit after affording his body its necessary rest in Sonnet XXVIII. Even though it has left behind its powerful strength of waterfalls and has rushed with "hasty stride" towards the harbor which opens into the ocean, the Duddon continues to manifest great strength through the appearance of calm: in Sonnet XXI it is "unseen," but it is heard as a "gentle roar" (in a phrase which contains both the idea of diminished strength, in "gentle," and the idea of continued power, in "roar"); in Sonnet XXXII the Duddon glides "in silence" "over smooth flat sands," but it does so "with unfettered sweep."

The final pattern of imagery which I wish to point out here is that of peace and settling calm, which is not really so much a pattern as it is a permeation of the poem's concluding atmosphere, literally and symbolically. The ruins of the "embattled House" in Sonnet XXVII are "quietly" buried in "earth's mould," the winds which sweep through them are "silent," and men now living may preserve their freedom if they will abide "in peace" with one another. This initial peace and calm is temporarily disturbed in Sonnet XXVIII, where the poet rises to recommence his journey; however, the motion of this sonnet takes place in a "heat-oppressed" atmosphere, relieved only by the "current of the water-breeze." The moving winds and waters of Sonnet XXIX chant their praise for heroes who have fallen to their eternal repose long ago in "these retired domains." There is motion in Sonnet XXX, where the poet announces his separation from the River Duddon, but this motion of separation is achieved with a feeling of "love." There is a sense of increasing peace and calm in the images of Sonnet XXXI, with its references to the "peaceful rent" of a cloud, to the sweetness of "leisure,"

to the Church-yard where the poet might "recline," to the faint shine of "moon-lit mountains," and to the soothing effect of the "unseen River's gentle roar." Sonnet XXXII describes the ocean as a place "Where mightiest rivers into powerless sleep / Sink, and forget their nature," and it describes the Duddon as "gliding in silence" "over smooth flat sands" into that "powerless sleep." The concluding sonnet of this section, XXXIII, contrasts the peace and calm of the Duddon's sinking into the sea with the proud bustle of the Thames's commercial and martial hurry into the sea: by contrast, the Duddon waves "no haughty pendants," but rather carries lowly masts and humbly spreads its sails as it "seeks that receptacle vast / Where all his unambitious functions fail"; and, like the Duddon, the poet himself will sink into an eternal peace and calm, leaving behind "the sweets of earth"

to advance like Thee;
Prepared, in peace of heart, in calm of mind
And soul, to mingle with Eternity!

Realizing the thematic direction of this last section as it is developed in several patterns of imagery throughout seven sonnets, we may look more closely at the sonnets themselves in order to discover the particular degree of the poet's growth into his role as a pilgrim of eternity and infinity and out of his role as an Adventurer through nature. The contrast between these roles is revealed through the symbol of the fallen castle in Sonnet XXVII. While lying in the resting-place described in Sonnet XXIV, the poet ponders the significance of this scene of ancient ruin:

Fallen, and diffused into a shapeless heap,
Or quietly self-buried in earth's mould,
Is that embattled House, whose massy Keep
Flung from yon cliff a shadow large and cold. (XXVII, 1-4)

The image recalls that of the sunken stonehenge of Sonnet XVII, for both are returning to the Earth. The stonehenge at least remains intact although it is disappearing, but this "embattled House" has "diffused into a shapeless heap": the difference seems to be that the former is a memorial to the enduring human spirit's quest for union with the eternal gods in religious worship and the latter is the remains of an edifice constructed to house men without such concern for eternal values of the spirit--they were Warriors who "shrank" when they were "trid / By ghostly power," indicating to me that they failed to meet with the demands of spiritual value and so they were annihilated by that very element which they chose over the eternal--Time:

There dwelt the gay, the bountiful, the bold;
 Till nightly lamentations, like the sweep
 Of winds--though winds were silent--struck a deep
 And lasting terror through that ancient Hold.
 Its line of Warriors fled;--they shrank when tried
 By ghostly power:--but Time's unsparing hand
 Hath plucked such foes, like weeds, from out the land. (XXVII, 5-11)

Such is the consequence of all earthly values which have not endured the test of "ghostly power."

If men will abide in a community of spiritual communion, in an atmosphere of peace, they will be able to endure the test of "ghostly power" and so even the weakest of them may withstand the "strength" of others:

And now, if men with men in peace abide,
 All other strength the weakest may withstand,
 All worse assaults may safely be defied. (XXVII, 12-14)

The weakest of men, when they have achieved the peace of this earth, may defy even the worst of assaults--which is ultimately death itself. And this is exactly what the poet of The River Duddon is preparing himself to do.

He rises from his meditations on time and death and prepares to renew his journey in Sonnet XXVIII. He lingers to give thanks for his place of respite, and he does so in behalf of all the creatures which find relief from their earthly labors by coming to the banks of the River Duddon. These pure waters of the Duddon seem to bring heavenly derived nourishment from their mountain birthplace among the clouds down into the valley of this earth where they support the growth of protective vegetation and allow for repose of animal bodies and human spirits. Thus does the poet thank the Duddon "for their sakes, and love of all that rest."

This river of pure waters receives the poet's gratitude also because it has been responsible for "hopes and recollections worn / Close to the vital seat of human clay." It reflects, embodies, or objectifies the poet's sense of past values and also his hopes for future ones: it stretches back into the remote past of his life and it points onward to the not-too-distant future of his death and his reward of eternity. For the nourishment, therefore, which the Duddon provides his memory as well as his future, the poet gives further thanks:

For these, and hopes and recollections worn
 Close to the vital seat of human clay;
 Glad meetings, tender partings, that upstay
 The drooping mind of absence, by vows sworn
 In his pure presence near the trysting thorn--
 I thanked the Leader of my onward way. (XXVIII, 9-14)

And thus the poet-pilgrim goes on his way, led by the River Duddon, into the valley of the shadow of death.

In the next sonnet, XXIX, the poet reflects on the heroes who have fallen without human memorials in this region of his wanderings. It is as though he were himself being tested by that "ghostly power" from which the

Warriors of Sonnet XXVII had shrunk. This sonnet is itself a human monument to those fallen heroes, embodying the praise chanted by passing Winds and rushing Torrents.

Yet, to the loyal and the brave, who lie
 In the blank earth, neglected and forlorn,
 The passing Winds memorial tribute pay;
 The Torrents chant their praise, inspiring scorn
 Of power usurped; with proclamation high,
 And glad acknowledgment, of lawful sway. (XXIX, 9-14)

This reminds us of Wordsworth's recent poetry of praise to the heroes of freedom who have fallen in battles resisting the imperial designs of Napoleon, but it also suggests the sympathies which nature has for heroic endeavors and "mortal hopes defeated and o'erthrown," as in "Laodamia." The dead heroes of the past are praised by the elements of nature and by the poet of nature in Sonnet XXIX; however, the poet of nature moves into the final phase of his pilgrimage in the next sonnet, where he achieves a kind of purgation from his mortal condition when he breaks the "chain" which ties him to the River Duddon's course of motion.

The octet of Sonnet XXX describes the afflictions which fall upon the man who "swerves from innocence," and the sestet describes the rewards which come to the man who chooses to cast off the chains which bind him to the side of the "pleasant River." The octet implies values which threaten to plunge into the inanity of courting popular opinion and protecting one's reputation:

Who swerves from innocence, who makes divorce
 Of that serene companion--a good name,
 Recovers not his loss; but walks with shame,
 With doubt, with fear, and haply with remorse:
 And oft-times he--who, yielding to the force
 Of chance-temptation, ere his journey end,
 From chosen comrade turns, or faithful friend--
 In vain shall rue the broken intercourse. (XXX, 1-8)

However, by examining the meaning of these lines in the context of The River Duddon as an organic whole, we may redeem them from the charge of cowardly prudence. We see in these lines what might have happened to the poet had he left the Duddon too soon, had he broken off his intercourse with the processes of nature too soon, had he matured too quickly and been divorced from the roots of his being that lay in his memories of childhood innocence; had he done these things, he would have been lost in shame, doubt, fear, and remorse (as indeed Wordsworth was in danger of being lost after his loss of faith in reason and the French Revolution, as he describes his life in The Prelude).

The language of this octave has associations of meaning with the myth of Adam's fall as described in Paradise Lost: Adam did "swerve" from innocence, did lose his "good name," did not recover "his loss," did walk "with shame, / With doubt, with fear, and haply with remorse," did yield to "the force" of temptation (though perhaps not "chance" temptation) and was expelled from Paradise. The point of this seems to be that even though Adam and his posterity may have lost their earthly paradise, they have not lost the means or hope to find release from their mortal condition into the wider freedom of spiritual being:

Not so with such as loosely wear the chain
 That binds them, pleasant River! to thy side:--
 Through the rough cypse wheel thou with hasty stride;
 I choose to saunter o'er the grassy plain,
 Sure, when the separation has been tried,
 That we, who part in love, shall meet again. (XXX, 9-14)

Here we have the fulfillment of the prophecy made in Sonnet XX:

But these chains
 Will soon be broken (11. 6-7)

And even though the poet and the River Duddon have taken up different routes, they will both arrive at the same ocean of Death and Eternity. The poet has not become completely alienated from the river, however, for we discover in the next sonnets that he can still hear it even if he cannot see it; in the darkness of old age and impending death, the poet can no longer see his life reflected in the waters of natural process, and in this same darkness it seems to the poet that his life will end when that process ends by plunging into the ocean of Eternity. But we know, as he comes to admit in the "After-Thought" of Sonnet XXXIV, that the process which had reflected his particular life does not end, that it only appears to end to the being whose consciousness of nature comes to an end, and that it will repeat the cycle of reflecting life in the recurring processes of nature, and, finally, that it will continue to reflect the works and spirit of the poet Wordsworth if not the man himself. Thus, in a kind of wry pun, the poet's spirit does achieve a condition of eternity in the works which memorialize his journey along the banks of the Duddon: he and the Duddon "meet again" in the minds of his readers.

But this does not bring us to the conclusion of the poem, for Wordsworth did not especially have in mind the idea of literary immortality when he broke the "chain" that bound him to the Duddon. His idea of immortality was best represented by the Church, and so he does suddenly glimpse ahead in the darkness of the evening the "Kirk of Ulpha," reminding us of Chaucer's pilgrims when they finally arrived at Canterbury:

The Kirk of Ulpha to the pilgrim's eye
 Is welcome as a star, that doth present
 Its shining forehead through the peaceful rent
 Of a black cloud diffused o'er half the sky:
 Or as a fruitful palm-tree towering high
 O'er the parched waste beside an Arab's tent;

Or the Indian tree whose branches, downward bent,
Take root again, a boundless canopy. (XXXI, 1-8)

This octet attempts to convey the value of his sighting the Kirk of Ulpha, and it does so in a series of similes which intimate Wordsworth's attitude towards the earthly nature through which he has journeyed (literally, as in the French, his day's walk; metaphorically, his life's walk) as well as toward the haven of his soul.

