"Come forth and feel the sun":

Wordsworth's Relational Invitation

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Dedications

From an early age, my parents have emphasized to me the importance of an education and through the years have made extraordinary sacrifices to help see me through the completion of my degree. This project is dedicated to them, along with my brother and sister-in-law, Brian and Heather, and my three baby nephews, Chandler, Landon, and Cameron whose love has been felt at every stage of this remarkable journey.

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Abstract

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True to Wordsworth's reformist agenda, this dissertation attempts to revive a vital aspect of his achievement and sensibility. Though his critical reputation as a "nature poet" persisted through the nineteenth century, the frequent imagery of nature's sights and sounds—the warbling of a choir of redbreasts or the blinking of a glow worm in the hills—has become a secondary consideration in recent decades both to idealist critics with their gaze fixed toward the Imagination and to New Historicists preoccupied with the poet's attitudes toward the French Revolution and the indigent and working poor.

Nonetheless, the current school of eco-critics also errs in setting up the sensory imagery of Wordsworth's nature poetry as an antithesis to the sublime and, most significantly, in rejecting the urge to embrace the power and grandeur implicit in our humanity as an egotistical pursuit that sets us at odds with nature. Thus, the novelty of my study (a revamped ecological interpretation, necessarily adjusted to encompass Wordsworth's culminating poetic achievement) is that it ultimately reveals Wordsworth at home not only amongst shepherds caring for their flocks in the tranquil pastures of Westmoreland but also as he stood atop Mount Snowdon absorbed by the unity yet threatening power of the natural sublime.

This study argues that Wordsworth uses the body of his poetry to invite his readers to come into relationship with especially the non-human world in which they dwell, a project that only becomes possible with the discovery of his own imaginative

potential. Still, even at the height of his poetic powers, he conceptualized Imagination not as a self-centered tool for exercising original genius but as a mode of contact and relationship—an expression of his love for the world. My chronological survey of Wordsworth's life and art, which discerns a circular, even spirical return to his birthplace following a series of self-discoveries, thus traces how the poet was guided by nature to a new awareness of the indestructible strength of his humanity, an affirmation that enabled the poet-wanderer to overcome his alienated condition and experience himself in relationship to the greater cosmos.

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CHAPTER I

THE GREENING OF WORDSWORTH: THE ECOCRITICAL CHALLENGE TO IDEALISM IN WORDSWORTHIAN CRITICISM

Jonathan Bate opens *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) with a compelling discussion of the proper function and use of poetry. Enveloped as we are in the ethical and political issues of our times, he affirms that individuals have always turned to poetry in times of distress for insight about how better to understand themselves and how best to conduct their lives. Thus, it is understandable why poets have traditionally been perceived as "healers" or "ministers" though many have been uncomfortable with the classification (1).

Reminding his readers that literary criticism traditionally shifts in response to the changing needs and values of its particular age, Bate admonishes his own generation as being in dire need of reform. He begins by describing the political arena of the 1980s as a simplistic but popular attempt to polarize nationalism and religion into Left-Right models (3). Pointing to the collapse of the Marxist-Leninist regime in Eastern Europe as evidence of the breakdown of a decrepit world-view, he campaigns for a revamped ideological vantage point that entertains new ways of seeing (3). Given the recent attention to environmental crises such as air pollution and ozone depletion that received political expression in the 1990s, he proposes that "the political map has been redrawn and it is time for literary criticism to politicize itself in a new way" (4). Bate's work points toward a "greener" pathway whose purpose is to explore literature for the ways it represents

relationships between humans and the natural world. He offers perhaps the most precise definition of the methodology underlying ecological criticism as an analysis of "the politics of our relationship to nature," especially in the literary pastoral, "the traditional mode in which that relationship is explored" (19).

In *The Song of the Earth* (2000), his more recent companion study, Bate highlights 1989 as a crucial turning point in the political and ethical orientation of Western society, explaining that the victory chants that followed the end of the Cold War were muted by a shocking awareness that technological power had contributed to ecocides and widespread famines. Consequently, he reminds us that in the same year that witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall, Paris, Amsterdam, and London served host to the first international conferences addressing the environmental condition of the planet. Moreover, he notes that beginning in the 1960s, environmental organizations such as Greenpeace attracted more members than any other political activist group in the Western world (70). He concludes that the radical fervor of environmentalism established a notable position alongside feminism and post-colonialism and that its platform deserves equal consideration in reassessing the English cannon. Why, then, have its interests been virtually ignored in literary circles? Bate contends that the answer is twofold, lying first in how readily our modern age identifies with disenfranchised subjects and second in how it strives to make its own human voice heard. However, he asks,

> [Who can speak for] the rights of nature—the land, the ocean, the polluted air, the endangered species [? . . .] A critic may speak as a person of colour, but cannot speak as a tree .... It is not easy for any of us to project

> ourselves into a character who is specifically non-human and is only gendered in a shadowy way. (72)

Therefore, he explains, literary discourse is situated in the domain of culture—an arena conventionally believed to exist apart from (and even in direct confrontation with) nature. Moreover, the central unanswered question that splits even environmental critics into divisive camps is whether or not human life should be envisioned as lying within or outside of nature. He contends that the primary goal of literary ecocriticism is to negotiate the proper role of "creative imagining in the complex set of relationships between humankind and the environment, between mind and world, between thinking, being, and dwelling" (73). In this regard, the manner in which the Romantics elevated poetry as a means of recovering a lost connection with nature establishes them as early, and as yet unrecognized, environmentalists in their own right.

Long before Bate, in "Home at Grasmere: Ecological Holiness" (1974), Karl Kroeber announced a similar challenge for reform, arguing that while Wordsworth has long been regarded as a "nature poet," our modern age is better positioned than in the past to appreciate his preference for natural landscapes over human society. He delineates the driving force behind Wordsworth's "return to nature," emphasizing the poet's belief that "man's humanity is completely realized only within nature's inhumanity" (132). Thus, he postulates that our own society's "return to nature" equips us with a greater vantage point to understand Wordsworth's passionate regard for the natural world. Because geographical and psychological conditions are right, he urges that we should undertake a reexamination of the poet's environmental sensitivity—a challenge he says that is intended not to alter Wordsworth's canonical status but to reveal instead a higher

"humanistic" objective whose aim is deeper understanding of our relationship to the governing forces that imbue both the current and more distant history of our culture (132).

In order to absorb fully the new direction in which ecological proponents like Bate and Kroeber wish to take Wordsworthian scholarship, it is useful to undertake a comprehensive examination of the shifting face of Romantic studies over the past half century—a history that reveals a radically changing tide in critical attitudes toward nature. Bate reminds us that in the nineteenth century, Wordsworth was undisputedly recognized as a nature poet. He points to John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* as evidence of the poet's enduring impact upon the generation of writers that followed closely on his heels. Here, Mill testifies firsthand how he was moved by reading "The Ruined Cottage" at the age of twenty-two. While he admits to having initially fallen in love with the "rural beauty" of Wordsworth's nature scenes, he credits the deeper impact of the poem to its therapeutic power. Having suffered a bout of depression, he attests to the remarkable manner in which the poem answered a specific longing:

> I needed to be made to feel that there was a real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation. Wordsworth taught me this not only without turning away from, but with a greatly increased interest in the common feelings and destiny of human beings. (14)

The far-reaching influences of Wordsworth's depiction of landscape on the nineteenth-century mindset is further evident in the rustic settings and provincial characters of George Eliot's novels. Eliot shared with Wordsworth an eccentric attachment to the natural world that shaped her disposition as much as her world-view. She acknowledges

this peculiar intimacy with the outdoors in "Impression of Theophrastus Such," confessing,

> I often smile at my consciousness that certain conservative prepossessions have mingled themselves in me with influences of our midland scenery, from the tops of the elms down to the buttercups and the little wayside vetchers. (2: 36-37)

Eliot further defends her fondness for portraits of nature in a letter written to an early critic, which exposes a deep-rooted Wordsworthian sensibility in language actually borrowed from "Tintern Abbey":

> I am afraid you despise landscape painting, but to me, the works of our own Stanfield and Roberts and Creswick bring a whole world of thought and bliss—a sense of something far more deeply interfused: the ocean and the everlasting hills are spirit to me, and they will never be robbed of their sublimity. (Letters, 1, 248)[1]

While Mill and Eliot assimilated themselves to Wordsworth's views of nature in crafting their own ideological stances, perhaps no writer did more to secure Wordsworth's title as "nature poet" for his nineteenth-century audience than his sister, Dorothy. Her delicate descriptions of the landscape she observed alone and by William's side prove how deeply she absorbed her brother's prayer to her in the closing passages of "Tintern Abbey" in which he advises her to keep faith amidst the darkest tribulations, remembering that "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her" (123-24). Perhaps the most widely

[1] Haight Gordons, ed. *The George Eliot Letters* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1954-78).

documented passage from Dorothy's writing is her own rendition of the daffodils they encountered in a wooded area near Gowbarrow Park. These spring flowers, whose bulbs spread rapidly and covered the western banks of Ullswater, along a well-traversed country turnpike, were transformed by Wordsworth into a metaphorical symbol of Imagination—that gentle, yet potent breath of life that flows through all things. Dorothy writes in a journal entry dated April 15, 1802,

> I never saw daffodils so beautiful [.T]hey grew among the mossy stones about & about them [.S]ome rested their heads upon these stones as though on a pillow for weariness & the rest tossed and reeled and danced & seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the Lake [.T]hey looked so gay [,] ever glancing [,] ever changing. This wind blew directly over the lake to them. There was here and there a little knot and a few stragglers a few yards higher up but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity and unity and life of that one busy highway. (85)

In his introductory commentary to *The Grasmere Journals*, Jonathan Wordsworth emphasizes that during the ten-year interval in which Wordsworth was separated from his French lover Annette Vallon and their daughter Caroline, Dorothy's influence in her brother's life became increasingly important to his psychological well-being. He maintains that as "the war dragged on . . . his thoughts turned gradually back to nature, and away from politics" (10). Even so, despite the sincere efforts of Wordsworth's most ardent followers to uphold his reputation, above all else, as a devout lover of nature, the trend of Wordsworthian scholarship began to shift in new directions, especially in the

mid-twentieth century when Romantic critics first began to "intellectualize" and later "historicize" Wordworthian studies, perceiving nature as merely a springboard for approaching the more crucial themes of his art: the transforming power of Imagination and the poet's response to the political upheaval of the French Revolution. Consequently, the revamped Romantic version of Pope's revered notion of "nature for nature's sake" (whether as a window into the poet's creative psyche or as a campaign to preserve the primitive beauty of rural settings in an increasingly urbanized world) has been rejected in contemporary times as an illegitimate (even condescending) focal point for assessing Wordsworth's achievement.

In the 1960s and 1970s, M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom shared the common belief that Wordsworth sought to transcend nature through the transformative power of Imagination. In *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (1964), Hartman refers to Wordsworth's poetic career as a life-long voyage in which he came to see nature as "leading to senses beyond themselves"—a progression in which "the Imagination becomes aware of its autonomy" (122). In "The Internalization of Quest Romance" (1970), Harold Bloom supports Hartman's theory that an autonomous imagination, divorced from the control of nature, embodies the principle aim of the Romantics' achievement. He maintains that the Romantics were enthralled by the experience of being "twice born" because the "pains of psychic maturation" at their climactic peak present the imaginative mind with a grueling decision: whether to stand on its own or surrender itself to nature's dominion (5).

In his introductory chapter to *The Confessional Imagination: A Reading of Wordsworth's Prelude* (1974), Frank D. McConnell provides this description of how

nature factors into Wordsworth's philosophy of poetry—a stance that accurately reflects the condescending attitude toward Wordsworth as primarily "nature poet," which was advocated by the school of criticism designated as "the history of ideas." McDonnell comments,

> Anyone who has taught Wordsworth's poetry to undergraduates has had to face the widespread cliché (or prejudice) about Wordsworth as "nature poet." He is a "nature poet" only in the most difficult, most contradictory way: the same way in which we might choose to call George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends, a "churchman" or a "minister." Wordsworth's attempt to redeem nature—to integrate it with the rhythms of his own consciousness—finally led him to a vision of self-in-nature which all but obscures the conventional imagery and existence of the natural world, turning that world rather into an almost abstract principle of otherness, of alternate resistance and support to the life of the mind, whose sensory qualities are important mainly for their functioning within this eternal give-and-take. (5)

Led by forerunners such as Jerome McGann, Kenneth R. Johnston, Marjorie Levinson, David Simpson, and Alan Liu, Bate pinpoints the 1980s as ushering in a return to historical considerations. He contends that both McGann and Liu reject Wordsworth's focus on the "all-powerful, redeeming poetic Imagination," claiming that in scaling to sublime heights, he purposefully evades historical circumstances (3). In *The Romantic Ideology* (1983), McGann claims that both nature and creative imagination are psychological safe-houses to which the Romantics retreated in times of distress. In the

midst of an unstable, revolutionary climate, the Romantics, he argues, pledged faith in "the integrity of the biosphere and the inner, spiritual self, both of which were believed to transcend the age's troubling doctrinal conflicts and ideological shifts" (68). He further proposes that the Romantics envisioned nature as possessing symbolic signs, which when properly decoded, could reveal the hidden meaning behind all truths. Thus, he asserts that "ecological nature is the locus of what is stable and orderly, and it is related to Imagination as a set of vital hieroglyphics is related to an interpretative key" (69). In short, nature is a lens that helps imaginative seekers focus on a higher order of reality, an order that exists entirely in heart and mind (69).

Likewise, in *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (1989), Liu dramatizes history as a dark rival that the solitary traveler suppresses in his mind by pitting himself against nature, a less formidable and more controllable opponent. True apocalypse, says Liu, cannot occur as long as nature intercedes. Only when history comes to occupy the barefaced self does Imagination truly make itself felt in the lives of men. Liu even goes so far as to suggest that "There is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government" (15). He reconfigures the central trope of Abrams's *Mirror and the Lamp*, relegating nature to a backseat position and offering a disruptive portrait of the Imagination's revealing powers:

> I believe that if we look [into the mirror] we will see through the self and mind in the foreground, through even nature in the middle ground, to a frightening skeleton in the background. Whatever else it is, Imagination is the haunt of Napoleon, the great bone of the time. (24)

Bate maintains that ecological criticism is opposed to both the idealist and New Historicist perspectives, the former making nature subordinate to the human mind and the latter insisting that "human society is more important than . . . the economy of nature" (9). In response, Bate proposes that Wordsworth's pastoral poetry clearly reflects a deliberate rejection of both intellectual elitism and social meliorism via rationalist social planning in favor of a conservative ideology of man in open communion with nature and at rest with his small, self-sufficient community. He contends that Wordsworth's pastoral vision depicts a rediscovery of the proper place of nature—a redefinition he does not perceive as an escape from politics but instead as an effort to understand politics anew as the relationship between "love of man" and "love of nature" (33).

