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**Fathers who fail their children: A study of selected poems by
William Wordsworth**

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Middle Tennessee State University, 1988

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Fathers Who Fail Their Children:
A Study of Selected Poems by William Wordsworth

Oliver James Davis

**A dissertation presented to the
Graduate Faculty of Middle Tennessee State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Arts**

May 1988

Fathers Who Fail Their Children:
A Study of Selected Poems by William Wordsworth

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Abstract

Fathers Who Fail Their Children:

A Study of Selected Poems by William Wordsworth

by Oliver James Davis

In his poems William Wordsworth is a close student of human beings and their relationships with one another. He believes that people nurture virtue by simplicity of living, closeness to nature, economic independence, and family affection. He demonstrates deep compassion for those who become victims in a troubled world. He tries with a nearly religious zeal to evolve an all-embracing poetics, one that could be meaningful and helpful to mankind. The object of this dissertation is to examine a selection of poems by William Wordsworth in which the poet, with a profound humanitarianism, portrays a succession of fathers who, in various ways, fail their children.

Chapter 1, "Introduction," offers statements by Wordsworth concerning the purpose for his works, presents typical comments made about Wordsworth by critics past and present, relates the purposes and histories of the poems to be analyzed in this study, and presents general critical interpretations of them.

Oliver James Davis

Chapter 2, "A Series of Deviant Fathers," considers the deficiencies of fathers and father substitutes in the following poems: "The Thorn," Peter Bell, Descriptive Sketches, "The Two Thieves," "Andrew Jones," "Anecdote for Fathers," "To the Sons of Burns," The Brothers, "Lucy Gray," and "The Last of the Flock."

Chapter 3, "Fanaticism in the Father in The White Doe of Rylstone," depicts a father who, through his lack of judgment and his obsessive behavior, destroys his family of nine sons and a daughter.

Chapter 4, "Parental Devotion and the Love for Lineal Property in Michael," shows a tragic struggle between a man's love for his inherited property and his love for his son. One result of this conflict is the loss and destruction of the son.

Chapter 5, "Conclusion," offers a brief summary and overview of the preceding chapters.

Acknowledgments

This study has been completed through the cooperation, assistance, and encouragement of many people. To everyone who helped to make this study a reality, I am indebted and deeply grateful.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the following members of the graduate English faculty at Middle Tennessee State University: Dr. R. Gregg Coleman, chairman of my doctoral committee, for his leadership, stimulation, and encouragement throughout this study; to Dr. William H. Holland, for his able assistance as my reader; to Dr. Francis R. Ginanni, Head of the Department of English; to Dr. John N. McDaniel, Dean of the School of Liberal Arts; and to Dr. Michael Dunne, Dr. Charles Durham, and Dr. George Kerrick. I extend my appreciation also to Dr. Charles W. Babb, a member of the graduate faculty from the Department of Special and Elementary Education.

I offer my gratitude to Dr. Calvin B. Rock, former President of Oakwood College; to Dr. Benjamin F. Reaves, President of Oakwood College; to Dr. Mervyn Warren and Dr. Roy Malcolm, former deans of the college; to Mr. Adell Warren, former business manager; to Mr. Robert Patterson, treasurer; to Dr. Rose Yates, Title III Director; and to Dr. Sandra Price, Mrs. Michelle Ramey, and Dr. Frances

Bliss, who assisted in the typing of this manuscript.

Also, I offer heartfelt thanks to Dr. James R. Smothers, Jr., Director of Educational Services for the United Negro College Fund, Inc., and to his associates for their granting me the Charles M. Dana Improvement Fund.

I give loving recognition to my parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. Eddie Davis, who died during the course of this study. They gave me much assistance and encouragement in many ways.

Finally, I express a grand tribute to my wife Ruth, my daughters Rose and Olivia, my son Oliver, Jr., and my son-in-law Carvill. Their support, prayers, love, and concern have been a motivating force in all my endeavors.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the famous Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth states that he wishes to offer his readers a class of poems "well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and not unimportant in the quality, and in the multiplicity of its moral relations" (Poetical Works 2: 385).¹ The poet displays compassion and sympathy for mankind as he continues with his discussion of poems in Lyrical Ballads:

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly, though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature; chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater

¹ This text is the source of all citations to Wordsworth's poems (excluding The Prelude) in this study. Passages are identified by volume and line numbers. Future citations to prose passages from this text specify page numbers preceded by PW and volume numbers.

simplicity, and, consequently, may be more easily contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation. (PW 2: 386-87)

In a letter to Lady Beaumont on May 21, 1807,

Wordsworth expresses the purposes of his poems: To console

the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier, to teach the young and the gracious of every age, to see, to think and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform long after we (that is, all that is mortal of us) are mouldered in our graves. (Letters 2: 126)

In The Prelude Wordsworth sums up his poetic doctrine with earnest solemnity. He says that he will

bend in reverence

To Nature, and the power of human minds,
 To men as they are within themselves,
 How oft high service is performed within,
 When all the external man is rude in show,--
 Not like a temple rich with pomp and gold,
 But a mere mountain-chapel that protects
 Its simple worshippers from sun and shower.
 Of these, said I, shall be my song; of these,
 If future years mature me for the task,
 Will I record the praises, making verse
 Deal boldly with substantial things; in truth
 And sanctity of passion, speak of these,
 That justice may be done, obeisance paid
 Where it is due; thus haply shall I teach,
 Inspire; through unadulterated ears
 Pour rapture, tenderness, and hope,--my theme
 No other than the very heart of man,
 As found among the best of those who live--
 Not unexalted by religious faith,
 Nor uninformed by books, good books, though
 few-- [t/o]
 In Nature's presence: thence may I select
 Sorrow, that is not sorrow, but delight;
 And miserable love, that is not pain
 To hear of for the glory that redounds
 Therefrom to human kind, and what we are.
 (13.224-29)

Matthew Arnold has thus summed up what he believes to
 be the peculiar greatness of Wordsworth's art:

Wordsworth's poetry is great because of the
 extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels
 the joy offered to us in the simple primary
 affections and duties; and because of the
 extraordinary power with which, in case after
 case, he shows us this joy and renders it so as
 to make us share it. (307)

In "Memorial Verses" Arnold asks:

. . . where will Europe's latter hour
 Again find Wordsworth's healing power?
 (lines 62-63)

P. A. Graham reacts to the joy of nature he finds
 expressed in the poetry of Wordsworth. Graham says:

If Wordsworth is pleasant to read, it is on account neither of his direct religious and moral teaching, nor by reason of his expression, but because he has like no other entered deeply into the joy of earth. Indeed the every odour of newly dug soil seems to hang about his verse; when most dull and tiresome he suggests at worst the weariness of a long journey over a dull landscape. At his best the charm he wields is comparable only to that of sunlight on waving corn, or birds singing on flowering hawthorn, of the brook chattering round its ferny islets. (qtd. in Hale 478)

William J. Long presents a view of Wordsworth's world:

No other poet ever found such abundant beauty in the common world. He had not only sight, but insight; that is, he not only sees clearly and describes accurately, but penetrates to the heart of things and always finds some exquisite meaning that is not written on the surface. Nothing is ugly or commonplace in his world; on the contrary, there is hardly one natural phenomenon which he has not glorified by pointing out some beauty that was hidden from our eyes. (383)

In Table Talk Samuel Taylor Coleridge says, "I think Wordsworth possessed more of the genius of a great philosophic poet than any man I ever knew, or, as I believe, has existed in England since Milton" (186).

Leslie Stephen believes that Wordsworth's poetry

speaks to our strongest feelings because his speculation rests upon our deepest thoughts. His singular capacity for investing all objects with a glow derived from early associations; his keen sympathy with natural and simple emotions; his sense of the sanctifying influences which can be extracted from sorrow, are of equal value to his power over our intellects and our imaginations. His psychology, stated systematically, is rational; and, when expressed passionately, turns into poetry. (qtd. in Beatty 193)

William Ellery Channing sees Wordsworth as a genius of

an age who has deep perception and who breathes a spirit
of universal sympathy:

The great poet of our times, Wordsworth--one of the few who are to live--has gone to common life, to the feelings of our universal nature, to the obscure and neglected portions of society, for beautiful and touching themes. Nor ought it to be said that he has shed over these the charms of his genius, as if in themselves they had nothing grand or lovely. Genius is not a creator, in the sense of fancying or feigning what does not exist. Its distinction is to discern more of truth than common minds. It sees under disguises and humble forms everlasting beauty. . . . This is the prerogative of Wordsworth to discern and reveal in the ordinary walks of life, in the common human heart. He has revealed the loveliness of the primitive feelings, of the universal affections of the human soul. The grand truth which pervades his poetry is that the beautiful is not confined to the rare, the new, the distant--to scenery and modes of life open only to the few; but that it is poured forth profusely on the common earth and sky, that it gleams from the loneliest flower, that it lights up the humblest sphere, that the sweetest affections lodge in lowly hearts, that there is sacredness, dignity, and loveliness in lives which few eyes rest on. . . . Wordsworth is the poet of humanity; he teaches reverence for our universal nature; he breaks down the factitious barriers between human hearts. (155-56)

Hugh Walker comments on the originality and
naturalness of Wordsworth:

Wordsworth has exercised more influence over English poetry than any other man of . . . [England]. He has done so mainly by virtue of his originality, for he is preeminently original. It is, of course, true that we find among his predecessors, and especially in Burns, anticipations of his style, and, at times, of his mode of thought. It is also true that the spirit of Wordsworth gives a poetic exposition of the cry of Rousseau for a return to nature, and in making it less a theory makes it much more profoundly true. But it is just in this that

his originality consists. He gives a clear exposition to tendencies which before his day had been vague and undefined. To do so he breaks boldly with the past, and enters upon a path of his own, a path which had been missed just because it is so very obvious. Wordsworth's great principle is to be in all things natural, natural in thought, natural in language; to avoid farfetched ingenuities of fancy and expression, and to trust for success to the force of simple truth. (qtd. in Hale 478)

In "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads," Robert Mayo finds freshness and newness in the Lyrical Ballads, not in subject matter but in treatment:

The strains of "nature" and "simplicity" in the Lyrical Ballads deeply blend with those of humanitarianism and sentimental morality, as they did in a great deal of popular verses. This aspect of the Lyrical Ballads, of course, has long been recognized, and has been fully explored in points of doctrines. What is striking about the volume, however, in relation to popular poetry, is not merely the climate of thought and feeling, but the landscape and the figures--the extent to which conventional imagery and detail have been employed. However much they may be rendered fresh and new by poetic treatment, it must be recognized that most of the objects of sympathy in the volume belong to an order of beings familiar to every reader of magazine poetry--namely, bereaved mothers and deserted females, mad women and distracted creatures, beggars, convicts and prisoners, and old people of the depressed classes, particularly peasants. For nearly every character, portrait, or figures, here is some seasoned counterpart in contemporary poetry. (495)

In the present study, 12 of Wordsworth's poems will be considered, most of them from one or more editions of the Lyrical Ballads. These poems are "The Thorn," Peter Bell, Descriptive Sketches, "The Two Thieves," "Andrew Jones," "Anecdote for Fathers," "The Sons of Burns," The

Brothers, "Lucy Gray," "The Last of the Flock," The White Doe of Rylstone, and Michael.

Helen Darbishire tells how Wordsworth in "The Thorn" takes a natural subject from common life and looks at it through an imaginative medium:

In The Thorn it is an old sea-captain of the neighbourhood. Wordsworth's object is truth and life: he wants to be as close as he can to the thing itself, to get away from poetic diction, artifice, and ornament, and to use language as people really use it when they talk to one another, repeating words and phrases, circling round the point of interest. In The Thorn the old man tells what seems a rambling and inconsequent tale, but is in reality a circling of the imagination round one centre--something that happened and the place where it happened. Places are as important to Wordsworth as people. The poem, he says, was suggested by the sight of an old stunted thorn on the ridge of the Quantock Hills. . . . The centre of the poem is the thorn-tree, with the little pond and the hill of moss beside it, the strange haunting scene of a human tragedy. Here the wretched woman comes, and here her misery finds utterance--finds in some inscrutable way fulfillment. Her babe is dead, and for her agony there is no cure. (38)

Mayo expresses how Robert Southey's "Hannah," a plaintive tale from the Monthly Magazine of October 1797, relates to the grief-stricken Martha Ray in "The Thorn." In "Hannah"

the speaker (who like the narrator in "The Thorn" has a kind of character of his own) sees a coffin being borne to the grave in a country village, and learns the sad story of Hannah. It is "a very plain and simple tale" of a village girl, "who bore, unhusbanded, a mother's name / And he who should have cherish'd her, far off / Sailed on the seas, self-exiled from his home. For he was poor." Alone, like Martha Ray, she bore the scorn of the country town. Her heartless lover

neglected her; she pined away, and finally expired "on the sick bed of poverty," unloved even by her child to whom she had been too weak express her love. ' (496-97)

The tale of Peter Bell, dedicated to Robert Southey, poet laureate, was published in 1819. In the dedication, dated April 7, 1819, Wordsworth discusses the intent of the poem:

The poem of Peter Bell, as the Prologue will show, was composed under a belief that the Imagination not only does not require for its exercise the intervention of supernatural agency, but that, though such agency be excluded, the faculty may be called forth imperiously, and for kindred results of pleasure, by incidents within the compass of poetic probability, in the humblest departments of daily life. Since the Prologue was written, you have exhibited most splendid effects of judicious daring in the opposite and usual course. Let this acknowledgment make my peace with the lovers of the supernatural; and I am persuaded it will be admitted that to you, as a Master in that province of the art, the following Tale, whether from contrast or congruity, is not an inappropriate offering. (PW 2: 331)

During a pedestrian tour among the Alps in 1791, Wordsworth composed a long poem called Descriptive Sketches. In this poem the poet describes a home governed by a stern father. This father nurtures his children until they reach manhood; then he forces them from their home and abandons them forever. Just as he was driven from home and forsaken by his parents, so does he drive his children away and forget them.

Of the situation described in "The Two Thieves," composed and published in 1800, Wordsworth says:

This is described from the life as I was in the habit of observing when a boy at Hawkshead School. Daniel was more than 80 years older than myself when he was daily thus occupied, under my notice. No book could have so early taught me to think of the changes to which human life is subject. . . . (PW 4: 447)

In "The Two Thieves" Daniel is a grandfather who leads his grandson astray.

In "Andrew Jones," written and published in 1800, the downfall of Andrew's children is to be expected because of the evil example set by their father.

"Anecdote for Fathers" describes the insistent questioning of a child by an unthinking, unwise father. Russell Noyes provides some historical information about the child who helped inspire Wordsworth to write this poem: "The child was a son of Wordsworth's friend, Basil Montagu; and the boy had been two or three years under the poet's care" (59-60). In a letter to her friend Jane Marshall, on March 19, 1797, Dorothy reveals the poet's and her fondness for little Basil. She says that the boy

has an insatiable curiosity which we are always careful to satisfy . . . the best of our ability. It is directed to every thing he sees, the sky, the fields, trees, shrubs, corn, the making of tools, carts, etc., etc., etc. He knows his letters, but we have not attempted any further step in the path of book learning. Our grand study has been to make him happy, in which we have not been disappointed; he is certainly the most contented child I ever saw; the least disposed to be fretful. At first when he came he was extremely petted from indulgence and weakness

of body; and perpetually disposed to cry. Upon these occasions (perhaps this may be of use to you) we used to tell him that if he chose to cry he must go into a certain room where he cannot be heard, and stay till he chose to be quiet, because the noise was unpleasant to us; at first his visits were very long, but he always came out again perfectly good-humoured. He found that this mode was never departed from, and when he felt the fretful disposition coming on he would say, "Aunt, I think I am going to cry" and retire till the fit was over. He has now entirely conquered the disposition. I dare say it is three months since we have had occasion to send him into this apartment of tears. (Letters 1: 164-65)

In a letter to F. Maugham in March 1797, Wordsworth says the purpose of "Anecdote to Fathers" is to point out the injurious effects of putting inconsiderate questions to children, and urging them to give answers upon matters either uninteresting to them, or upon which they had no decided opinion" (Letters 1: 154).

"To the Sons of Burns" was written in its first form probably late in 1805 and was published in 1807. It is a warning to Robert Burns's children not to follow in their father's footsteps.

In a letter of January 4, 1801, introducing The Brothers to Charles James Fox, Wordsworth's deep respect for rural domestic affections is evident:

In "The Brothers". . . I have attempted to draw a picture of the domestic affections as I know they exist amongst a class of men who are now almost confined to the North of England. They are small independent proprietors of land here called statesmen, men of respectable education who daily labour on their own little properties. The domestic affections will always be strong amongst

men who live in a country not crowded with population, if these men are placed above poverty. But if they are proprietors of small estates, which have descended to them from their ancestors, the power which these affections will acquire amongst such men is inconceivable by those who have only had an opportunity of observing hired labourers, farmers, and the manufacturing Poor. Their little tract of land serves as a kind of permanent rallying point for their domestic feelings, as a tablet upon which they are written which makes them objects of memory in a thousand instances when they would otherwise be forgotten. It is a fountain fitted to the nature of social man from which supplies of affection, as pure as his heart was intended for, are daily drawn. (Letters 1: 314-15)

Among these "statesmen" are the father and the brother of young Leonard Ewbank, two good men who nevertheless fail in their roles as surrogate fathers.