Wordsworth's evaluation of the feelings he has when he sees the Kirk is made in terms of imagery from earthly nature. The Church is "welcome as a star," which is not an unusual figure of speech for expressing a spiritual value of aspiration, of desire for the immortality in heaven which stars seem to have (and, indeed, it is the very image which Dante uses in the last lines of the Purgatorio to express his sense of redemption:

From those most holy waters, born anew
I came, like trees by change of calendars
Renewed with new-sprung foliage through and through,
Pure and prepared to leap up to the stars).

But what is interesting in this simile of the Church like the star (although by now it is not so unusual for Wordsworth) is its implication that the conditions surrounding the star represent similar conditions surrounding the Church, and it is in these conditions that the pilgrim finds himself when the sight of the Church is so welcome to him: the condition of not just darkness, but of a "black cloud" of stormy mortality which covers "half the sky" and so separates the pilgrim from a wide view of heaven. (The poem had opened in Sonnet II with the poet's apostrophe to the Duddon as a "Child of the clouds," and it is coming to a conclusion in this sonnet with a discovery of heaven's promise through "the peaceful rent / Of a black cloud.")

Wordsworth next compares the sight of the Kirk of Ulpha with the desert traveller's sight of a "fruitful palm-tree towering high / O'er the parched waste beside an Arab's tent." This image, of course, expresses his feeling that soon his hunger will be satisfied, that his parched body will be renewed with water and shade, and possibly that his lonely wandering will be relieved with companionship beneath the "Arab's tent": all being metaphorical statements of his spiritual condition after his life's journey. And in the final simile, the poet expresses his hope for rebirth after death:

Or the Indian tree whose branches downward bent,
Take root again, a boundless canopy.

Seeing the Kirk with its "Church-yard" occasions thoughts of death, which direct his vision from the heights of the "star" and (a little lower) the "palm-tree towering high" down towards the earth into which the "Indian tree" bends its branches to "take root again"; the result is that the traveler (temporal or eternal) will find "a boundless canopy" to protect him in his repose.

And it is this theme of repose which leads us into the sestet of
Sonnet XXXI:

How sweet were leisure! could it yield no more
Than 'mid that wave-washed Church-yard to recline,
From pastoral graves extracting thoughts divine;
Or there to pace, and mark the summits hoar
Of distant moon-lit mountains faintly shine,
Soothed by the unseen River's gentle roar. (XXXI, 9-14)

After his long walk from high in the mountains, with only a brief respite for his body, the poet-pilgrim is exhausted and rightfully desires some leisure for resting. If we approach this sonnet as a piece of "realism," we will be convinced that the poet is a little morbid; but, of course, the

scene of the cemetery is very appropriate to the sequence of The River Duddon if we take the approach that the entire poem is a metaphorical, or symbolic, account of the poet's life-journey. We are teased to wonder what "more" the poet would like his "leisure" to yield, and we may suppose that he is expressing his desire for conviction that death will lead into the immortality of infinity and eternity. The complex of images in this sestet is potent of much feeling and suggests several directions of thought, but it especially calls for two comments: the "wave-washed Church-yard" is appropriate as pointing back to the journey along the river's waters and as pointing forward to the expected journey into the sea, with the waters of earthly life carrying souls into the grave and the waters of spiritual life carrying them out of the grave; the alternative to "extracting thoughts divine" while reclining in the Church-yard is "to pace, and mark the summits hoar / Of distant moon-lit mountains," which is to say that he may look back to his beginnings in the mountains as a kind of final farewell to his earthly existence.

The meditations among the tombs in Sonnet XXXI resulted in two more sonnets, XXXII and XXXIII, which are monuments to those "thoughts divine" extracted from "pastoral graves" in Ulpha's Church-yard. The last line of Sonnet XXXI had recalled the poet's attention to the River Duddon (for just as his sight had taken him back to the birthplace of the river so did his hearing force him to return to the present condition of the river, "unseen" but heard as a "gentle roar"), and it is the Duddon which becomes the focus of attention in Sonnet XXXII.

Not hurled precipitous from steep to steep;
Lingering no more 'mid flower-enamelled lands
And blooming thickets; nor by rocky bands
Held; but in radiant progress toward the Deep

Where mightiest rivers into powerless sleep
 Sink, and forget their nature--now expands
 Majestic Duddon, over smooth flat sands
 Gliding in silence with unfettered sweep!
 Beneath an ampler sky a region wide
 Is opened round him:--hamlets, towers, and towns,
 And blue-topped hills, behold him from afar; (XXXII, 1-11)

The first three lines are a summary of the river's course down from the mountains into this estuary, where the margin of earth meets the boundary of the ocean and opens from time into eternity. We notice that the blackness of the preceding sonnet has given way somewhat to the image of radiance, as though the river were emitting its own light as it flows into the ocean. The concept of sleep (which is "literally" the something "more" which the poet had hoped "leisure" would yield him in Sonnet XXXI) has developed from its earlier forms of rest (in Sonnet XXIV) and leisure (in Sonnet XXXI) into this metaphorical statement of death. The ease of passing into death is contrasted with the difficulty of journeying through earthly life, and it suggests to me Wordsworth's willingness to give up any of his remaining sense of allegiance (if not affection) for the things of nature.

There is a final simile in this sonnet which compares the Dudden with the Thames (one of those "mightiest rivers" that must also "sink," like the Dudden, "into powerless sleep"):

In stately mien to sovereign Thames allied
 Spreading his bosom under Kentish downs,
 With commerce freighted, or triumphant war. (XXXII, 12-14)

Thus Wordsworth is making a final assertion of the quality of his own lonely career as a poet of nature far in the north country of England rather than as a poet of society in the metropolis of London; he must give up the loveliness and stark beauties of nature when he comes to the end of his life, but so must any man give up what he has valued in this life. Without the

graces of social living, the lonely poet of nature may glide into the sea with the same "stately mien" as any more colorful, or more commercial, or more "romantically" adventurous poet of society.

The notion that Wordsworth is speaking of himself when he speaks of the Duddon's being like the Thames is only implied in Sonnet XXXII, but in the next sonnet the implication becomes an explication. First, the poet describes the humble form of the Duddon's flow into the sea:

But here no cannon thunders to the gale;
Upon the wave no haughty pendants cast
A crimson splendour: lowly is the mast
That rises here, and humbly spread, the sail;
While, less disturbed than in the narrow Vale
Through which with strange vicissitudes he passed,
The Wanderer seeks that receptacle vast
Where all his unambitious functions fail. (XXXIII, 1-8)

In commenting on Sonnet XVIII, I noticed the similarity of that sonnet's statement about the function of religion's "holy light" in purging the "vapoury atmosphere" of the valley to a passage in The Excursion which described the function desired by the Wanderer of the Pastor for the Solitary; in this Sonnet, XXXIII, we find Wordsworth describing (as indeed he uses the very same appellation) the Duddon as "The Wanderer" whose humility and strength of endurance are just like those of the Wanderer in The Excursion. The character of the Wanderer seems to be Wordsworth's ideal notion of himself as a man of nature who is at the same time independent of nature and fully conscious of transcendent values of the eternal spirit, and so in this concluding sonnet of The River Duddon Wordsworth exclaims his desire to identify his role as Poet with the ideal role he saw for himself in the Wanderer:

And may thy Poet, cloud-born Stream! be free--

The sweets of earth contentedly resigned,
 And each tumultuous working left behind
 At seemly distance--to advance like Thee;
 Prepared, in peace of heart, in calm of mind
 And soul, to mingle with Eternity! (XXXIII, 9-14)

And so we have in Sonnet XXXIII, the "Conclusion," Wordsworth's sacrifice of "the sweets of earth," like Protesilaus's sacrifice of his earthly nature in "Laodamia," and also Wordsworth's final vision of apocalypse through a natural form, of eternity in the ocean opening to receive his soul and the waters of the River Duddon, like his visions of apocalypse in the "Vernal Ode." This statement of calm resignation is the "Conclusion" to The River Duddon; it is the fruit of pilgrimage--a purgation for the spirit and a palinode for the poet: the spirit purges itself of mortality and the poet renounces his allegiance to the nature which has been the main subject of his art.

Sonnet XXXIV: Palinode of "After-Thought"

Wordsworth entitled his Sonnet XXXIII "Conclusion" and so, structurally at least, The River Duddon is a poem of thirty-three sonnets; however, in order to arrive at a final number of thirty-three sonnets, Wordsworth had to do some "filling in": he went back to a sonnet written long before he had in mind The River Duddon sequence, Sonnet XXVI, and added it to his poem; and he expanded what was Sonnet XXXII into two sonnets, producing Sonnet XXXII and Sonnet XXXIII as we now have them. And then he added the thirty-fourth sonnet, after the "Conclusion" and as an "after-thought." I have elaborated this curiosity in the arrangement of The River Duddon for two rather simple, but perhaps otherwise extravagant, reasons: the number thirty-three is a magic number and it is a significant number in literature, for it is the number of cantos in each of Dante's three books of the Divine Comedy; the

other reason is that Wordsworth seems to be using a not uncommon literary device, the retraction or the palinode, in a very conscious way, perhaps even consciously imitating Chaucer's use of it in The Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde.

The entire River Duddon sequence has been a kind of palinode, a kind of song of farewell to the poet's "Foster-mother, Earth," but the "After-Thought" of Sonnet XXXIV is explicitly a palinode which recognizes that the very river whose form has inspired and given shape to his poem is a manifestation of the nature which he must renounce in death. The river was only a symbol, after all, and how strange it is for Wordsworth to be, in effect, admitting it. This is truly the "divorce" that had ultimately to come after Wordsworth sang his "spousal verse" of the "great consummation" in the "Prospectus" to The Recluse, and it is a formal gesture of divorce, through a conscious literary technique, which had occurred earlier in Sonnet XXX's breaking of the chain that bound the poet to the river.

The "After-Thought" summarizes the poet's attitudes towards nature as they have been embodied in the "speaking monuments" of his sonnets placed along the banks of the River Duddon; it is really the product of his musing in the Church-yard of Sonnet XXXI, where he looked back towards "the summits hoar / Of distant moon-lit mountains" where the Duddon was born:

I thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
As being past away.--Vain sympathies!
For, backward, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide; (XXXIV, 1-5)

And so, just as Sonnets XXXII and XXXIII were products of the poet's "extracting thoughts divine" from the "pastoral graves" in Ulpha's Church-yard,

so is Sonnet XXXIV a product of his pacing among those same graves and musing on the mountains he has left behind. Wordsworth still feels the conflict of desire for nature and aspiration of spirit which was manifested in the "debate" of "Laodamia" between Laodamia and Protesilaus, but here he sacrifices his first love and resigns himself to the austere conditions of being which come with his separation from nature:

Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;
 The Form remains, the Function never dies;
 While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
 We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
 The elements, must vanish;--be it so!
 Enough, if something from our hands have power
 To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
 And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
 Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
 We feel that we are greater than we know. (XXXIV, 5-14)

Leaving his art to speak for all men, Wordsworth passes from the "I" of the first four lines to the "We" of the last eight lines. He has effected, by necessity, the ultimate "divorce" from nature, but he has the promise of an auspicious new marriage in the form of "faith's transcendent dower."