In this same spirit, Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) offers one of the most comprehensive studies outlining the stylistic technique of what he terms "green thinking" and "green reading" as he finds it in primarily American literary traditions. Buell maintains that "environmental crises" are "imaginative crises," meaning that they cannot be resolved solely through political activism or governmental legislation but only through a genuine revision of ethical consciousness. Most strikingly, he clearly articulates both the personal and global benefits of ecological criticism, explaining that in learning to reassess the role of nature in literature, we can train our minds to discover alternative ways of conceptualizing nature and humanity's relationship to it (2). In a later chapter, he verbalizes his far-reaching vision of where ecological criticism can take us, advocating "a mode of living that respects the physical environment as the primary reality which must shape human thoughts and choices" (81). Thus, an increased sensitivity to environmental issues is advantageous not only in combating pollution; it

also constitutes the hope of a more profitable and satisfying lifestyle. Bate supports this proposition, asserting that Wordsworth's central contribution to his nineteenth-century audience is that "he taught [them] how to walk [earnestly and pleasurably] with nature" (8).

Buell's study is further significant for offering a set of basic assumptions that characterize an "eco-friendly" text. First and foremost, he proposes that in such a text nature is alive and purposeful, existing not merely as a background prop but as an active, invested participant in the human drama. Secondly, he maintains that an environmental text recognizes the presence of a rich, authentic natural world outside the human realm and affords equal consideration to its unique non-human interests. He points to the young boy's pity for the bird who mourns its deceased mate in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" as depicting a more genuine regard for the suffering of nature's creatures than Shelley's "To a Skylark" or Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," in which the poet's own torment takes center stage. By contrast, Whitman's bird is invested with "a habitat, a history, a story of its own" (7).

Buell's third characteristic distinguishes an ecological text as one that deals openly and honestly with the ethical dimensions of humanity's violations of nature, noting that by this standard, Wordsworth's "Nutting" would be a better fit than "Tintern Abbey" because, while the latter poem articulates the sublime power of nature, the former exposes first-hand the poet's self-guilt for mistreating the hazel grove as a boy (7-8). Fourthly, Buell asserts that environmental texts value nature as an empowered mode of consciousness that functions not merely in the external world but as part of the dynamic "inner life" of man (8).

Buell notes that criticisms of environmental texts written from the standpoint of an intellectual or socio-historical approach often point out the sentimentalism of the Romantics' pastoral vision, arguing that they did not position themselves in close physical proximity to the "nature" they idealized from an aesthetic distance. As evidence, he points to a well documented passage in Thoreau's *The Maine Woods*, in which the poet's observations of the raw and naked wilderness call to mind an intimate "Conradian" portrait of man's primal origins:

> This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man's garden, but the unhandselled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste-land. It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, as it was made forever and ever. . . . It was Matter, vast, terrific. . . . a place for heathenism and superstitious rites,—to be inhabited by men nearer of kin to the rocks and wild animals than we. (qtd. in Buell 12)

Buell does not deny that, on one level, Thoreau's description is an exemplary model of "romantic literary sublimity" in its most exaggerated form (12). However, he explains that the poet's literal encounter with a landscape and his ability to conjure up later that specific landscape in his mind with acute accuracy, inquiring further about what sort of inhabitants might embody it, supply proof that, though written accounts of experiences with natural settings are consciously constructed into the body of a text, a true environmental text is one where "the nonbuilt environment is one of the variables that influence culture, text, and personality" (13).

Collectively, Bate and Buell present ecological criticism as revolutionary not only in its political orientation but perhaps more poignantly in its revisionist promotion of literary practice in which the environment plays a more pivotal role in the psychological experience of reading and simultaneously of experiencing human existence. Likewise, in *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination* (2004), Angus Fletcher contends that an "environment-poem" is an environment itself, not merely a physical place but an arresting state of mind. Moreover, it possesses an uncanny ability to absorb the reader into its portals and to resonate in receptive hearts a sense of "at-homeness" that is at once strange and familiar—both a representation of the world as it is and as it could be (123).

Fletcher explains that, while every genre of fiction from motion pictures to Shakespeare's sonnets offers the escapist mentality of being swept away to a fantastical reality, what most distinguishes the environment-poem is its fluent surface—its resistance to traditional forms. He asserts that the focus of the environment-poem is not on the struggle, growth, and triumph of any particular character, nor on the development of an emotional connection between the reader and a single protagonist, but instead upon depicting an egalitarian community where all members are actively participant (123-24). Fletcher maintains that "nature's economy calls not for a House of Burgesses, of Lords, of Commons, but more radically for 'representatives' with whom we interact in a system of mutual co-representation" (124).

Kroeber, too, defines Wordsworth's perception of nature as a highly intricate set of self-governed communities whose synergistic members contribute to the aggregation of a unified whole. For him, the poet's notion of the "One Life Philosophy" constitutes a

steady, universal heartbeat in which the entire weight of human existence is but a faint chord in the larger cosmic song. He argues that amongst the profound truths Wordsworth gleaned through his experience of the French Revolution was the acknowledgment that "in the perspective of natural existence—the rhythmic continuity of an infinitely rich ecosystem—even the most epical of social events is trivial and fragmentary" ("Home" 132). Hence, Wordsworth adopts the gradualist theory of development, evident in both geological and evolutionary theory, while rejecting cataclysmic (and creationist) explanations of the natural world and cosmos.[2]

Having carefully assimilated and thoughtfully considered the theoretical perspectives of several environmental critics, where, one might ask, do their methodologies ultimately lead us? Precisely what does a "greener" reading of Wordsworth's poetry stand to teach us that could further our understanding and

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[2] It should be noted that while the early Wordsworth rejected religious orthodox ideas, the later poet returned to Christian dogma, as is evidenced by his repeatedly editing out explicitly pantheistic expressions in his revised 1850 *Prelude* and replacing them with pompous Biblical imagery. In Book XIV, he incorporates a remarkable strand of devotional sentiments often criticized as weakening the sublimity of the remainder of the poem, such as his redefinition of the phrase "higher love" (Imagination, the great cohesive force which brings the individual soul into relationship with man and nature) in specifically Christian terms so that "intellectual love" becomes "spiritual love":

> There linger [and rest alone in some green bower], listening, gazing with delight
> Impassioned, but delight how pitiable!
> Unless this love by a still higher love
> Be hallowed, love that breathes not without awe;
> Love that adores, but on the knees of prayer,
> By heaven inspired; that frees from chains the soul,
> Bearing, in union with the purest, best,
> Of earth-born passions, on the wings of praise
> A mutual tribute to the Almighty's Throne. (IV. 177-85)

Furthermore, in the revised edition, his description of the endowed poet, guided by nature to a realization of the divinity that exists both within himself and in the world adopts language directly borrowed from the New Testament book of Philippians. Thus, near the end of his poetic masterpiece, he contends that if the "peace / Which passeth understanding" (XIV. 127-28) should not be the final reward of his labor, then he should diligently seek it in vain. The poet's willingness to revise rigorously his best poetic masterpiece (much as he did "The Ruined Cottage"), suggests that, despite his intellectual and artistic achievements, he continued to grapple with a certain degree of anxiety about the state of his immortal soul.

appreciation of his life and art? Expanding upon the foundation that Kroeber, Bate, and others have pioneered, a central aim of this project is to demonstrate through an explication of many of the poet's best received works that Wordsworth absorbed a profound truth similar to that articulated by Kentucky native Emma Bell Miles in *The Spirit of the Mountains*. Miles provides an intriguing caricature of the Appalachian mountaineer, proposing that "A man born and bred in a vast wild land nearly always becomes a fatalist. He learns to see nature not as a thing of fields and brooks . . . but as a world of depths and heights and distances illimitable, of which he is but a tiny part" (140).

Wordsworth, too, perceived the fatal flaw of humanity to reside in its inflated notion of self—its egotistical desire to rule atop the natural hierarchy. He and his Romantic contemporaries rejected the superiority invested in man by the concept of the "Great Chain of Being"—a "vertical" depiction of the universal order that placed humanity near the top of the totem pole, second only to God and angels, while relegating animals, plants, and minerals to the lower ranks. Consequently, his quest to discover glimpses of the grandeur in lowly subjects from rural places was partially an effort to decentralize humanity's oppressive regime—a role-reversal he intended to enrich rather than devalue the significance of human life when he asserts repeatedly the joy and satisfaction available to the soul that recognizes the spiritual sanctity of its own smallness and interconnectedness. In essence, Wordsworth promoted a "horizontal" view of the universe in suggesting that the individual who humbly enters into nature with a heart softened by love possesses direct access to divinity—not a monarchic God who rules apart from the world but a universal current that passes through all things, making no

distinction between the mighty and the small, but joining all within its own being as one inseparable whole:

> . . . I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. ("Tintern" 94-103)

Indeed, it is the poet's recognition of a single life force that is soaked up through the roots of nature and nourishes all things that allows him to achieve what the wanderer of Salisbury Plain and the Pedlar of the "The Ruined Cottage" so ardently longed for—a sense of being "at home" in one's world.

The field of ecology is specifically concerned with the interactions of organisms within the space that is their home. In the Preface to his study *The Economics of Imagination*, Kurt Heinzelman notes that the term "economy" takes its origin from the Greek word *oikonomia*, which means "the management of a household." Citing John Locke's theory in *Of Civil Government* that "God and his reason commanded [us] to subdue the earth—i.e. , improve it for the benefit of life and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labour"(132), he distinguishes "Home at Grasmere" as

"Wordsworth's most sustained celebration of his poetic contract" (233). He contends that it is here that the poet exalts imaginative, as opposed to economic labor, as the vital power, which the human mind contributes to the sustenance of a place (223). Accordingly, this study investigates Wordsworth's gradual recognition of "home" as a state of being in which all living entities coexist in a state of mutual dependence, both contributing and receiving life-sustaining energy in benevolent relationship with one another—a radical view of the universal order quite similar to the ideology embraced by modern environmentalists.

Both as a physical structure and a psychological mindset, the concept of "home" held a prominent, albeit painful place, in the Wordsworthian lexicon. Stephen Gill adds insight into the emotionally taxing atmosphere of the poet's home during his childhood and adolescent years, stating that for young William and his siblings "the worst effect of their father's [untimely] death . . . was that it deprived them of a home" (35). He further describes the unstable aura surrounding the young poet's life, explaining that "From 1784 onwards Wordsworth had no base" (35). Thus, as an orphaned child and a disillusioned patriot of his native country who was raised by mean-spirited relatives, Wordsworth had good reason to abandon conventional notions of domesticity, identify with dispossessed subjects, and daily seek to discover a more fitting home within the world of nature.

In the absence of parental influences, the poet possessed from early youth a peculiar desire, bordering on the primitive, to mingle with the bare forces of nature:

> While yet an innocent little-one, a heart
> That doubtless wanted not its tender moods,
> I breathed (for this I better recollect)

Among wild appetites and blind desires,

Motions of savage instinct, my delight

And exaltation.

. . . . . .

Deep pools, tall trees, black chasms, and dizzy crags,

I loved to look at them, to stand and read

Their looks forbidding, read and disobey,

Sometimes in act, and evermore in thought.

With impulses which only were by these

Surpassed in strength.

("Home" 910-15; 917-22)

We see these predatory impulses exercised in "Nutting," as the poet perceives the hazels "tall and erect, with milk-white clusters" as belonging to "a virgin scene"—a sensuous image that leaves him panting like a hungry vulture (18-19). "Fearless of a rival," his boyish mind partakes of the bountiful "banquet" as though the beauty of the scene exists entirely for himself (22-23). Placing his cheek directly upon a mossy green stone beneath the shady boughs, his ears delightfully absorb the sweet murmuring sound of "fairy water breaks," and he deems it a misfortune that such nurturing melodies should be wasted "on stocks and stones / And on vacant air" (31-40). In adulthood, his gluttonous appetite was tempered, as he sought to tame the savage impulses of his selfish nature within a charitable abode: "I had hopes . . . that with a frame of outward life / I might endue, might fix in a visible home, / Some portion of those phantoms of conceit, / That had been floating loose about so long" (Prelude I. 127-31). Describing his vulturous appetite as

subdued by Reason, nature whispers to his heart, "Be mild and love all gentle things; Thy glory and thy happiness be there" ("Home" 942-44).

It was, thus, the desire to transcend the fractured state of his self-centered existence and feel himself a contributing member of the greater whole that drove Wordsworth to adopt a philosophical view of the universe in which all living organisms shared a common life source and thereby felt a sense of kinship as children of the same 'great parent.' [3] In *Politics in English Romantic Poetry (1970)*, Carl Woodring reminds us that it was at the age of seventeen, according to the 1799 version of *The Prelude,* that Wordsworth "saw one life and felt that it was joy," though most critics agree that he could not have fully absorbed the theory until closer to 1793-94. Still, he marvels at the precociousness of the young poet in observing that "Only a comprehensive, unified soul could perceive its own union with the vital other, the *rest* of life" (29). Though it is difficult to assess precisely when Wordsworth fully embraced the doctrine of the One Life philosophy as a cohesive artistic and ethical viewpoint, my study points even to Wordsworth's earliest poetry as evidence of his attempt to engage his readers' conception of self as being in relationship to what is not self—a lifelong and central poetic theme he championed as a means of exposing and reconciling man's broken relationship with the natural world.

In *The Active Universe*, H. W. Piper explores the scientific and historical factors that contributed to the origination and advancement of the One Life philosophy in

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[3] Erasmus Darwin writes in *Zoonomia*: "the great CREATOR of all things has infinitely diversified the works of his hands, but has at the same time stamped a certain similitude on the features of nature, that demonstrates to us, that *the whole is one family of one parent*" (qtd. in Matlack 112). See Richard E. Matlak, *The Poetry of Relationship: The Wordsworths and Coleridge, 1797-1800* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1997).

Romantic thought. He alludes to M. H. Abrams's assertion in *The Mirror and the Lamp* that "the mere postulation of an animate universe" (64) did not originate with the Romantics but was evident both in Isaac Newton's theory of an omniscient God whose diffused presence steadily holds the planet in orbit and even earlier in the notion of the "World-Soul"[4] (which implies a single life-sustaining source) embraced by the Stoics and Platonists (Piper 3). The evolutionary theories of contemporary scientist Erasmus Darwin and the chemist and Nonconformist minister Joseph Priestley also supported the idea of a

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[4] The notion of the "One Life" can be traced back even further to the ancient Greeks' concept of the *psyche,* which did not yet recognize the notion of a Christian soul but emphasized instead the "breath of life," which was thought to depart from the body during "swoons" (fainting spells marked by a temporary loss of oxygen to the brain) or in sleep, thus becoming active when the light of sense goes out. Hippocrates offered this alluring depiction of the psyche at work:

> But when the body is at rest the soul (psyche), being set in motion and awake, administers her own household and of herself performs all the acts of the body. For the body when asleep has no perception; but the soul when awake has cognizance of all things—sees what is visible, hears what is audible, walks, touches, feels pain, ponders. In a word, all the functions of the body and soul are performed by the soul during sleep. (qtd. in Jan Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983] 51).