Wordsworth notes that "Lucy Gray,"

Written at Goslar in Germany in 1799, . . . was founded on a circumstance told me by my Sister, of a little girl who, not far from Halifax in Yorkshire, was bewildered in a snowstorm. Her footsteps were traced by her parents to the middle of the lock of a canal, and no other vestige of her, backward or forward, could be traced. The body however was found in the canal. (PW 1: 360)

In the poem Lucy Gray's father appears to be a loving father. Yet it is he who sends Lucy on the mission that leads to her death.

In a letter to John Kenyon on September 24, 1836, Wordsworth mentions the weeping father in "The Last of the Flock." Kenyon had wondered about a man's weeping in public. Wordsworth reminds Kenyon that most people have

seen men weep in public at funerals or at executions and says:

I was a witness to a sight of this kind the other day in the Streets of Kendal, where male mourners were following a Body to the grave in tears. But for my own part, notwithstanding what has been said in verse, I never in my whole life saw a man weeping alone in the roads; but a friend of mine did see this poor man weeping alone, with . . . [a] Lamb, the last of his flock, in his arms. (Letters 6: 292)

The 10 poems introduced above, beginning with "The Thorn" and continuing through "The Last of the Flock," are the subject of chapter 2 in this study. The White Doe of Rylstone is the subject of chapter 3, and Michael is the subject of chapter 4.

The White Doe, written in 1807 and published in 1815, is based on the traditional ballad "The Rising in the North." Carl Woodring summarizes The White Doe in this manner:

The White Doe of Rylstone tells how Francis, the eldest of Richard Norton's sons, remains true to the Queen and the Protestant cause when his father and eight brothers join the rising in the North; how he tries to save his father's life, and failing that, the banner and honor of the Nortons; how, when he is declared traitor, the banner leaves his hand stained with his blood; and how his sister Emily, forlorn, is sustained in the ruins of Rylstone by the companionship of . . . the pure white doe. (197)

Thomas D. Percy offers the following helpful background for the ballad "The Rising in the North," based on an insurrection against Queen Elizabeth I in 1569:

There had been . . . a secret negotiation entered into between some of the Scottish and English nobility, to bring about a marriage between Mary Q. of Scots, at that time a prisoner in England, and the Duke of Norfolk, a nobleman of excellent character, and firmly attached to the Protestant religion. This match was proposed to all the most considerable of the English nobility, and among the rest to Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland, two noblemen very powerful in the North. As it seemed to promise a speedy and safe conclusion of the troubles in Scotland, with many advantages to the crown of England, they all consented to it, provided it should prove agreeable to Q. Elizabeth. The Earl of Leicester (Elizabeth's favorite) undertook to break the matter to her, but before he could find an opportunity, the affair had come to her ears by other hands, and she was thrown into a violent flame. The Duke of Norfolk was committed to the Tower, and summons were sent to the Northern Earls instantly to make their appearance at court. It is said that the Earl of Northumberland, who was a man of a mild and gentle nature, was deliberating with himself whether he should not obey the message, and rely upon the Queen's candour and clemency, when he was forced into desperate measures by a sudden report at midnight, Nov. 14, that a party of his enemies were come to seize on his person. The Earl was then at his house at Topcliffe in Yorkshire. When, rising hastily out of bed, he withdrew to the Earl of Westmoreland at Brancepeth, where the country came in to them and pressed them to take arms in their own defence. They accordingly set up their standards, declaring their intent was to restore the ancient religion, to get the succession of the crown firmly settled, and to prevent the destruction of the ancient nobility, &c. Their common banner (on which was displayed the cross . . . with the five wounds of Christ) was borne by an ancient gentleman, Richard Norton, Esq., of Norton-conyers; who, with his sons, . . . distinguished himself on this occasion. Having entered Durham, they tore the Bible, &c., and caused mass to be said there: they then marched on to Clifford-moor

near Wetherbye, where they mustered their men. Their intention was to have proceeded on to York, but altering their minds, they fell upon Barnard's castle, which Sir Richard Bowes held out against them for eleven days. The two earls, who spent their large estates in hospitality, and were extremely beloved on that account, were masters of little ready money; the E. of Northumberland bringing with him only 8000 crowns, and the E. of Westmoreland nothing at all for the subsistence of their forces, they were not able to march to London as they had at first intended. In these circumstances, Westmoreland began so visibly to despond, that many of his men slunk away, tho' Northumberland still kept up his resolution, and was master of the field till December 13, when the Earl of Sussex, accompanied with Lord Hunsden and others, having marched out of York at the head of a large body of forces, and being followed by a still larger army under the command of Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, the insurgents retreated northward towards the borders, and there dismissing their followers, made their escape into Scotland. Tho' this insurrection had been suppressed with so little bloodshed, the Earl of Sussex and Sir George Bowes, marshal of the army, put vast numbers to death by martial law, without any regular trial. The former of these caused sixty-three constables to be hanged at once. And the latter made his boast, that, for sixty miles in length, and forty in breadth, betwixt Newcastle and Wetherby, there was hardly a town or village wherein he had not executed some of the inhabitants. This exceeds the cruelties practised in the West after Monmouth's rebellion; but that was not the age of tenderness and humanity. (266-67)

This is the anonymous ballad itself, as recorded by Percy:

Listen, lively lordings all,
 Lithe and listen unto mee,
 And I wiss sing of noble earle,
 The noblest earle in the north countrie.

Earle Percy is into his garden gone,
 And after him walkes his fair ladie:
 I heard a bird sing in mine eare,
 That I must either fight, or flee.

Now heaven forfend, my dearest lord,
 That ever such harm should hap to thee:
 But goe to London to the court,
 And faire fall truth and honestie.

Now nay, now nay, my ladye gay,
 Alas! thy counsell suits not mee;
 Mine enemies prevail so fast,
 That at the court I may not bee.

O goe to the court yet, good my lord,
 And take thy gallant men with thee;
 If any dare to doe you wrong
 Then your warrant they may bee.

Now nay, now nay, thou lady faire,
 The court is full of subtiltie:
 And if I goe to the court, lady,
 Never more I may thee see.

Yet goe to the court, my lord, she sayes,
 And I myselfe will ryde wi' thee:
 At court then for my dearest lord,
 His faithfull borrowe I will bee

Now nay, now nay, my lady deare;
 Far lever had I lose my life,
 Than leave among my cruell foes
 My love in jeopardy and strife.

But come thou hither, my little foot-page,
 Come thou hither unto mee,
 To maister Norton thou must goe
 In all the haste that ever may bee.

Commend me to that gentleman,
 And beare this letter here fro mee;
 And say that earnestly I praye,
 He will ryde in my companie.

One while the little foot-page went,
 And another while he ran;
 Untill he came to his journeyes end,
 The little foot-page never blan.

When to that gentleman he came,
 Down he kneeled on his knee;
 And tooke the letter betwixt his hands,
 And lette the gentleman it see.

And when the letter it was redd
 Affore that goodlye companye,
 I wis, if you the truthe wold know,
 There was many a weeping eye.

He sayd, Come thither, Christopher Norton,
 A gallant youth thou seemst to bee;
 What doest thou counsell me, my sonne,
 Now that good erle's in jeopardy?

Father, my counselle's fair and free;
 That erle he is a noble lord,
 And whatsoever to him you hight,
 I wold not have you breake your word.

Gramercy, Christopher, my sonne,
 Thy counsell well it liketh mee,
 And if we speed and scape with life,
 Well advanced shalt thou bee.

Come you hither, my nine good sonnes,
 Gallant men I trowe you bee:
 How many of you, my children deare,
 Will stand by that good erle and mee?

Eight of them did answer make,
 Eight of them spake hastilie,
 O father, till the daye we dye
 We'll stand by that good erle and thee.

Gramercy now, my children deare,
 You shoue yourselves right bold and brave;
 And whethersoe'er I live or dye,
 A fathers blessing you shal have.

But what sayst thou, O Francis Norton,
 Thou art mine eldest sonn and heire:
 Somewhat lyes brooding in thy breast;
 Whatever it bee, to mee declare.

Father, you are an aged man,
 Your head is white, your bearde is gray;
 It were a shame at these your yeares
 For you to ryse in such a fray.

Now fye upon thee, coward Francis,
 Thou never learnedst this of mee:
 When thou wert yong and tender of age,
 Why did I make soe much of thee?

But, father, I will wend with you,
 Unarm'd and naked will I bee;
 And he that strikes against the crowne,
 Ever an ill death may he dee.

Then rose that reverend gentleman,
 And with him came a goodlye band
 To join with the brave Erle Percy,
 And all the flower o'Northumberland.

With them the noble Nevill came,
 The erle of Westmorland was hee:
 At Wetherbye they mustred their host,
 Thirteen thousand faire to see.

Lord Westmorland his ancyent raisde,
 The Dun Bull he rays'd on hye,
 And three Dogs with golden collars
 Were there sett out most royallye.

Erle Percy there his ancyent spred,
 The Halfe-Moone shining all soe faire:
 The Nortons ancyent had the crosse,
 And the five wounds our Lord did beare.

Then Sir George Bowes he straitwaye rose,
 After them some spoyle to make:
 Those noble erles turn'd backe againe,
 And aye they vowed that knight to take.

The baron he to his castle fled,
 To Barnard castle then fled hee.
 The uttermost walles were eathe to win,
 The earles have wonne them presentlie.

The uttermost walles were lime and bricke;
 But thoughe they won them soon anone,
 Long e'er they wan the innermost walles,
 For they were cut in rocke of stone.

Then newes unto leeve London came
 In all the speede that ever might bee,
 And word is brought to our royall queene
 Of the rysing in the North countrie.

Her grace she turned her round about,
 And like a royall queene shee swore,
 I will ordayne them such a breakfast,
 As never was in the North before.

Shee caus'd thirty thousand men berays'd,
 With horse and harneis faire to see;
 She caused thirty thousand men be raised,
 To take the earles i'th' North countrie.

Wi' them the false Erle Warwick went,
 Th' erle Sussex and the lord Hunsden;
 Untill they to Yorke castle came
 I wiss, they never stint ne blan.

Now spred thy ancyent, Westmorland,
 Thy dun bull faine would we spy:
 And thou, the Erle o' Northumberland,
 Now rayse thy half moone up on hye.

But the dun bulle is fled and gone,
 And the halfe moone vanished away:
 The Erles, though they were brave and bold,
 Against soe many could not stay

Thee, Norton, wi' thine eight good sonnes,
 They doom'd to dye, alas! for ruth!
 Thy reverend lockes thee could not save,
 Nor them their faire and blooming youthe.

Wi' them full many a gallant wight
 They cruellye bereav'd of life:
 And many a childe made fatherlesse,
 And widowed many a tender wife. (268-74)

As described earlier in this chapter, Wordsworth sent a copy of The Brothers to Charles James Fox, accompanied by a letter in which Wordsworth extolled the simple domestic affections and simple landowners. At the same time that he sent The Brothers to Fox, he also sent Michael. In a letter to Thomas Poole, on April 9, 1801, Wordsworth briefly describes his purpose for Michael, begun on October 12, 1800, and completed on December 9:

To give a picture of a man, of strong mind and lively sensibility, agitated by two of the most powerful affections of the human heart; the

parental affection, and the love of property, landed property, including the feelings of inheritance, home, and personal and family independence. (Letters 1: 266)

David B. Pirie sees a near identity between these "two powerful affections of the human heart":

If love for the land involves as many "feelings of inheritance, home . . . and family independence" as does "parental affection," then the two, far from being mutually exclusive, can seem almost indistinguishable. The land on which man works for flock and family seems to body forth an essentially integrated system of values. (45)

Mary Moorman has this to say about Michael:

The poem . . . has always been one of the best loved of all Wordsworth's writings, not only because of the profound yet extraordinary simple statements of thought and feeling, arising from the power of Wordsworth's ethical discovery that suffering, when illuminated by love, creates its own nobility of heart. (1: 500)

Kenneth MacLean speaks of the concept of the romantic peasant as seen in Michael:

Wordsworth's peasant world becomes the scene of tragic experience, for here there is the continual possibility that one strong affection will come into conflict with another. The tragic character of peasant life Wordsworth has best recreated in "Michael," where we see a struggle between a man's love of his son and his love of inherited property, with the less worthy feeling controlling finally his actions. (50)

Laurie Magnus says: "Michael was composed to show that the primary passions are at once the strongest and the most universal, and form accordingly the most obvious psychological sanction for any scheme of equality" (97).

Harold Bloom points out the Biblical significance of the father-son relationship in the poem:

Michael is the most directly Biblical of Wordsworth's poems. It turns upon the symbol of a covenant between father and son, and its hero, though a poor shepherd, has a moral greatness that suggests the stories of the Patriarchs. Had Michael ever heard of his vanished son again, he might have said with Jacob: "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." But in Wordsworth's poem, the covenant is forever broken, and the old shepherd dies without the solace of a prodigal's return. (182-83)

In this chapter the commentaries by and about Wordsworth are typical of many that have been written over the years. Certainly it is well established that Wordsworth is a poet of nature and of the simple people who live close to nature and that Wordsworth considers the lives and emotions of these people an important subject for a poet.

Among the recurring motifs in Wordsworth's poems is that of fathers who, in various ways, fail their children. To pursue this motif in a selection of Wordsworth's poems is the object of this study.

Chapter 2

A Series of Deviant Fathers

In this chapter are discussed fathers and father figures from 10 of Wordsworth's poems, mostly from Lyrical Ballads. In one of these poems is

"A woman in a scarlet cloak,
And to herself she cries,
'Oh misery! oh misery!
Oh woe is me! oh misery!'" (2: 63-66)

This is the plaintive cry of Martha Ray in "The Thorn." It could just as easily be an utterance of the Highland girl in Peter Bell. In these poems, both of which originated in 1798, Wordsworth discloses instances in which men--Stephen Hill and Peter Bell--beguile the hearts of young, innocent women, conceive children by them, and then abandon the women and the unborn babies.

Over two decades have passed since Martha Ray gave

"Her company to Stephen Hill;
And she was blithe and gay,
While friends and kindred all approved
Of him whom tenderly she loved." (2: 106-10)

The poem presents a young woman, her relatives, and her friends, all of whom are innocent and unenlightened about Stephen's deceptive ways. Martha opens her heart entirely to him. Her friends and relatives believe that this man is unmistakably the one whom she will marry. Stephen and Martha "had fixed their wedding day, / The morning must

wed them both" (2: 111-12).

On the day of the anticipated ceremony, Stephen's insincerity towards Martha emerges:

" . . . Stephen to another Maid
Had sworn another oath;
And, with this other Maid, to church
Unthinking Stephen went." (2: 113-16)

Stephen cares little, if at all, about any promises of love, status, and fortune he may have made warmly and confidently to Martha. No doubt he has made identical solemn testimonials to his new maiden. The poet uses the word unthinking to characterize Stephen, whose insidious actions demonstrate his irresponsibility and recklessness towards Martha, her family, and her friends. Apparently this is Martha's first encounter with human depravity.

Wordsworth shows her reaction to Stephen's deception:

"Poor Martha! on that woeful day
A pang of pitiless dismay
Into her soul was sent;
A fire was kindled in her breast,
Which might not burn itself to rest."
(2: 117-21)

Another "pang of pitiless dismay" with poor Martha is caused by her pregnancy.

"She was with child, and she was mad;
Yet often was she sober sad
From her exceeding pain.
O guilty Father--would that death
Had saved him from that breach of faith!"
(2: 128-32)

Even greater than his guilt toward Martha herself, it may seem, is his guilt toward the unborn child.

In his picturing the deplorable behavior of Stephen toward Martha Ray and of Peter toward the Highland girl, Wordsworth brings to mind one of the seven cardinal sins of medieval theology, lust. In The Faerie Queene, Edmund Spenser depicts the behavior of one who has a lustful heart:

In a greene gowne he clothed was full faire,
Which underneath did hide his filthinesse,
And in his hand a burning hart he bare,
Full of vaine follies, and new fanglenesse,
For he was false, and fraught with
ficklenesse, [t/o]
And learned had to love with secret lookes,
And well could daunce, and sing with
ruefulnesse, [t/o]
And fortunes tell, and read in loving bookes,
And thousand other wayes, to bait his fleshly
hookes. [t/o]
(1.4.25)

Spenser affirms that the lustful person wears a facade to eclipse his indecencies. His soul becomes vain, false, fickle, and rueful. He studies secretly and painstakingly how to trifle with human hearts.

In The Seven Deadly Sins Today, Henry Fairlie asserts that lust has nothing to give, nothing to ask:

Lust is not interested in its partners. . . .
It is . . . a form of self-subjection, in fact,
of self-emptying. The sign it wears is: "This
property is vacant." Anyone may take possession
of it for a while. Lustful people may think that
they can choose a partner at will for sexual
gratification. But they do not really choose.
They accept what is available. Lust accepts any
partner for a momentary service; anyone may squat
in its groin. It has nothing to give, and so it
has nothing to ask. (175)

Hungering and thirsting after his prey, Stephen captures Martha and satisfies his impermanent and promiscuous desires. He beguiles his chaste maiden and leaves with her his child.