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Tempestuous Winds His Holy Errand Crossed

Sometime during the summer of 1788, when he was eighteen years old, Wordsworth underwent an experience which could be compared only to a religious conversion, and some sixteen years later he described this experience as crucial in the growth of his mind:

Magnificent

The morning was, a memorable pomp,
More glorious than I ever had beheld.
The Sea was laughing at a distance; all
The solid Mountains were as bright as clouds,
Grain-tinctured, drench'd in empyrean light;
And, in the meadows and the lower grounds,
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn,
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
And Labourers going forth into the fields.
--Ah! need I say dear Friend, that to the brim
My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit. On I walk'd
In blessedness, which even yet remains.

(Prelude, 1805-06, IV, 330-345)

And so Wordsworth, "a dedicated Spirit," walked "in blessedness" for more than sixty years. He could declare in 1804 that the "blessedness" which was his in 1788 "yet remains," and when he died in 1850 he left in manuscript what would be his final comment on that experience:

On I walked

In thankful blessedness, which yet survives. (Prelude, 1850, IV, 337-338)

We notice, first of all, that a tone of gratitude and perhaps of humility has slipped into the passage, and then we notice a more revealing change in the description: the "blessedness" which settled upon the new-born bard

in 1788 and "remained" with him until 1804 could be described in 1839 (the last date for which we have evidence that Wordsworth worked on The Prelude) only as a condition which "yet survives." The difference between "remains" and "survives," with the attendant tone of gratitude, is an indication of the difference between the Wordsworth of 1804 and the Wordsworth of 1839 (or 1850, since he allowed the lines to stand as final). Between those eras of his life, Wordsworth's "dedicated Spirit" was put to the test many times and yet it managed to survive in its "holy errand":

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
 A lasting inspiration, sanctified
 By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved,
 Others will love, and we will teach them how;
 Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
 A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
 On which he dwells, above this frame of things
 (Which, 'mid all revolution in the hopes
 And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
 In beauty exalted, as it is itself
 Or quality and fabric more divine. (Prelude, 1850, XIV, 444-454)

Wordsworth began and continued his career as a "prophet of Nature," but one of the most difficult of his discoveries about human experience was that earthly nature is insufficient for satisfying the human imagination and its desires for eternity and infinity. Wordsworth's quest for the regions of eternity and infinity may itself be viewed as a symbolic strategy for shoring up psychological defenses against the storms of life, especially in old age.

It is not difficult to understand that the young orphan Wordsworth would have to find some basis for personal security in those places where he most felt there was some sympathy for his lonely plight, and since his relatives denied him their sympathy (or so he came to believe), he turned to the forms and forces of nature as companions for his lonely soul and as

nourishment for his hungry, though powerful, imagination. The elements of the earth, wind, water, mountains, and sunlight, seemed to the young Wordsworth to be the most permanent (and so secure) forms imaginable. In them he placed his faith for spiritual centrality as the stabilizing axis for his whirling and lonely life. They saw him through the political and philosophical storms that made up his changing attitudes towards the French Revolution, but gradually he began to open his heart and imagination to the more satisfying influences of human beings: Dorothy, Annette, Coleridge, Mary, Dora, and a few others.

Love for human beings was more satisfying to his imagination in many ways, but it was subject to the vicissitudes of change in a way that his love for nature was not. But Wordsworth could never return, try as he might, to the relatively simple faith of his youth in the permanences of natural forms and forces. Those forms could, however, serve his mature imagination as symbols or "types" of values which he desired to retain or to sacrifice in his efforts to achieve a real and enduring home for his soul. And so between his love for the forms in nature which seemed to be so permanent and his love for people whose hold on his affections was so satisfying, Wordsworth experienced revolutions "in the hopes / And fears of men" and he felt the "tempestuous winds" of emotional attachments as his loved ones died or grew away from him.

From domestic storms to metaphysical perplexities, Wordsworth felt involved in the swiftly flowing currents of life. But throughout them all, he remained a "dedicated Spirit," determined to walk through all the tempests of his life and survive in "thankful blessedness." Although he had to resort to many of the beliefs of institutional religion in order to satisfy his longing for a home in eternity, Wordsworth nevertheless discovered for

himself that they might strengthen his already felt conviction that "Our destiny, our nature, and our home / Is with infinitude, and only there" (Prelude, 1805-06, VI, 604-605).

Thus Wordsworth devised the strategies of sacrifice, apocalyptic vision, and naturalistic pilgrimage in order to express the new direction of his artistic commitment without at the same time denying that his previous commitments had been of value. In The White Doe of Rylstone Emily Norton learns the values of sacrifice and she survives through the afflictions of her life with the aid of the White Doe; Emily's communion with the agency of God's grace is what gives her the strength to endure her sorrow as a "blessed Pilgrim . . . lifted towards her God":

From fair to fairer; day by day
A more divine and loftier way!
Even such this blessed Pilgrim trod,
By sorrow lifted towards her God;
Uplifted to the purest sky
Of undisturbed mortality. (11. 1848-1852)

In The Excursion we attend the vesper-service of the Pastor in the conclusion of Book IX and hear this prayer of sacrifice:

'Conscious of that abundant favour showered
On you, the children of my humble care,
And this dear land, our country, while on earth
We sojourn, have I lifted up my soul,
Joy giving voice to fervent gratitude.
These barren rocks, your stern inheritance;
These fertile fields, that recompense your pains;
The shadowy vale, the sunny mountain-top;
Woods waving in the wind their lofty heads,
Or hushed; the roaring waters, and the still--
They see the offering of my lifted hands,
They hear my lips present their sacrifice,
They know if I be silent, morn or even;
For, though in whispers speaking, the full heart
Will find a vent; and thought is praise to him,
Audible praise, to thee, omniscient Mind,
From whom all gifts descend, all blessings flow.'
(Excursion, IX, 738-754)

The love and affection for the forms and forces of earthly nature are obvious in this prayer, and it is this same love for the things of earth which underlies the pathos of Laodamia's plight.

Laodamia's affirmation of the values of the flesh and naturalistic experience and her refusal to deny them for the sake of eternal union with Protesilaus in the regions of infinity express the inner struggle through which Wordsworth himself was going; the promise of repose in the regions of infinity which is made by Protesilaus expresses that increasing tendency in Wordsworth's imaginative experience to transcend the realms of time and space and discover more enduring values which lie beyond the limitations of the flesh. Sympathy for Laodamia arises from the feeling of the poet that this earth is a place of affecting beauty, and sympathy for Protesilaus arises from the poet's growing conviction that this earth cannot satisfy the soul of man and that indeed it may impede the soul's efforts to achieve eternity and infinity. Laodamia's dialogue with Protesilaus is Wordsworth's dramatized version of his own efforts to converse with infinity.

And in the "Vernal Ode" Wordsworth records two conversations with infinity, one through the agency of an Angel and one through the agency of a Bee. Again we detect the conflicting values of the poet's career, for we can recognize in the Angel those values of transcendence which the poet so hoped to discover but which he found so difficult to comprehend, and we can recognize in the Bee those values of the abiding earth which Wordsworth so loved but which he felt interfered with his discovery of eternal values. Throughout that period in his career which I have called the "boundary" between his earlier and his later poetry, Wordsworth tends to write a poetry in which his observations of the things of earth become experiences of apocalypse or revelation, in which more abiding and even eternal verities are

discovered. During this boundary period Wordsworth gradually relaxed his resistance to such apocalyptic experiences.

In The River Duddon Wordsworth describes in a series of thirty-four sonnets the experience of his life in its relationship to natural phenomena and in its development of faith in the verity of his apocalyptic experiences. We may observe the gradual diminishment of resistance to the call of eternity and infinity, and we may also note the increasing willingness to accept as support for his experience of apocalypse the teachings and symbols of traditional Christianity.

The full acceptance of those teachings and symbols underlies the form and substance of The Ecclesiastical Sonnets, which were begun as a conscious sequel to The River Duddon:

I, who accompanied with faithful pace
 Cerulean Duddon from its cloud-fed spring,
 And loved with spirit ruled by his to sing
 Of mountain-quiet and boon nature's grace;
 I, who essayed the nobler Stream to trace
 Of Liberty, and smote the plausible string
 Till the checked torrent, proudly triumphing,
 Won for herself a lasting resting-place;
 Now seek upon the heights of Time the source
 Of a Holy River, on whose banks are found
 Sweet pastoral flowers, and laurels that have crowned
 Full oft the unworthy brow of lawless force;
 And, for delight of him who tracks its course,
 Immortal amaranth and palms abound. (Sonnet I, "Introduction")

The development of his art from the conclusion of The River Duddon into the introduction to The Ecclesiastical Sonnets represents Wordsworth's movement from a symbolic art embodying infinite values in finite forms to an allegorical art presenting infinite values through the medium of finite forms, and it represents the poet's movement from a personal statement of discovery to an impersonal declaration of faith.

The Ecclesiastical Sonnets were composed mainly during 1821 and published

in 1822, but as late as 1819 Wordsworth could declare that prayer was insufficient as a means of finding peace during the storms of despair; in the sonnet "Composed During a Storm" he expressed his achievement of tranquility as an effect of nature, of atmospheric calm. And then after the near purgatorial experiences of The River Duddon and after the achieved conviction of The Ecclesiastical Sonnets, Wordsworth can describe with confident fidelity the effectiveness of prayer in calming the storms threatening the life of St. Bega:

When Bega sought of yore the Cumbrian coast,
 Tempestuous winds her holy errand crossed:
 She knelt in prayer--the waves their wrath appease;
 And, from her vow well weighed in Heaven's decrees,
 Rose, where she touched the strand, the Chantry of St. Bees.
 ("Stanzas Suggested in a Steamboat off Saint
 Bees' Heads," ll. 32-36; PW, IV, 25-30.)

By 1833, the year in which he composed these lines, Wordsworth had attained a confidence in the values of "a Christian place," of "man's intelligence sublimed by grace" ("Saint Bees," ll. 30-31), which he did not have as late as 1819 but which he was struggling to achieve.

The Pilgrim of the Sky

The ocean into which the River Duddon emptied its contents served Wordsworth's purpose as a symbol for the eternity into which his own soul was moving, and it was an inevitable conclusion for a poem whose form was determined by the flow of a river. In that poem Wordsworth presented himself as an Adventurer becoming a Pilgrim, but throughout the poem he was earth-bound. In his poem "To a Sky-Lark," composed between 1802-1805, Wordsworth expressed the weary, but determined, life of the earth-bound traveller, resigned to his "fate" on earth but hopeful of the "higher raptures" he detects in the blithe song of the sky-lark. Some twenty years later,

Wordsworth again wrote a poem "To A Sky-Lark," and this time there was little of the weary fate and plodding hope expressed in the earlier poem.