Compare this passage with Wordsworth's explanation of a similar process at work in "Tintern Abbey," in which the poet's *psyche* is associated with the "mind's eye," Imagination. Wordsworth tries to find a way to describe

> . . . that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid to sleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things. (42-50)

M.H. Abrams provides a fascinating discussion of how the ancient Greek and Roman concept of *anima mundi*, which acknowledged "the concept of a kind of breath, a divine gas, infusing the material world and constituting also the individual human psyche" has been adapted by the Romantic poets (122). He refers to the poet Lucan as stating that Apollo discovered the Delphic oracle "at a huge chasm [bearing a striking resemblance to Mt. Snowdon] where the earth breathed forth the divine truth, and . . . gave out a wind that spoke," while the priestess who dwelt there literally inhaled the "World Soul" and received inspiration from it (122). Abrams explains that Coleridge hypothesized that "all animated nature / may be but organic wind harps, diversely framed, through which sweeps one intellectual breeze, at once, the Soul of each, and God of All" and notes how in *The Prelude* Wordsworth invoked "the Wisdom, Spirit, and Soul of the Universe, 'that givest to forms and images a breath / And ever-lasting motion'" (qtd. in Abrams 123). See "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor," *The Kenyon Review* 19.1 (1957): 113-30.

universe endowed with life and further pointed to the gradual perfection of the universal spirit as a pathway toward paradise (23).

Piper notes that what was, indeed, groundbreaking about the Romantics' perception of the universe was their claim that it was possible not only to sense divinity in nature intuitively but to communicate with it directly (4). Piper further explores the irony that Wordsworth and Coleridge reached almost the exact same conclusion on the subject long before they met each other or even read one another's works—a compelling turn of events he attributes less to scientific knowledge than to the rampant sense of radicalism that infiltrated their generation and necessitated a spirit of reform. As he explains,

> Coleridge's Unitarianism and Wordsworth's association with the sympathizers of the French Revolution placed them in a current of thought which between 1750 and 1800, in England and in France, swept away the Newtonian mechanical 'universe of death' and brought a new conception of life, development, and purpose in the natural world. (1)

Thus, while the "nature poetry" of the eighteenth century celebrated the aesthetic beauty of the natural world, stimulating the emotions to participate in acts of religious piety, the Romantics sought a deeper sense of beauty in the dynamic world of nature that penetrated beyond surface features to the very soul of man (11-12).

Piper points out that while facets of the "One Life" unquestionably shaped the mental framework of all the Romantic poets, it filled for Wordsworth a deeply personal void. He explains that "at this time, Wordsworth was a lonely man in a world where events stronger than his will had swept the control of his life out of his hands [and

therefore h]e desperately needed to find a religious system in which to believe" (75). Moreover, while Coleridge is credited with amalgamating its precepts into an organized theoretical framework, the One Life acquired a certain novelty in the verse of Wordsworth, for here it was "perhaps the first time that the new philosophy had reached a poet of original mind who was already a lover of natural scenery and steeped in eighteenth-century nature poetry" (75).

Piper further emphasizes a principal distinction between Wordsworth's and Coleridge's views, noting that Coleridge looked to nature as embodying "symbolical" power training the mind much like the Bible, in that its subliminal forms are meant to draw man into closer relationship with God (79). By contrast, Wordsworth believed that natural forms embodied "an independent life which was to be known and loved for its own sake [and furthermore that] this love brought with it illumination and benevolence towards all life" (79).[5] Thus, though he, too, hailed the Imagination as a faculty that shapes, orders, and animates the physical world, the mature Wordsworth ascertained to a greater degree than his Romantic contemporaries what Piper refers to as the "human significances" of natural forms which, in turn, enabled him to revere the natural world as "full of a life which answers [favorably] to man's" (1).

A detailed examination of Wordsworth's *relational invitations* (as a window into the poet's unique conception of the One Life) serves as an important focal point of this study, and illustrates that in the same way that nature stimulates the inner life, so too does

[5] Jonathan Wordsworth adds that Wordsworth was less concerned than Coleridge about whether this invisible cosmic spirit was "energy or thought" or if it should be equated with a Christian God (202). What most mattered is that it possessed the potentiality for raw, naked contact so that "immortality is perceived through the senses and worship is a spontaneous act of communion" (202). See *The Music of Humanity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

poetry stir our hearts and minds to new awareness, so too, does poetry. Because Wordsworth recognized Imagination as the synthesizing agent that makes *all* relationship possible, he experimented with writing poetry that acts upon the individual soul, evoking the same psychological response of hope and healing as nature. After offering "green" readings of two early works, this dissertation highlights *Lyrical Ballads* and the 1805 *Prelude* as the poet's most radical endeavors to suggest new purposes for poetry, modeling creative ways to move outside our egocentric mentalities and achieve a sense of at-homeness with the universal community.

The next chapter depicts the idealized Wordsworthian home experienced by William and Dorothy at Grasmere. Within this serene sanctuary, the subtle delights of the landscape gently stir their hearts to a renewed relationship both with each other and with their environment. Wordsworth could not have rendered so passionately and perfectly the joyful state of connectedness and belonging attainable between the human heart and nature had he not first experienced the bitter pangs of separation. Chapter Three turns back the clock some six years in Wordsworth's development and explores the dreadful journey he made across Salisbury Plain at the crossroads of his poetic career—a frightening, chaotic period after publishing his college efforts ("Descriptive Sketches" and "An Evening Walk") in 1793 when his personal feelings of isolation and abandonment were compounded by the divisive state of England as it stood on the brink of war. The political implications of "Salisbury Plain" are well documented when, in the closing stanzas, the poet boldly advocates an apocalyptic overthrow of monarchy to be achieved through armed force, returning society to its Eden-like paradise of self-government. The poem ends with a bitter denunciation of British imperialism and a fiery

call for revolt: "Heroes of Truth, pursue your march, uptear / Th' Oppressor's dungeon from its deepest base / . . . [and] pursue your toils till not a trace / Be left on earth of superstition's reign" (541-42, 547-48).

Still, if "Salisbury Plain" is a poem of political protest, it is equally a cautionary tale of the dangers of self-abuse that uncultivated minds inflict upon themselves and others when they traverse life severed from nature's nurturing spirit. For Wordsworth, exposing this separation and its tragic implications becomes the first stage in a long, complicated process of expanding his awareness and thus reintegrating himself with nature, his native home, as a necessary means of establishing a sense of community with the human society he felt at odds with. Nonetheless, it should be noted that it took Wordsworth some seven years after his return to France in November 1792 to find his way home.

The chapters to follow, which trace the poet's development through Goslar and the beginnings of the Two-Part *Prelude* with his conception of the "spots of time" in the winter/spring of 1798-99, document the long, difficult journey (intellectual, emotional, physical, and artistic) undertaken by Wordsworth in order to arrive at and conceptualize the idyllic home that Grasmere comes to represent.

Highlighting the relationship between the poet-narrator and the Pedlar, which evolves out of their shared suffering, my discussion of "The Ruined Cottage" in Chapter Four demonstrates Wordsworth's growing awareness of the powerful psycho-emotional attachments we are capable of forging with each other and with the nonhuman world. It further suggests that while one cannot always predict or control life's circumstances (as

Margaret's unfair lot so poignantly demonstrates), the "mind's eye," in accordance with nature, is capable of transcending abuse and restoring wholeness in the very face of ruin.

Expanding upon this same premise, though with a more specific emphasis on the poet's fascination with characters who are uniquely aligned to the natural world, my reading of *Lyrical Ballads* in Chapter Five pinpoints a pivotal stage in the poet's developing sense of *extra-human*[6] awareness; namely, he came to recognize the existence of alternative modes of engaging with the world and expressed an eager desire to be in closer contact with them. Accordingly, this chapter specifically focuses upon marginalized characters who, in learning to accept the unique connection they possess with their environment, find the spiritual means to transcend their outcast position and feel themselves "at home" with the greater cosmic community.

My explication of the 1805 *Prelude* in Chapter Six argues that the introspective "soul-searching" that Wordsworth conducts through the "spots of time" is motivated by his personal desire to transcend his orphan status by reconnecting with nature, his native home. It suggests that while his initial childhood "spots" encompass moments of alienation and separation, the mature poet derived energy from these and other alluring experiences from his past that ultimately led to his discovery of the Imagination as the agency that enables relationship between all life forms, human and nonhuman alike.

Finally, looking to excerpts from Wordsworth's later writings, the concluding chapter examines the poet's ongoing efforts to defend the sanctity of his Grasmere home

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[6] I adopt the term "extra-human" in this study in reference to Wordsworth's precocious recognition of a larger community residing outside or in addition to the human realm—a complex, holistic universe of which humanity is but a single link. Though the term "ecological" belonged to a much later period, his awareness of the "extra-human" establishes him as an important forerunner of ideas later expressed by environmentalists.

in light of the destructive alterations to the natural scenery that accompanied its rapid development into a tourist retreat beginning in 1806. It suggests that the poet's dedication to preserving the landscape from exploitation establishes him (by modern standards) as an "environmental activist" in his own right.

The chronological structure of this dissertation further intends to trace how Wordsworth's lifelong sensitivity to the interests of nonhuman nature anticipated ecological concerns brought to the forefront in the late twentieth century when environmentalism as an organized and energized movement gained political expression. Part of the value of my study is that it seeks to expand an important new field in Wordsworthian scholarship; namely by offering book-length study devoted to discussion of the Wordsworth/Coleridge One Life philosophy. Though my project does not claim to provide an extensive philosophical treatise on the subject, my hope is that, through my New Critical and green readings of some of Wordsworth's major works, which explore the One Life as a central undercurrent of the poet's quest for home, I can lend new clarity on this vitally important, and hitherto neglected, aspect of Wordsworth's poetry.

Note on the Editions of the Texts

While Ernest de Selincour and Helen Darbshire's edition *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (in five volumes) is typically considered the standard edition for all Wordsworth poems, the tortured history of much of the early poetry (with all the

numerous revisions they have undergone) makes it difficult to select the most appropriate reading text. Because this study aims to capture Wordsworth's internal development through a chronological explication of his works, four deviations have been made from the standard version in order to provide a more accurate representation of the poet's original mindset at the time of original composition. "Salisbury Plain," "The Ruined Cottage," and "The Discharged Soldier" in *Lyrical Ballads* are all cited from the Cornell Wordsworth Edition. The fourth exception is *The Prelude*, which I have cited from the Norton Critical Edition of The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850 (1979), edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill.

CHAPTER II

"BROTHER OF THIS WORLD": WILLIAM AND DOROTHY AS "HOME-MAKERS" IN THE GRASMERE YEARS

Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, who became the most influential female presence in his life, mentions numerous references to *home* in her *Grasmere Journals,* which arguably represents the best third party account of the Wordsworthian homestead during the siblings' three-year stay at Grasmere between 1800 and 1803. A close analysis of Dorothy's *Grasmere Journals* reveals a feverish quest to secure a sense of personal belonging—a mission extended by William in "Home at Grasmere," one of his few great credo poems, which though failing to attain the same critical attention as "Tintern Abbey,"[1] conveys an intimate artistic portrait of Wordsworth's One Life philosophy in its depiction of a wholesome, self-governed community conjoined through the shared affection of its members. Here, the peaceful calm and assurance of connectedness that Dorothy glimpses in her *Journals* amongst the subtle gaieties of an animated landscape are transformed into a sustained vision of an idyllic paradise that, as Karl Kroeber explains, pleasantly mirrors "the self-sufficing unity of being that the poet holds forth as a human ideal" (133).

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[1] Karl Kroeber attributes critical neglect of the poem to Wordsworth's own open dissatisfaction with it, its delayed publication (some thirty years after his death when his reputation had faded) and to its fragmented status as a failed opening to *The Recluse.* Still, in its defense, he reminds us that major parts of the poem have been cited as representative of Wordsworth's "philosophy" (132). He further marvels at the completeness of the poem, allowing it to achieve epic status despite its brevity, and he even suggests "that 'Home at Grasmere' is *The Recluse.* Wordsworth could never 'finish' *The Recluse* because he had already written it" (132-33). See "'Home at Grasmere': Ecological Holiness," *PMLA 89.1 (1974): 132-41.*

In "Wordsworth and the Recluse: The University of Imagination," Kenneth R. Johnston emphasizes that Wordsworth wrote *The Prospectus* to *The Recluse* and even returned to *The Prelude* during a frustrated break from "Home at Grasmere" in which he struggled to rectify the pastoral safe-haven depicted in the delicate scenery of the vale against the dark reality of moral evil and human suffering that permeated his age.[2] He notes that the poem stands as an expression of a pivotal moment in Wordsworth's artistic maturity when the poet plunged, fortunately as it turns out, into an investigation of "the mind's growth in terms of the *places* in which it prospered, in which it found—or did not find—itself at home" (65). That the imaginative mind should discover in that period of doubt and despair that its proper home exists inside the poem itself and that its salvation requires mere entrance into the "institution" it has created provides compelling evidence of the poem's significance in Wordsworth's developing ideology (65). In short, Johnston explains, "Without the ideal of *The Recluse*, there was no need for *The Prelude*" (60).

As a precursor to her brother's pivotal work, Dorothy's *Grasmere Journals* provide an appropriate starting point for a study aimed at investigating William's arduous search for "home"—a quest he pursued throughout his poetic career both as a means of personal fulfillment and as a curative measure for the pervasive feelings of alienation and displacement that characterized his war-torn society. In fact, some of Wordsworth's most glorious encounters with nature are experienced in the company of his sister, Dorothy, in poems which demonstrate how nature stirs within the human heart an invigorating spirit

[2] For a more detailed discussion of theories surrounding the biographical incidents and intellectual developments that shaped the poet's perspective in the six-year span in which he put on hold the completion of "Home at Grasmere," see Jonathan Wordsworth, "On Man, On Nature, and On Human Life," *RES* (The New Series) 31.121 (1980): 17-29.

we cannot help but share. Such poems are often didactic and involve the passing of his beliefs to a receptive listener. In "To my Sister" (composed earlier, during their residence at Alfoxden), the poet urges his sister to suspend her morning chores, put on her "woodland" dress, and join him outdoors where they might together soak up the pleasure of a beautiful spring day. His invitation to "come forth and feel the sun" (12) requires the shedding of all outer garments that hinder us from bare contact with the natural elements.[3]

These metaphorical "cloaks" we so commonly put on—which might include the pursuit of knowledge, ambition, wealth or even the burden of responsibility—work to conceal our true nature and impede those motivating forces toward which our innermost passions and desires are bent. In Book Four of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes the shedding of his own cloaks on a calm, rejuvenating walk in the "cold and raw" air outside his cottage door when his soul "put off her veil, and self-transmuted stood / Naked as in the presence of her God" (150-51). Accordingly, it is not merely sensory pleasure but the potential for sublime encounter that imbues the poet's enchanting assessment in "Lines..." that "It is the hour of feeling" (24).