Because Stephen forsakes her and his expected child for another lover, Martha in her distress murders her child, at least that is the rumor among her neighbors. In the opinion of some,

"She hanged her baby on the tree;
Some say she drowned it in the pond,
Which is a little step beyond:
But all and each agree,
The little Babe is buried there,
Beneath that hill of moss so fair."
(2: 204-09)

Murdered or not, Stephen's abandoned child is dead.

The tale of Peter Bell was finally published in 1819, after being started in 1798. Peter Bell is an itinerant potter who inspires fear in the hearts of people wherever he roams. As he searches for work, food, and pleasure, his ramblings encompass many enchanting places. Peter Bell

"Had been a wild and woodland rover;
Had heard the Atlantic surges roar
On farthest Cornwall's rocky shore,
And trod the cliffs of Dover.

"And he had seen Caernarvon's towers,
And well he knew the spire of Sarum;
And he had been where Lincoln bell
Flings o'er the fen that ponderous knell--
A far-renowned alarum!

"At Doncaster, at York, and Leeds,
And merry Carlisle had he been;

And all along the Lowlands fair,
All through the bonny shire of Ayr;
And far as Aberdeen.

"And he had been at Inverness;
And Peter, by the mountain-rills,
Had danced his round with Highland lasses;
And he had lain beside his asses
On lofty Cheviot Hills:

"And he had trudged through Yorkshire dales,
Among the rocks and winding scars;
Where deep and low the hamlets lie
Beneath their little patch of sky
And little lot of stars:

"And all along the indented coast,
Bespattered with the salt-sea foam;
Where'er a knot of houses lay
On headland, or in hollow bay;--
Sure never man like him did roam!" (2: 206-35)

Generally speaking, an individual may become broadminded, rejuvenated, knowledgeable, and distinguished as he travels to distant places, converses with the people, and participates in the diversified community activities. But with all of Peter's wanderings, "not the value of a hair / Was [his] heart or head the better" (2: 239-40). Not even "'nature . . . could find the way / Into the heart of Peter Bell'" (2: 244-45). Seemingly nothing can change his perverted disposition.

E. Hershey Sneath discusses the failure of Peter's long association with nature to improve either his heart or mind. Nature seems never to have awakened in him a single worthy response:

He was indifferent to, if not, indeed, ignorant
of, her charms. That she had any lesson to

teach, that in her beauteous forms there was any spiritual meaning, never seemed to have dawned on his soul. She had not found the way to the heart of this lawless and insensate man. (117-18)

Having one wife keeps the order of marriage pure and sacred. Because of his incessant roving Peter could never live by this marital principle. He follows the practice of of a plurality of wives:

"Of all that lead a lawless life,
Of all that love their lawless lives,
In city or in village small,
He was the wildest far of all;--
He had a dozen wedded wives.

"Nay, start not!--wedded wives--and twelve!
But how one wife could e'er come near him,
In simple truth I cannot tell;
For, be it said of Peter Bell,
To see him was to fear him." (2: 276-85)

In his dictated notes to Isabella Fenwick of Alfoxden in 1798, Wordsworth comments about real-life prototypes of Peter Bell:

The countenance, gait, and figure of Peter, were taken from a wild rover with whom I walked from Builth, on the river Wye, downwards nearly as far as the town of Hay. He told me strange stories. It has always been a pleasure to me through life to catch at every opportunity that has occurred in my rambles of becoming acquainted with this class of people. The number of Peter's wives was taken from the trespasses in this way of a lawless creature who lived in the county of Durham, and used to be attended by many women, sometimes not less than half a dozen, as disorderly as himself, and a story went in the country that he had been heard to say while they were quarrelling, "Why can't you be quiet? there's none so many of you." (PW 2: 527)

Among the women in the sordid past of Wordsworth's Peter Bell was the Highland girl, who died because of him. After

Peter's character finally improves,

his heart is stung
To think of one, almost a child;
A sweet and playful Highland girl,
As light and beauteous as a squirrel,
As beauteous and as wild!

Her dwelling was a lonely house,
A cottage in a heathy dell;
And she put on her gown of green,
And left her mother at sixteen,
And followed Peter Bell. (2: 886-95)

While he roves through the countryside, Peter takes the time to recall the loveliness and sweetness of this inexperienced child--the Highland girl. He wished to have her to become another one of his wives. Forgetting the public vows and commitments given to his other wives, Peter enticed this charming and unenlightened young woman to agree to marry him. Living on a tract of uncultivated wasteland, apparently this maid and her mother were innocent and uninformed about human depravity. They did not even press for information about Peter's background and character. In her dress of immaturity the Highland girl left her mother and followed the Rover, "a wicked man" (2: 725).

Wordsworth characterizes this congenial child as one who thought well of others, who exemplified daily her sincere religious principles, and who fondly accepted her new role as Peter's helpmeet.

. . . many good and pious thoughts
Had she; and, in the kirk to pray,
Two long Scotch miles, through rain or snow,

To kirk she had been used to go,
Twice every Sabbath-day.

And when she followed Peter Bell,
It was to lead an honest life;
For he, with tongue not used to falter,
Had pledged his troth before the altar
To love her as his wedded wife. (2: 896-905)

As Martha Ray in "The Thorn" gave her all to Stephen Hill,
so did the Highland girl open also her young heart wholly
to Peter Bell. She and her mother believed that this wild
rover would be a suitable mate for the Highland girl.
Their judgment could hardly have been more flawed. The
Highland girl, deserted by her husband and pregnant,

drooped and pined like one forlorn;
From Scripture she a name did borrow;
Benoni, or the child of sorrow,
She called her babe unborn. (2: 907-10)

It is obvious that Wordsworth and the Highland girl know
the story of Jacob with his two wives--Leah and Rachel--as
recorded in Genesis. After Rachel conceives Joseph, her
first son for Jacob, she says, "The Lord shall add to me
another son" (30.24). Following the reconciliation between
Jacob and Esau prior to the death of Isaac, their father,
Rachel's prophecy comes to pass as Jacob and his enormous
family journey from Bethel to Jerusalem.

Rachel . . . had hard labour. And it came to
pass, when she was in hard labour, that the
midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have
this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul
was in departing, that she called his name
Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. And
Rachel died, and was buried in the way to
Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. (35.16-19)

Benoni is defined as "the son of my sorrow." Similarly it means "the son of my pain" or "the son of my misfortune" (White 206).

Wordsworth also communicates his knowledge of a person with the name Benoni:

Benoni, or the child of sorrow, I knew when I was a school-boy. His mother had been deserted by a gentleman in the neighbourhood, she herself being a gentle woman by birth. The circumstances of her story were told me by my dear old Dame, Anne Tyson, who was her confidante. The lady died broken-hearted. (PW 2: 527)

When she became acquainted with Peter's shabby character, the Highland girl "took it in most grievous part; / She to the very bone was worn" (2: 912-13). Again Spenser, in his description of lust, seems to anticipate Peter Bell.

Spenser describes the

Inconstant man, that loved all he saw,
And lusted after all, that he did love,
Ne would his looser life be tide to law,
But joyd weake wemens hearts to tempt and prove
If from their loyall loves he might them move;
Which lewdnesse fild him with reprochful paine
Of that fowle evill, which all men reprove,
That rots the marrow, and cosumes the braine:
Such one was Lecherie. . . . (1.4.26)

And it came to pass, the Highland girl, "ere that little child was born, / died of a broken heart" (2: 914-15). The inhumanity of Peter toward his childlike wife caused her to die in this manner. In her agony Peter sees

The Highland girl--it is no other;
And hears her crying as she cried,
The very moment that she died,
"My mother! oh my mother!" (2: 927-30)

In failing the Highland girl, Peter at the same time failed the unborn child.

In Descriptive Sketches Wordsworth points out how the father disowns his sons:

Full oft the father, when his sons have grown
To manhood, seems their title to disown;
And from his nest amid the storms of heaven
Drives, eagle-like, those sons as he was driven.
(2: 512-15)

In these lines the poet emphasizes how the father renounces his sons when they reach maturity, drives them away from home, and has nothing further to do with them.

Wordsworth remains silent on the father's rearing of his children from birth to manhood. Some of the meanings for the word "manhood" are "maturity," "adulthood," "age of consent," and "age of responsibility." Of these four meanings, the "age of responsibility" comes closest to the father's concept of manhood. However, the age of responsibility does vary; it could range from the age of nine to the age of sixteen. Whatever the right age is for responsibility as calculated by the father, he starts to reject his sons openly at that moment.

Not only does the father renounce his sons when they arrive at a certain age, but he "from his nest amid the storms of heaven / Drives, eagle-like" (2: 514-15) his sons away from home. In Autumn of the Eagle George Laycock presents his observations on the development of eagles:

When the chick is six or seven weeks old, the down (fine, soft fluffy feathers) is replaced by dark feathers, which appear first on wings and tail and finally cover the body. The eaglets grow on the abundant food carried to them, and as they grow toward full size the concern of the parents for their safety slowly diminishes. No longer do the young birds, covered with their new feathers and equipped with powerful talons, need constant protection from rain and sun, gulls and magpies, raccoons and redtailed hawks. The nest-building urge of the parents also wanes. They gradually cease carrying sticks and grass to the tree for nest repairs as they did occasionally far into the summer.

As the eagles' parents prepare to drive them from the nest, so the restless father seemingly counts the days when he will force his sons away from him. As soon as the bells toll the dawn of their age of responsibility, the father compels his sons to leave their home.

In addition, once the children are sent away, the father has nothing further to do with them: with "stern composure" he watches his sons depart. "Eagle-like" he drives them away, and "Eagle-like" he separates himself from them forever (1: 516-17). In Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World, Leslie Brown and Dean Amadon comment on the death rate of eagles after their independence:

Mortality among eagles after independence is likely to be high. In some species, for instance the Crowned Eagle of Africa, most of the young seem to survive for six to nine months after they leave the nest, but their losses between fifteen months and probably four years are likely to be much more severe. Indeed, the period immediately after independence is probably the time of greatest mortality in the lives of eagles.

(1: 125)

The death rate of the father's sons may be high also after they are forced into independence. If they live and come to be fathers, they and their descendants may continue in the sins of the father in Descriptive Sketches, sternly and insensitively driving their children from their homes and having nothing further to do with them.

In several poems by William Wordsworth, fathers fail their children by their unprosperous example-setting. In "The Two Thieves," Wordsworth's principal characters and the work which they do together are introduced in this manner:

The One, yet unbreeched, is not three birthdays
old, [t/o]
His Grandsire that age more than thirty times
told; [t/o]
There are ninety good seasons of fair and foul
weather [t/o]
Between them, and both go a-pilfering together.
(4: 13-16)

Undoubtedly the grandson highly esteems his grandfather. The child and the old man are constant and close companions. By precept and example, the grandfather influences his grandson to develop an abnormal, persistent impulse or tendency to steal. The poet vividly pictures how this innocent three-year-old grandson obeys and works diligently and untiringly with his grandfather:

The pair sally forth hand in hand: ere the sun
Has peered o'er the beeches, their work is begun:
And yet, into whatever sin they may fall,
This child but half knows it, and that not at
all. [t/o]

They hunt through the streets with deliberate tread, [t/o]
And each, in his turn, becomes leader or led;
And, wherever they carry their plots and their wiles, [t/o]
Every face in the village is dimpled with smiles.
(4:33-40)

As might be supposed, the grandson follows the lead of his grandfather. At times the grandfather walks eagerly behind his grandson in their stealing of small sums or petty objects. Their conduct fascinates and amuses the community.

A second title for "The Two Thieves" is the "The Last Stage of Avarice." Wordsworth asks this question:

For the Prodigal Son, Joseph's Dream and his
sheaves, [t/o]
Oh, what would they be to my tale of two
Thieves? [t/o]

The results of avarice, indiscretion, and hypocrisy in the two Biblical stories have their relationship to "The Two Thieves." The Prodigal Son acknowledges no obligation to his father, and he does not express any gratitude; however, he claims the rightful privilege of a child in sharing his father's goods. The family inheritance that would fall to him at his father's death the Prodigal desires to receive immediately and completely. He seeks fame, wealth, and enjoyment at once. Henry Fairlie writes, "At the heart of Avarice is the evil of waste. Most obviously there is the squandering of the Prodigal Son. He does not give but wastes" (149-50).

In Peter Bell Wordsworth mentions Rachel's younger son, Benoni or Benjamin. Now the poet speaks of Joseph, the

child of the aged Jacob. Unwisely, Jacob manifests his preference for Joseph, and this excites the jealousy of his older sons. The father's injudicious gift to Joseph of a costly coat or tunic, such as the kind worn by persons of distinction, seems to them clear evidence of his partiality and precipitates a suspicion that he intends to pass by his elder children and to bestow the birthright upon the son of Rachel (White 209). With reference to Joseph's dream and his sheaves, the brothers' malice increases as Joseph one day relates these visions to them and his father.

For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.
(Gen.10-11)

By these dreams God points out to Joseph that he will receive high honors. A day will come when all his family will make obeisance to him.

In summary, there are several relationships among the Prodigal Son, Joseph's dream and his sheaves, and "The Two Thieves." First, there is a connection among the ages of characters. Joseph's grandfather is 163, Jacob is 103, Joseph is 12, Daniel is 90, and his grandson is 3. Second, the two fathers and the grandfather all fail. The Prodigal Son's father fails the Prodigal by giving him his

inheritance too early in his life. Israel fails Joseph by presenting him with that injudicious gift--the coat of many colors--expressing his obvious preference for Joseph above his brothers. Daniel damages his grandson's character by teaching him by precept and example how to steal and to covet the property of others. Also, all three men live to see the outcomes of their mistakes. The Prodigal Son comes to himself and returns to a gracious and a forgiving father. After two decades Israel offers his final blessings to Joseph, who forgives his brothers and cares for all their possessions. Wordsworth remains silent about the grandson's future in "The Two Thieves," but the boy's outlook seems poor. The poet pays an ironic compliment to old Daniel by saying, "Long yet may'st thou live! for a teacher we see / That lifts up the veil of our nature in thee" (4: 47-48). The reference is to the darkness in human nature. Though Wordsworth's tone is somewhat humorous and is even somewhat affectionately condescending in "The Two Thieves," Wordsworth obviously recognizes the harm Daniel is doing to the child.

"Andrew Jones" is another poem depicting a failing father. Andrew sets an atrocious example for his sons. Wordsworth tells in explicit language the sentiments of the villagers towards Andrew. The narrator says:

I hate that Andrew Jones: he'll breed
His children up to waste and pillage.
I wish the press-gang or the drum

Would, with its rattling music, come,
And sweep him from the village!

I said not this, because he loves
Through the long day to swear and tippie;
But for the poor dear sake of one
To whom a foul deed he had done,
A friendless Man, a travelling Cripple!
(2: 1-10)

As bad as the cursing and drinking are, even worse, says Wordsworth, is what Andrew Jones once did to a wretched, wandering cripple. Two halfpennies thrown to the cripple by a passing horseman and painstakingly retrieved from the dust by the cripple were stolen by Andrew Jones, who just happened to be passing by.

Andrew appears to everyone in the community as being a father who is irresponsible to his family, insensitive to the needs of his neighbors, and excessively and exclusively avaricious for his own advantage, pleasure, and well-being without any regard for others. Andrew is a terrible man and a terrible father, who orientates his children to his own evil ways.

Another poem, "Anecdote for Fathers," involves the questioning of a child by an indiscreet father. First, Wordsworth makes a pleasant description of a child and a warm relationship between father and son. The narrator says:

I have a boy of five years old;
His face is fair and fresh to see;
His limbs are cast in beauty's mould,
And dearly he loves me.

One morn we strolled on our dry walk,
 Our quiet home all full in view,
 And held such intermitted talk
 As we are wont to do. (1: 1-8)

Next, the narrator discloses:

"Now tell me, had you rather be," I said,
 And took him by the arm,
 "On Kilve's smooth shore, by the green sea,
 Or here at Liswyn farm?" (1: 29-32)

Then three times the father commands his innocent child to tell why he prefers to be at Kilve rather than at Liswyn farm. At last the child replies, "At Kilve there was no weather-cock; / And that's the reason why" (2: 55-56). One error of the father is that, although unintentionally, he almost forces the frustrated child to speak untruthfully. Also, the father sets a poor example by his ridiculous insistence and by his suggesting that a presumably complex emotional reaction can and should be given a simple explanation.