The difference in style and thought between the "Sky-Lark" of 1802-05 and the "Sky-Lark" of 1825 represents in an obvious way the difference between the earlier Wordsworth and the later Wordsworth. The first "Sky-Lark" is naturalistic, personal, and developed according to a pattern of unfulfilled desire; the second "Sky-Lark" is symbolic, impersonal, and developed according to a pattern of achieved wisdom and insight.

In the "Sky-Lark" of 1802-05 we are most aware of the personality of the speaker, whose address to the bird is an expression of his own emotional condition. He sees in the bird a kind of freedom from cares and joyful strength transcending earthly concerns which he himself would like to achieve. He calls out to the sky-lark to lift him up into the clouds:

Up with me! up with me into the clouds!
 For thy song, Lark, is strong;
 Up with me, up with me into the clouds!
 Singing, singing,
 With clouds and sky about thee ringing,
 Lift me, guide me till I find
 That spot which seems so to thy mind! (11. 1-7)

We detect immediately in the poem a kind of tension created by the opposing forces of the poet's desire for the joyful freedom of the lark and his feeling of weary bondage to the earth:

I have walked through wildernesses dreary
 And to-day my heart is weary;
 Had I now the wings of a Faery,
 Up to thee would I fly. (11. 8-11)

As these four lines reveal in the heart of the poem the tension of desire conflicting with necessity, so does the overall pattern of development in the poem reveal the same tension; if the opening stanza is a plea for escape,

the closing stanza is a declaration of determined resignation:

Alas! my journey, rugged and uneven,
 Through prickly moors or dusty ways must wind;
 But hearing thee, or others of thy kind,
 As full of gladness and as free of heaven,
 I, with my fate contented, will plod on,
 And hope for higher raptures, when life's day is done. (ll.26-31)

In 1802-05 Wordsworth may have felt "contented" with his "fate" of plodding on "through wildernesses dreary" with a weary heart, and he may have felt "contented" only to "hope for higher raptures, when life's day is done," but after recording in The River Duddon a kind of spiritual autobiography in which he "walked through wildernesses dreary," over a route sometimes "rugged and uneven," and to a conclusion "when life's day is done," Wordsworth felt freed from his bondage to the earth and free to glory in the being of the sky-lark. In the "Sky-Lark" poem of 1825 he purged himself from the poem, compressed and economized his language, and presented to the imagination only the sky-lark, a symbol of Wordsworth's own self-conscious status (a point discursively reenforced by his note to the poem, in which he stated that the poem was composed at "Rydal Mount 1825. Where there are no skylarks, but the poet is everywhere." PW II, 518).

He who had been a plodder of the earth, a pilgrim along the Duddon, now sees in the sky-lark an attribute of his achieved freedom from the bondage of earth:

Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!
 Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
 Or, while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
 Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?
 Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
 Those quivering wings composed, that music still! (ll. 1-6)

The questions asked of the lark reveal the poet's continuing affection for

the things of earth, but the amazing revelation is that the "music" of the bird will cease if the bird leaves the sky and descends into the earthly nest--"amazing" because here Wordsworth reveals how far he has come from the days when he felt that his primary inspiration came from his contact with the things of the earth.

Then we hear the poet's admonition to the "ethereal minstrel" to make a sacrifice of those earthly objects of "heart and eye," to transcend the binding limitations of earthly being, and to burst from the darkness of mortality into the glory of heavenly light:

Leave to the nightingale her shady wood;
A privacy of glorious light is thine. (ll. 7-8)

The "glorious light" of heaven is the source of inspiration for the "Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!" It may be private to the minstrel himself, but through his music he will communicate a feeling of divine harmony to all those weary and plodding earth-bound mortals below:

A privacy of glorious light is thine;
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony, with instinct more divine;
Type of the wise who soar, but never roam;
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home! (ll. 8-12)

This is the Wordsworth of 1825: an "ethereal minstrel," conversant with infinity; a "pilgrim of the sky," who yet can keep in his heart and eye the things of earth without being bound to them; one of "the wise who soar, but never roam," knowing now the true point of his high destination and not subject to the errant wanderings of men whose paths are darkened by the limitations of mortality; a poet "true to the kindred points of Heaven and Home," in two senses: true to Heaven as the source of his poetic inspiration, and true to Home as the refuge of his soul on earth; true to the Heaven which is his Home in eternity and infinity.

NOTES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

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- 16
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His Life and Letters (New York: Exposition Press, 1951), p. xv.
- 38
Ibid., pp. xvi-xvii.
- 39
The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination (London:
Chatto and Windus, 1954), p. 53. Hayden's and Jones's three-fold patterns
remind us of Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh, whose spiritual crisis underwent a
three-fold process of development.
- 40
"On The Making of Wordsworth's 'Dion,'" SP XLIX (January, 1952), 66-74.
- 41
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42

O.J. Campbell, p. 37, and Morse Peckham, p. 118, would mark the change at 1805; George McLean Harper, p. 153, at 1807; Matthew Arnold, p. 36, at 1808; Edith Batho, p. 315, at 1815.

43

All citations from The Prelude, either the 1805-06 or the 1850 versions, are taken from The Prelude: or Growth of a Poet's Mind, eds. Ernest De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (2d ed. rev.; Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1959).

44

DeSelincourt, "Introduction" to The Prelude, p. xlvi.

45

Ibid., note to lines 102-8 of 1805-06 text. p. 527.

46

E. De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, eds. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1949), V. 423. Notes to Book IV of The Excursion. All references to Wordsworth's poetry other than The Prelude that will henceforth be cited in the text of my study are from this five volume edition of DeSelincourt (and Darbishire, for volumes III, IV, and V).

47

Ernest De Selincourt, ed. The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, Vol. I: 1821-30. Letter number 710. "W.W. to Walter Savage Landor," January 21, 1824. pp. 134-135.

48

Basil Willey, More Nineteenth Century Studies: A Group of Honest Doubters, "Francis W. Newman," Academy Library TB/12621 (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 11-52. First published in 1956.

49

Morse Peckham finds this repeated effort to succeed in the face of inevitable failure to be a characteristic of all Romantic literature:

If an orientation is only instrumentally, not constitutively, valid, it is useful only temporarily, in moments of illumination, spots of time. Further, the Romantic knows from history, his own and man's, that the great human temptation is to regard an orientation as final and that succumbing leads to disaster, for Christianity and the Enlightenment had ultimately collapsed. Consequently his moral task is to break down an orientation once it has been fully realized. His only means is self-disorientation. . . .

But Peckham is unwilling to accept as valid Wordsworth's attempt to solve his spiritual problem by turning to realms of eternity and infinity for his meaning and to symbolic art for his mode of presentation:

. . . . Wordsworth eventually regressed, for such a position is a compromise. To be sure, there is all the difference between perceiving the world as evidence of divine order and perceiving it as a symbol of divine value, and finding order in the act of perception itself, but the latter, or symbolic, perception is extremely unstable, since it really asserts the existence of two sources of value and order, the self and the world. . .

"Toward a Theory of Romanticism: II. Reconsiderations," Studies in Romanticism, I (Autumn, 1961), pp. 6-7, 5.

Also, Robert Langbaum, in his study of The Poetry of Experience (New York: Random House, 1957), finds that such inevitable instability as that which characterized Wordsworth's early poetry is characteristic of Romantic literature. But, unlike Peckham, Langbaum does not view the "turning back" in Wordsworth's career as a "regression"; he describes his view in this way:

It makes no difference whether the romanticist arrives in the end at a new formulation or returns to an old one. It is the process of denial and reaffirmation which distinguishes him, both from those who have never denied and those who, having denied, have never reaffirmed. Although many romantic careers look like a working back to what had been originally rejected, it would be a mistake to suppose that the position returned to could ever again be the same as the original position. For the position returned to has been chosen, and that makes it a romantic reconstruction rather than a dogmatic inheritance. (p.20)

50

See Hartman, Chapter II. "Synopsis: The Via Naturaliter Negativa," pp. 33-69, but particularly pp. 39-48, for a discussion of this idea.

CHAPTER II: "LAODAMIA"

1

E. de Selincourt, ed., The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, II (Oxford, 1944), 267-272.

2

About the same time he was writing "Laodamia," Wordsworth wrote other poems in the form of the "debate." "Artegal and Elidure," which begins as a narrative, develops into a debate between the faithless Artegal and the faithful Elidure: Artegal, plagued by his jealous ambition, cannot credit Elidure's generous sacrifice as anything but stupidity (ll. 130-185), and so the difference continues until Elidure succeeds in persuading Artegal of his honest intentions (ll. 186-217). Elidure, in his generosity, sacrifice, and moral integrity, suggests the values which Protesilaus argues; Artegal, in his unwillingness to accept Elidure's sacrifice, suggests the values which Laodamia argues. (PW, II, 14-22)

In his sonnet, "Weak is the will of Man, his judgment blind," Wordsworth describes the dialectic involved between the man who lacks imagination and the man who possesses that "glorious faculty." The man who lacks imagination is blind in judgment, persecuted by his memory, betrayed by his hope, and mournful at the transience of human joy: he presents a view which is not dissimilar to that of Laodamia. The man who possesses imagination elevates the "more-than-reasoning Mind," colors "life's dark cloud with orient rays," and binds the forehead of suffering mankind with the "amaranthine flower / Of Faith": he presents a view very much like that of Protesilaus. (PW, III, 19-20)

The unimaginative and unredeemed attitude of Canute is set against the imaginative and redeemed attitude of Alfred in "A Fact, and an Imagination." The unimaginative Canute attempts to control the processes of nature and fails so ignominiously that he renounces his crown, "esteeming earthly royalty / Contemptible as vain"; but the imaginative Alfred is able to discover through his visionary powers that there are values in nature which lead man in hope to discover the "placed beauty and sublime content" at the "bounds by Heaven assigned." Canute's failure of imagination suggests Laodamia's failure of will which denies her the eternal reunion with her husband which she so desires; Alfred's visionary insight suggests Protesilaus's mission of describing the reward of paradise which he and Laodamia might share. (PW, IV, 91-92)

3

The "impassioned" Laodamia attempts to grasp the "unsubstantial Form" of Protesilaus in a manner which suggests the process of matter taking form; Laodamia cannot discipline her passion well enough to succeed in achieving the "form" of eternal love which her vision of Protesilaus has provided her. In "The Brownie's Cell," Wordsworth describes a "world-wearied" man who gives up his pleasures in this world, retires to the wilderness, and writes of "The faded glories of his Clan" (l. 60); like Laodamia, this hermit of the forest is "impassioned," but his passion gives substance to his dream, a dream which has been made possible by his sacrifice of earthly comfort and pleasure: the hermit restrained his passion and dedicated himself to achieving the vision of his dream through the "form" of writing (ll. 51-60).