The poet's challenge to let "no joyless forms . . . regulate / Our living Calendar" suggests that we are capable of demolishing our social clocks and creating new ones to tick in accordance with the cosmos (17-18). While our first instinct is to seek ways to make nature serve our own purposes, deeper joys await those who pattern themselves

[3] In his "Essay on Morals" (1798), Wordsworth argues "I know of no book or system of moral philosophy written with sufficient power to melt into our affections, to incorporate itself with the blood and vital juices of our minds, and thence to have any influence worth our notice in forming those habits of which I am speaking" (103). See *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B Owen and Jane W. Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1974), I: 103-04.

after nature's higher precepts. Such individuals are not burdened by the uncertainties of the future but are free to absorb the beauty and depth of the immediate moment. Casting off all social rules and customs, the poet deems that we can dedicate ourselves to "silent laws" that shall henceforth direct our course: "We for the year to come may take / . . . Our temper from to-day" (29, 32). He further predicts the marvelous transformation of a life repositioned to dwell in closer proximity with nature and one's fellow man:

> And from the blessed power that rolls
> About, below, above,
> We'll frame the measure of our souls:
> They shall be tuned to love. (33-36)

D. J. Moores identifies this "blessed power" as the presence of Love itself, which functions in Wordsworth's poetry as "the universal binding force, the cosmic cement that allows all disparate entities to adhere together in a great, monistic similitude" (178). He further reminds us that in Book Eight of *The Prelude* Wordsworth describes the defining moment when he first discovered the inseparable bond that seals together the human and natural worlds. While the poet intently watches the morning light "as it glistens on the silent rocks," he is humbled by the sympathetic understanding that it truly "Loves" the shepherds (VIII. 56) Thus, the poet praises nature as the faithful guide who lifted him from the isolation of solitude and reconnected him with humanity:

> 'Twas thy power
> That raised the first complacency in me
> And noticeable kindliness of heart.
> Love human to the creature in himself

> As he appeared, a stranger in my path,
> Before my eyes a brother of this world—
> Thou first did with those motions of delight
> Inspire me. (VIII. 74-81)

The phrase "brother of this world" provides a suitable metaphor for the development of Wordsworth's poetic consciousness, which aptly describes how his relationship with Dorothy[4] gave expression to the love he came to feel for nature and humanity as he learned to delight in the glory of the rude and commonplace. Accordingly, as a pure, uncensored expression of her love for William—a love that only deepens as her relationship with nature matures—Dorothy's *Grasmere Journals* provides an exemplary model of the *relational ties* that William, in return, reciprocated in "Home at Grasmere," a poem (perhaps never intended for public exposure) which reads as an intensely personal love offering to his sister as well as a private prayer to nature movingly offered up from the heart of a "foster child," reverently expressing gratitude for the nurturing home she so lovingly provides.

An interesting fact concerning Dorothy's writings is that while she almost always refers to *home* as an indoor construct, she offers virtually no description of its interior. Instead, her intense interest in familiarizing herself with the intricate details of the scenery in and around Dove Cottage often led her to set out on foot, willfully exposing her body and spirit to the elements so that she might soak up the beauty of the natural

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[4] In Book X of the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth credits Dorothy as the inspirational presence who turned his mind away from the social and political failings of France and England and back to the calmness and tranquility of nature: "She, in the midst of all, preserved me still, / A poet, made me seek beneath that name / My office upon earth, and nowhere else" (918-20).

world in all its varied phases. In her article "Subtle Fire: Dorothy Wordsworth's Prose and Poetry," Susan Levin praises Dorothy for distinguishing herself amongst her nineteenth-century contemporaries in the unique manner that she employs the autobiographical genre of journal writing to conduct an innovative mode of nature exploration and soul-searching, which Levin terms "consciousness formation" (348). She explains that in the same manner that Dorothy imaginatively constructs the landscape through scrupulous attention to details, she uses her journal as a means of ordering and arranging her emotions in an effort to differentiate between "all that is self and all that is not self"—a balancing process that "constitutes the formation of an individual ego" (347-48). Citing a passage from Coleridge's *Notebooks*, in which the poet confesses to approaching the natural world in search of a "symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists,"[5] Levin contends that the exact opposite is true for Dorothy, who "seeks that which forever exists in nature in order to define that which forever exists in her" (348).

Levin further acknowledges a clear sense of purposefulness and immediacy as original attributes of Dorothy's writing, asserting that while most journal entries record "open-ended" responses to day-to-day affairs, Dorothy's *Journals* frame a story that embodies her reactions to "a definite event or period of time in her existence" so that "when the matter at hand ends, so does the journal" (348). She identifies the personal nadir that Dorothy seeks to work through in *The Grasmere Journals* as directly linked to the disruptive changes in the ecology of her home ushered in by William's marriage to

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[5] Kathleen Coburn, ed. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 5 vols. (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1961), 2: 2546.

Mary Hutchinson in October of 1802. Still, resisting the urge to project Dorothy as a victim, she emphasizes the non-traditional route Dorothy undertook in never choosing to become a wife or mother and credits her with accomplishing a nearly unheard of feat for a woman in her time. As she explains, "Dorothy's writing comes out of her relationship with her brother. [6] The country walks, the reading and discussions, and the emotional tensions which formed her life with William formed the subject of her art" (354).

In her introductory comments to *The Grasmere Journals*, Mary Moorman comments upon the "spacious freedom" enjoyed by Dorothy at Grasmere—a luxury that supersedes what most women were accustomed to in her time. Not only was she not employed outside the home, but she had no stringent responsibilities within it. Thus, if rainy conditions prevented her from venturing outside (such days encompass the gloomiest entries of her *Journals*), she was free to stay indoors all day, even in bed, perhaps rising merely to have tea with William and John.

It is easy to imagine life at Grasmere as a rare treat for Dorothy. Because she had been separated from her siblings for seventeen years following the death of her mother, Dorothy finds, Moorman contends, "her first real home since she was six" (x). Given the prolonged estrangement from family and home (Dorothy did not even return to Cockermouth to grieve with her brothers at her father's funeral), Moorman emphasizes that Grasmere provided an opportunity to forge fresh adult relationships between the

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[6] For additional information regarding how the fraternal bond between Dorothy and William both stimulated and complicated Wordsworth's writings during the "Grasmere" years see Donald H. Reiman, "Poetry of Familiarity: Wordsworth, Dorothy, and Mary Hutchinson," *The Evidence of the Imagination: Studies of Interactions between Life and Art in English Romantic Literature,* ed. Donald H. Reiman, Michael C. Jaye, and Betty T. Bennett (New York: New York UP, 1978): 142-77.

Wordsworth children—an experience that was denied them during their formative years. As she explains,

> Any one of us with this background would have found the coming to Grasmere an intense delight. This was not a lent house or a furnished house. It was to be the creation of her own family, of herself, and her brothers William and John, to furnish as they wished, to make the garden how they wanted it. (xi)

In light of the newfound liberty that Dorothy and her brothers inevitably felt when given the chance to carve out their own space, Moorman reads both William's prayer in "Home at Grasmere," to "Embrace me, then, ye Hills, and close me in / Now in the clear and open day" (110-11) and Dorothy's lonely outcry to Jane Pollard in a July 1793 letter in which she longs for a spiritual meeting (should a literal one be impossible) with her favorite brother "on a bank [, a] garden . . . adorned by magic [where] the roses and honeysuckles spring at our command" as evidence of their shared "passion to find a home" (xi).

Moorman identifies the trademark feature of Dorothy's writing as a constant expression of the "intensity of feeling," a stylistic characteristic and personality trait, which Coleridge immediately noticed and assumed to be a mark of innocence (xii). Still, as Moorman is careful to add, Dorothy's *Journals* do not render a sunshiny tale enveloped in pure joy. To the contrary, she possessed an honesty for expressing the dark side of life through acute attention to detail, an aesthetic technique she strangely exercised from a "silent distance [as though,] behind the glass"—a vantage point that allowed her to capture the pain and sorrow of victims in distress and thus to convey what

Moorman refers to as "an image of human solitude and struggle as haunting as any in Hardy" (xviii).

In *The Grasmere Journals*, the specific location of *home* as it is generally depicted in relationship to outdoor walks (where Dorothy and William daily encountered many homeless outcasts) is particularly striking. Most often *home* signifies a point of return at the end of a scenic journey and fairly often evokes calmness and turbulence, erratically and even interchangeably (as though in the same breath): "Came *home* by Clappersgate. The valley was very green. Many sweet views up to Rydale head when I could juggle away the fine houses, but they disturbed me even more than when I had been happier" (1). [7] Though in her time the *home* was regarded as the wellspring of charitable acts, she relates with brutal honesty that even her smallest gestures of kindness were overshadowed by despair as she weighed with heavy heart the state of affairs in England: "At Rydale, a woman of the village, stout, and well-dressed, begged a half-penny. She had never before she said done it before but these hard times—arrived at home with a bad headache, set some slips of privet"(1). In this case, *home* was a place where everyday comforts offer no solace to the homeless who are shut outside and very little to the restless occupants secluded inside.

Though *home* as a physical structure was, for Dorothy and her brothers, a peaceful sanctuary that afforded warmth in the combat against the bitter cold temperatures they exposed themselves to in their outdoor walks, it often entailed brutally self-sacrificing attitudes as a state of mind. Early on, Dorothy speaks of *home* as a spot

[7] Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere Journals*, ed. Pamela Woof. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991).

she stayed anchored to, suspending all tasks and future thoughts while awaiting the arrival of her brothers: "I resolved to write a journal of the time till W. and J. return and I set about keeping my resolve because I will not quarrel with myself and because I shall give William pleasure by it when he comes home again" (1). While Dorothy embraced her home at Grasmere as a sacred refuge from the dark memories that scarred her past (perhaps owing to the pressures placed upon women in her time to preserve and protect the homestead even at the expense of their own happiness), she paradoxically conceptualized *home* as a place where peace should prevail in others' lives even when turmoil existed in her own.

In contrast to the dismal picture of human society conveyed by Dorothy through her numerous encounters with the homeless solitaries who roamed the vale, her depiction of the nonhuman world is pleasantly alive and active. Every gentle movement of the landscape—the swaying of the plants and flowers in the wind, the rippling of the waves, which jump out of the water and appear as "a dance of spirits" (7), or the chirping of "a pair of stone chats" as they tread through the water, playfully chasing each other's shadows (2)—suggests a restful community in which inhabitants exist in harmonious relationship with one another. Moreover, she recognizes a few select constituents of the nonhuman world as endowed with preternatural powers. Her description of Helm Crag as rising "bold and craggy, a being by itself" (48), acknowledges the natural landmark as a self-sufficient entity endowed with an independent will while the alluring call and echo of the raven heard in the distance from Benson's wood, even when it could be seen no longer (14), inspires the imaginative mind to reach out and communicate with the world that lies beyond the realm of mere sensory impression.

William's lifelong fascination with the distinct energies that contribute to the spirit of a specific place are readily identified in Dorothy's intimate portrait of a landscape charged with feeling and susceptible to human emotion. In an October 11, 1800, entry detailing her journey through Mr. Oliff's woods, the chosen locale of their future house and the spot that would later serve as the composition site of Wordsworth's "Michael," the crumbling sheepfold "built nearly in the form of a heart unequally divided" (26), bespeaks a tragic image of unrequited love between a faithful shepherd and his wayward son. Still ironically this humble memorial, which preserves the imprint of human suffering within its aging portal, is enshrined within the tranquil fields of a pastoral paradise. Dorothy stands in awe of "The colours of the mountains soft and rich, with orange fern—the cattle pasturing upon the hill-tops[—]the kites sailing in the sky above our heads—sheep bleating and in lines and chains and patterns scattered over the mountains" (26).

Just a few weeks later at John Dawson's, she attends a memorial service for an unnamed, little-known woman of the parish and testifies to the reverent manner in which Nature honors the life of an individual who left behind no mourners: "When we got out of the dark house the sun was shining and the prospect looked so divinely beautiful as I never saw it. It seemed more sacred than I had ever seen it, and yet more allied to human life" (20). Ironically, the most compassionate "neighbors of the churchyard" are not human figures but the "green fields" enveloped in sunlight (20), which serve as favorable substitutes for both the respectful, yet detached pallbearers of her funeral procession, who tip their hats and sing solemn verses to the stranger they hold in the casket, and the drunken priest who "did not look as a man ought to do on such an occasion" (21). It is,

instead, the warm response of nature, which carves out a beautiful pathway leading toward her grave that leads Dorothy to believe that this kindred spirit "was going to a quiet spot" (20), a reflection that moves her to tears.

Though Dorothy instinctively recognizes the natural world as highly responsive to human emotion, the personal quest to feel herself a connected and contributing member of the greater cosmic community presented a much more difficult challenge. We sense throughout her writings that she and William subconsciously sought within their intimate living quarters a transcendent moment when they should feel at peace with themselves and their surroundings. In turn, their disappointed hope of attaining and sustaining a permanent sense of belonging is evidenced in the countless headaches, restless nights, and mental breakdowns that plagued the two of them in the very midst of their pastoral haven (such as the frustrated fit that led William to burn a composition, "At the Sheepfold," after weeks of tireless labor).

Even as Dorothy's *Journals* fail to point to a single life-altering experience when her position within the cosmic sphere is confidently defined and delineated,[8] her daily

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[8] Percy Shelley records the kind of defining epiphanic moment that Dorothy unsuccessfully sought in his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." There, he describes himself as a child who chased ghosts and conversed with dead spirits, as he indiscriminately appreciated Nature merely for her surface pleasures and her thrilling haunts. Yet he pinpoints an occasion one springtime when the gentle winds that bring to life the plants and flowers revitalized his own dormant spirits, leading him to ponder deeply "on the lot / Of life" (56-57). He explains that in such a state of peaceful meditation, the shadow of Intellectual Beauty (an invisible power of the universe rather than a conventional, anthropomorphic god) fell over him. Much like the mariner who instinctively blesses the water snakes, the child responds in an awe-struck but worshipful manner: "I shrieked, and clasped my hands in extacy!" (59-60). He further vows that from that point on "I would dedicate my powers / To thee and thine" (61-62).