An additional poem on the failure of fathers is "To the Sons of Burns," written in 1805. Wordsworth speaks of his and Dorothy's visiting the grave of Robert Burns:

On our way to the churchyard where Burns is
 buried, we were accompanied by a bookseller,
 who showed us the outside of Burns's house,
 where he had lived the last three years of
 his life, and where he died. It has a mean
 appearance, and is in a bye situation; the
 front whitewashed, dirty about the doors, as
 most Scotch houses are; flowering plants in
 the window. Went to visit his grave; he lies
 in a corner of the churchyard, and his second
 son, Wallace, beside him. There is no stone to
 mark the spot; but a hundred guineas have
 been collected to be expended upon some sort

of monument. "There," said the bookseller, pointing to a pompous monument, "lies Mr.--(I have forgotten the name)--a remarkably clever man; he was an attorney, and scarcely ever lost a cause he undertook. Burns made many a lampoon upon him, and there they rest as you see." We looked at Burns's grave with melancholy and painful reflections, repeating to each other his own poet's epitaph:--"Is there a man," &c. (PW 3: 440)

Surely Wordsworth and Dorothy loved and admired Burns greatly. Now Wordsworth thinks of the sons of Burns and addresses them in this way:

Sons of the Bard, my heart still mourns
With sorrow true;
And more would grieve, but that it turns
Trembling to you!

Through twilight shades of good and ill
Ye now are panting up life's hill,
And more than common strength and skill
Must ye display;
If ye would give the better will
Its lawful sway. (3: 3-12)

Wordsworth expresses deep sorrow for the sons of Burns; he feels very close to them, as he does to his own children. In fact, the poet's grief for Burns is less intense than the fatherly concern he feels for Burns's sons. Wordsworth remembers the dissolute behavior of Burns before his sons; thus he hopes that these boys will somehow be prudent and self-restrained. In addition, Wordsworth is afraid that Burns's sons may have inherited certain dangerous characteristics from their father, as well as inherited problems created by Burns's fame. Wordsworth writes:

Hath Nature strung your nerves to bear
Intemperance with less harm, beware!

But if the Poet's wit ye share,
 Like him can speed
 The social hour--of tenfold care
 There will be need;

For honest men delight will take
 To spare your failings for his sake.
 Will flatter you,--and fool and rake
 Your steps pursue;
 And of your Father's name will make
 A snare for you. (3: 13-14)

James Currie, Burns's first editor and also his biographer, laments Burns's "fondness for drink and states what was to become the accepted legend for more than a century--Burns was a confirmed alcoholic" (Lindsay 97). Currie says of Burns:

Perpetually stimulated by alcohol . . . in his moments of thought he reflected with the deepest regret on his fatal progress, clearly foreseeing the goal towards which he was hastening, without the strength . . . to stop, or even to slacken his course. His temper became more irritable and gloomy; he fled from himself into society, often of the lowest kind. And in such company, that part of the convivial scene in which wine increases sensibility and excites benevolence, was hurried over, to reach the succeeding part, over which uncontrolled passion generally presides. (102)

Wordsworth admonishes the sons of Burns:

 . . . ne'er to a seductive lay
 Let faith be given,
 Nor deem that "light which leads astray
 Is light from Heaven." (3: 39-42)

The sons of Burns must avoid anything intemperate, dishonest, and seductive. As a friend and substitute father, Wordsworth seriously advises them to "think, and fear!" (3: 48). In addition, these sons must

remember that their father died prematurely because of his undisciplined way of life.

Another poem recounting how fathers fail their children is The Brothers, written and published in 1800. The poem opens with the spoken words of the simple, congenial Priest of Ennerdale to Jane, his wife:

"These Tourists, heaven preserve us!
 needs must live [t/o]
 A profitable life: some glance along,
 Rapid and gay, as if the earth were air, And they
 And they were butterflies to wheel about
 Long as the summer lasted: some as wise
 Perched on the forehead of a jutting crag,
 Pencil in hand and book upon the knee,
 Will look and scribble, scribble on and look,
 Until a man might travel twelve stout miles,
 Or reap an acre of his neighbour's corn.
 But, for that moping Son of Idleness,
 Why can he tarry yonder?--In our church-yard
 Is neither epitaph nor monument,
 Tombstone nor name--only the turf we tread
 And a few natural graves." (2: 1-15)

The priest speaks disparagingly of tourists. He thinks that, generally, they are rather ridiculous idlers.

There is, however, a surprising, reposing stranger who after twenty years at sea has come silently to the churchyard for consolation. This is Leonard Ewbank at home again. Inwardly he rejoices to be again on the property where the Parish Chapel stands, for it symbolizes brotherhood, mutuality, stability, and peace of mind. In deep meditation he returns to thoughts of the past concerning the shepherd's life which he had shared with his brother, whom he now desperately seeks to find:

And now, at last,
 From the perils manifold, with some small
 wealth [t/o]
 Acquired by traffic 'mid the Indian Isles,
 To his paternal home he is returned,
 With a determined purpose to resume
 The life he had lived there; both for the
 sake [t/o]
 Of many darling pleasures, and the love
 Which to an only brother he has borne
 In all his hardships, since that happy time
 When, whether it blew foul or fair, they two
 Were brother-shepherds on their native hills.--
 They were the last of all their race: and
 now, [t/o]
 When Leonard had approached his home, his
 heart [t/o]
 Failed in him; and, not venturing to enquire
 Tidings of one so long and dearly loved,
 He to the solitary church-yard turned;
 That, as he knew in what particular spot
 His family were laid, he thence might learn
 If still his Brother lived. (2: 65-83)

As the sons of Robert Burns were left fatherless during
 their developing years, so Leonard and James became orphans
 after the untimely death of their parents. Now Leonard's
 heart fails him for fear of the dreadful probability that
 his brother whom he has not seen for more than two decades
 is dead. His heart palpitates because of his negligence
 about writing to James or any of the other people at home.
 The thought that his brother could be dead is almost more
 than he can abide; conversely, if he finds his dear brother
 alive, the vision of the myriad things he would do for James
 sustains him. Leonard finds himself in a terrifying state
 of perplexity and doubt.

Erroneously, the Priest epitomizes Leonard as a "moping
 Son of Idleness" (2: 11). Nevertheless,

The actual parents of the brothers died. Now the substitute father of the boys was grandfather Walter Ewbank, a man who must try to manage the family's inheritance of financial struggles with bond, interest, and mortgages. The weighty responsibility of rearing two active boys and of trying to liquidate the numerous debts overwhelmed him. At Walter's death,

The estate and house were sold; and all their
sheep, [t/o]
Well--all was gone, and they [Leonard and
James] were destitute,
And Leonard, chiefly for his Brother's sake,
Resolved to try his fortune on the seas.
(2: 301-06)

The brothers' parents and then Walter Ewbank fail the boys by leaving them poverty-stricken, though Wordsworth casts no blame on the parents and the grandfather. No clear suggestion is made that they could have done anything other than what they did.

The Priest describes James's reaction to Leonard's leaving home:

. . . when his Brother
 Had gone to sea, and he was left alone,
 The little colour that he had was soon
 Stolen from his cheek; he drooped, and pined,
 and pined. . . . [t/o]
 (2: 337-40]

Although the community tried to care for James by providing him shelter, food, clothing, and love, still he grieved for Leonard. The Priest says:

"And, when he dwelt beneath our roof, we found
 (A practice till this time unknown to him)
 That often, rising from his bed at night,
 He in his sleep would walk about, and sleeping
 He sought his brother Leonard." (2: 349-53)

While at sea, Leonard often thought about his brother and the homeland. At the same time, James worried about and searched for Leonard. He grieved for his brother.

Finally, the Priest reveals to Leonard the unfortunate death of his brother:

"One sweet May-morning,
 (. . . twelve years since when Spring returns)
 He had gone forth among the new-dropped lambs,
 With two or three companions, whom their course
 Of occupation led from height to height
 Under a cloudless sun--till he, at length,
 Through weariness, or haply, to indulge
 The humour of the moment, lagged behind.
 You see yon precipice;--it wears the shape
 Of a vast building made of many crags;
 And in the midst is one particular rock
 That rises like a column from the vale,
 Whence by our shepherds it is called, THE PILLAR.
 Upon its aery summit crowned with heath,
 The loiterer, not unnoticed by his comrades,
 Lay stretched at ease; but, passing by the place
 On their return, they found that he was gone.
 No ill was feared; till one of them by chance
 Entering, when evening was far spent, the house
 Which at that time was James's home, there learned
 That nobody had seen him all that day:
 The morning came and still he was unheard of:
 The neighbours were alarmed, and to the brook
 Some hastened; some ran to the lake: ere noon
 They found him at the foot of that same rock
 Dead, and with mangled limbs." (2: 356-81)

In summary, the parents and grandfather of Leonard and James fail the boys by leaving them unprovided for financially. Leonard himself, who might have filled a role as a substitute father for James, then fails his brother by

deserting him to go to sea. His motive, to earn needed money for James, is commendable, but, given a second chance, it is most likely that Leonard would have stayed with James and protected him from the broken heart which led to his death.

Other poems depicting fathers who fail their children are "Lucy Gray" and "The Last of the Flock." As in The Brothers, Wordsworth does not blame the fathers for their parental failures as he does Stephen Hill in "The Thorn" and Peter Bell. In "Lucy Gray," written at Goslar in Germany in 1799, is a little girl who represents a child whom any mother or father would desire to have. She is sweet, devoted, and obedient. Lucy is swift to obey as "the hare upon the green" (l: 10). She is, in general, a good and dutiful child. Lucy Gray is well-known in the countryside. The speaker of the poem says:

Oft I had heard of Lucy Gray:
And, when I crossed the wild,
I chanced to see at break of day
The solitary child.

No mate, no comrade Lucy knew;
She dwelt on a wide moor,
--The sweetest thing that ever grew
Beside a human door! (l: 1-8)

One day Lucy's father requests that she go to the town to guide her mother home through an expected snow:

"Tonight will be a stormy night--
You to the town must go;
And take a lantern, Child, to light
Your mother through the snow." (l: 13-16)

The parent-child relationships in "Lucy Gray" are affectionate, fervid, and responsive. With enthusiasm Lucy responds to her father's entreaty:

"That, Father! will I gladly do:
'Tis scarcely afternoon--
The minster-clock has just struck two,
And yonder is the moon!"

At this the Father raised his hook,
And snapped a faggot-band;
He plied his work;--and Lucy took
The lantern in her hand. (l: 17-24)

Lucy obeys her father happily and gladly. The child demonstrates no impudence, rudeness, or irreverence to her parents. Cheerfully she proceeds:

Not blither is the mountain roe:
With many a wanton stroke
Her feet disperse the powdery snow,
That rises up like smoke. (l: 25-28)

However,

The storm came on before its time:
She wandered up and down;
And many a hill did Lucy climb:
But never reached the town. (l: 29-32)

The foreseen blizzard occurs unexpectedly soon, perplexing the child. The poet makes no attempt to represent the child's emotions now; the only expressions of unhappiness are from the parents. The speaker of the poem states:

The wretched parents all that night
Went shouting far and wide;
But there was neither sound nor sight
To serve them for a guide.

At day-break on a hill they stood
That overlooked the moor;

And thence they saw the bridge of wood,
A furlong from their door.

They wept--and, turning homeward, cried,
"In heaven we all shall meet;"
--When in the snow the mother spied
The print of Lucy's feet. (l: 33-34)

The parents trace the footprints to the middle of a bridge above a canal, and there the footprints end. Because of the loss of their daughter, the parents are mournful, grieved, comfortless, and tearful.

Because of Lucy's obedience and trustworthiness, a natural overconfidence has prevailed in the father. In ordering her to go to town despite the forthcoming blizzard, he is not worried that anything is likely to go wrong that she cannot safely manage. Indeed, he confidently gives the child an adult responsibility. He says, "'And take a lantern, Child to light / Your mother through the snow'" (l: 15-16). Even if Lucy were a less responsible child than she is, the mother would of course be with her on the trip back from town and would protect her if necessary. Nevertheless, the father makes a fatal mistake. Like Leonard Ewbank in "The Brothers," the father in "Lucy Gray" would, if given a second chance, no doubt proceed far differently from the way he does.

In "The Last of the Flock," the poet introduces a peaceable and unsophisticated man, the owner of a flock of sheep. His robust and vigorous physique radiates with health. His countenance expresses maturity, manliness, and

intelligence. However, his soft-heartedness overcomes him as he weeps "in the public road, alone" (2: 4). Finally, his patriarchal vigilance for his rescued sheep bears witness as he gently carries in his powerful arms a lamb, the last of all his flock.

Stanza two of the poem presents the owner of the flock spying the narrator of the poem, who says:

He saw me, and he turned aside,
As if he wished himself to hide:
And with his coat did then essay
To wipe those briny tears away. (2: 11-14)

When a man cries openly, he may experience an almost overmastering predicament in his life. He may become grief-stricken and chagrined for his tears. The owner of the sheep notices that an observer sees him crying and attempting to clean his face of all teardrops. The narrator speaks to this distressed man: "'My friend, / What ails you? wherefore weep you so?'" (2: 14-15).

The father is ashamed when he has to account for his crying so profusely. He answers:

--"Shame on me, Sir! this lusty Lamb,
He makes my tears to flow.
To-day I fetched him from the rock;
He is the last of all my flock." (2: 17-20)

Whatever may be necessary to protect and to keep his last lamb from dying is the foremost concern of this man. It seems, however, that he perceives that it will die. In responding to the questions concerning his abundant tears, the owner of the flock reflects on his early life:

"When I was young, a single man,
And after youthful follies ran,
Though little given to care and thought,
Yet, so it was, an ewe I bought." (2: 21-24)

As a young man, he is, like many other youths, childish, irrational, frivolous, and absurd. At the same time, he does exhibit a sure sign of adult responsibility, for he purchases the sheep which will become the basis of a flock, a means of supporting himself and, in time, a family. He continues to tell his story: "And other sheep from her I raised, / As healthy sheep as you might see." (2: 25-26) As an industrious shepherd, he becomes affluent. He then concludes that he is ready for marriage. He says:

"And then I married, and was rich
As I could wish to be;
Of sheep I numbered a full score,
And every year increased my store." (2: 27-30)

Surely this man demonstrates his financial and intellectual ability to marry and support a family. Already he has twenty sheep, and his flock is increasing yearly. Proudly he speaks of his annual profits:

"Year after year my stock it grew;
And from this one, this singly ewe,
Full fifty comely sheep I raised,
As fine a flock as ever grazed!
Upon the Quantock hills they fed;
They throve, and we at home did thrive."
(2: 31-36)

Indeed, his stock of sheep brings prosperity and other assets to him, and he provides a comfortable home for his wife and children. But now he weeps and says, "'This lusty Lamb of all my store / Is all that is alive'" (2: 37-38).

While he still has his fine flock, hard times come to the countryside. The father believes that he cannot now supply even the basic needs for his family. No job is available through which he might support his wife and children. His next step is to seek relief from the parish office. However, he is not at this point truly poor; he has the physical health to continue working diligently, and he owns fifty sheep. The parish officials marvel that he would ask for financial help since he has many sheep. He is encouraged to sell his sheep for bread to feed his children, for the parish assists financially only destitute people. Reluctantly the father carries out the parish's recommendation:

"I sold a sheep, as they had said,
And bought my little children bread,
And they were healthy with their food;
For me--it never did me good." (2: 51-54)

The father uses the money from the selling of a sheep to provide nourishing food for his family. He too eats, but he is so unhappy over having to sell his sheep that the food does him no good. He compares with the melting of the snow his dwindling flock and all his profits:

"To see the end of all my gains,
The pretty flock which I had reared
With all my care and pains,
To see it melt like snow away--
For me it was a woeful day." (2: 56-60)

Having developed his beautiful flock with painstaking care, he morosely watches as it rapidly diminishes. Too, he seems

more concerned about the specific needs of his sheep than those of his six children. Then he seems almost to fall under a divine curse for his great homage to his sheep. The plague against his flock comes swiftly:

"Another still! and still another!
A little lamb, and then its mother!
It was a vein that never stopped--
Like blood-drops from my heart they dropped.
Till thirty were not left alive
They dwindled, dwindled, one by one;
And I may say, that many a time
I wished they all were gone." (2: 61-68)

Even if all his stock died, however, the father's struggles would not cease. The impact of his losses would obsess him. Thinking that they condemn him for the death of his sheep, he feels uncomfortable in the presence of people. He becomes mentally unbalanced:

"No peace, no comfort could I find,
No ease, within doors or without;
And crazily and wearily I went my work about;
And oft was moved to flee from home,
And hide my head where wild beasts roam."
(2: 75-88)

Even if he did escape to the wilds, there would remain no peace, no comfort, and no ease for the father.

Towards the end of the poem the father acknowledges that God has "cursed" him "in his sore distress" (2: 86), his inability to love his family much more than his flock. His praying to God seems to be an abomination:

"I prayed, yet every day I thought
I loved my children less;
And every week, and every day,
My flock it seemed to melt away." (2: 87-90)

One wonders how sincerely and often the father would pray for his children. His prayer could not restore his genuine love for his children, nor could his petition prevent the pestilence against his sheep. All his sheep are dead:

"They dwindled, Sir, sad sight to see!
From ten to five, from five to three,
A lamb, a wether, and a ewe;--
And then at last three to two;
And, of my fifty, yesterday
I had only one:
And here it lies upon my arm,
Alas! and I have none;--
To-day I fetched it from the rock;
It is the last of all my flock." (2: 91-100)

The poem ends with the father crying over the last sheep of his fold. It remains very significant that he does not weep for his children. His ability and strength to gain property during his early years yield to his supreme weaknesses and ultimately his full rejection of his family. His patriarchal vigilance for his children bears a woeful witness.