Wordsworth may be giving us a glimpse of his own conception of the way

his poetry takes form. The poet's passions of desire for vision may evoke the vision, but they cannot seize it without imposing discipline and restraint upon themselves. Or, the vision may only appear to come at the bidding of passionate desire, for it may in fact be the reward of the imagination for the discipline of character which fidelity represents: Laodamia's Protesilaus comes to her partly because she has been faithful in her love for him; the hermit of "The Brownie's Cell" has "impassioned dreams" because of his enduring love for "The faded glories of his Clan." (PW, III, 97-100)

4

Hermes is present as a possible point of view, but he does not remain long enough to realize the possibility beyond suggesting that Protesilaus appears at the command of Jove.

5

After she has been calmed from her initial fright at Protesilaus's appearance, Laodamia accepts his being in his earthly form on the evidence of her sight alone; however, Hermes has told her that Protesilaus's ghost is the gift of Jove. Protesilaus is a form allowed to human vision by divine power. In "Laodamia," Wordsworth presents the visionary experience as deriving from the powers of divinity; at about the same time, in "Yarrow Visited," the poet, now speaking in his own voice, describes the visionary experience as deriving from the operations of his imagination:

I see--but not by sight alone,
Loved Yarrow, have I won thee;
A ray of fancy still survives--
Her sunshine plays upon thee! (ll. 73-76)

Unlike Laodamia, the poet does derive satisfaction from the "sight" of his vision without demanding further sense experience from it. The vision which has arisen from the poet's imaginative perception of the Yarrow becomes a source of values which will sustain him in his future years:

. . . I know, where'er I go,
Thy genuine image, Yarrow!
Will dwell with me--to heighten joy,
And cheer my mind in sorrow. (ll. 85-88; PW, III, 106-108)

6

In "The Ruined Cottage," later incorporated as the first book of The Excursion, we have three points of view which are very similar to the three in "Laodamia." Margaret's husband left her in an act of self-sacrifice (although there is some ambiguity involved here--he may have left out of pride or even out of cowardice), but she remained faithful to his memory and to her hope that he would return, just as Laodamia does. Margaret's point of view of intense passion is countered by the Wanderer's dispassionate concern for the ordered restraint of passions in the interests of social and moral order: thus his view is similar to Protesilaus's. A third point of view is that of the speaker who comes upon the Wanderer and to whom the Wanderer tells his story: this view develops from one of disinterested observation to one of interested involvement in the sufferings of Margaret: thus his view is similar to that of the impersonal voice in "Laodamia." (PW, V, 7-40)

7

Laodamia's desire for further proof of Protesilaus's presence in the form of his speaking is like the poet's initial desire in "Yarrow Visited" for music to chase away his disappointment on first viewing the Yarrow; thus, like Laodamia's mistaking her memory of Protesilaus in his earthly form for her vision of his spiritual form, the poet in "Yarrow Visited" mistakes his dream of Yarrow for his perception of it, and the gap between the expectation and the fulfillment is at first so great that the poet experiences sad disappointment:

And is this--Yarrow?--This the Stream
Of which my fancy cherished,
So faithfully, a waking dream?
An image that hath perished!
O that some Minstrel's harp were near,
To utter notes of gladness,
And chase this silence from the air,
That fills my heart with sadness! (ll. 1-8)

Laodamia expected spiritual vision to be earthly fact, and she proves unable to survive her disappointment. The poet in "Yarrow Visited" expected earthly fact to be spiritual vision, but he proves able to overcome his disappointment by allowing his imagination to discover the true nature of the Yarrow, to discover in the facts of earthly existence the values of spiritual experience. And he does this without depending on "some Minstrel's harp," as he at first desired. (ll. 9-16; PW, III, 106-108)

8

Laodamia's "mortal effort" to detain the "Shade" of Protesilaus is vain. This is a truth which the poet perceives and describes in lines "Composed At Cora Linn: In Sight of Wallace's Tower" (PW, III, 100-102), where "Shapes of awful phantasy" are called away from the banks of the Clyde to some "untrodden shore":

Less than divine command they spurn;
But this we from the mountains learn,
And this the valleys show;
That never will they deign to hold
Communion where the heart is cold
To human weal and woe. (ll. 31-36)

Laodamia was allowed communion with the shade of her dead husband partly because her heart was not cold (in her loving fidelity), but she was denied eternal communion with him partly because her heart was cold to the "human weal and woe" of other men: Protesilaus had sacrificed his life for the welfare of his countrymen, and Laodamia so resisted accepting his sacrifice that she prevented herself from being able to accept the spiritual significance of his visitation.

9

In "Yarrow Visited," Wordsworth expresses his delight in the poetry of love. He relishes the art which describes the paradise of lovers:

Delicious is the Lay that sings
 The haunts of happy Lovers,
 The path that leads them to the grove,
 The leafy grove that covers. (ll. 33-36)

And this is the kind of happy place which Protesilaus describes as the realm where Laodamia might join him in an eternal reunion of spiritual love. But Laodamia's conception of love is not yet spiritual, and so her faith in love's mightypowers is misplaced and leads to the tragedy which evokes pity; thus does Wordsworth call sorrowful the poetry which describes "The unconquerable strength of love" in "Yarrow Visited":

And Pity sanctifies the Verse
 That paints, by strength of sorrow,
 The unconquerable strength of love;
 Bear witness, rueful Yarrow! (ll. 37-40)

The restraint which may be learned from the example of sacrifice is described in "Artegal and Elidure" (PW, II, 14-22), where the rewards for achieving that restraint are also noted:

. . . king Elidure, with full consent
 Of all his peers, before the multitude,
 Rose,--and to consummate this just intent,
 Did place upon his brother's head the crown,
 Relinquished by his own;
 Then to his people cried, 'Receive your lord,
 Gorbonian's first-born, your rightful king restored!'

The people answered with loud acclaim:
 Yet more;--heart-smitten by the heroic deed,
 The reinstated Artegal became
 Earth's noblest penitent; from bondage freed
 Of vice--thenceforth unable to subvert
 Or shake his high desert.

(ll. 219-231)

10

In "The Brownie's Cell," Wordsworth describes this sacrifice of self-interest for the sake of a high ideal as an ascent to "a new ambition":

World-wearied Men withdrew of yore;
 (Penance their trust, and prayer their store;)
 And in the wilderness were bound
 To such apartments as they found;
 Or with a new ambition raised. (ll. 5-9)

It must be noted, however, that Protesilaus was not "world-wearied," and so his sacrifice was in fact more difficult (and so seemed to be more spiritually ambitious) than those of the hermits described in "The Brownie's Cell."

11

Protesilaus comes with the message of spiritual and mental discipline

over passion as the means for Laodamia to achieve a "blest re-union" with him "in the shades below": he, through his sacrifice, has become an instrument of salvation for a soul which is bound in the fetters of passion. Wordsworth thus describes the mission of those hermits who retired to the forest to become similar instruments of salvation in "The Brownie's Cell":

Within this little lonely isle
 There stood a consecrated pile:
 Where tapers burned, and mass was sung,
 For them whose timid Spirits clung
 To mortal succour, though the tomb
 Had fixed, for ever fixed, their doom!
 (ll. 15-20)

12

Protesilaus describes for Laodamia the paradise which may be achieved through spiritual restraint and faithful love; in "Yarrow Visited," Wordsworth describes the paradise which his imagination has achieved through restraint and love: he abandons his earlier notion of what Yarrow would be like, and after he accepts the disciplining facts of the actual scene,

the vale unfolds
 Rich groves of lofty stature,
 With Yarrow winding through the pomp
 Of cultivated nature. (ll. 49-52)

It becomes a vision of paradise in which the ages of man are described and in which spiritual love is discovered:

Fair scenes for childhood's opening bloom,
 For sportive youth to stray in;
 For manhood to enjoy his strength;
 And age to wear away in!
 Yon cottage seems a bower of bliss,
 A covert for protection
 Of tender thoughts, that nestle there--
 The brood of chaste affection. (ll. 57-64)

This place of earth-become-paradise through imagination not only inspires love's devotions (ll. 65-68), but it also inspires faith to endure the oncoming winter of old age: he crowns his "True-love's forehead" with a "crest of blooming heather," and expresses his desire to do the same to his own,

And what if I enwreathed my own!
 'Twere no offence to reason;
 The sober Hills thus deck their brows
 To meet the wintry season. (ll. 69-72)

13

The mission of Protesilaus to show Laodamia the way to achieve the condition of salvation is echoed in the attempts by Elidure to rescue Artegai:

Thus was a Brother by a Brother saved;
 With whom a crown . . .
 'Gainst duty weighted, and faithful love, did seem
 A thing of no esteem;
 And from this triumph of affection pure,
 He bore the lasting name of 'pious Elidure!'

(11.234-235, 238-241)

14

Just as Laodamia has no control over the coming-and-going of Protesilaus, so does Dion have no control over that of the Phantom sent to warn him of his impending fate.

But Shapes, that come not at an earthly call,
 Will not depart when mortal voices bid;
 Lords of the visionary eye whose lid
 Once raised, remains aghast, and will not fall! (11. 90-93)

This lack of control over the appearances and disappearances of visionary shapes suggests that Wordsworth continues to experience those transcending visions of Imagination which he describes while writing the Simplon Pass episode in The Prelude, Book VI; however, the visitations are now interpreted as missions from realms of being which are beyond this nature (which are realms of eternity and infinity) and which are intended to redeem this nature for eternity. After he has recognized his inability to control the visitation of the Phantom, Dion, in a Faustian manner, denies that any force can redeem his tainted soul:

Ye Gods, thought He, that servile Implement
 Obeys a mystical intent!
 Your Minister would brush away
 The spots that to my soul adhere;
 But should she labour night and day,
 They will not, cannot disappear;
 Whence angry perturbations,--and that look
 Which no philosophy can brook! ("Dion," 11. 94-101; PW, II 272-278)

And so, like Laodamia, Dion perishes without benefiting from the visitation of the visionary spirit.

15

Protesilaus's mission over, and perhaps ended in failure, he must depart to the realms below. Wordsworth's description of Protesilaus's ghostly appearance and quick disappearance as a visionary experience of Laodamia is similar to the description of his own visionary experience in his poem "Composed At Cora Linn":

But clouds and envious darkness hide
 A Form not doubtfully descried:--
 Their transient mission o'er,
 O say to what blind region flee
 These Shapes of awful phantasy?
 To what untrodden shore? (11. 25-30)

The poet was not at all in doubt that he had "descried" a "Form," a Shape "of awful phantasy," although the forms of nature worked to force the disappearance of the vision. This apparent conflict between natural and supernatural (or visionary) experience appears in much of Wordsworth's poetry. In his earlier poetry, the natural experience usually won out over the visionary experience, or there was a "marriage" of the two in a "spousal verse" of "great consummation" ("Prospectus" to The Recluse, ll. 57-58; PW, V, 4-5); "Yarrow Visited" (composed 1814) continues in the line of his poetry which achieves a "marriage" of the natural with the visionary, but the lines "Composed at Cora Linn" (composed perhaps 1814) describe an unreconciled struggle between the two kinds of experience; "Laodamia" (composed 1814) presents in dramatic form that very struggle, with emotional sympathy for Laodamia and the passionate experiences of nature conflicting with intellectual sympathy for Protesilaus and the spiritual experiences of vision. This same conflict is also described in the "Vernal Ode," composed in 1817, but in this poem there is an apparently quiet resolution of the conflict.