Shelley describes a similar moment in his Dedication to Mary Shelley, which opens his epic poem *Laon and Cythna*. The incident occurs when as a schoolboy he walked through the "glittering grass" on a May morning and wept without knowing why (21-23). Nearing the schoolhouse, there abruptly "rose . . . voices, that alas! / Were but one echo from a world of woes / The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes" (24-27). He goes on to describe an "ordination ceremony" quite similar to Wordsworth's Great Dawn Dedication, in which his poetic mission is dramatically unveiled to him:

entries are heavily dotted with "Glowworms everywhere!" (25). The warm, serene glow of these sacred creatures operates upon her troubled mind much like those welcoming experiences that William had by now termed in his 1799 version of *The Prelude* "spots of time"—those brief, yet enduring moments when in quiet contemplation with nature the veil of darkness shrouding our lives is temporarily lifted and our troubled minds are supernaturally fed and restored (XI. 264). Dorothy tenderly welcomed such moments when nature gently guided her to a place of rest where she felt at peace with herself and the larger world. Returning from Rydale just before dark one late spring evening, she observes,

> Grasmere was very solemn in the last glimpse of twilight [that] calls home the heart to quietness. I had been very melancholy in my walk back. I had many of my saddest thoughts and I could not keep the tears within me. But when I came to Grasmere I felt that it did me good. (2)

It is in such a state of silent meditation, when nature taught his fidgety young legs to be still in her presence, that Wordsworth achieves in "Home at Grasmere" a state of enriched consciousness in which a familiar childhood haunt reveals to his mature mind his purpose and place in the universal order. In *William Wordsworth: A Poetic Life*, John

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And then I clasped my hands and looked around—
 --But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,
Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground—
 So without shame, I spake:--"I will be wise,
 And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
Such power, for I grow weary to behold
 The selfish and the strong still tyrannise
Without reproach or check." I then controuled
My tears, my heart grew calm, and I was meek and bold. (28-36)

L. Mahoney captures the anticipation with which the weary poet-sojourner first reached Grasmere following a disappointing trip to Germany where he, Dorothy, and Coleridge withdrew in September of 1798 during a turbulent period when the French army advanced over much of western Europe. He explains,

> The peace of the valley, the majesty of the surrounding mountains, the soothing charm of the lakes—all of these touched [Wordsworth] deeply, and when he found a house that pleased him, he wrote to Dorothy to describe this paradise and to offer a plan for living there. On December 17, 1799, brother and sister, like a knight and his lady, set out from Sockburn on what has become a legendary journey. First on horseback, then on foot, they battled a raging snowstorm so fierce that they did not reach Kendal for three days. And from Kendal, where they purchased household needs, they pushed on to Grasmere, arriving there on December 21, 1799 at what was then the Dove and Olive Branch, now Dove Cottage. (115)

Indeed, the opening passages of the poem paint the vale as a welcoming resting spot—a comfortable refuge from inclement skies. The only responsibility assigned to the speaker in this secluded paradise is *to stop* and open his heart to the beauty of the natural world: "Long did I halt; I could have made it even / My business and my errand so to halt. / For rest of body 'twas a perfect place" (de Selincourt, ms B 313). In this peaceful repose, a world that once seemed stagnant to the unreflecting mind is instantly set in motion, and he finds, like Dorothy, an animate world, which offers to the responsive observer the capacity for relationship: "He thought of clouds / That sail on winds; of Breezes that

delight / To play on water," or to chase each other through the "yielding plain / Of grass or corn, over and through and through, / In billow after billow, evermore" (25-30).

Suddenly, both life's pettiest heartaches and severest afflictions appear an insufficient price to pay in exchange for the pure pleasure of existing in that moment. Still, the poet expresses regret that he should have ever considered this sacred spot a destination arrived at through his own merits. No longer does he selfishly view the vale as the acquisition of a prize for acting honorably and enduring much, but as a love offering willfully exchanged between two partners as they enter into a consensual relationship. He passionately describes this renewed, unpretentious perspective, explaining "what once / Did to my blindness seem a sacrifice, / The same is now a choice of the whole heart" (315).

Within the calming serenity of the vale, Wordsworth tenderly illustrates the intimate familial relationship discovered between him and Dorothy and Nature's gentlest pair of "milk-white Swans" (239) who graced the middle of Grasmere Lake with their presence during a two-month period when the region was hit by heavy storms (242-45). He fondly recollects,

> . . . we knew them well—I guess
> That the whole Valley knew them; but to us
> They were more dear than may be well believed,
> Not only for their beauty and their still
> And placid way of life and constant love
> Inseparable, not for these alone,
> But that their state so much resembled ours,

They having also chosen this abode;

They strangers, and we strangers; they a pair,

And we a solitary pair like them. (247-56)

Though the possibility that somewhere down the line the two couples should cross each other's paths again seems faint, if not implausible, his imaginative mind ponders a joyous family reunion amongst "consecrated friends / Faithful companions . . . / Surviving, they for us, and we for them" (261-63). The poet experiences a similar state of companionship in his encounter with a "quire of redbreasts" that herald his "Residence in London" in Book VII of his 1805 *Prelude*. These joyful messengers delight the poet with "unthought-of greetings unawares," as they share with him a song that penetrates to the tranquil recesses of his spirit where he discovers an intersection in their paths and, thus, pauses to recognize his awareness of the spiritual connection between brothers:

And, listening, I half whispered, 'We will be,

Ye heartsome choristers, ye and I will be

Brethren, and in the hearing of bleak winds

Will chaunt together. (34-37)

Along that same path, the poet encounters a moving image of a glow worm upon the hills, shining "like a hermit's taper seen / Through a thick forest" (VII. 41-42), solidifying his belief that humans share not only a physical space but a spiritual plane with the lowliest of creatures. Each of us embodies a common purpose and destiny, which is to contribute good will to one another through our very presence in each other's lives. Thus, the poet permits his heart to be guided by a more superior faculty than the sensual ear:

Silence touched me here
No less than sound had done before: the child
Of summer, lingering, shining by itself,
The voiceless worm on the unfrequented hills,
Seemed sent on the same errand with the quire
Of winter that had warbled at my door,
And the whole year seemed tenderness and love. (VII. 42-48)

The poet opens Book XII with an extended meditation upon the transformative process he identifies in his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* as "emotion recollected in tranquility." He proposes that "From Nature doth emotion come, and moods / Of calmness equally are Nature's gift: / This is her glory" (XII. 1-3). He maintains that, when the mellowed heart yields itself to the external world, "it is / That genius which Exists by interchange / Of peace and excitation, finds in her / His best and purest friend" (XII. 7-10). It is, thus, in the soothing conversation between the composed heart and a benevolent nature that one gleans the strength of mind to struggle through trying circumstances in search of permanent, enduring truths. He marvels that in this "wiser mood" (46), those things that "we blazon with the pompous names / Of power and action" (XII. 48-49)—(a direct reference to the violent impulses that accompanied his initial support of the French Revolution)—lose their splendor in his eyes, as he learns to recognize the divine attributes of the lowly orders and "to look with feelings of fraternal love / Upon those unassuming things that hold / A silent station in this beauteous world" (XII. 50-52).

The poet surmises that we often doubt the significance of the relationships forged between ourselves and Nature's spirited beings in the quiet recesses of our private lives,

asking "What, if I floated down a pleasant Stream / And now am landed, and the motion gone[?]" ("Home" 292-93). Yet he assures us that the responsive heart is constantly revived by the continuity of Nature's *staying power* and in that contented state eternally gives and receives strength in loving relationship with the rest of life: "Ah no, the Stream / Is flowing, and will never cease to flow, / And I shall float upon that stream again" (294-96). Thus, so long as tenderness and love remain the guiding influence of our shared sentiment, we coexist in a benevolent, holistic society and, therefore, will never have to be alone (no matter how secluded from humanity we may find ourselves).

Only through the vehicle of Imagination is the relationship between the human mind and physical world possible, and thus the *relational invitation* to bring readers into closer contact with nature serves as one of the major impulses of Wordsworth's poetic career. In essence, he sought to impress upon his readers' minds the superior craftsmanship of the universal design, thereby illustrating "[h]ow exquisitely the individual Mind . . . to the external world / Is fitted, and how exquisitely too, . . . the external world is fitted to the mind"[9] (de Selincourt, ms B version 339). Accordingly, Karl Kroeber comments upon the "psychic freedom" attained by Wordsworth in the wide

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[9] William Blake speaks disparagingly of these lines in his *Annotations to Wordsworth's Preface to* The Excursion where he states, "You shall not bring me down to believe such fitting & fitted I know better & Please your Lordship" (667). See *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman, newly revised edition (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982) 666-67. Jennifer Davis Michael explains that "To fit things together suggests that they are separate objects that retain their boundaries even when joined: the pieces of a puzzle, when assembled, do not fuse into a single piece "(83). She contends that "Blake resists the language of 'fitting and fitted' because he sees the separation of mind and nature as evidence of a fall from their original unity, when no such differentiation was possible" (83). She further explains that "For Blake, nature originally is . . . the embodiment of human desires [and that i]t is toward that embodiment that human labor strives" (83). Thus, for Blake, the mind which ponders too long on physical nature is enslaved at the level of mere sensory perception, or in Michael's words, "the focus on nature blinds human beings to their own divinity" (83-84). For a more exhaustive discussion on this debate see *Blake and the City* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2006) 82-84.

open fields of the vale as he absorbs the liberating power of the birds and insects who exist "but only for this end, / To flit from field to rock . . . / From shore to island" (39-41). He explains that the vale inspires the poet to be "indifferent to rootedness" so that "[h]e does not feel tied to an owned piece of property" but rather attempts to "fit himself to nature and fit nature to himself" (134).

Following Kroeber, it is crucial to understand that Wordsworth was less concerned with maintaining strong, unshakable ties with one's specific place than with maintaining emotional and imaginative relationship with what humans find in the non-human physical environments they inhabit. From his numerous encounters with England's homeless outcasts, he learned that fixation with specific place was not merely a rhetorical posture but an unfortunate, irreversible condition of life in an antagonistic, war-torn society where there was no "alternative" home—no peaceful vale to cling to. Instead, the bittersweet fate of characters such as Margaret in "The Ruined Cottage" or the Old Cumberland Beggar and Michael in *Lyrical Ballads* who are weighed down by their sufferings and lack the means to transcend their circumstances reinforces Bate's assertion that "The politics of Grasmere Vale are ultimately based upon a relationship to the environment"—a union between man and his world where "in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all" (33).

Wordsworth's characters are all affixed to the physical world in distinct ways. He presents them both as a symbolic representation of the oppressive state of the human condition and as an acknowledgment of the creative potential that is specific to our individual natures. The poet realizes that as hallowed as each participant of the natural world may be, neither the "humble Roof embowered among the trees," or the "calm fire-

side" ("Home" 682-83) is capable of speaking to what is eternal in human nature, for "Possessions have I that are solely mine, / Something within which yet is shared by none, / Not even the nearest to me and most dear, / Something which power and effort may impart" (686-89). [10] Even so, our "internal brightness" (675) remains a stagnant potential, unless our "inward lustre fondly seek / And gladly blend with outward fellowship" (677-78).

In turn, he demonstrates through each character's unique circumstances (and through his own foibles) that the mind, ever fixated on itself, remains imprisoned within a tightly constricted space. Still, "Home at Grasmere" teaches us how the mind can learn *to love* that space (to appreciate all that it affords, and in turn, to value the energies that it both contributes and receives). The mind so instructed is no longer trapped within that space but "belongs" to it in a state of reciprocal exchange—a dialectical relationship that dissolves boundaries and connects us to the One Life. Love, the synthesizing force that interpenetrates all of nature, is powerfully illustrated through the mesmerizing flight of a flock of birds as they continuously "mount with a thoughtless impulse" (200) toward the heavens and then rapidly swoop down to the lake in one uninterrupted motion, encapsulating the entire inner circumference of the spherical-shaped vale with such beautiful rhythmic continuity that it seemed "as if one spirit swayed / Their indefatigable flight" (215-16). Likewise, the chapters to follow present several intriguing solitaries who discover in the sphere of their private lives with nature a liberating power, which enables

[10] Kurt Heinzelman identifies this creative aspiration as "Reason," which Wordsworth defines as the "full measure of content" (XIII. 110) attainable within the boundaries of "this small abiding place" ("Home" I. 146). See *The Economics of the Imagination* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1980).

them to soar above the divisive state of their human society and feel themselves at one with the greater cosmos. It was largely in attaining the unique perspective afforded by careful and realistic scrutiny of some of England's lowliest outcasts that Wordsworth discovered an empowering mode of being that enabled him to overcome his own feelings of estrangement with human society, with nature, and with himself. Finally, he came to feel himself ultimately at home amongst both the smallest and mightiest aspects of the natural sublime.

CHAPTER III

THE CALM INSIDE THE STORM: REVELATIONS ON SALISBURY PLAIN

A fascinating aspect of Wordsworth's career is how the dawning of his poetic self-consciousness was preceded by a direct confrontation with the hostile forces of nature. Stephen Gill's seminal biography *Wordsworth: A Life* (1989) recounts how, in the summer of 1793, at the outset of the Reign of Terror, Wordsworth began a walking tour with childhood friend William Calvert whose goal was the Isle of Wight. Midway through, for unknown reasons, the poet abruptly changed directions, splitting from his companion and beginning a solitary journey across the empty recesses of Salisbury Plain. What was partially intended to be a retreat from the terrors of an impending war brought young Wordsworth into the staging area of Britain's naval power, readying itself for war with France. In the evening, he heard cannons firing overhead and in the morning saw the naval fleet assembling on the coast (Gill 74). As the stage was set for yet another protracted war between France and England, nature herself seemed to absorb and reflect the psychological and physical horrors to come. A massive storm swept over northern England that summer in which six-inch hail reportedly fell from the sky—a natural disaster that Wordsworth saw as a dreadful omen of the violent course of the Revolution (Gill 74).