Chapter 3

Fanaticism in the Father in The White Doe of Rylstone

Several important factors influenced Wordsworth in his writing of The White Doe of Rylstone: Or the Fate of the Nortons. In her biography of Wordsworth, Mary Moorman describes the poet's visit in 1807 to the Yorkshire valley that sequestered the ruins of Bolton Abbey:

The Wordsworths left Coleorton on June 10th, 1807, returning to Grasmere by way of Yorkshire, where they stayed at Halifax with Dorothy's "aunt" Mrs. Rawson, who had brought her up, and with her old friend Jane Pollard, now Mrs. John Marshall, and her family, at New Grange, Kirkstall, then a village just outside Leeds. From Kirkstall William and Dorothy and the Marshalls made an "excursion" on horseback and by carriage up Wharfedale, to visit Bolton Abbey. This expedition had important consequences for Wordsworth, for it led to the writing of The White Doe of Rylstone in the following autumn. (2: 108)

Also in the background of the poem is the historic ballad called "The Rising in the North," which is quoted in full in the first chapter of this study. The subject of the old ballad is the great Northern Insurrection in the twelfth year of Elizabeth, 1569, which proved fatal to Thomas Percy, the seventh Earl of Northumberland (Percy 1: 266). As E. Hershey Sneath summarizes it, "The conflict really represented an uprising of the Roman Catholics against the

Government" (237). He goes on to point out that "two of the Norton family (Emily and Francis) were Protestants, and were unwilling that their father and brothers (who were Catholics) should identify themselves with the hostile movement, in which they finally lost their lives" (237).

Although The White Doe follows the plot of Percy's ballad, "Wordsworth's version centered not on the physical events described but on the internal movements of imagination and feeling in the minds and hearts of the characters," as Stephen M. Parrish recognizes (226).

Wordsworth says:

Rylstone was the property and residence of the Nortons, distinguished in that ill-advised and unfortunate Insurrection; which led me to connect with this tradition the principal circumstances of their fate, as recorded in the Ballad.
(PW 3: 535)

In addition, Wordsworth shows himself conversant concerning such annalists as William Camden and John Stow on the role of the Norton family in the unsuccessful uprising of Roman Catholics under the Duke of Norfolk in 1569. The fourth Duke of Norfolk, who was executed and attainted for attempting to marry Mary Queen of Scots, was the tragic hero of the Howard family. In The Duke of Norfolk John M. Robinson suggests that the Duke was as much a victim of the greatness of his position as his own personal feelings. Robinson says that the Duke, who had been a "sincere Protestant" his entire life, was thought to have been a main

instigator in an

international Catholic plot involving the Pope and Philip II of Spain to overthrow Elizabeth, replace her with Mary Queen of Scots and to restore the Catholic religion in England. Though it cannot definitely be proved one way or the other, it is highly likely that the Duke was deliberately and cold-bloodedly misrepresented as a principal conspirator in a plot of which he was essentially ignorant and innocent. He was not entirely free from guilt, for he had re-opened correspondence with Mary Queen of Scots despite his promise to Elizabeth not to do so. That was his fault, but it was not a heinous fault, and there was no reason in the first place why he should not have aspired legitimately to the hand of Mary Queen of Scots. (52)

Also among the influences on The White Doe was Edmund Spenser. Wordsworth opens the poem with his Dedication to Mary Wordsworth, his wife, which refers to Una and the milk-white lamb in The Faerie Queene. Wordsworth writes:

In trellised shed with clustering roses gay,
And, Mary! oft beside our blazing fire,
When years of wedded life were as a day
Whose current answers to the heart's desire,
Did we together read in Spenser's Lay
How Una, sad of soul--in sad attire,
The gentle Una, of celestial birth,
To seek her Knight went wandering o'er the earth.
Ah, then, Beloved! pleasing was the smart,
And the tear precious in compassion shed
For her, who, pierced by sorrow's thrilling dart,
Did meekly bear the pang unmerited;
Meek as that emblem of her lowly heart
The milk-white Lamb which in a line she led,--
And faithful, loyal in her innocence,
Like the brave Lion slain in her defence.
(3: 1-16)

Commenting on these opening lines of the Dedication, Moorman states:

"The gentle Una of celestial birth" had first made endurable the loss of their [William and Mary

Wordsworth's] two children, and next to it in this ministry of comfort, said Wordsworth, had been "this song of mine"--The White Doe, so redolent of Spenser in all its spiritual implications. (2: 108)

Finally, Wordsworth appropriates the legend of the white doe that makes a weekly pilgrimage to Bolton from Rylstone, where the estate of the rebel Nortons has been confiscated by Queen Elizabeth. In The White Doe of Rylstone Richard Norton, the father and Catholic rebel, destroys his family by manifesting a great lack of judgment. He deports himself as though he has absolute authority vested in him.

In the first canto the poet introduces the white doe after the parishioners have just come into the church and sung their first hymn:

A moment ends the fervent din,
And all is hushed, without and within;
For though the priest, more tranquilly,
Recites the holy liturgy,
The only voice which you can hear
Is the river murmuring near.
--When soft!--the dusky trees between,
And down the path through the open green,
Where is no living thing to be seen;
And through yon gateway, where is found,
Beneath the arch with ivy bound,
Free entrance to the churchyard ground--
Comes gliding in with lovely gleam,
Comes gliding in serene and slow,
Soft and silent as a dream,
A solitary Doe!
White she is as lily of June,
And beauteous as the silver moon
When out of sight the clouds are driven
And she is left alone in heaven. (3: 43-62)

Moorman believes that Wordsworth's interpretation of

the white doe legend is wholly his own:

The doe in the poem becomes the spiritual guardian and companion of Emily, the Protestant daughter of the Catholic rebel--a character created entirely by Wordsworth. She is the passive and sorrowful heroine of the story, and the doe, whose appearances always brighten the poetry with a peculiar radiance and mystery of their own, like the recurrence of a lovely theme in music, is the symbol of her spiritual victory over disaster and sorrow. (2: 111)

Throughout the second canto of the poem, Wordsworth unfolds the father's uncompromising relationships with his children. First, he commands Emily to embroider the sacred cross and the wounds of Christ on an unblest work--a Banner--to her a sign of impending disaster, but to her father, a symbol of martial courage in a righteous cause:

Her Father did with joy behold,--
Exulting in its imagery;
A Banner, fashioned to fulfil
Too perfectly his headstrong will:
For on this Banner had her hand
Embroidered (such her Sire's command)
The sacred Cross; and figured there
The five dear wounds our Lord did bear;
Full soon to be uplifted high,
And float in rueful company! (3: 350-59)

Martin Price affirms that the Banner serves to illuminate the motives of the elder Norton:

The Banner is both a battle-standard and something more; its religious imagery asserts his high purpose in engaging in battle, a purpose as much higher than his leaders' as his courage is more enduring. The efficacy of the Banner lies in its concrete representation of Norton's cause, but as a zealot Norton tends to confound the cause with a desire for immediate action. The wounds and the cross, which may evoke divine humility, serve Norton's "holy pride." The Banner in this aspect

becomes a "glittering, floating Pageantry" (190-91).

As the father is insensitive to the silent rebuke from his meek daughter Emily, who obeys him with some apparent misgiving, Norton is also ignorant of the heartfelt pleading of his eldest son, Francis Norton, for his father to remain a peacemaker. Francis perceives that his father and all his brothers will never return alive if they become part of the Insurrection. Francis supplicates his father not to abandon his flock:

"O Father! rise not in this fray--
The hairs are white upon your head;
Dear Father, hear me when I say
It is for you too late a day!
Bethink you of your own good name:
A just and gracious Queen have we,
A pure religion, and the claim
Of peace on our humanity.--
'Tis meet that I endure your scorn;
I am your son, your eldest born;
But not for lordship or for land,
My Father, do I clasp your knees;
The Banner touch not, stay your hand,
This multitude of men disband,
And live at home in blameless ease;
For these my brethren's sake, for me;
And, most of all, for Emily!" (3: 381-97)

The words of address--"O Father," "Dear Father," and "My Father"--confirm the love, devotion, and reverence that Francis possesses fervently for his father. In the passionate speech or prayer of Francis to his father, Wordsworth uses many Old Testament images. "'The hairs are white upon your head'" (3: 382) is reminiscent of Jacob, who suffers agonizingly for the son of his old age, Joseph.

Likewise, "Bethink you of your own good name" (3: 385) brings to memory the admonition from King Solomon: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Prov. 22.1). Francis and Emily desire that the family remain together as they are now. Francis says to Norton, "'I am your son, your eldest born; / But not for lordship or for land'" (3: 390-91).

Finally, Francis, a son of piety, experience, and sound judgment, makes a solemn oath by saying, "My Father, do I clasp your knees" (3: 392). Francis longs for his father to pledge to observe four requests for the sake of the family, especially for Emily:

"The Banner touch not, stay your hand,
This multitude of men disband,
And live at home in blameless ease." (3: 393-95)

Using Emily's name in his supplication to his father, Francis' appeal momentarily impassions Norton:

Tumultuous noises filled the hall;
And scarcely could the Father hear
That name--pronounced with a dying fall--
The name of his only Daughter dear,
As on the banner which stood near
He glanced a look of holy pride,
And his moist eyes were glorified.
(3: 398-404)

At this moment, at least, Norton's concern for his children and the care of the father for his sheep in "The Last of the Flock" are similar. His eyes "moist," Norton with his eight sons leaves Francis and Emily. The father forsakes his only daughter, "The last leaf on a blasted

tree" (3: 566). In "The Last of the Flock," the father's cheeks are wet with tears, for his having lost almost all his sheep; the father wails and suffers; soon he will lose forever the last of all his flock.

In "The Rising in the North," Norton addresses Francis in this manner:

"Now fye upon thee, coward Francis,

 When thou wert yong and tender of age,
 Why did I make soe much of thee?" (3: 85-88)

In Percy's ballad, Francis describes his father as an old man having white hair and a gray beard. Francis's remarks insult his father; hence Norton calls Francis a "coward." At any rate, Wordsworth's Francis would fight for England if the causes were just. He believes in the brotherhood of mankind; therefore, he will not fight against the Catholic opposition. In the second canto of The White Doe, Wordsworth reveals Norton's spoken decision to fight for his Queen. He says to his sons:

"Thou, Richard, bear'st thy father's name,
 Keep thou this ensign till the day
 When I of thee require the same:
 Thy place to be on my better hand;--
 And seven as true as thou, I see,
 Will cleave to this good cause and me."
 He spake, and eight brave sons straightway
 All followed him, a gallant band! (3: 406-13)

Josef Rudin asserts that certain phases of life incite even the most peace-loving citizens to exhibit a remarkable receptibility to fanatic judgments and positions:

It is not only the adolescent puritan who can be carried away by the fervor of a new idea; even in the second half of life a person can suddenly catch fire for some absurd goal and become a warrior--and even old age can show passion in its half-closed eyes and once more burst into flame.
(4)

Richard Norton, the fanatic with "a look of holy pride," seizes the Banner, thrusts it into another's hands, and leads forth in regimental style "a gallant band," his eight sons to battle for the rebels Neville and Percy. In "The Rising in the North," Norton's mustering of troops seems less urgent:

Then rose that reverend gentleman,
And with him came a goodlye band
To join with the brave Erle Percy,
And all the flower o'Northumberland.

With them the noble Nevill came,
The erle of Westmorland was hee:
At Wetherbye they mustred their host,
Thirteen thousand faire to see.
(3: 93-100)

To assure him that his cause is holy and right as he leads his eight sons to destruction, Norton receives loud acceptance from the rebel forces:

. . . with his sons, when forth he came,
The sight was hailed with loud acclaim
And din of arms and minstrelsy,
From all his warlike tenantry,
All horsed and harnessed with him to ride,--
A voice to which the hills replied! (3: 414-19)

So the father leaves his eldest son Francis and his daughter Emily behind to agonize concerning the fate of the battle and of Rylstone. Francis can hardly believe what he sees--his father whom he admires and respects abandoning him

as the son stands silently in a vacant hall "under dreary weight" (3: 421). Because his father rejects him, Francis is overwhelmed and desolate. Tears of anguish and sorrow and hurt flow through his eyes. The eldest son has become

cleansed from the despair
And sorrow of his fruitless prayer.
The past he calmly hath reviewed. (3: 439-41)

Francis finally accepts the answer to his prayer. It is the overwhelming pressure of the Queen and the compelling will of his father for him to carry the Banner into battle, to excite the multitude of men to the conflict, to ensnare his brothers into the controversy; and Norton will reject Emily and him. Refined and reconstituted from these terrible frustrations, the soul of Francis has deepened. Now he wishes to share with Emily the peace of his mind and heart gained from his having overcome his spiritual crisis. Meanwhile Emily, "Her head upon her lap, concealing in solitude her bitter feeling" (3: 448-49), sorrows over the recent events. Her brother finds her and commences to speak to her his benedictory speech with appropriate words. There are several aspects of this ardent speech to Emily. First, Francis rehearses the fatal decision of their father:

"Gone are they, bravely, though misled;
With a dear Father at their head!
The sons obey a natural lord;
The Father had given solemn word
To noble Percy; and a force
Still stronger, bends him to his course.
This said, our tears to-day may fall

As at an innocent funeral.
 In deep and awful channel runs
 This sympathy of Sire and Sons;
 Untried our Brothers have been loved
 With heart by simple nature moved;
 And now their faithfulness is proved:
 For faithful we must call them, bearing
 That soul of conscientious daring." (3: 461-75)

Then in nostalgic tones Francis recites to Emily the
 names of some of their brothers:

--"There were they all in circle--there
 Stood Richard, Ambrose, Christopher,
 John with a sword that will not fail,
 And Marmaduke in fearless mail,
 And those bright Twins were side by side;
 And there, by fresh hopes beautified,
 Stood He, whose arm yet lacks the power
 Of man, our youngest, fairest flower!"
 (3: 476-83)

In Francis's prayer to his father for him to "live at
 home in blameless ease" (3: 395), Marmaduke himself "was
 yielding inwardly" (3: 490) to remain at home. "And would
 have laid his purpose by, / But for a glance of his Father's
 eye" (3: 492-93).

Just as importantly, though Francis disagrees with the
 Insurrection, he decides to follow his father and brothers
 into battle as a conscientious objector, refusing to bear
 arms in the warfare on the ground of moral and religious
 principles. He says:

"With theirs my efforts cannot blend,
 I cannot for such cause contend;
 Their aims I utterly forswear;
 But I in body will be there.
 Unarmed and naked will I go,
 Be at their side, come weal or woe:
 On kind occasions I may wait,

See, hear, obstruct, or mitigate.
 Bare breast I take and an empty hand."
 (3:507-15)

Moreover, to Emily Francis foretells the inevitable
 downfall of the house of Richard Norton:

--"O Sister, I could prophesy!
 The time is come that rings the knell
 Of all we loved, and loved so well:
 Hope nothing, if I thus may speak
 To thee, a woman, and thence weak:
 Hope nothing, I repeat; for we
 Are doomed to perish utterly." (3: 527-33)

Francis observes as one having extraordinary moral and
 spiritual insight concerning the desolation of Rylstone.
 His prophecy of total destruction includes the following:
 Norton and eight sons in battle, their home and its
 surroundings, and even the lovely Doe. Perhaps the house of
 Norton would have remained had Norton only listened to the
 wisdom of Francis and Emily. Sorrow increases moment by
 moment within the family. Finally, Francis reminds Emily of
 the moral strength and fortitude of the relationships that
 have drawn them together. Such kindred ties must support
 her to the end of her lonely pilgrimage:

--"But thou, my Sister, doomed to be
 The last leaf on a blasted tree;
 If not in vain we breathed the breath
 Together of a purer faith;
 If hand in hand we have been led,
 And thou, (O happy thought this day!)
 Not seldom foremost in the way;
 If on one thought our minds have fed,
 And we have in one meaning read;
 If, when at home our private weal
 Hath suffered from the shock of zeal,
 Together we have learned to prize
 Forbearance and self-sacrifice;

If we like combatants have fared,
 And for this issue been prepared;
 If thou art beautiful, and youth
 And thought endue thee with all truth--
 Be strong;--be worthy of the grace
 Of God, and fill thy destined place:
 A Soul, by force of sorrows high,
 Uplifted to the purest sky
 Of undisturbed humanity!" (3: 566-87)

Wordsworth seems to say that Emily is worthy of the grace of God, and that she can abide in the assurance of this.