In all these versions of the conflict between the natural and the visionary, Wordsworth seems to be intensely aware of the transience of the visionary experience, and so he tries more or less successfully to hold on to as much of the vision as he can. He discovers through his visionary experience those very values which make his natural experience meaningful and which sustain him in his hope that he may endure the gradual loss of natural values as he grows older; the imaginative perception of Yarrow Vale provides him with such a hope:

The vapours linger round the Heights,
 They melt, and soon must vanish;
 One hour is theirs, nor more is mind--
 Sad thought, which I would banish,
 But that I know, where'er I go,
 Thy genuine image, Yarrow!
 Will dwell with me--to heighten joy,
 And cheer my mind in sorrow. (ll. 81-88)

16

Wordsworth describes nature as having sympathies with man in "The Brownie's Cell," where the vegetable and animal life of nature express a living memorial to the dead hermit (ll. 71-90), and in the lines "Composed at Cora Linn," where the roar of the river Clyde is a "voice" "dear" to the "Heroes laid / In dust" along its banks. (ll. 16-18)

17

In "Yarrow Visited," Wordsworth describes a similar feeling of possibility for rebirth in similar imagery; he has just experienced disappointment in the failure of the real Yarrow to measure up to his imaginative expectations, and is in the process of recovering a sense of pleasure in the beauty of the vale as he is now viewing it:

A blue sky bends o'er Yarrow vale,
 Save where that pearly whiteness
 Is round the rising sun diffused,
 A tender hazy brightness;

Mild dawn of promise! that excludes
All profitless dejection. (ll. 17-22)

In this poem, the initial dissatisfaction with nature is dissipated by the functioning of an imagination now disciplined by the concrete facts of natural experience, but at the same time bringing into the realm of nature those values which can be envisioned only by the imagination.

This image of light breaking through clouds of darkness is used as a metaphor for the spirit being reborn from out of the dead condition of selfish negation in "Artegal and Elidure." Artegal's past of selfishness and jealous ambition may give way to a rebirth of selfless reign:

'And what if o'er that bright unbosoming
Clouds of disgrace and envious fortune past!
Have we not seen the glories of the spring
By veil of noontide darkness overcast?
The frith that glittered like a warrior's shield,
The sky, the gay green field,
Are vanished; gladness ceases in the groves,
And trepidation strikes the blackened mountain coves.

'But is that gloom dissolved? how passing clear
Seems the wide world, far brighter than before!
Even so thy latent worth will re-appear,
Gladdening the people's heart from shore to shore.'

(ll. 194-205)

18

In his letter to Walter Savage Landor on January 21, 1824, Wordsworth makes a comment on "Laodamia" which develops a point that is pertinent to the idea I am discussing here, viz., that there is a near identity of qualities between the intensified world of passions and the spiritual world of the soul:

. . . You have condescended to minute criticism upon the Laodamia. I concur with you in the first stanza, and had several times attempted to alter it upon your grounds. I cannot, however, accede to your objection to the 'second birth,' merely because the expression has been degraded by Conventiclers. I certainly meant nothing more by it than the eadem cura, and the largior aether, etc., of Virgil's 6th Aeneid. All religions owe their origin or acceptation to the wish of the human heart to supply in another state of existence the deficiencies of this, and to carry still nearer to perfection whatever we admire in our present condition; so that there must be many modes of expression, arising out of this coincidence, or rather identity of feeling, common to all Mythologies. . . .

De Selincourt, Letters
loc. cit.

19

Paradise as a place of great light but little heat is hinted at in a sonnet Wordsworth composed December, 1815, "While Not a Leaf Seems Faded"

(PW, III, 26-27). In this poem, he speaks of the "nipping air" which is "Sent from some distant clime where Winter wields / His icy scimitar" into the warm months of early fall; this warning sent from "distant climes" is like that brought by Protesilaus to Laodamia. And, like the region to which Protesilaus would lead Laodamia, this "distant clime" of Winter poses not so much a threat as a challenge to the spirit, for it is "a season potent to renew, / 'Mid frost and snow, the instinctive joys of song, / And nobler cares than listless summer knew." Such faith in renewed potency of the poetic spirit suggests that Wordsworth felt at this time a stirring of his creative imagination. But the art which he envisions at this time is not that of his former period, of his naturalistic imagination; rather, it is to be an art "in graver mood / Revived, with finer harmony pursued," ("Laodamia," ll. 101-102) an art of "nobler cares than listless summer knew" ("While not a leaf seems faded, l. 14), an art which translates the naturalistic and humanistic into the eternal regions of the supernatural.

The place of great light but little heat is described again in another sonnet composed in December, 1815 (PW, III, 27), and this time it takes the form of a snow-covered mountain which serves to protect human vision from the approaching darkness of night, suggesting the function which faith, or hope, or spiritual vision performs in helping mortal man to overcome the threat of annihilation which he fears in approaching death.

How clear, how keen, how marvelously bright
The effluence from yon distant mountain's head,
Which, strewn with snow smooth as the sky can shed,
Shines like another sun--on mortal sight
Uprisen, as if to check approaching Night,
And all her twinkling stars. (ll. 1-4)

That clear, keen, and bright region cannot be traversed "by the flight / Of sad mortality's earth-sullying wing," nor can it be dissolved by "the aerial Powers"; it will endure in its promise of light until "paradise" is come again:

destined to endure,
White, radiant, spotless, exquisitely pure,
Through all vicissitudes, till genial Spring
Has filled the laughing vales with welcome flowers.
(ll. 11-14)

The snow-covered mountain suggests the firmly disciplined, almost dispassionate, vision of spirit which Protesilaus represents; and, like Protesilaus, such vision encourages and teaches the hope of a paradise beyond, in which the "laughing vales" are filled "with welcome flowers."

20

In "Artegal and Elidure," a scene of offering to the gods is described in the first stanza: the poet expresses the mood of ubi sunt in his questioning about where the temples of Brutus are now. Laodamia raised her prayers and made her sacrifices in the "fruitless hope" that her dead husband would be restored to her from out of the dark depths of the past and the dissolving grave; Brutus had erected temples of worship and sacrifice in order to invoke the protection of gods for the Trojans who sought to build a home in the darkness of savage Britain and in the darkness of the unknown future.

In "Artegal and Elidure," Wordsworth pays homage to the man credited with founding Britain, and Brutus is ironically the direct descendent of the hero who escaped, with much sacrifice, from the very war Protesilaus's sacrifice helped the Greeks to win. If Protesilaus had not fulfilled the prophecy with his sacrifice, the Greeks would not have successfully invaded Troy; thus, Troy would not have been destroyed, and Aeneis would not have fled to other lands, and neither would his descendent Brutus have founded the Britain which Wordsworth loved so dearly. And so the ironies of fate and time have worked to place the poet in sympathy with the sacrifice of Protesilaus.

21

"Artegal and Elidure" opens with the description of a place of offering made by Brutus on the primeval shores of Britain's Isle; it was a place which has long since disappeared, but which established the founder's desire that his mission of overcoming the savage nature of Britain be sanctified and blessed by the powers of the supernatural world. Although the place has disappeared, its function must not have failed since Brutus's intention was realized in the establishment of Britain.

22

That Wordsworth was much concerned with the concept of the "hero" and heroic exploits during this period of his life can be easily discovered by glancing at a few of his odes composed around 1816. The occasion for the odes was, of course, the victory of the allies over Napoleon at Waterloo, and Wordsworth finds in the event the very kind of material which he needed to embody his conception of the sacrifice which ennobles, disciplines, and sanctifies the human spirit. In the "Ode:1814" (PW, III, 143-148), he invokes the Muses:

And ye, Pierian Sisters, sprung from Jove
 And sage Mnemosyne,--full long debarred
 From your first mansions, exiled all too long
 From many a hallowed stream and grove,
 Dear native regions where ye wont to rove,
 Chanting for patriot heroes the reward
 Of never-dying song! (ll. 111-117)

The values of art are not easily won; they can be achieved only at the expense of heroic deed (as Wordsworth had indicated with specific reference to the artist in his sonnet "To B.R. Haydon" in 1815), and so before the Muses will grant the vision of art, men must show themselves worthy of the favor. The poet requests the favor as the spokesman of heroes dead in the cause of liberty:

Now, on the margin of some spotless fountain,
 Or top serene of unmolested mountain,
 Strike audibly the noblest of your lyres,
 And for a moment meet the soul's desires!
 That I, or some more favoured Bard, may hear
 What ye, celestial Maids! have often sung
 Of Britain's acts,--may catch it with rapt ear,
 And give the treasure to our British tongue!
 (ll. 123-130)

In the "Ode:1815" (PW, III, 151-155), Wordsworth declares that his imagination, which had never before been content with themes of warfare, "Stopped to the Victory on that Belgic field / Achieved, this closing deed magnificent, / And with the embrace was satisfied." The function of his poetic art will be similar to that which he calls for in the cathedrals of the land--a celebration at the victory:

Commemoration holy that unites
The living generations with the dead;
By the deep soul-moving sense
Or religious eloquence. (ll. 66-69)

Wordsworth's victory odes celebrate the sacrifices which have made possible the retention of freedom in Britain, and so does "Laodamia" describe a sacrifice which makes possible the achievement of a region of spiritual desire; both the odes and "Laodamia" are "holy" commemorations that unite "The living generations with the dead."

Like the growing expectation of Laodamia as she views the approach of her husband's Phantom, the poet in "Ode: The Morning of the Day Appointed For A General Thanksgiving" (PW, III, 155-163) grows in exultation as he views the dawning of the sun on this day of national thanksgiving:

Not unrejoiced I see thee climb the sky
In raked splendour, clear from mist or haze,
Or cloud approaching to divert the rays,
Which even in deepest winter testify
Thy power and majesty,
Dazzling the vision that presumes to gaze.
(ll. 8-13)

And "'Mid the deep quiet of this morning hour," the poet feels that all nature hears him while he speaks of "The outward service of this day" which memorializes the nation's thanksgiving for victory over an external foe, which symbolizes the "internal conquests made by each" individual, having surrendered his "whole heart to sacred pleasures." (ll. 36, 177, 174, 138)

23

This condition of being unconcerned for the things of the past or anxious about the things of the future is described in "The Brownie's Cell" as a characteristic of the man who retires "to indite / In his lone Isle, the dreams of night." (ll. 57-58) He resists the forces of evil and worldly power by refusing to become a slave to the demands of worldly time:

He, struggling in the net of pride,
The future scorned, the past defied. (ll. 27-28)

24

In his "Effusion In the Pleasure-Ground on the Banks of the Bran," (PW, III, 102-105), Wordsworth describes his desire to revive "Heroic arts in graver mood" and "with finer harmony pursued" than they are in the Pleasure-Ground's "baubles of theatric taste"; he would, "like the men of earliest days," seize "whate'er, through misty air, / A ghost, by glimpses, may present

Of imitable lineament" and "hew with patient stroke" a "figurative Man" out of the rock. (ll. 74-86) The resulting form would "deny / All fervour to the sightless eye" (as perhaps the strict and perfect form of Protesilaus might suggest), and it would admonish its viewers from those "Vain pleasures of luxurious life" which are forever with themselves at strife (ll. 94-106), just as Protesilaus warns Laodamia to harmonize her chaotic passions. This form is intended to provide for the "admiration sprung from truth; / From beauty infinitely growing / Upon a mind with love o'erflowing" (ll. 114-116) just as Protesilaus intends to provide Laodamia with a vision of paradise and with the knowledge of how to gain it.