Wordsworth transcribed these nightmarish experiences in "Salisbury Plain"—a poem that, much like Eliot's *The Waste Land* might easily be considered a haunting portrait of a modern world wracked by war. In "'Home at Grasmere': Ecological Holiness" (1974), Karl Kroeber asserts that, despite its repulsive connotations, the

metaphorical symbol of the wasteland (of which "Salisbury Plain" is a landmark romantic example) presents exciting challenges for ecological proponents, which are tightly interconnected with groundbreaking changes in modern attitudes concerning the relationship between "Man, Nature, and human life" (132). He explains that no longer do we perceive only aesthetically beautiful monuments (canyons, waterfalls, flower gardens, etc.) as sacred entities; we revere toxic wastelands as well (132). He marvels that while draining a swamp was once considered amongst the greatest of humanitarian efforts, we now have advocates who lobby against the removal of contaminated marshes on behalf of insects and reptiles. Thus, Wordsworth's superior foresight is realized when one considers that even in the absence of endangered species campaigns, he anticipated twentieth-century efforts to preserve "unspectacular" and "unfecund" places as "territorial sanctuaries"—a conviction illustrated in taking this tumultuous journey alone (132). The poet further presents himself as willing to brave treacherous conditions because he sentimentalizes the desert landscape as possessing therapeutic powers he desires to be in contact with.

Shelley's autobiographical Julian (from *Julian and Maddalo* [1818]) echoes the common romantic sentiment toward remote wilderness regions when, riding a horse at sunset across a beach near Venice, he pauses to admire the thorn and thistle-covered sand dunes, confessing, "I love all waste / And solitary places; Where we taste / The pleasure of believing what we see / Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be" (14-17). Accordingly, the opening stanzas of "Salisbury Plain"[1] assume an anthropological

[1] The Cornell Edition of the poem (edited by Stephen Gill) has been used in this chapter as opposed to the

perspective and speculate about the meaning of this deserted landscape to the prehistoric peoples who once dwelled there; even the weary "naked and unhouzed traveler / . . . The hungry savage, 'mid deep forests, rouzed / By storms [who] lies down at night on unknown plains / And lifts his head in fear" (1; 3-5) is buoyed by the spiritual power that such isolated regions afford and "is strong to suffer, [for] his mind / Encounters all his evils unsubdued" (10-11).[2] Given Wordsworth's passionate regard for isolated places, it is not unlikely that in departing from Calvert, he hoped to discover some private uplift from his distresses at the prospect of Britain plunging into war again. Shockingly, what nature revealed instead was a grim reminder of the dreadful consequences of human being's lack of concern for one another.

On one level, the distressed traveler of "Salisbury Plain" symbolizes the dispossessed poet who ranges across a remote wilderness in search of his poetic muse. His desperate cries for divine intervention closely mirror the pleas of William Blake, who in 1793 grumbled to the muses, "How have you left the ancient love / that bards of old enjoyed in you?" (qtd. in Abrams 99). Indeed, the "homelessness" of the Romantic poet was a shared experience of youth culture before and after the French Revolution. In the late eighteenth century, a nation at war had muted its ears to poetry, and

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de Selincourt "Guilt and Sorrow" version (published in 1842), since the later version does not adequately reflect the poet's mindset when he composed the poem in 1794 while living in England during its war against France's revolutionary government. Because this chapter aims to demonstrate how the exterior landscape reflects the condition of the poet's inner life in the early years when he was still a republican and an egalitarian concerned with the devastating effects of the war upon England's poor, the Gill version provides a more suitable text since it represents (as Gill points out in his editorial notes) an accurate reflection of the poem in its original state, aside from a very few minor alterations.

[2] Kroeber's critical assertions, particularly his observations concerning the link between Wordsworthian ideas and contemporary attitudes, distinguish him as amongst the first scholars to recognize important traces of environmental and proto-ecological thinking in Wordsworth and other Romantic poets.

consequently, the poet became an outcast figure who lived a life of poverty and neglect—a "savage without home in winter's keenest gale" (36). Likewise, though Wordsworth would eventually fulfill his artistic mission, which masterfully combined political rebellion with literary reform, he could not do so without first experiencing, however briefly, the extreme physical vulnerability that his journey through the heart of Sarum came to signify and that further mirrors the uncertainty of his own changing times. In a word, he could not write about *homelessness* without literally and figuratively "weathering the storm"—a process that involved nakedly exposing himself as a privileged son of affluence to the natural elements.

"Salisbury Plain" represents a significant turning point in the poet's intellectual and political evolution and clearly echoes his political attitudes toward the French Revolution. Just as the subjects of Eliot's "The Hollow Men" (1925) have, in the aftermath of the apocalyptic World War I, lost all capacity to feel, the figure on the landscape of Salisbury Plain further reflects both the sterile soul of the poet, whose rudimentary mind is enchained by bonds of vengeance, as well as the threatening, unfruitful climate that has come to pervade the nation. In Chapter 12 of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge identifies the psychic conditions of the disconcerted wanderer as one of the most terrifying states of human enslavement. He defines "freedom" as the innate longing that unites every living being in the universe though he emphasizes that in underdeveloped minds (closed off by fear, and its offspring, vengeance) it is a suppressed desire that never " rise[s] into consciousness" (465). He warns that such individuals remain imprisoned in a world of darkness since "where the spirit of man is

not filled with the intercourse of freedom . . . all spiritual intercourse is interrupted, not only with others, but even with himself" (466). He further contends that words alone are not capable of communicating to spirits who speak in a tongue only translatable between souls:

> No wonder, then, that [the houseless wanderer] remains incomprehensible to himself as well as to others. No wonder, that in the fearful desert of his consciousness, he wearies himself out with empty words, to which no friendly echo answers, either from his own heart, or the heart of a fellow being; or bewilders himself in the pursuit of nominal phantoms, the mere refractions from unseen and distant truths through the distorting medium of his own unenlivened and stagnant understanding! To remain unintelligible to such a mind, exclaims Schelling on a like occasion, is honor and a good name before God and man. (466)

Truly, England's declaration of war against France had thrown Wordsworth precisely into such a frenzied state. "Salisbury Plain" registers and represents this bewildered mindset of alienation from mankind as well as from the natural world: the poet's plea for a listening ear is answered only by the mocking groans of the dead. Even in a hellish state of abandonment, the solitary poet of Salisbury Plain recognizes what would later become the source of his artistic muse when he seeks the refuge of a shepherd's lowly dwelling (5). Though the traveler's fruitless search for a shepherd's homestead provides evidence of Wordsworth's desire to seek community and thus find a nurturing "home" within the realm of nature that could sustain his desire to write an optimistic poetry of pure,

untainted life, this vision is temporarily obscured behind the terror and tumult of war.

Though the first-person traveler is not necessarily the poet, but rather a character incorporated for dramatic effect, his metaphorical reenactment of a journey Wordsworth actually took in September of 1793 suggests that we can accurately look to the poem for evidence of nature's influence on his own internal development. In the opening book of his 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth contends that nature instructs through two seemingly disparate methods: through the agencies of Beauty and Fear (I. 306). Accordingly throughout the poem, nature operates as a paradox, conserving a sense of personal indictment for wrongdoing that stretches back to antiquity while still managing to display a powerful portrait of social cohesion set amongst a climate of ruin. By depicting Nature as the great "revealer" of human error, the poem instructs the poet's contemporaries about the perils of a cruel, apathetic society as well as the joyful union of human communities bound together by love. At a pivotal moment when the young Wordsworth focused upon the political renovation of the modern spirit, nature sternly dealt with him, exposing his heart and mind to the best and worst of human potential.

"Salisbury Plain's" narrative allows for the vagrant woman to relate her tale to an attentive listener (a rhetorical technique later used by Wordsworth in "The Ruined Cottage" and by Coleridge in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"), aims to arouse compassion within the reading audience. The ensuing relationship forged between two homeless outcasts within the walls of the plain's "dead house" further draws upon elements of romance—a narrative device that, as Kurt Fosso explains in "The Politics of Genre in Wordsworth's 'Salisbury Plain,'" was appealing to many writers in the early 1790s as a

means of boosting the morale of a nation at war. He explains the significance of the romance genre thusly:

> In a decade of rising political tensions when, as Gertrude Himmelfarb points out, changes in technology, economics, politics, demography, and ideology made England's "poverty more conspicuous, more controversial, and in a sense less natural than it had ever been seen before," and when the numbers of the poor, unemployed and homeless were steadily rising, romance form offered Wordsworth a much-needed course of action. . . . It is not surprising, then, that of the genres at his disposal to represent England's homeless, Wordsworth should have chosen a form currently being deployed precisely in the politically charged and pro-and anti-revolutionary rhetorics of natural versus unnatural social orders and rights, a form participating in the very social-political world that to us it might appear to elude or deny. (160-61)

Fosso cites the poet's own observation in *The Prelude* that the Revolution offered to a sterile climate with its "stale, forbidding ways / Of custom, laws, and statutes" . . . the attraction of a country in romance" (XI. 110-12)—a landscape "regenerated," though still belonging to "the world / Of all of us" (142-43). He further adds that while the Gothic Revival of the late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century England was a movement born largely out of the Revolution's failed hopes, symbolizing as it did the death of "cultural reform or rebirth" (70), the romance genre utilized imagination and history (generally turning to medieval settings and themes as a means of recapturing the

charming, magical aura of a foregone happier time) in an effort to identify what Jon Klancher describes as "unrealized possible futures" (qtd. in Fosso 73).[3]

The weakness of this strategy for the amateur poet is that it still upholds the naïve belief in the "Age of Sensibility," that idealism and sentimentalism alone could overcome the growing issue of poverty and homelessness in England. In fact, the poem offers much evidence of Wordsworth's juvenile mindset (the use of pathetic fallacy, supernatural elements drawn from the gothic revival, the inclusion of an overly sentimental speaker who indulges in emotion for dramatic effect, and ultimately his hesitation in the final stanzas about whether poetry alone is capable of producing widespread social reform).[4] Even so, the poem's incorporation of narrative techniques derived from both the gothic and romance traditions reveals Wordsworth's early attempt to evoke simultaneously the emotional responses of Beauty and Fear within the reader and thus to produce an innovative poetry that acts upon the human heart in the same fashion as nature.

As a pure, uncensored expression of his early political leanings, the poem preserves two conflicting attitudes concerning the poet's evolving vision of social reform. While an angry voice envelops the closing lines in a militant spirit of vengeance and

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[3] Jon Klancher, "Godwin and the Republican Romance: Genre, Politics, and Contingency in Cultural History," *MLQ* 56 (1995): 145-65.

[4] Wordsworth's use of the Spenserian stanza is also worth noting. Many of the Romantics (Byron in *Child Harold's Pilgrimage*, Keats in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, Shelley in *Laon and Cythna*, Scott in *Don Roderick*, etc.) adopted this technique, paying homage to the poet regarded as amongst the most skilled practitioners of early modern English verse. In "Salisbury Plain" Wordsworth appears to use this verse form (traditionally associated with mythic legends and heroic quests) somewhat ironically as a means of exposing the flaws of his contemporary society. Moreover, his use of the Spenserian stanza as a vehicle of internal narrative recording the vagrant woman's tale of suffering and woe is further evidence the young poet is testing his artistic ability to communicate passion and evoke sympathy within the reader inside the perimeters of a tightly constricted form.

violent overthrow, the poem models the emergence of a benevolent community, far from the public pathway, which literally springs up from the ruins of a decrepit wasteland, suggesting an early hint of his growing awareness that genuine revolution is attainable solely in establishing a renewed relationship with one's environment. Though certainly not as refined or assured in its poetic technique as Wordsworth's later poems, "Salisbury Plain" provides an anticipatory glimpse of the young poet's lifelong fixation on specific place and in its suggestion that the mutual love of individuals (toward themselves and the natural world) possesses the power to establish homes for the poor and dispossessed.

From a purely aesthetic perspective, the selection of a stark, uncivilized location that is free of the lavish extravagances that characterize modern life allows the poet to embody and yet transcend historical and geographical references. Cast as it is against a "blank sky" (41), "Salisbury Plain" embodies a *naturalism* similar to King Lear's "bare forked animal" on the moor—a naked man reduced to nothing but an animal creature.[5] The poet's decision to set his dramatic poem at the site of Stonehenge, alongside its legends of human sacrifices and its emerging gothic overtones, allows him to retrace not only the instability of all civilizations, but also the self-indulgent motivations that for generations have driven mankind to fall out of favor with nature.

In "Nature and Art in the Nineteenth Century" (1977), Carl Woodring highlights Schiller's assessment in "Naive and Sentimental Poetry" (1795) that the blind, childlike innocence that characterized Homer's connection with nature was an intimacy that the

[5] Geoffrey Hartman maintains that the initial wave of shock associated with the events of 1793 implanted in the poet's mind a seemingly irreconcilable breach from nature—a process that in mythological terms constitutes "one irremediable act which strips mankind naked" (117).

self-conscious modern has labored feverishly to emulate (194). Schiller concludes, "It is because nature in us has disappeared from humanity [that] we rediscover her in her truth only outside it, in the inanimate world" (194). Woodring explains that the Romantic imagination withdraws from human company and seeks to penetrate the spiritual underpinning of external nature with the expectation that it will lead us back to that perfect state from which we fell. For Wordsworth, this solitary journey frequently led to the loneliest region known to man: the dark, inner recesses of what Emerson called "man thinking" (83). Prone to intense moments of internal brooding, he often steered down isolated corridors where he bravely confronted his own private ghosts. Having undertaken this metaphorical journey in "Salisbury Plain," he willfully discloses the wretchedness in his heart to the public eye, not as an escape mechanism, nor even merely as a means of self-discovery, but instead as entrance to an enticing aesthetic platform which brings us strikingly close to the triumphs and maladies of his age.

The qualities of landscape reflected in "Salisbury Plain" offer a disturbingly clear vantage point for assessing the irrefutable evidence of humanity's mistreatment of each other. The poet's technique of "stripping bare" the landscape allows him to unearth the stark truth that lies buried within. Throughout the poem, nature serves as "the great unveiler" and revealer of stockpiles of waste (centuries worth of human abuse), which have been purposively hidden from public sight. The poem's central character soon "came where, antient vows fulfilled, / Kind pious hands did the Virgin build /A lonely Spital, the belated swain / From the night-terrors of that waste to shield" (121-24).

Most alarmingly, the exterior pollution of the environment on Sarum mirrors the moral depravity that lies within the Pitt administration and its war policy. Appropriately, it is in sickness, drenched with rain and staggering "[w]ith flight unwilled, / Worn out and wasted, wishing the repose / Of death" (119-21), that the traveler confronts the contaminated wasteyard that projects the illness of the human heart on its surface like an unsightly rash. Though no light initially shines down to illuminate the traveler's steps, the moon gradually surfaces above the clouds in a poignant scene where nature discloses what people have done to each other. Its "sickly glare" (119) illuminates a detestable sphere of crime and oppression—a dumping ground so noxious that "no human being could remain [and] now the walls are named the dead house of the plain" (125-26).