At the opening of the third canto, Norton appears to be the great deliverer, a marvelous hero for the holy cause. He praises highly his "gallant band," his eight loyal sons. He says, addressing the leaders:

"I bring with me a goodly train;
 Their hearts are with you: hill and dale
 Have helped us: Ure we crossed, and Swale,
 And horse and harness followed--see
 The best part of their Yeomanry!
 --Stand forth, my Sons!--these eight are mine,
 Whom to this service I commend;
 Which way soe'er our fate incline,
 These will be faithful to the end;
 They are my all"--voice failed him here--
 "My all save one, a Daughter dear!
 Whom I have left, Love's mildest birth,
 The meekest Child on this blessed earth.
 I had--but these are by my side,
 These Eight, and this is a day of pride!
 The time is ripe." (3: 606-21)

Norton speaks the truth and nothing but the truth when he acknowledges his eight sons by saying that, except for Emily, they are his "all." Purposely he does not mention the name of his eldest son, Francis. To the father this firstborn son is rebellious, self-willed, disrespectful, disobedient, and worthless. The father may desire never to

see him again. He does remember what he considers his son's disgraceful fear and timidity for his father's holy cause. To the father Francis dishonors the family name of Norton by not following the leadership of his father to battle for the rebels Neville and Percy. Seemingly, Norton's judgment of Francis is that his son's actions are unpardonable. To him the son will remain an eternal transgressor. He does not regard Francis as a prodigal son who will return to his father and forgiveness. Norton rejects Francis permanently.

Norton's triumphant voice momentarily fails him when he calls to mind his "Daughter dear." He sentimentalizes about her as "Love's mildest birth" and as "The meekest Child on this blessed earth." When he says that the "time is ripe," he utters an ironic prophecy. The time for the father's ultimate destruction of himself and his children has almost come.

Ennobled amidst the pageantry at Brancepeth, Norton takes the banner in his own hands and tries unsuccessfully to stem the retreat of the rebel forces, and

Back through the melancholy Host
Went Norton, and resumed his post.
Alas! thought he, and have I borne
This Banner raised with a joyful pride,
This hope of all posterity,
By those dread symbols sanctified;
Thus to become at once the scorn
Of babbling winds as they go by
A spot of shame to the sun's bright eye,
To the light clouds a mockery!
--"Even these poor eight of mine would stem--"
Half to himself, and half to them

He spake--"would stem, or quell, a force
 Ten times their number, man and horse;
 This by their own unaided might,
 Without their father in their sight,
 Without the Cause for which they fight;
 A Cause, which on a needful day
 Would breed us thousands brave as they."
 (3: 843-61)

Seeing the rebel officers and troops retreating from the conflict to save their own lives, Norton still believes that his uplifting and carrying the Banner while his sons are fighting valiantly with him will eventually prevail in the struggle. He believes that the forces on his side will take heart and rally once more for the Queen---"A Cause, which on a needful day / Would breed us thousands brave as they" (3: 860-61). Outnumbered against an armed enemy, Norton should retreat or surrender to save the loss of additional lives, especially the lives of his own children. However, to raise the white flag would encourage his receiving the scorn, shame, and mockery of the Queen. Duty calls, and headstrong he must fight even though he remains alone with his sons.

Then his "reverend head" is "Raised toward that Imagery once more" (3: 862-63). Norton appears presumptuous. A guilty father seeks to forget his fatherly duties by uplifting the banner in battle. Seeing the rebel officers and troops answer the call to retreat, one might conclude that inwardly Norton's trust falters; the banner seems to him a "mockery." Even he feels a superstitious foreboding,

superseding his paternal twinge, when he reflects that Emily wept for the religious division of the family, rather than for the Catholic cause, as she worked the sacred emblem into the banner:

. . . the familiar prospect shed
Despondency unfelt before:
A shock of intimations vain,
Dismay, and superstitious pain,
Fell on him, with the sudden thought
Of her by whom the work was wrought:--
Oh! wherefore was her countenance bright
With love divine and gentle light?
She would not, could not, disobey,
But her Faith leaned another way.
Ill tears she wept; I saw them fall,
I overheard her as she spake
Sad words to that mute Animal,
The White Doe, in the hawthorn brake;
She steeped, but not for Jesu's sake,
This Cross in tears: by her, and One
Unworthier far we are undone--
Her recreant Brother--he prevailed
Over that tender Spirit--assailed
Too oft, alas! by her whose head
In the cold grave hath long been laid:
She first in reason's dawn beguiled
Her docile, unsuspecting Child:
Far back--far back my mind must go
To reach the well-spring of the woe! (3: 864-88)

In a condemnatory mood, Norton's mind returns to thoughts of the past for his supposed deception by his saintly daughter. He meditates on how she duped him in three specific ways. First, professing herself to be an obedient child, she proved to be for another cause, not her father's holy belief. Second, she permitted her "undone, recreant" brother's sincerity to prevail over her. Third, her mother's prayers have been answered: she is still a charitable Protestant. Norton does not condemn himself for

his having failed as a father; rather he rationalizes that he is not guilty. Shifting the blame is a universal practice. It becomes painful for the father to admit that he is wrong--so painful that he does almost anything to avoid confronting his mistake.

Martin Price adds that Norton can allow himself to recall more clearly the circumstances under which the Banner was made:

The splitting apart of the military forces makes him see the initial constraint under which Emily acted. It was not unmixed zeal that went into its making; for "her Faith," as he well knows, "leaned another way" and into the Banner flowed tears, but "Not for Jesu's sake." This fusion in Norton's mind of Emily's motives with the efficacy of the Banner may be the result of "superstitious pain."
(191)

According to Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, Norton realizes "that the banner wrought at his command but against her will, is an emblem, not of a triumphant cause, but of imminent disaster (PW 3: 547).

As the Banner ceases for Norton to be an imaginative symbol of unity of purpose and acquires the suggestion of division, Francis appears, intending both to do his father honor and to dissuade him from further resistance:

"Though here I bend a suppliant knee
In reverence, and unarmed, I fear
In your indignant thoughts my share;
Am grieved this backward march to see
So careless and disorderly.
I scorn your Chiefs--men who would lead,
And yet want courage at their need:
Then look at them with open eyes!
Deserve they further sacrifice?--

If--when they shrink, nor dare oppose
 In open field their gathering foes,
 (And fast, from this decisive day,
 Yon multitude must melt away;)
 If now I ask a grace not claimed
 While ground was left for hope; unblamed
 Be an endeavor that can do
 No injury to them or you." (3: 897-913)

Francis seeks to save his wandering father, whom he still loves, reveres, and makes obeisance to. He is indignant with the selfish leaders who would retreat carelessly and in disorder, thus discouraging and dispiriting the regular troops and causing needless casualties. To his father Francis is a namby-pamby hypocrite; yet Francis craves his father's acceptance of him again as a faithful, caring son. He makes this fervent request to Norton:

"My Father! I would help to find
 A place of shelter, till the rage
 Of cruel men do like the wind
 Exhaust itself and sink to rest;
 Be Brother now to Brother joined!
 Admit me in the equipage
 Of your misfortunes, that at least,
 Whatever fate remain behind,
 I may bear witness in my breast
 To your nobility of mind!" (3: 914-23)

Francis humbles himself by identifying with his father and by sharing in his distresses and certain disaster. A little time still remains for Norton and his terrorized warriors to escape sudden death. Francis addresses Norton as "My Father!" Such an endearing exaltation might cause any father to feel honored and esteemed. Francis offers praises to his father's "nobility of mind." Yet, when

Francis begs his father to come with him into hiding,

Norton's reply is passionate and bitter:

"Thou Enemy, my bane and blight!
Oh! bold to fight the Coward's fight
Against all good"--but why declare,
At length, the issue of a prayer
Which love had prompted, yielding scope
Too free to one bright moment's hope?
Suffice it that the Son, who strove
With fruitless effort to allay
That passion, prudently gave way;
Nor did he turn aside to prove
His Brothers' wisdom or their love--
But calmly from the spot withdrew;
His best endeavours to renew,
Should e'er a kindlier time ensue." (3: 924-37)

At the opening of the fourth canto, Wordsworth personifies the moon as it looks down on Rylstone in a temporary state of repose and freedom from turmoil and agitation. The night is forspent, the effect of destructive forces in battle subdues Norton and his eight sons, and the natural world comes to its evening rest:

'Tis night: in silence looking down,
The Moon from cloudless ether sees
A Camp, and a beleaguered Town,
And Castle like a stately crown
On the steep rocks of winding Tees;--
And southward far, with moor between,
Hill-top, and flood, and forest green,
The bright Moon sees that valley small
Where Rylstone's old sequestered hall
A venerable image yields
Of quiet to the neighbouring fields;
While from one pillared chimney breathes
The smoke, and mounts in silver wreaths.
--The courts are hushed;--for timely sleep
The greyhounds to their kennel creep;
The peacock in the broad ash-tree
Aloft is roosted for the night,
He who in proud prosperity
Of colours manifold and bright

Walked round, affronting the daylight;
 And higher still, above the bower
 Where he is perched, from yon lone Tower
 The hall-clock in the clear moonshine
 With glittering finger points at nine.
 (3: 938-61)

Enjoying this quietness at Rylstone is the milk-white doe, which seeks "To win some look of love, or gain / Encouragement to sport or play" (3: 1016-17) from Emily, "the consecrated Maid" (3: 999). Such a title befits her, for she gives her life to her family with deep solemnity, dedications, and devotion. During this peaceful evening Emily recalls her religious mother who "strove / To teach her salutary fears / And mysteries above her years" (3: 1030-32).

One concludes that Emily's mother was affectionate, godly, and virtuous. Apparently upon her children, especially Emily and Francis, she ardently and earnestly desired heaven's richest blessings to be bestowed. Surely "a fondly-anxious Mother" (3: 1030) believed that rearing her children in the fear and admonition of Protestantism would be first, last, and best in all of her relationships with them. Wordsworth speaks of Emily's mother as

that blessed Saint
 Who with mild looks and language mild
 Instructed . . . her darling Child,
 While yet a prattler on the knee,
 To worship in simplicity
 The invisible God, and take for guide
 The faith reformed and purified. (3: 1035-41)

In thinking about her revered mother, Emily thinks also

about her father. Despite his ardent Catholicism, Norton tolerates Emily and Francis as members of the Reformed church, their mother's church. Emily recalls a portion of her brother's prayer to Norton: "My Father, do I clasp your knees" (3: 392). She makes a decision to support Norton in battle: "She will go! / Herself will follow to the war, / And clasp her Father's knees" (3: 1059-61).

Instantly she then decides not to go, for Francis's influence on her is greater than Norton's. The words of her brother reverberate in her heart:

"Be Strong;--be worthy of the grace
Of God, and fill thy destined place:
A Soul, by force of sorrows high,
Uplifted to the purest sky
Of undisturbed humanity!" (3: 583-87)

By alluding in line 1069 to John Milton's "When I Consider How My Light Is Spent," the poet allows Emily to confirm her decision to stay and find her place. In the sonnet Milton says:

God doth not need
Either man's works or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His
state [t/o]
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait. (185)

Though tempted to become an active participant in the bloody Insurrection, Emily perceives that truly her duty is "to stand and wait." Speaking to this point about Emily, Carl Woodring says, "Emily comes to realize that her duty is to triumph over pain and grief by waiting and enduring" (198).

Still seeking to understand her part in the reconciliation of her family, Emily is approached and greeted warmly and respectfully by one of her father's old friends, who says:

"And old man's privilege I take:
Dark is the time--a woeful day!
Dear daughter of affliction, say
How can I serve you? point the way." (3: 1078-81)

The entire situation would have been quite different, of course, had Norton grasped the true worth of his daughter and asked her, "How can I serve you?" Certainly Emily would have repeated these heartfelt words of Francis to Norton:

"The Banner touch not, stay your hand,
This multitude of men disband,
And live at home in blameless ease;
For these my brethren's sake, for me."
(3: 393-96)

The father's devotion obviously is not for the well-being and solidarity of his family. Unfortunately, it will never be. To the contrary, the old man seeks to buoy up the heart of Emily. He is familiar with the conflict, and especially he knows the geographical area and the physical features of the land where the battle is being fought. He submits these words of assurance to her:

"Hope," said the old man, "must abide
With all of us, whate'er betide.
In Craven's Wilds is many a den,
To shelter persecuted men:
Far under ground is many a cave,
Where they might lie as in the grave,
Until this storm hath ceased to rave:
Or let them cross the River Tweed,
And be at once from peril freed! (3: 1092-1100)

Encouraged by the words of wisdom from this old man, Emily tells him that all she now asks is that he report to her whatever he may learn about her brothers and her father. Respectfully and promptly, the old man leaves the blameless maid to go on his mission of mercy.

Norton had previously and triumphantly exaggerated the prowess of his eight sons in military skills. He argued that by themselves they could conquer an army

"Ten times their number, man and horse;
This by their own unaided might,
Without their father in their sight,
Without the Cause for which they fight;
A Cause, which on a needful day
Would breed us thousands brave as they."
(3: 856-61)

Norton's prophecy fails miserably for him, his eight sons, and the Banner. Wordsworth ends the canto with an account of their destruction:

The friend shrinks back--the foe recoils
From Norton and his filial band;
But they, now caught within the toils,
Against a thousand cannot stand;--
The foe from numbers courage drew,
And overpowered the gallant few.
A rescue for the Standard!" cried
The Father from within the walls;
But, see, the sacred Standard falls!--
Confusion through the Camp spread wide:
Some fled; and some their fears detained:
But ere the Moon had sunk to rest
In her pale chambers of the west,
Of that rash levy nought remained. (3: 1149-62)

In the fifth canto the old warrior tenderly and honorably reveals to Emily his principal findings on his mission of mercy for her. To begin with, he assures her

that Francis lives:

"Your noble brother hath been spared;
To take his life they have not dared;
On him and on his high endeavour
The light of praise shall shine for ever!
Nor did he (such Heaven's will) in vain
His solitary course maintain;
Not vainly struggled in the might
Of duty, seeing with clear sight;
He was their comfort to the last,
Their joy till every pang was past." (3: 1212-21)

His speaking of her brother gives Emily a confident belief and expectation that something of worth will result from her brother's conciliatory efforts with Norton. Francis's presence in the conflict brings a painful separation from him, but at the same time joy. In many ways Francis is reminiscent of the title character in Wordsworth's poem "Character of the Happy Warrior." The Happy Warrior is one

Who, whether praise of him must walk the earth
For ever, and to noble deeds give birth,
Or he must fall, to sleep without his fame,
And leave a dead unprofitable name--
Finds comfort in himself and his cause;
And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause;
This is the Happy Warrior; this is He
That every Man in arms should wish to be.
(4: 77-85)

Further, the old man tells Emily that her father has greeted him cordially and sincerely, but that toward Francis her father has manifested anger and a great lack of judgment. The old man says that Norton has accused Francis of being a coward and of being a blight upon the family.

Then the old man affirms to Emily that her father's ambitions in the insurrection remain the same:

" . . . to his purposes, that burned
Within him, [he] instantly returned:
He was commanding and entreating
And said--'We need not stop, my Son!
Thoughts press, and time is hurrying on'--
And so to Francis he renewed
His words, more calmly thus pursued." (3: 1254-60)

Then, explains the old man, Norton, knowing that the time of his execution is near, condescends toward his son by asking him to fulfill a parting request:

"'Hear then,' said he, 'while I impart
My Son, the last wish of my heart.
The Banner strive thou to regain;
And, if the endeavour prove not vain,
Bear it--to whom if not to thee
Shall I this lonely thought consign?--
Bear it to Bolton Priory;
And lay it on Saint Mary's shrine;
To wither in the sun and breeze
'Mid those decaying sanctities.'" (3: 1286-95)

Norton sees in the Banner testimony of his unswerving aim to struggle. "For lost Faith and Christ's dear name" (3: 1299). The son whom he has cursed as a coward he now offers to forgive and to bless. This obedient son comforts his rebellious and obsessed father before the destruction: Francis says,--"'Trust thy Son, / For, with God's will, it shall be done!'"--(3: 1310-11).

Finally, the messenger relates to Emily how Francis, respecting his father's last wish before execution, has taken the banner from a soldier, in his father's joyful sight, with the intent to lay it in the shrine of the Virgin

Mary at Bolton Priory:

"The unhappy Banner Francis saw,
 And, with a look of calm command
 Inspiring universal awe,
 He took it from the soldier's hand;
 And all the people that stood round
 Confirmed the deed in peace profound.
 --High transport did the Father shed
 Upon his Son--and they were led,
 Led on, and yielding up their breath;
 Together died, a happy death!--
 But Francis, soon as he had braved
 That insult, and the Banner saved,
 Athwart the unresisting tide
 Of the spectators occupied
 In admiration or dismay,
 Bore instantly his Charge away." (3: 1330-45)

There are three main elements in the opening lines of the sixth canto: an ominous question, an obituary for the Nortons, and a description of Francis. First, there is the ominous question--"Why comes not Francis?" (3: 1364). Mentally Emily asks this three times. Such a heartfelt question indicates a fervent and genuine love between brother and sister. Emily yearns to see Francis for several reasons. She herself needs to see him alive although she has faith to believe that he is living; she must hear from him firsthand that the old man gave an accurate description of the recent struggle involving her father and brothers; and she longs to see again her "unblest work," the Banner, being borne by her brother to Bolton Priory, where it will be placed on Saint Mary's shrine.