25

In "Laodamia," paradise is described as a place in eternity much like the lovely earth in time; in "The Brownie's Cell" the "Wild Relique" of the hermit's residence is described as a lovely place on earth much like the place of refuge for immortal gods. (ll. 91-100)

26

In The Prelude (1850) I, Wordsworth speaks of his desires to write poetry on the themes of heroes, knights, adventure, and romance:

Sometimes the ambitious Power of choice, mistaking
 Proud spring-tide swellings for a regular sea,
 Will settle on some British theme, some old
 Romantic tale by Milton left unsung;
 More often turning to some gentle place
 Within the groves of Chivalry, I pipe to
 Shepherd swains, or seated harp in hand
 Amid reposing knights by a river side
 Or fountain, listen to the grave reports
 Of dire enchantments faced and overcome
 By the strong mind, and tales of warlike feats,
 Where spear encountered spear, and sword with sword
 Fought, as if conscious of the blazonry
 That the shield bore, so glorious was the strife.

(I, 166-179)

In many of the poems composed during the period which this paper is examining, Wordsworth indeed writes of those very themes he had hoped to employ when he set out to prepare for his "philosophic poem" by describing the growth of his mind in The Prelude. "Artegall and Elidure" is one such poem, and in it he echoes the lines just quoted from The Prelude:

There too we read of Spenser's fairy themes,
 And those that Milton loved in youthful years;
 The sage enchanter Merlin's subtle schemes;
 The feats of Arthur and his knightly peers;
 Of Arthur,--who, to upper light restored,
 With that terrific sword
 Which yet he brandishes for future war,
 Shall life his country's fame above the polar star! (ll. 49-56)

Arthur is restored to the "upper light" in order to make glorious his "country's

fame" just as Protesilaus is restored to "the paths of upper air" in order to rescue his wife's soul for the glories of paradise. And just as Arthur was a hero whose fame derives from his exploits in battle and "warlike feats," thus fulfilling the ideals expressed in lines 166-179 of The Prelude I, so is Protesilaus a hero, but his fame derives from achievements in soul which are fulfillments of the ideals expressed in the following lines of The Prelude (1850):

Whence inspiration for a song that winds
Through ever-changing scenes of votive quest
Wrongs to redress, harmonious tribute paid
To patient courage and unblemished truth,
To firm devotion, zeal unquenchable,
And Christian meekness hallowing faithful loves.
(I, 180-185)

Hence, Wordsworth seems, in this period of 1814 to 1816, to be reaching towards the fulfillment of those desires expressed in Book One of The Prelude, first articulated in 1805 and reasserted in 1850. (Although this specifically Christian attitude toward the "inspiration" is taken only in the 1850 version.)

27

Wordsworth describes the ghost of the heroic Wallace communicating from eternity and infinity with the natural world in the poem "Composed at Cora Linn":

Along thy banks, at dead of night
Sweeps visibly the Wallace Wight;
Or stands, in warlike vest,
Aloft, beneath the moon's pale beam,
A Champion worthy of the stream,
Yon grey tower's living crest! (ll. 19-24)

28

In the Preface to the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth is concerned with establishing the true criteria by which to judge good poetry: these resolve themselves into the successful communication of the primary laws of human nature, which Wordsworth believed could be found in the lives of humble rustics. In those lives, he believed, were to be found fully integrated sensibilities (unperverted by the false taste of urban life), hearts true to themselves and true to their natural environments. In The Prelude, Wordsworth was concerned to describe how he came to know himself as a man and as a poet; in The Prelude identity is discovered through the poet's perception of his place in the world of nature, but in "Laodamia" identity is discovered through the poet's perception of limitations in the world of nature which must be overcome so that his place may be revived "ingraver mood" and "with finer harmony" than it was.

In "Michael," the old shepherd has no trouble with knowing who he is or what his place in the world is, but his son Luke does; the fortitude of Michael enables him to survive the tragedy of his losses, but the losses have occurred because of failures in communication between himself and his son and because of the perversion of his son's sensibility by the evil influences of urban society.

29

Protesilaus's achievement of "Elysian beauty" and "melancholy grace" through the sacrifice of self-interest is echoed in "Artegal and Elidure," where the poet describes the successful attempts by Brutus and his followers to refine, civilize, and imbue a sense of "grace" in the land of Albion:

How Brutus came, by oracles impelled,
 And Albion's giants quelled,
 A brood whom no civility could melt,
 'Who never tasted grace, and goodness ne'er had felt.'
 By brave Corineus aided, he subdued,
 And rooted out the intolerable kind;
 And this too-long polluted land imbued
 With goodly arts and usages refined. (ll. 13-20)

Like Protesilaus, Brutus was impelled by prophecy to commit himself to the cause of others, and like Protesilaus, Brutus's efforts were rewarded with the achievement of a "paradise": a supernatural one for Protesilaus, and a natural one for Brutus.

30

Just as Laodamia was unable fully to trust her vision and so was unable to comprehend the significance of Protesilaus's visitation, so is Artegal unable fully to trust the expressed intentions of his brother Elidure. Under circumstances of complete trust and selfless love, successful communication would not be difficult to achieve:

'I do not blame thee,' Elidure replied;
 'But, if my looks did with my words agree,
 I should at once be trusted, not defied,
 And thou from all disquietude be free.' (ll. 146-149)

Laodamia desired words to confirm her vision of Protesilaus; Elidure desired that Artegal perceive in his visage a confirmation of his words. In this imperfect world of doubt and distrust, communication is interrupted and the data of experience do not harmonize with one another: sight fails to support sound, and sound fails to support sight.

31

In his sonnet, "'Weak is the will of Man, his judgment blind,'" Wordsworth describes the functions of the man of imagination in such a way that we are reminded of the mission of Protesilaus to communicate the truth of imagination to Laodamia: the man of imagination possesses

. . . the glorious faculty assigned
 To elevate the more-than-reasoning Mind,
 And colour life's dark cloud with orient rays.
 Imagination is that sacred power,
 Imagination lofty and refined:
 'Tis hers to pluck the amaranthine flower
 Of Faith, and round the sufferer's temples bind
 Wreaths that endure affliction's heaviest shower,
 And do not shrink from sorrow's keenest wind. (ll. 6-14)

In another sonnet, "To B.R. Haydon" (PW, III, 21), Wordsworth asserts a function for "Creative Art" which again reminds us of the mission of Protesilaus:

High is our calling, Friend!--Creative Art

 Demands the service of a mind and heart,
 Though sensitive, yet, in their weakest part,
 Heroically fashioned--to infuse
 Faith in the whispers of the lonely Muse,
 While the whole world seems adverse to desert.
(ll. 1,4-8)

32

In his renunciation of the crown for the sake of his love for Artegai, Elidure "instructs" his brother "how the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth / On which he dwells," thus doing the very thing which Wordsworth had always desired to do himself in his poetry. To save a Brother and attain a "triumph of affection pure," as Elidure does (ll. 234, 240), is the intention of Wordsworth's poetry, which speaks "a lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason and by truth."

33

In his sonnet "To B.R. Haydon," composed December 1815, Wordsworth indicates the degree of his consciousness about his continuing efforts to achieve the Imaginative vision which redeems the natural world and discovers the beauty of the human soul:

And, oh! when Nature sinks, as oft she may,
 Through long-lived pressure of obscure distress,
 Still to be strenuous for the bright reward,
 And in the soul admit of no decay,
 Brook no continuance of weak-mindedness--
 Great is the glory, for the strife is hard! (ll. 9-14)

2

This tendency to provide the evening sunset as the setting for his visions of apocalypse recurs throughout this period of Wordsworth's career. We find it in "The Longest Day: Addressed to My Daughter, Dora," composed in 1817:

Let us quit the leafy arbour,
And the torrent murmuring by;
For the sun is in his harbour,
Weary of the open sky.

Evening now unbinds the fetters
Fashioned by the glowing light;
All that breathe are thankful debtors
To the harbinger of night.

(ll. 1-8)

Although there is no real presentation of apocalyptic vision in "The Longest Day," the evening conditions are conducive to the poet's discovery of eternal truths which he communicates to his young daughter. Again, in 1817, Wordsworth notes in his "Ode to Lycoris" that bards of "ebbing time" seem to prefer the Twilight to the Dawn (l. 21). The "visionary splendor" of an evening sunset is the setting and the substance for the poem "Composed Upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty: in 1818: in this poem the light of evening's "transcendent hour" causes the poet's "soul, though yet confined to earth," to rejoice "in a second birth!" (ll. 77-78). The somewhat stiff though mythopoeic poem "To Enterprise," composed in 1820, describes a vision of deified duty by a poet who is "in the evening of his day." (l. 12)

3

In the ode "Composed Upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty," Wordsworth does begin by describing a natural sunset, but he is so caught up by the beauties of the scene that he suspects some of the value comes from light not of this earthly nature:

Thine is the tranquil hour, purpureal Eve!
But long as god-like wish, or hope divine,
Informs my spirit, ne'er can I believe
That this magnificence is wholly thine!
--From worlds not quickened by the sun
A portion of the gift is won;
And intermingling of Heaven's pomp is spread
On ground which British shepherds tread!

(ll. 33-40)

4

It is this same promise which spring represents heard whispering to the heart of the poet in the "Ode to Lycoris"; even though the poet is most conscious of the mutability of nature, he holds to his vision of spring-time hope for rebirth:

While blossoms and the budding spray
Inspire us in our own decay;

Still, as we nearer draw to life's dark goal,
Be hopeful Spring the favourite of the Soul!

(ll. 51-54)

5

This merging of inanimate into animate and of animate into inanimate forms was very consciously achieved (at least, so it seemed in retrospect) in "Resolution and Independence," for Wordsworth went to some pains to explain how it works for that poem in his Preface to the 1815 Edition of his Poems; in describing how he developed his poetic strategy for merging the old Leech Gatherer with the landscape of rock and water, Wordsworth reveals the degree of his consciousness in using the technique in 1815 at least, and this is only a year or so previous to the composition of the "Vernal Ode":

In these images, the conferring, the abstracting, and the modifying powers of the Imagination, immediately and mediately acting, are all brought into conjunction. The stone endowed with something of the power of life to approximate it to the sea-beast; and the sea-beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone; which intermediate image is thus treated for the purpose of bringing the original image, that of the stone, to a nearer resemblance to the figure and condition of the aged Man; who is divested of so much of the indications of life and motion as to bring him to the point where the two objects unite and coalesce in just comparison. . . .