The "sacrificial altar" (184) is exposed only through the earth's painful moans though, as a prominent landmark surrounding the folk history of the plains, the human slaughter house stands as a gruesome reminder of "what man has made of man."[6] In this scene, Wordsworth likens the execution site of the ancient Druids to modern England as a graphic form of social protest against the inhumane war policies practiced by Pitt and his followers, whom the poet suggests are little more advanced in their treatment of humanity than the primitive and heathen Druids of prehistoric times. Thus, by framing the poem with the uncivilized practices of Sarum Plain and the Druids, the poet emphasizes that his own society (in their war-mongering factions) just as barbaric as the ancient "tribes" who lived as collective bodies and whose only foe was nature. Similarly, Wordsworth's self-indulgent generation feeds and preys upon itself.

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[6] "Lines Written in Early Spring" (24).

A solemn voice from the grave warns the reader to "avert thy face" from Stonehenge, an admonition that a single mind cannot withstand the full weight of its archaic transgressions (82). We are left to contemplate why Wordsworth conjured up such disturbing images of human abuse as a symbol of his own personal fault. Indeed, the poet possessed a deeply personal reason for infusing the exterior landscape with emanations of his own guilty conscience. In "Wordsworth and the Sense of Guilt," T.V. Smith remarks that, though guilt is a natural emotion, to "contain guilt" is a spiritual matter that implies deeper scars and greater responsibilities (233). She further asserts that while no man is capable of attaining in his private sphere the greater ideal of what life should be, Wordsworth continually grappled with remorse for what he considered to be his own insufficient part in contributing to the dawning of the new age (X. 235).

Wordsworth was, by nature, a highly intuitive individual in touch with his physical surroundings—a character trait evidenced in how readily he felt the outbreak of the Revolution. Having learned that England had declared war on France, he responded to the event not merely as a political partisan but as the subject of deep personal betrayal: "Not in my single self alone I found, / but in the minds of all ingenious youth / Change and subversion from that hour" (X. 230-32). Clearly, Wordsworth's response to the war exceeded ordinary fears and disappointments to the extent that he felt himself personally indicted for crimes he had not actually committed. Three years after the outbreak of the Revolution, during the dismal period when the Girondins were targeted as scapegoats and later killed in the September Massacres, he suffered nightmarish visions where he envisioned himself as a guilty culprit being tried before a wrathful seat:

I scarcely had one night of quiet sleep
Such ghastly visions had I of despair
And tyranny and implements of death,
And long orations which in dreams I pleaded
Before unjust Tribunals, with a voice
Laboring, a brain confounded and a sense
Of treachery and desertion in the place
The holiest that I knew of, my own soul. (372-80)

Later in life, Wordsworth's self-conscious nature allowed him to forge intimate relationships with both his fellow men and the larger natural world. But at this early stage in his career, he did not yet envision himself as a connected member of any natural ensemble. Nature was to him an exterior force, at times benevolent but more often acting as a monstrous predator that pursued him against his will. The image of a frightened soul who fled in terror and "backward cast his face" (128) mirrors the juvenile mind described in "Tintern Abbey" at the stage when he describes himself as a roe who bounded among the hills, "more like a man / Flying from something that he dreads, than one / Who sought the thing he loved" (71-72) and by the nine-or-ten-year-old boy described in Book One of *The Prelude* who takes a stolen boat for a joyride and imagines the mountain pursuing him. The adolescent mind described in each of these instances assumes that the universe responds solely to its own sufferings, and to some extent the poet's guilty conscience suggests an awareness of an inflated importance upon the world stage.

While the traveler's frightful plea for divine intervention goes unnoticed, he finds solace in the company of a vagrant female dweller. In her story, Wordsworth provides a fascinating juxtaposition between the external horrors of war that loom in the traveler's tumultuous, overnight journey and the deeper longevity of human suffering that emerges in the tragic tale of a woman's long and agonizing existence. The famished traveler, having failed to experience the fortune of companioned years, is tormented by visions of self-absorbed individuals feasting "on the couch of Affluence" (24). Still, in the pitiable woman's story, we learn that a deeper suffering is reserved for the individual who once rested comfortably within the gaiety of social life until the "turns of chance prevail[ed]" (6). Here, Wordsworth discloses the terrifying realization of how easily members of an established class-based society can slip from a state of comfort to poverty, from security to homelessness.

Wordsworth reveals in "Salisbury Plain" that among the most tragic impacts of war was its brutal destruction of the domestic unit. The widow describes her childhood home, a tiny cottage "[b]y Derwent's side" (226), as scene to the happiest years of her life. In *Romantic Ecology*, Bate maintains that according to Marxist theory, the individual who works for wages is often alienated from his labor and reduced to a foreign object. However, Bate notes that Wordsworth's shepherds work for no one but themselves and therefore symbolize "the spirit of unalienated labour" (122). Likewise, the widow describes her father as one who delighted in landed living without regard for its economic profit: "A little flock and what the finny flood / Supplied to him were more than mines of gold" (228-29).

In distinguishing Wordsworth's pastoral vision from the pastoral tradition of Greece, Bate is careful to mention that Wordsworth's paradise is not a "Prelapsarian Eden" but "a working Paradise" (207). Likewise, the upkeep of the family cottage with its gardens, "stored with peas and mint and thyme," included such arduous chores as digging in the garden and shearing sheep, yet they were met with "merriment and song" (239). Even the chime of the church bells in the middle of the work day lent sanctity to their eager industry (238). The family hearth welcomed visitors with evening dance and games, and, though dark clouds gathered in the surrounding hills, the sturdy cottage withstood the storm (250-53).

Tragically when the woman's childhood home is cut off from water rights by larger landowners, she and her father are turned out of the peaceful dwelling which contains all that is meaningful to them in life. Her father's last glance, accompanied by a tear of sensibility, settles upon the steeple tower of the church where he married his daughter's mother. In this very spot, he laid his wife's remains on the same day she gave birth to his child, and it was there, beside her, that he planned to rest at the end of his earthly labor. The unwavering strength of the aged man's character is demonstrated when, stripped of all his earthly possessions, he bows his head to pray, remaining grateful, even in sorrow, to the sanctuary that brought him so many pleasurable years.

The widow confesses that her own afflicted heart, vexed by the injustice of the situation, rejected her father's plea to place her faith in a higher power: "I could not pray, by human grief oppressed, / Viewing our glimmering cot through tears that never ceased" (269-70). By fortunate fate, the vagrant woman's marriage to a compassionate man,

whose tender voice "charmed the rude winds to sleep by river, field, or grove" (279), revives her spirits and ushers in a few sunny moments in a life bedimmed by misery. Yet, after four short years where "daily bread was blessed, / By constant toil and constant prayer supplied" (289-90), the household is once again uprooted as war disrupts the family economy.

Wordsworth experienced first-hand the strains war imposed upon the familial unit. For years, the Revolution separated him from his French lover Annette and their daughter Caroline, and consequently the poetry of the early 1790s frequently represented the calamities of war in graphic images of broken homesteads and other communal ties in scenes where loss of place is presented as poignantly as loss of love. Only eight days after King Louis XVI was executed in Paris, Wordsworth's walking tour of the English Lake District led to the composition of "An Evening Walk" (1793)—a topo-descriptive and reflective poem whose elongated portrait detailing the beauty of the natural scenery is suddenly interrupted by a bleak image of tyrannical oppression, as far from the public limelight, the poem depicts how women and children endure the internal pangs of war in the private sector. A female beggar single-handedly dragging her babes amidst "feverish groans" and "step[s] of pain" (245; 247) emerges amongst the cruelest examples of subjugation. Like the female vagrant of "Salisbury Plain," she is a neglected outcast, who is refused even a suitable resting place: "I see her now, denyed to lay her head, / On cold blue nights, in hut or straw-built shed" (257-58). In an overly sentimental fashion, which mirrors the emotional excess common to late eighteenth-century domestic fiction, the scene closes with the desperate death wish of the injured lover who points to a distant star

with hopes that in some distant land her soul-mate should fix his eye upon the same target, and two disjointed hearts could be reunited in spirit.

Similar to this quixotic love scene, the union forged between "Salisbury Plain's" traveler and his widow friend is tenderly communicated as a fraternal relationship, cleansed of sexual implications that adheres to the respectable decorum of "courtly romance." Wordsworth reveals in "Nutting" that to experience fully the intimate interchange of feeling with one another and with our environment, we must refrain from aggressive yearnings and surrender ourselves to fraternal affection. In the middle of the widow's tale, he interjects potentially seductive images, such as the bashful blush on the woman's cheek and the upward movement of her "sister breasts of snow" (211). Yet in the subsequent stanza the speaker maintains that the man is "unhappy" who forgoes the delight of daily sprinkling dew upon the fragile flower to possess it wholly with a biting frost.

As the young, reckless destroyer of the hazel grove learns, the temporary surge of pleasure cannot atone for the violation of the flower—a sense of guilt so painful that neither time itself nor any natural process short of death can obliterate it (343-51). Thus, moved as he is by the widow's misfortunes, the traveler patiently attends to every utterance, refraining from disclosing his own tale of sorrow though the single tear that dims his eye, an emotional response easily identifiable in sentimental fiction, such as Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771)—is pinpointed by the narrator as proof that "he, too, had withered young in sorrow's deadly blight" (406). Consequently, nature rewards his controlled affections. As he forgets his own self-pity and focuses his energies

upon soothing the heart of another, his nerves are soothed, his spirits revived, "and in the youthful mourner's doom severe / He half forgot the terrors of the night" (401-02).

Fosso calls attention to the uncanny powers of the Spital in "Salisbury Plain" as a chamber of metamorphosis where dead corpses issue forth to the world of the living through their dreadful moans (76). Still he explains that in contrast to the "sensational frisson" (78) typically associated with gothic dwelling places (the image of the mad woman in the attic in *Jane Eyre* serves as a representative example of how solitary confinement leads to suppression of speech and irrationality), when graced by the listening ear of the traveler, the vagrant woman's lonely shelter is transformed into a hospitable boarding house in which her emotional outpouring leads to social cohesion. Pointing to the "Lazarus-like" manner with which she unwraps her wounds as she opens up her narrative, he surmises,

> She is in her tale-telling a mourner of "never-ceasing tears" (270) owed to a loss that can be signified in words only incompletely, let alone ended, which accounts for much of her . . . peculiar power. It is her unbinding of this past loss that enables her and the traveler to "converse" and it is their conversation that in turn converts them from solitary wanderers to comrades in the morning. (79)

Truly, the homeless poet appears to have discovered through his persona's interaction with a poor, dispossessed subject a renewed conception of home, which does not imply a sense of rootedness to a fixed location, but rather refers to a state of expanded consciousness acquired by formulating fresh attachments to one's environment—a

process that requires learning to view one's suffering as an impetus which positively shapes one's individual connection to the world. Though pain and sorrow constitute the "common calamity" of human experience, the poem demonstrates that the process of openly communicating and sharing our grief with others fosters an altruistic mentality which enables us to function as part of an interdependent system where members derive strength in relationship to one another.

Karl Kroeber describes the Wordsworthian notion of home as "the opposite of the Yeastsian ancestral house," an entitled possession acquired through one's birthright. By contrast, he explains, "The poet and his sister are new to the vale. Grasmere is a place they *choose* to live in and love" (134). Likewise, the decaying infrastructure where the traveler finds the sleeping widow is not her desired place of residence but merely one of many bivouacs she endures through her homeless life after returning from British colonial service as the wife of a soldier. Yet the warm conversation of two gracious hearts transforms the crumbling walls of the deserted "Spital," a symbolic reference to a medieval hospital used to house ostracized lepers and other "untouchables" rejected by human society, into a benevolent community bound together by *Love*– a cohesive power defined by Kroeber as an "emotional commitment to the unified complexity of a particular geographical-ecological entity" (134).

In the wee morning hours, following a night of engagingly honest conversation, the pair is rejuvenated by the rising sun, when the sea lays aside its toilsome labors and resigns itself to peaceful slumber: "By these extended beams of dawn impressed, / In the calm sunshine slept the glittering main / The very ocean has its hour of rest / Ungranted to

the human mourner's breast" (353-56). Here, the abstract notions of grief and terror are harmoniously blended into the natural environment, providing a source of emotional power. While in the early stanzas of the poem Wordsworth depicts a harsh, ambivalent, and threatening climate as a means of provoking heightened emotions for psychological effect, he now departs from the sensational and sublime, displaying instead in softer language a picturesque scene of beauty, order, and regularity.

Truly, Wordsworth was drawn to secluded environments, in part because he recognized their ability to restore strength to fatigued and troubled minds and, thus, naturally to "domesticate" two wild and savage wanderers—a clear break from eighteenth- century conventions, which credited domesticity and its "taming" properties to the traditional home. Yet he was equally fascinated by the prospect of catching a glimpse of Earth's great energizing force in her daily struggle to sustain her own livelihood. Indeed, the most significant lesson instilled the poet by nature was the satisfaction of fusing himself into the cosmic community where he later professed in "Tintern Abbey" that he feels at home amidst "the light of setting suns, / And the round ocean, and the living air, / And the blue sky" (98-100). Even more importantly, a sense of interconnectedness with the larger world assures that a calm and peaceful center is attainable within that magnificent sphere—a microcosm of the universal order which Wordsworth calls "the mind of man" ("Tintern" 100). Accordingly, as Fosso surmises, the open path that stretches out before the couple and leads to a cottage with smoking chimney wedged between the trees, points to a journey "homeward"—not necessarily a physical residence but a mode of being in which the strength derived from their shared

sorrow will henceforth define their goal as a frame of mind and encourage their resolve to establish such a home.

Still, as the admiring yet skeptical voice of the speaker intrudes into the closing stanzas, lightly mocking the false hope of the invigorated couple, we are left to question whether such inner strength is possible for bodies so fragile. Fosso contends that the "symbolic shift from 'ruinous' night to 'fair' morning is itself typical of romance" (168). He points to the "dawn of gladness" (337) in the calm of the storm as a "locodescriptive cue [that] in keeping in touch with romance's traditional structure implies a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* causation" signified in the success of the peasant woman's narrative in "charm[ing] and reviv[ing] the dead world inside and outside the spital,[and thus] instigating the regenerative scene that follows close behind it" (168).

Indeed, it appears that the swift reformation of the couple owes more to animalistic impulse than conscious awareness. Perhaps it constitutes the same instinctual connection with nature that Emerson pinpoints as a lower order function of nature's beauty– its "natural forms of delight," which allow the individual whose body is cramped up inside constricted quarters to return to the openness of the natural environment where, looking up at the sky and sea, he becomes a human being again ("Nature" 27). On the other hand, observing that an aura of jest surrounds the speaker's farewell advice to go back inside this peaceful dwelling and ". . . think that life, is like this desart broad, / Where all the happiest find is but a shed / And a green spot 'mid wastes interminably spread" (420-22), one might just as easily question whether or not an unbelieving heart can fully comprehend the magnitude of nature's healing powers.