A second element in the opening lines of the sixth canto is a brief obituary section, which describes the fate

of Norton and his eight sons. Francis

could hear
The death-sounds of the Minster-bell:
That sullen stroke pronounced farewell
To Marmaduke, cut off from pity!
To Ambrose that! and then a knell
For him, the sweet half-opened Flower!
For all--all dying in one hour! (3: 1365-71)

A final element in the opening of the sixth canto is the poet's description of the obedient son who moves feverishly to carry out his father's request. As he hurries to Bolton Priory, suddenly to his mind comes his prediction of complete annihilation of Rylstone made to Emily:

He sighed, submitting will and power
To the stern embrace of that grasping hour.
"No choice is left, the deed is mine--
Dead are they, dead!--and I will go,
And, for their sakes, come weal or woe,
Will lay the Relic on the shrine." (3: 1430-35)

In "Imagination in The White Doe of Rylstone," Martin Price comments on how the Banner finally provides Francis with an active purpose in the climax of the rebellion.

In taking the Banner to Bolton Priory, he must risk an act of apparent rebellion, but the Banner can no longer serve the cause of the old faith. It has become by now a symbol of loyalty, of Norton's loyalty to a high cause, and of Francis' loyalty to his father and brothers. The very presence of the Banner in his hand seems to Francis an assertion of "Heaven's purpose"; it allows him to fulfill a prayer "breathed to a Son forgiven, and blest." The old prophecy of desolation returns like a "spectre," but now its realization has new import. For Francis, death is no longer blind desolation but an act of loyalty. The Banner has given him purpose as it modifies the prophetic vision with its own imaginative significance. The Banner symbolizes the feelings that have gone into its making and its use. (193)

Surely, Francis risks an act of obvious rebellion by taking the relic to Bolton Priory. When Sir George Bowes and his men capture him on a mountaintop with a view of the Tower of Bolton, they consider Francis a traitor. Yet he is innocent, and he does not surrender to his foes. As Francis strives to defend himself against that multitude of men,

A Spearman brought him to the ground.
The guardian lance, as Francis fell,
Dropped from him; but his other hand
The Banner clenched; till, from out the Band,
One, the most eager for the prize,
Rushed in; and--while, O grief to tell!
A glimmering sense still left, with eyes
Unclosed the noble Francis lay--
Seized it, as hunters seize their prey;
But not before the warm life-blood
Had tinged more deeply, as it flowed,
The wounds the brodered Banner showed,
Thy fatal work, O Maiden, innocent as good!
(3: 1486-98)

As a sure result of his deciding to follow his father into the struggle and of his agreeing to carry the Banner to Bolton Priory, Francis truly dies the death of a noble and a valiant son. At the end of the canto, Emily arrives restlessly just as Francis, who was declared a traitor for clutching the Banner, is buried in Bolton Priory yard.

The seventh canto begins with the poet's invocation to the Spirit of consolation for Emily. Francis's prophecy-- "'Hope nothing, I repeat; for we / Are doomed to perish utterly'" (3: 532-33)--has come to pass too quickly for her. Her longing to see him alive is in vain: he is dead and buried. She is in desperate straits. She must have

spiritual assistance to "take her anguish and fears / Into a deep recess of years!" (3: 1566-67). Wordsworth describes also Rylstone in ruins:

. . . despoil and desolation
 O'er Rylstone's fair domain have blown;
 Pools, terraces, and walks are sown
 With weeds; the bowers are overthrown,
 Or have given way to slow mutation,
 While, in their ancient habitation
 The Norton name hath been unknown.
 The lordly Mansion of its pride
 Is stripped; the ravage hath spread wide
 Through park and field, a perishing
 That mocks the gladness of the Spring!
 (3: 1568-78)

Emily, forlorn, survives, aided by the comforting presence of the doe. At her death the poet memorializes Emily in the closing lines of The White Doe: "Thou, thou are not a Child of Time, / But Daughter of the Eternal Prime!" (3: 1909-10).

In The White Doe of Rylstone Norton fails his children in these ways. First, as a Roman Catholic he should not have fought against his Government nor influenced his sons to think as he did in political enterprises. Second, he should have practiced religious tolerance among his children and in his community. Third, Norton's thinking that the Banner is a symbol of martial courage in a righteous cause proves fatal to himself, to his sons, even to Emily. Fourth, this father demonstrates his patriarchal ignorance by ignoring the sincere pleadings of his meek daughter Emily and his eldest son Francis. Fifth, the father acts out his

religious prejudice against Protestantism, for had Emily and Francis approved Catholicism, much greater affections and parental blessings would have been given them by their father. Sixth, the father's efforts to reconcile his religiously divided home fail miserably. Seventh, Norton deceives his eight sons along with the other troops that their hostile movement would triumph. But it fails--father and sons die in combat. Eighth, when he could have surrendered, he and his sons foolishly continue to fight for a losing cause. Ninth, he blames his wife, Emily, and Francis for his imminent destruction, not himself. Finally, he hastens the death of Emily, for as she learns of the death of her father and brothers, especially Francis, and as she views the utter destruction of Rylstone, her heart suffers.

Then,

At length, thus faintly, faintly tied
 To earth, she was set free, and died.
 Thy soul, exalted Emily,
 Maid of the blasted family,
 Rose to the God from whom it came!
 --In Rylstone Church her mortal frame
 Was buried by her Mother's side. (3: 1864-70)

Chapter 4

Parental Devotion and the Love for Lineal Property in Michael

The introductory chapter of this study includes a number of references to Michael made by Wordsworth himself and others. Commenting on Michael, written and published in 1800, Wordsworth says in a letter to his friend and neighbor Thomas Poole on April 9, 1801, that the purpose of the poem is

To give a picture of a man, of strong mind and lively sensibility, agitated by two of the most powerful affections of the human heart; the parental affection, and the love of property, landed property, including the feelings of inheritance, home, and personal and family independence. (Letters 1: 322)

Mary Moorman says:

The poem . . . has always been one of the best loved of all Wordsworth's writings, not only because of the pathos of the story, but because of the profound yet extraordinary simple statements of thought and feeling, arising from the power of Wordsworth's ethical discovery that suffering, when illuminated by love, creates its own nobility of heart. (1: 500)

Harold Bloom is aware of the Biblical significance of the poem:

Michael is the most directly Biblical of Wordsworth's poems. It turns upon the symbol of a covenant between father and son, and its hero, though a poor shepherd, has a moral greatness that suggests the stories of the Patriarchs. Had

Michael ever heard of his vanished son again, he might have said with Jacob: "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." But in Wordsworth's poem, the covenant is forever broken, and the old shepherd dies without the solace of a prodigal's return. (178)

Wordsworth opens the poem with a universal invitation to Michael's sheepfold near "the tumultuous brook of Green-head Ghyll" (2: 2). In his notes Wordsworth says:

It may be proper to inform some readers that a sheepfold in these [North England's] mountains is an unroofed building of stone walls, with different divisions. It is generally placed by the side of a brook, for the convenience of washing the sheep; but it is also useful as a shelter for them, and as a place to drive them into, to enable the shepherds conveniently to single out one or more for any particular purpose. (PW 2: 484-85)

As one travels up the mountains, he will come into contact "With a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites / That overhead are sailing in the sky. / It is in truth an utter solitude" (2: 11-13). The expression "an utter solitude" does not mean here an utter wilderness, an emptiness, or a wasteland. It does mean a place where a person can be alone and commune genuinely and freely with natural forces. He can participate intimately with nature as Michael does.

The poet alerts the traveler to observe a very special object during his journey through the mountains, an object which, though plainly seen, could easily go unnoticed. Immediately beside the brook which courses through Green-head Ghyll

Appears a straggling heap of unhewn stones!
 And to that simple object appertains
 A story--unenriched with strange events,
 Yet not unfit, I deem, for the fireside,
 Or for the summer shade. (2: 14-21)

These stones without shape or form designate the exact problem in Michael's symbolic covenant: the love for his land and the love for his son that are circumscribed in the heart of the old shepherd. The poet, speaking of Michael's story, which he has known since boyhood, proposes to

relate the same

For the delight of a few natural hearts;
 And, with yet fonder feeling, for the sake
 Of youthful Poets, who among these hills
 Will be my second self when I am gone. (2: 35-39)

Wordsworth then begins to unfold his narrative about Michael, a vigilant shepherd and father. Wordsworth writes that in Grasmere Vale

There dwelt a Shepherd, Michael was his name;
 An old man, stout of heart, and strong of limb.
 His bodily frame had been from youth to age
 Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen,
 Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,
 And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
 And watchful more than ordinary men. (2: 40-47)

Although he is now fourscore years of age, Michael is fully a man and more. He is stouthearted, resolute, Herculean, perceptive, sagacious, prudent, agile, and vigilant. He knows his work as a shepherd, for he protects, watches, and shelters his sheep. He understands the atmospheric phenomena and the vibrations within the earth in his region. He knows

the meaning of all winds,
 Of blasts of every tone; and oftentimes,
 When others heeded not, He heard the South
 Make subterranean music, like the noise
 Of bagpipers on distant Highland hills.
 The Shepherd, at such warning, of his flock
 Bethought him, and he to himself would say,
 "The winds are now devising work for me!"
 And, truly, at all times, the storm, that drives
 The traveller to a shelter, summoned him
 Up to the mountains: he had been alone
 Amid the heart of many thousand mists,
 That came to him, and left him, on the height .
 (2: 48-60)

From forces of nature--valleys, streams, rocks, fields,
 hills, mountains, and varied animals--Michael learns eternal
 truths. The subtitle of Michael is A Pastoral Poem. John
 F. Danby explains that the poet inverts the conventional
 view of what a pastoral entails. Danby writes:

Traditionally, the pastoral world was a never-
 never land where literally no one ever had it so
 good. Wordsworth's shepherd lives where sheep too
 have to be worked for, where nothing comes from
 nothing, where man is as exposed as the animals he
 tends, or the mountains they feed upon: the
 perspectives of vulnerability and endurance
 are endless. (25)

Michael lives all his life in intimate contact with nature,
 and the hills and mountains engrave upon his mind incidents

Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear;
 Which, like a book preserved the memory
 Of the dumb animals, whom he had saved,
 Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts
 The certainty of honourable gain. (2: 68-73)

He truly loves his property. He has a deep and enduring
 feeling for it. Indeed, the meaning of his fields and hills
 is to him inseparable from the meaning of life itself.

Those fields, those hills-what could they less?
 had laid [t/o]
 Strong hold on his affections, were to him
 A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
 The pleasure which there is in life itself.
 (2: 74-77)

Michael's "days had not been passed in singleness" (2: 78). Ably supporting him in his inward conflict between his ardent love of his son and his profound love of his property is his wife Isabel, who is "younger than himself full twenty years" (2: 80). Isabel has many positive characteristics. She "is a woman of stirring life" (2: 81). Abounding with strength and energy, she devotes no idle moments to selfish pleasure, however, but uses her time to accomplish the best results for her family. The happiest place on earth for her is her home. Wordsworth describes her as a woman

Whose heart was in her house: two wheels she had
Of antique form; this large for spinning wool;
That small, for flax; and, if one wheel had rest,
It was because the other was at work. (2: 82-85)

The poet's description of Isabel echoes King Solomon's didactic narrative on the virtuous woman:

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her,
so that he shall have no need of spoil. . . . She
seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with
her hands. . . . She looketh well to the ways of
her household, and eateth not the bread of
idleness. (Prov. 31: 11-27)

Like Solomon's virtuous woman, Isabel is queen of her home. In his old age, Isabel conceives for Michael a child--Luke. In training their only son, Isabel assists in teaching him how to labor in the fields, how to do household chores, and

how to repair and to maintain various pieces of equipment. In fulfilling her duties, Isabel works late into the night, aided by the light of an old lamp, "Surviving comrade of 'uncounted hours'" (2: 118). It is the most brilliant light in the rustic neighborhood and has great local significance.

Wordsworth says:

This light was famous in its neighborhood,
And was public symbol of the life
That thrifty Pair had lived.
For, as it chanced,
Their cottage on a plot of rising ground
Stood single, with large prospect, north and
south, [t/o]
High into Easedale, up to Dunmail-Raise,
And westward to the village near the lake;
And from this constant light, so regular,
And so far seen, the House itself, by all
Who dwelt within the limits of the vale,
Both old and young, was named The Evening Star.
(2: 129-39)

Burning for countless hours into the darkness, this guiding light represents a woman of integrity, fortitude, and productivity. Surely Isabel performs "as a proverb in the vale / For endless industry" (2: 94-95).

Although Michael loves Isabel, his energetic and prudent wife, his strong parental love for Luke surpasses greatly his love for her. Wordsworth reveals:

The Shepherd, if he loved himself, must
Have loved his Helpmate; but to Michael's heart
This son of his old age was yet more dear--
Less from instinctive tenderness, the same
Fond spirit that blindly works in the blood of
all-- [t/o]
Than that a child, more than all other gifts
That earth can offer to declining man
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts

And stirrings of inquietude, when they
 By tendency of nature needs must fail.
 (2: 141-50)

As "the birth of Isaac, bringing, after a lifelong of waiting, this fulfillment of his dearest hopes, filled the tents of Abraham . . . with gladness" (White 146), so the birth of Luke "to declining Michael / Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts" (2: 147-48).

Wordsworth introduces three human developmental stages of Luke: stage one, babyhood; stage two, boyhood; and stage three, youth. In stage one, while Michael holds in his arms baby Luke,

Exceeding was the love he [Michael] bare to him,
 His heart and his heart's joy! For often-times
 Old Michael, while he was a babe in arms,
 Had done him female service, not alone
 For pastime and delight, as is the use
 Of fathers, but with patient mind enforced
 To acts of tenderness; and he had rocked
 His cradle, as with a woman's gentle hand.
 (2: 151-58)

Luke and Michael develop a loving relationship. The father bathes, clothes, and feeds him. Tenderly Michael places the child in his cradle and, it may be supposed, sings lullabies, tells bedtime stories, and offers simple prayers for his son.

There are two aspects to stage two, boyhood. First, Wordsworth relates how Michael keeps Luke with him wherever Michael goes in doing his shepherd's work. This practice begins quite early in Luke's life.

Had put on Boy's attire, did Michael love,
Albeit of a stern unbending mind,
To have the Young-one in his sight, when he
Wrought in the field, or on his Shepherd's stool
Sate with a fettered sheep before him stretched
Under the large old oak. (2: 159-65)

Resting, eating, playing, singing, and working, Michael teaches Luke the ways of life. Too, though Luke is a good child, he can be mischievous at times. When he is, Michael does not hesitate to reprove him. His vigilance in observing and correcting the behavior of his son is so constant that, for example, even

With others round them, earnest all and blithe,
Would Michael exercise his heart with looks
Of fond correction and reproof bestowed
Upon the Child, if he disturbed the sheep
By catching at their legs, or with his shouts
Scared them, while they lay still beneath the
shears. [t/o]
(2: 171-76)

The second aspect of stage two presents seemingly a subtle way that Michael initiates his five-year-old son into the world of the shepherds:

And when by Heaven's good grace the boy grew up
A healthy Lad, and carried in his cheek
Two steady roses that were five years old;
Then Michael from a winter coppice cut
With his own hand a sapling, which he hooped
With iron, making it throughout in all
Due requisites a perfect shepherd's staff,
And gave it to the Boy; wherewith equipt
He as a watchman oftentimes was placed
At gate or gap, to stem or turn the flock.
(2: 177-86)

Luke begins to be a shepherd, though he is "Something between a hindrance and a help" (2: 189). Yet, always, his

father patiently guides him. The happy relationship between Michael and Luke reaches its full bloom when the son,

full ten years old, could stand
Against the mountain blasts; and to the heights,
Not fearing toil, nor length of weary ways,
. . . with his Father daily went, and they
Were as companions. (2: 194-97)

Presumably, in his youthful mind Luke can now meditate upon the valleys, streams, rocks, fields, hills, and mountains, and is sensitive to all the natural forces which exhilarate and rejuvenate Michael's heart with "Feelings and emanations--things which were / Light to the sun and music to the wind" (2: 201-02). Also, he must know well his occupation, know how to lead the sheep gently to the sheepfold, correct and reprove them when necessary, protect them from predators, and repair damaged stone walls of the sheepfold.

Thus in his Father's sight the Boy grew up:
And now, when he had reached his eighteenth year,
He was his comfort and his daily hope.
(2: 204-06)

Then the soul of the father becomes troubled with depressing news: economic disaster threatens his property. Michael "had been bound / In surety for his brother's son" (2: 210-11). Gladly Michael had fulfilled the agreement to become the keeper of his brother's son, "a man / Of an industrious life, and ample means" (2: 213-14). Also, Michael had no reason to think this nephew would default.

"But unforeseen misfortunes suddenly / Prest upon him," and the nephew now cannot repay the debt (2: 213-14). Called upon to rescue him, Michael does not know how "to discharge the forfeiture; / A grievous penalty, but little less / Than half his substance" (2: 215-17). At the time of his agreement to help his brother's son, Michael could not see how this would ever threaten his ancestral property. However, as it turns out, helping his nephew clear his debts may cause Michael to lose almost half of this inherited land. The prospect of selling part of his land "for a moment took / More hope out of his life than he supposed that any old man ever could have lost" (2: 218-20). The staggering experience constrains Michael to think seriously and urgently how to resolve his momentous difficulty, how to obtain enough money to pay off the debt.