(PW, II, 438)

6

This process of discovering enduring values through the integrated powers of the human mind is revealed in the poem "To Enterprise" in a most obvious way:

Bold Spirit! who art free to rove
Among the starry courts of Jove,
And oft in splendour dost appear
Embodied to poetic eyes,
While traversing this nether sphere,
Where Mortals call thee Enterprise.
Daughter of Hope! her favourite Child,
Whom she to young Ambition bore,
When hunter's arrow first defiled
The grove, and stained the turf with gore;
The winged Fancy took, and nursed
On broad Euphrates' palmy shore. . . . (ll. 14-25)

7

The hope which spring brings after a winter of desolation receives a similar treatment in the theme of the sonnet "Composed During a Storm." In this sonnet, the hope is symbolized or created (?) by the breaking of sunlight through the dark and terrible storm, which seems to objectify in nature the

internal experience of spiritual turmoil; the degree of horror which the poet experiences in his spiritual turmoil is very intense, as can be seen in the scene of the storm:

his course surrendering to the care
Of the firece wind, while mid-day lightnings prowl
Insidiously, untimely thunders growl;
While trees, dim-seen, in frenzied numbers, tear
The lingering remnant of their yellow hair,
And shivering wolves, surprised with darkness, howl
As if the sun were not.

(11. 3-9)

8

Wordsworth is able, as late as 1817, to assert directly that the power for discovering values (especially of beauty) is peculiarly humanistic, and not derived necessarily from divine or supernatural sources of inspiration. In the companion ode to Lycoris, "To the Same," he declares to his "Dearest Friend" that

'tis the heart that magnifies this life,
Making a truth and beauty of her own;
And moss-grown alleys, circumscribing shades,
And gurgling rills, assist her in the work
More efficaciously than realms outspread,
As in a map, before the adventurer's gaze--
Ocean and Earth contending for regard.

(11. 12-18)

9

This idea of redeeming our natural earth to its pristine beauty through the powers of an imagination disciplined by "toil" and "Duty" is elaborated upon in the ode "To Enterprise." Enterprise is a goddess who is the daughter of Hope and Ambition, but nursed by Fancy in the realms of luxurious mystery (11. 20-42). This is one goddess who can come to earth and aid those who merit her aid:

What though this ancient Earth be trod
No more by step of Demi-god
Mounting from glorious deed to deed
As thou from clime to clime didst lead;
Yet still the bosom beating high,
And the hushed farewell of an eye
Where no procrastinating gaze
A last infirmity betrays,
Prove that thy heaven-descended sway
Shall ne'er submit to cold decay.

(11. 43-52)

Wordsworth then describes how through sacrifice to Enterprise many of earth's inhabitants may contribute to the recovery of something like paradise (11. 53-88), and this reflects the current optimism about the progress of human discovery in many realms of thought. But the poet then wonders what will be the

rewards granted by Enterprise to the dedicated and sacrificing poet:

--But oh! what transports, what sublime reward,
 Won from the world of mind, dost thou prepare
 For philosophic Sage; or high-souled Bard
 Who, for thy service trained in lonely woods,
 Hath fed on pageants floating through the air,
 Or calentured in depth of limpid floods;
 Nor grieves--tho' doomed thro' silent night to bear
 The domination of his glorious themes,
 Or struggles in the net-work of thy dreams!

(11. 89-97)

And by the poem's conclusion we have learned what the poet hopes to receive as his, as well as the world's, reward:

Thy impulse is the life of Fame;
 Glad Hope would almost cease to be
 If torn from thy society;
 And Love, when worthiest of his name,
 Is proud to walk the earth with Thee! (11. 157-161)

10

Emile Legouis, in his Early Life of William Wordsworth, discusses the important influence which Coleridge's early poetry had on Wordsworth.

Above everything else in the Religious Musings, Wordsworth delighted in the vision, widely as it differed from his own, of the earth as regenerated by the return of pure Faith and meek Piety victorious over atheism, and in the description of the daily joys of those who are in constant communion with heaven. Man will then enjoy

such delights
 As float to earth, permitted visitants!
 When on some solemn jubilee of Saints
 The Sapphire-blazing gates of Paradise
 Are thrown wide open, and thence voyage forth
 Detachments wild of seraph-warbled airs,
 And odours snatched from beds of amaranth,
 And they, that from the chrystal river of life
 Spring up, on freshn'd wing, ambrosial gales!
 The favor'd good man in his lonely walk
 Perceives them, and his silent spirit drinks
 Strange bliss which he shall recognize in heaven.

(11. 364-375)

He admired also the following description of the end of the world, when it is received into the bosom of Christ.

O Years! the blest pre-eminence of Saints!
 Sweeping before the rapt prophetic gaze
 Bright as what glories of the jasper throne
 Stream from the gorgeous and face-veiling plumes

Or Spirits adoring! Ye, blest years! must end,
 And all beyond is darkness! Heights most strange!
 Whence Fancy falls, fluttering her idle wing.
 For who of woman born may paint the hour,
 Whence seized in his mid course the Sun shall wane
 Making noon ghastly! who of woman born
 May image in his wildly working thought,
 How the black-visag'd, red-eyed Fiend outstretcht
 Beneath the 'unsteady feet of Nature groans
 In feverish slumbers--destine'd then to wake,
 When fiery whirlwinds thunder his dread name
 And Angels shout, Destruction! How his arm,
 The mighty Spirit lifting high in air,
 Shall swear by Him, the ever-living One,
 Time is no more!

Believe thou, O my soul,
 Life is a vision shadowy of Truth,
 And vice, and anguish, and the wormy grave,
 Shapes of a dream! The veiling clouds retire,
 And lo! the Throne of the redeeming God
 Forth flashing unimaginable day
 Wraps in one blaze earth, heaven, and deepest hell.
 (11. 403-428)

By the breath of these passionate effusions Wordsworth was wafted beyond the confines of earth. Though they did not at once exercise upon him any apparent influence, little by little they led him to widen the range of his thought, and to direct towards the mystery beyond the meditation which had as yet had no object but the present hour and the sensible world.

The Early Life of William Wordsworth:1770-1798. A Study of "The Prelude," trans. J. W. Matthews, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1897), pp. 332-333.

Also, in his study of "Samuel Taylor Coleridge," Basil Willey makes the following observation:

. . .There was at this time a new spirit afloat, a sense that there were spiritual needs, and unseen realities, which had been unrecognized in the religious, ethical, political and aesthetic teachings of the immediate past. The new demand was for an interpretation of the whole range of human experience which should be richer, more deeply satisfying, than the old, dry, superficial rationalism. That Mill himself, whose mind had been cast in an eighteenth century mould, should have seen the one-sidedness of the tradition in which he had been nurtured, and recognized in Coleridge the necessary correctives, is a remarkable testimony to his own open-mindedness and to the importance of Coleridge's influence. If Mill, the successor of Hartley, Bentham, Ricardo and James Mill, felt the spell of Coleridge, it is no wonder that other, more kindred, spirits should have paid homage to him. . . .

Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold, Harper Torchbooks/ The Academy Library (New York: Harper & Row, 1966, p.2.

And, of course, Wordsworth was one of those "other, more kindred, spirits," and he was one of the earliest, although his homage to Coleridge may not have been early or so openly proclaimed.

11

The pilgrim in "The Pilgrim's Dream" is rebuffed by the Warder of a castle when he seeks refuge there for the night; thus, when human aid is denied him, he turns to the protection of nature:

And from the gate the Pilgrim turned,
To seek such covert as the field
Or heath-besprinkled copse might yield,
Or lofty wood, shower-proof.

(11. 5-8)

And after his dream-vision of immortality, the pilgrim holds nature dear as the place where he has discovered his enduring hope:

Waking at morn he murmured not;
And, till life's journey closed, the spot
Was to the Pilgrim's soul endeared,
Where by that dream he had been cheered
Beneath the shady tree.

(11. 68-72)

Wordsworth again treats the theme of nature's protection in "The Haunted Tree," composed in 1819; this time, the poet needs shade from the light and heat of the mid-day sun, and he finds it beneath a "time-dismantled Oak," which may symbolize his own protecting influence over his wife and family:

Those silver clouds collected round the sun
His mid-day warmth abate not, seeming less
To overshadow than multiply his beams
By soft reflection--grateful to the sky,
To rocks, fields, woods. Nor doth our human sense
As, for its pleasure, screen or canopy
More ample than the time-dismantled Oak
Spreads o'er this tuft of heath, which now, attired
In the whole fulness of its bloom, affords
Couch beautiful as e'er for earthly use
Was fashioned; . . .

(11. 1-11)

CHAPTER IV: THE RIVER DUDDON

1

From Wordsworth's note on Sonnets XVII and XVIII. PW, III, 508.

2

Professor Wilcox, referring to the Fenwick Notes and to some remarks of O.J. Campbell, describes the important symbolic function of the river in this way:

The 'Postscript' to The Duddon reveals how clearly aware Wordsworth was of this: 'There is a sympathy in streams,--"one calleth to another" . . . The power of waters over the minds of Poets has been acknowledged from the earliest ages;--through the "Flumina amem sylvasque inglorius" of Virgil down to the sublime apostrophe to the great rivers of the earth by Armstrong, and the simple ejaculation of Burns (chosen, if I recollect right, by Mr. Coleridge, as a motto for his embryo "Brook") . . .' In spite of his comment to Miss Fenwick that for a long while his recollections of the Duddon were unpleasant, his powers of tranquil restoration eventually worked upon the raw material until, as O.J. Campbell says, 'the obscure fishing brook had become suffused with the beauty of the auxiliary light of his independent mind. It assumed the form of an archetypal silent stream that flowed through time, unaffected by the decay and desolation which had taken place on its banks.' For his design he had found an appropriate symbol to suggest both time and eternity, mutability and permanence.

"Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets," PMLA, LXIX (March, 1954), 134.

3

William Wordsworth: His Life, Works, and Influences, Vol. I (2d ed.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 416-417.

4

The Later Wordsworth (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963), p.175.

5

Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814, op. cit., pp. 3-30.

6

Quotations from Paradise Lost are taken from The Student's Milton, ed. Frank Allen Patterson (2d ed. rev.; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1961), pp. 159-363.

7

Sir Herbert J.C. Grierson makes an interesting comment about this development in Wordsworth's life which is pertinent to my discussion. He observes that "France of the Revolution his mistress was; England and her morals, customs, prejudices became his wife." Milton and Wordsworth, Poets and Prophets: A Study of Their Reactions to Political Events (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1937, p. 156.

8

Quoted by George McLean Harper, Vol. II, 429.

9

Science and the Modern World: Lowell Lectures, 1925. (New York: Mentor Book, The New American Library, 1948) The MacMillan Company, 1925), pp. 74, 78, 79, and 83.

10

The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, The Florentine, Cantica II Purgatory, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1955).

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