After Michael "armed himself with strength / To look his trouble in the face" (2: 221-22), the old man reluctantly chooses "to sell at once / A portion of his patrimonial fields (2: 222-24), and his "heart failed him" (2: 226). The absolute truth remains that he has an obsessive love for his patrimonial fields. Michael recounts to Isabel his keenly felt sentiments about the property:

"I have been toiling more than seventy years.
And in the open sunshine of God's love
Have we all lived; yet, if these fields of ours
Should pass into a stranger's hand, I think
That I could not lie quiet in my grave.
Our lot is a hard lot; the sun himself
Has scarcely been more diligent than I;

And I have lived to be a fool at last
To my own family." (2: 228-36)

There are many factors in Michael's extreme devotion to his land. One, which he has just stated, is a fear almost any man might understand, the fear that he might seem to be a "'fool at last'" in the eyes of his family. Also, Michael has worked and developed his lineal property for over seventy years. He would probably die before he would willingly offer for sale his land. He reveres his ancestral possessions as well as any true ancient Israelite could revere them. According to the Levitical code, no land could be transferred permanently by sale or exchange:

So shall not the inheritance of children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe; for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. . . . Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance. (Num. 36.7-9)

In the spirit of the Levitical code, Michael says to Isabel:

. . . "the land
Shall not go from us, and it shall be free;
He [Luke] shall possess it, free as is the wind
That passes over it." (2: 244-47)

The father resolutely decides to send his beloved and loving son to work with a kinsman to pay the note on the property which Michael is liable for. Michael says, "'Our Luke shall leave us, Isabel'" (2: 244). In patriarchal families the fathers' words are indisputable. In speaking of the wife, Wordsworth says, "Isabel sat silent, for her

mind / Was busy looking back into past times" (2: 256-57).
 In her active mind she rehearses the narrative about Richard Bateman, an impoverished parish-boy, a respectable child. His neighbors conclude that his lad, given the opportunity to be nurtured in London, would someday become one of England's great leaders. Eventually Richard leaves for London and finds a master

Who, out of many, chose the trusty boy
 To go and overlook his merchandise
 Beyond the seas; where he grew wondrous rich,
 And left estates and monies to the poor,
 And, at his birth-place, built a chapel floored
 With marble, which he sent from foreign lands.
 These thoughts, and many others of like sort,
 Passed quickly through the mind of Isabel,
 And her face brightened. (2: 265-73)

Observing his wife's facial radiance during her mental preoccupation about Richard Bateman, Michael orders Isabel to dress up their son immediately so he can leave home in style:

"Make ready Luke's best garments, of the best
 Buy for him more, and let us send him forth
 Tomorrow, or the next day, or tonight:
 If he could go, the Boy should go tonight."
(2: 279-82)

Having formulated how he would pay off his property, Michael "to the fields went forth / With a light heart" (2: 283-84). While he wanders in his fields, he sees in the distance the memorials--the unhewn stones. Again the father reflects upon the binding promises between him and Luke. For two nights as he and Isabel lie in bed, Michael

is troubled in his sleep:

And when they rose at morning she could see
That all his hopes were gone. (2: 291-93)

In his mind he wrestles with the two contending questions:
whether to save his son or to save his fields.

Understanding the love and tenderness her husband has always
felt for their son, Isabel pleads with Luke to stay home:

"Thou must not go:
We have no other Child but thee to lose,
None to remember--do not go away,
For if thou leave thy Father he will die."
(2: 295-98)

Wordsworth then lets Isabel share in the human sacrificing
of Luke for the fields. Of course, in the Bible Abraham
will not tolerate Sarah's interference with the sacrifice of
Isaac. Yet both sons give willing obedience to their
parents. White pictures Isaac's reaction when with
trembling voice Abraham unfolds to him the divine message:

It was with terror and amazement that Isaac
learned his fate, but he offered no resistance.
He could have escaped his doom, had he chosen not
to do so; the grief-stricken old man, exhausted
with the struggle of . . . three terrible days,
could not have opposed the will of the vigorous
youth. But Isaac had been trained from childhood
to ready, trusting obedience, and as the purpose
of God was opened before him, he yielded a willing
submission. He was a sharer in Abraham's faith,
and he felt that he was honored in being called to
give life as an offering to God. He tenderly
seeks to lighten the father's grief, and
encourages his nerveless hands to bind the cords
that confine him to the altar. (152)

Responding to his mother's request that he not leave them,
Luke alleviates fears and misgivings about his going to

work with their kinsman in order to save the land. His trusting obedience prompts Isabel to accept fully her husband's decision to send Luke away. In appreciating her son's cordial and loving behavior to them,

That evening her best fare
Did she bring forth, and all together sat
Like happy people round a Christmas fire.
(2: 301-03)

Happiness prevails in The Evening Star once more. Isabel works even harder to prepare the best garments for Luke. Eventually, thrilling and heart-swelling tidings come from the prosperous kinsman. He gives

kind assurances that he would do
His utmost for the welfare of the Boy;
To which, requests were added, that forthwith
He might be sent to him. Ten times or more
The letter was read over; Isabel
Went forth to show it to the neighbours round;
Nor was there at that time on English land
A prouder heart than Luke's. (2: 308-15)

Isabel becomes extremely jubilant. The kinsman's thoughtful letter results in additional merriment and lightheartedness in the cottage. Remembering again the success of Richard Bateman, Isabel shares with her neighbors the good tidings that Luke leaves soon for London to become another loyal and distinguished English celebrity from Green-head Ghyll. Then Michael speaks firmly these words about Luke: "'He shall depart tomorrow'" (2: 316). Isabel "gave consent, and Michael was at ease" (2: 321).

The evening before Luke leaves for the city, Michael, to remind Luke and himself of the significance of the unhewn

stones--stones intended for the construction of the sheepfold--takes him "Near the tumultuous brook of Green-head Ghyll" (2: 322). Having been obsessed with a love for his patrimonial property, Michael has not taken time to erect, with his son, this commemoration of their forefathers. Fully conscious that his son's departure from home draws near, the father initiates, symbolically, his son's sacrificial slaughter. In his parting speech to Luke, the old man addresses him in amiable and endearing words:

"My son,
To-morrow thou wilt leave me: with full heart
I look upon thee, for thou art the same
That wert a promise to me ere thy birth,
And all thy life hast been my daily joy."
(2: 331-35)

Although Luke has been to his father a promise and a continuing joy, still Michael commands him to leave. With exuberant heart, the father cites their two histories: Michael says of his narration, "' . . . 'twill do thee good / When thou art from me, even if I should touch / On things thou canst not know of'" (2: 337-39). Before Luke begins to lay the stones to build the sheepfold, he listens as Michael speaks of the past, all the while giving evidence of parental warmth and devotion.

First, the father speaks about Luke's childhood: his being born to his parents during their old age; his receiving his father's birthright blessing, an inheritance of property and worldly wealth; the sustaining love for him

from his parents from day to day; and the revitalizing energy given to the father through the son's growing appreciation of natural forces. Hearing these testaments from his father, Luke sobbed aloud. The old man grasped his hand

And said, "Nay, do not take it so--I see
That these are things of which I need not
speak. [t/o]

--Even to the utmost I have been to thee
A kind and a good Father; and herein
I but repay a gift which I myself
Received at others' hands." (2: 358-64)

The comforting and reassuring words from this kind father bring quietude to the heart and mind of his son. Second, Michael memorializes his parents for all their love, hard work, forbearance, and farsightedness. He says:

"I still
Remember them who loved me in my youth.
Both of them sleep together: here they lived,
As all their Forefathers had done; and, when
At length their time was come, they were not loth
To give their bodies to the family mould.
I wished that thou shouldst live the life they
lived, [t/o]
But 'tis a long time to look back, my Son,
And see so little gain from threescore years.
These fields were burthened when they came to me;
Till I was forty years of age, not more
Than half of my inheritance was mine.
I toiled and toiled; God blessed me in my work,
And till these three weeks past the land was free.
--It looks as if it never could endure
Another Master." (2: 365-80)

Surely Luke can now see that his lineage consists of men and women who could love sincerely their families, who could defend their fields, and who could maintain their inheritance code. The son knows, it does appear, why his

father is preoccupied with his ancestral property. Michael foresees destruction to both his property and his son; therefore he prays: "Heaven forgive me, Luke, / If I judge ill for thee, but it seems good / That thou shouldst go" (2: 380-82). If Luke experiences great success in London as Richard Bateman has done, the father will certainly know that the land and the prosperity of his son are secure. He and Isabel will go to their graves satisfied that Luke and his descendants will possess the land forever. But this condition is not to be. When the father finally attempts to build the sheepfold with Luke, Michael speaks these words:

"This was a work for us; and now, my Son,
It is a work for me. But, lay one stone--
Here, lay it for me, Luke, with thine own hands.
Nay, Boy, be of good hope;--we both may live
To see a better day." (2: 385-89)

Still speaking to Luke, Michael--84 years of age--then says:

"I will begin again
With many tasks that were resigned to thee:
Up to the heights, and in among the storms,
Will I without thee go again, and do
All works which I was wont to do alone,
Before I knew thy face." (2: 391-96)

Michael continues to predict that Luke will never return home. The old man will himself carry out all the assignments once given to Luke, and Michael makes no suggestion that Luke will ever come home to resume them. Michael does not need the boy; he prefers only the land. The father now does so much needless talking that he

constantly forgets why he and his son are alone in the mountains. Finally the old man returns his attention to the sheepfold and says, "'Lay now the corner-stone'" (2: 403). But before the boy can lay this most important stone of the sheepfold, the father interrupts him and makes his final remarks to his son:

"Luke,
 When thou art gone away, should evil men
 Be thy companions, think of me, my Son,
 And of this moment; hither turn thy thoughts
 And God will strengthen thee: amid all fear
 And all temptation, Luke, I pray that thou
 May'st bear in mind the life thy Fathers lived,
 Who, being innocent, did for that cause
 Bestir them in good deeds. Now, fare thee well--
 When thou return'st, thou in this place wilt see
 A work which is not here: a covenant
 'Twill be between us; but, whatever fate
 Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last,
 And bear thy memory with me to the grave."
 (2: 404-17)

In these parting words the father perceives that evil associates will entangle his son. The father institutes no real agreement or covenant with his son. A true covenant would provide a way of escape for Luke while he is in London, and he would eventually return to claim the family lands. But Michael understands that his son will face destruction in London.

When a meaningful ceremony begins to develop as Luke lays "The first stone of the Sheep-fold" (2: 420), the father again interrupts the service--Michael is overcome with emotion.

The old Man's grief broke from him; to his heart
 He pressed his Son, he kissed him and wept;
 And to the house together they returned.
 (2: 421-31)

Michael is sorrowful because his son is leaving the next day, but he does not even attempt to establish any truly protective agreement with Luke. Knowing full well what lies ahead for his son, Michael terminates the ceremony, and the father and son return to the cottage without another word's being spoken. Isabel loses all her energy and strength, for she also surmises that her son will not return, that they are seeing each other for the last time. Then an extreme quietness prevails in the cottage of the old man and his wife and son. "--Hushed was that House in peace, or seeming peace, / Ere the night fell" (2: 424-25). Wordsworth does not report any further words spoken in or around the cottage. Also, even as Luke prepares to leave his home for the city, the poet does not show the parents embracing their son, nor does Wordsworth describe the parents weeping. At the break of day, ". . . the Boy / Began his journey, and when he had reached / The public way, he put on a bold face" (2: 425-27).

At first, Luke does well: "A good report did from their Kinsman come, / Of Luke and his well-being" (2: 431-32).

Also, Luke

Wrote loving letters, full of wondrous news,
 throughout [t/o]
 "The prettiest letters that were ever seen."
 (2: 433-36)

Thus the parents are happy, and prospects seem good.
 Perhaps Luke will indeed accumulate enough money to clear
 the nephew's debts and will return home to help his father
 finish the sheepfold and to inherit the lineal fields.
 Thinking that Luke and he "both may live / To see a better
 day" (2: 388-89),

The Shepherd went about his daily work
 With confident and cheerful thoughts; and now
 Sometimes when he could find a leisure hour
 He to that valley took his way, and there
 Wrought at the Sheep-fold. (2: 438-42)

However, Luke's success will not last. Wordsworth tells the
 whole of Luke's degeneration in six lines:

Luke began
 To slacken in his duty; and, at length,
 He in the dissolute city gave himself
 To evil courses; ignominy and shame
 Fell on him, so that he was driven at last
 To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas.
(2: 442-47)

Luke is never heard from again.

Although Michael loses his son, he retains the
 ancestral property. Despite Luke's failure to pay off the
 debt, nothing is said about Michael's ever having to sell
 any of his land. Also, Michael can find "comfort in the
 strength of love, which else / Would upset the brain, or
 break the heart" (2: 448-50).

In his last years

Among the rocks
 He went, and still looked up to sun and cloud,
 And listened to the wind; and, as before,

Performed all kinds of labour for his sheep,
And for the land, his small inheritance.
(2: 455-59)

As for Michael and the unfinished sheepfold,

. . . 'tis believed by all
That many and many a day he thither went
And never lifted up a single stone. (2: 464-66)

When Michael and Luke are communing near the brook of Green-head Ghyll, the old man says, "'I still am strong and hale;--do thou thy part; / I will do mine'" (2: 390-91). Wordsworth does not relate anything else about the dedicated work of Isabel. Presumably she mourns deeply the catastrophe to her son, to her husband, and, in time, the ancestral property. In obituary style, the poet announces the end of Michael and Isabel:

The length of full seven years, from time to time,
He at the building of the Sheep-fold wrought,
And left the work unfinished when he died..
Three years, or little more, did Isabel
Survive her husband. (2: 470-74)

The unfinished sheepfold sadly remains. Isabel, it may be supposed, keeps the lamp in the cottage burning brightly as long as she can after her husband's death. Immediately "at her death the estate / Was sold, and went into a stranger's hand" (2: 474-75). The new landlord makes great changes on the estate. The poem concludes:

The Cottage which was named The Evening Star
Is gone--the ploughshare has been through the
ground [t/o]
On which it stood; great changes have been wrought
In all the neighbourhood:--yet the oak is left

That grew beside their door; and the remains
Of the unfinished Sheep-fold may be seen
Beside the boisterous brook of Green-head Ghyll.
(2: 476-82)

As a father Michael fails in several ways. Obviously, he loves his lineal property more than he does his son. His love for the property is obsessive. Significantly, his restlessness about the future of his property becomes less intense as he artfully perceives how he may eventually sacrifice Luke in an effort to preserve the ancestral lands. Also, his decision to save the property by sending his son to London proves disastrous. And Michael has known that Luke has had no experience with the ways of the city to protect him from its dangers. When Michael says to Luke, "' . . . whatever fate / Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last'" (2: 415-16), it is almost the same as his saying that he knows what will happen. In attempting to save his ancestral land, Michael loses and destroys his son.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In many poems by Wordsworth, fathers (or, sometimes, substitute fathers) fail their children. The fathers in "The Thorn" and in Peter Bell beguile the hearts of two young women, make them pregnant, and then abandon them and the expected babies. Stephen Hill, the father in "The Thorn," breaks his promises of love to Martha Ray. Because Stephen rejects her and her baby and turns to another woman, Martha becomes so distressed that she apparently murders the child. Peter Bell has no permanent home, and he moves about constantly in search of work, food, and pleasure. As Martha Ray in "The Thorn" gives her all to Stephen Hill, so does the Highland Girl open her heart wholly to Peter Bell, resulting in the destruction of both the Highland Girl and the child.

In Descriptive Sketches Wordsworth pictures a father who becomes stern and cold in his association with his children. The poet emphasizes how the father renounces his sons the moment they reach maturity, drives them away from home, and has nothing further to do with them. When these sons come to be fathers themselves, they will continue in the sins of their father by forcing their children away from their homes and then renouncing these children.

In "The Two Thieves" a grandfather perverts his young grandson's character by teaching him through both precept and example how to covet and steal the property of others. The father in "Andrew Jones" sets an example of dissipation and cruelty for his sons, whose futures are therefore predictably bleak. In "Anecdote for Fathers" a father (or father figure) sets an example of ludicrous insistence before his child and, though unintentionally, leads the child to tell a lie. In "The Sons of Burns" it is lamented that the poet Robert Burns has not only given his sons bad examples to follow but has perhaps left them handicapped by destructive inherited traits.

In "The Brothers" parents, a grandfather, and, in addition, an older brother who might effectively have taken the place of a father, all, though unintentionally, contribute to the deprivation, broken heart, and death of young James Ewbank. In "Lucy Gray" a father fails his daughter through his poor judgment. He is a decent and loving father, but his daughter loses her life because of a mistake he makes. In "The Last of the Flock" a father is more concerned about the specific needs of his sheep than he is about the needs and well-being of his children.

In The White Doe of Rylstone Norton destroys his family of nine sons and a daughter through his fanatical devotion to an abortive insurrection against Queen Elizabeth I.

Finally, in Michael Wordsworth depicts a father who loves his ancestral property even more than he does his son. Consequently, his son is destroyed.

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