Whether one regards the couple's emotional connection to the restful ocean as a mere surface pleasure accomplished through excessive sentimentalism or a deep-penetrating joy, the true beauty of the scene is surmised in the recognition that for two uprooted wanderers, nature's awe-inspiring power can evoke images of permanence and stability, despite the instability forced upon them by social injustices, a possibility that stands in sharp contrast to the fragmented state of human society lying in ruins around them. Most striking is that such an intimate connection could be felt by two complete strangers who occupy the same space for the course of a few hours—a novelty that testifies to the poet's devout faith in the revelatory power of Love.

Though the repressive forces of tyranny appear to control Wordsworth's war-torn society tightly, making "the walk of private life [seem u]nblessed by justice" (442-43) while "Strife / Outrage and deadly Hate" (444-46) rule unabatedly, the poem hints in the final few stanzas that the long, cruel reign of the British monarchy is loosening. Why else should it cringe in terror at the liberating image of "a slave on its naked knees? (460). The poet scorns the cowardice of those power-hungry rulers who feel threatened at the sight of a battered victim groping after even his basic liberties. With his heart given to sympathy for the French cause, he suddenly shifts his gaze from the invigorated couple and concludes with an impassioned order to take down the Crown. Though a deep-seated doubt that physical force can lead to freedom is evident in his prophetic question "Oh what can war but endless war still breed?" (509),[7] Wordsworth overturns his better

[7] A similar expression of the tension between what critic Michael O'Neill identifies as "a poet's libertarian imaginings" (256) and the harsh reality that such a quest will in all likelihood yield destructive repercussions is expressed through the chorus in the closing lines of Shelley's *Hellas*:

judgment in the closing stanzas, not only throwing his support behind the revolutionary effort to destabilize and root out the monarchy (and all class privilege with it) but literally signaling the command to proceed. Perhaps his conflicted mindset is best described in Hartman's assertion that "a visionary or prophetic mind envisions a future so different from the past that the future must involve violence" (50). [8]

O, write no more the tale of Troy,
If earth Death's scroll must be!
Nor mix with Laian rage the joy
Which dawns upon the free;
Although a subtler Sphinx renew
Riddles of death Thebes never knew. (1078-83)

Though painting a beautiful portrait of regeneration in which "Saturn and Love their long repose / Shall burst, more bright and good / Than all who fell, than One who rose" (1090-92), the final instruction given is to "cease" before blood is shed (1096). In the poet's note to the cautionary advice delivered in the poem's conclusion he states that "Prophecies of wars, and rumours of wars &c. may safely be made by poet or prophet of any age, but to anticipate, however darkly, a period of regeneration and happiness is a more hazardous exercise of the faculty which bards possess or feign" (*Shelley's Poetry and Prose* 463). O'Neill quotes Gerald McNiece's assertion in *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea* that the chorus's parting words serve to reinstate the sense of anxiety and dread which permeates the poem by hinting that "with each revolution of Destiny's wheels may come back the hatred and death of every earlier one" (256). See Michael O'Neill, "A More Hazardous Exercise: Shelley's Revolutionary Imaginings," *YES* 19 (1989): 256-64.

[8] Hartman further explains that in Christian theology, the apocalyptic concept of "a new heaven and a new earth" is distanced from our everyday world by the "flood of fire" prophesized in Revelation—a theory which entails a "necessary violation of nature or a previous state of being" and naturally demands a jarring transformation in which nature is restored to its original, undefiled condition (50). Accordingly, in his "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff," Wordsworth defends the execution of the king, asserting that "the obstinancy and perversion of men is such that she [Liberty] is too often obliged to borrow the very aims of despotism to overturn him and in order to reign in peace must establish herself through violence" (33). See *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* , ed. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1974). I: 33.

Even so, Nicholas Roe reminds us that, despite its obvious political sentiments, "Salisbury Plain is poetry not a polemical pamphlet" (127). He contends that the characterization of the Vagrant Woman demonstrates an important digression away from the extreme sensationalism of the impoverished woman in "An Evening Walk" toward a more authentic portrayal of human suffering, which reveals "Wordsworth's new preoccupation with the woman's inner life" (127). Nonetheless, he contends that the poet's "anti-war protest" is "the chief impulse" of the poet's humanitarian aims, explaining "[i]t is in this context that Wordsworth's growing awareness of human feeling becomes more readily explicable"—a shift he further argues corresponds with the changing intellectual climate of the 1790s that "saw an alteration in the structure of feeling for the poor and disenfranchised among articulate liberals, radicals, and dissenters" (129). Roe explains, "It was this change in articulated political and social feeling that led to government reaction, and which also offered an enabling pattern for Wordsworth's poetic development after 1793" (129). See Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1988).

Though Wordsworth subconsciously knew that nature was the true redemptive agent at this early stage of his career, he still rallied behind political and social movements, which he foresaw as the only viable solution to the oppressive state of all of Europe and Britain. Even so, the visionary portrait of the wary travelers sucking energy from the benevolent ocean (much like the infant who sucks milk from its mother's breast as nourishment and pure joy) and returning to the broken world in a revitalized state signifies a sublime encounter between the human mind and nature—a primitive attachment that he advances in scenes such as the midnight ride of "The Idiot Boy" in *Lyrical Ballads* and the frequently cited passages of infant development in Book Two of *The Prelude.*

In between, Wordsworth composed "The Ruined Cottage"—a tale of prolonged suffering composed in a period of his life when hasty decisions gave way to careful reflection, and with it, a bleak realization of the internal pangs of war—an awareness that led him to recast the vagrant woman's story in a new light. The next chapter proposes that the "dark turn" between "Salisbury Plain" and "The Ruined Cottage" is accounted for by the poet's loss of confidence in social, political, and religious institutions as a feasible remedy for England's homeless outcasts. No help comes to Margaret (from around, within, or above), and, thus, the poem relates her slow and agonizing demise. Even so, the souls of two solitary wanderers who take time to relive the "intensity of feeling" her tragic story evokes are uplifted by a shared sentiment of love and connectedness—a sense

of belonging to each other and to the world, though without divine consolation which is the meaning of the Wordsworthian portrait of home most vividly outlined in "Home at Grasmere" and "Tintern Abbey."

CHAPTER IV

LESSONS FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE: GRIEF, CONSOLATION, AND REDEMPTION IN THE PEDLAR'S "RUINED COTTAGE" STORY

In "From Salisbury Plain to the Ruined Cottage," Geoffrey Hartman reads Wordsworth's artistic development over the course of the two poems as a deepening awareness of the mind's gradual detachment from nature—a painful, but necessary stage in the poet's quest for creative autonomy. He perceives that this progression begins in the former poem with the psychological torment of an alienated traveler at odds with his environment and achieves a more mature expression in the expansive wisdom of the Pedlar[1] who is able to place Margaret's suffering in a larger context than the speaker of "Salisbury Plain." He notes that while both narratives evolve out of "a concern with specific and fated place," in the latter poem, Wordsworth places "human filters" in-between the imaginative eye and the suffering object which serve to cleanse the harsher aspects of a disparaging situation (139), enabling us to glean from our prolonged contemplation on misery and injustice the peace of mind and strength of character to live honorably and love deeply. Thus, the true subject of the "The Ruined Cottage" is identified by Hartman as "the perfected mind of man facing a still imperfect world" through the renewed perspective of a "humanized Imagination" (140).

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[1] Isabella Fenwick offers an intriguing discussion of the poet's identification with the character, originally called Armytage in the 1797-98 version of "The Ruined Cottage" and then renamed The Pedlar when Wordsworth uses this poetry as basis for Book One of *The Excursion*. She cites the poet as stating "I can with truth affirm, was mine, but this propensity in me was happily counteracted by inability from want of fortune to fulfill my wishes. But had I been it is unlikely that being strong in body, I should have taken to a way of life such as that in which my Pedlar passed the greater part of his days" (Appendix II). Thus, while acknowledging the original usage of the name Armytage, this chapter retains the conventional title of Pedlar for the natural philosopher that Wordsworth envisioned as a prototype of the wanderer figure he desired to be.

Drawing upon the central premise that "The Ruined Cottage" emerges as the poet's first successful attempt to utilize "nature poetry" as an antidote for human suffering, this chapter highlights four significant revisions in the poet's retelling of the vagrant woman's story, which collectively signify Wordsworth's maturing awareness of the Imagination's restorative power. First, I identify in both the pictorial description of the landscape and the evolving relationships between the characters and their environment a movement from basic allegory to complex organic symbolism, which demonstrates the poet's more sophisticated understanding of the way the mind receives and modifies sensory input both in the tranquility of nature and in the calming experience of reading and engaging with poetry. Second, I illustrate that the poem's slower pace and smaller, enclosed setting allows Wordsworth to convey a more "humanized" portrait of suffering, as he intimately gauges the extent to which we are influenced by the space that is our home.

Third, through a detailed comparison of Margaret's responses to suffering with those of the vagrant woman of "Salisbury Plain," I argue that Margaret's sense of guilt—her extraordinary willingness to accept responsibility for her own personal failures as opposed to blaming her oppressors—signifies a more mature awareness of her relationship to the greater whole. This awareness allows her to transcend victimization and attain a sense of interconnectedness with her natural surroundings. It is a paradoxical victory she paradoxically achieves despite her dark, irreversible destiny, which is revealed to us from the onset of her story. The gruesome image of an abandoned well "[h]alf-choked" (63) in the opening passages of the poem foretells Margaret's tragic demise: slowly and painfully, her strength of spirit gives way to weakness, the cherished

family home falls to ruin, and both she and her children die. Even so, with the seeds of humility and fortitude planted deeply within the walls of her feeble home (a crumbling cottage she faithfully remains rooted to in life and death), the weeds that encroach upon her grave in the closing scene testify to an eternal bond between this compassionate soul and nature, which signifies a spirit that subsists in the landscape from which her story originates.

Finally, building on Hartman's commentary, I emphasize that Wordsworth employs in "The Ruined Cottage" a fourth crucial element that is absent in "Salisbury Plain": the added dimension of an endowed storyteller, the Pedlar, who shares Margaret's story with a responsive listener, the poet-narrator, who in turn, relates the moving tale to the reader. Though the differing responses to grief exhibited by the opposing personalities of the Pedlar and narrator arguably reveal Wordsworth's early personal reservations towards One Life doctrine, particularly the threats it posed to individualism, this more sophisticated rhetorical framework permits the poet to highlight the budding fraternal relationship that is forged between the two male speakers, who in turn pass on to the reader through the shared experience of reliving Margaret's heart-wrenching tale the emotional strength to endure our own sorrow and thus to be with each other and the universal world.

While nature in "Salisbury Plain" could be said to function as a mirror, which sensitively reflects the state of the human condition, in "The Ruined Cottage," nature embodies her own independent truths made available only to the human mind that

conditions itself to her purposes.[2] At the start of the poem, the southern uplands are enveloped in a beautiful steamy mist, while in the northern downs "steady beams / Of clear and pleasant sunshine" find their way through an overcast sky, tossing shadows of the mountains upon the ground (8-9). The narrator imagines that the traveler who should rest with weary limbs "beside the root / Of some huge oak whose branches make / A twilight of their own" (11-12) would be further delighted by the sweet voice of the wren, as in a dreamy state, his restful mind is led to view the scene from the enriched perspective of a "side-long eye" (16).

Through this new lens, he surveys the entire picture once more and witnesses a subtle, though significant inversion of the natural hierarchy, as the large, domineering oak tree with its lanky, outstretched branches, peacefully fades into the background and is "made more soft, / More soft and distant" by the soothing harmony of a tiny bird's song (17-18). It is a scene, the narrator suggests, that would uplift the spirits of a cheerful, reposed observer with a mind "[h]alf-conscious" of its beauty (15). Yet the exhausted narrator, whose thoughts are consumed by his own suffering, confesses to be unmoved by the scene, denying himself even the simplest delight of a few moments pleasure. Later, the Pedlar, too, admits that dismal feelings cloud his mind, causing him to be a morose spectator of nature's beauty. Pausing from his sorrowful tale of Margaret's prolonged suffering, he chastises himself for being unable to appreciate the serene portrait of a

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[2] Like "Salisbury Plain," the complicated editorial history of the poem makes it difficult to choose the most appropriate version. Since my aim is to accurately reflect Wordsworth's internal development during the period of the poem's original composition, the Cornell Edition (edited by James Butler) has been selected, using the ms.D version, which presents the earliest (most complete) version of the poem available (as Dorothy's ms.B leaves several gaps in the text).

summer afternoon and then further inquires about what is so inherently callous in human nature that causes it to turn away so unmoved by nature's gifts:

> Why should a tear be in an old man's eye?
> And why should we thus with an untoward mind
> And in the weakness of humanity
> From natural wisdom turn our hearts away,
> To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears,
> And feeding on disquiet thus disturb
> The calm of nature with our restless thoughts? (192-98).

It is not surprising that the process of perception should play such an integral role in the psychological underpinning of the poem. Emerson, too, proposed in "Nature" that the redemption of modern society is dependent upon its ability to entertain new ways of seeing. He explains,

> The ruin or bland that we see when we look in nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque. The reason the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is disunited with himself. He cannot be a naturalist until he satisfies all the demands of the spirit. (54)

Wordsworth's emphasis in "The Ruined Cottage" upon capturing the human mind as it is engaged in the act of perception foreshadows an artistic vantage point he would sharpen in more mature works, such as "Tintern Abbey," where we find that an entirely new face of nature is revealed every single time "the picture in [his] mind revives again" (62). Furthermore, in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Abrams praises the publication of

Wordsworth's 1805 *Prelude* for rendering the harshest blow to accepted conventions of eighteenth-century thought, which envisioned the mind as a mere "reflector of the external world" whose purpose was to copy and throw back (as though an image on a projection screen) "a selected and ordered image of life" (58). He quotes Coleridge's explanation of the principal achievement of Wordsworth's project as its ability "to treat man as man—a subject of eye, ear, touch, and taste, in contact with external nature, and informing the senses from the mind, and not compounding the mind out of the senses" (58). In this statement, Coleridge addresses Wordsworth's belief that the human mind was much more than a mechanical reservoir of sensory impressions (a direct rebuttal of the Enlightenment psychology advocated by David Hartley's theory of "associationism").[3] Aided by the synthesizing, coalescing power of Imagination, it possesses through its interaction with nature the ability to contribute something new and

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[3] Hartley's *Observations on Man (1749)* conjectured that tiny particles attached to the nerve endings of the brain vibrate when excited by external stimuli—a mere physiological reflex as opposed to a conscious act of perception. Though Coleridge eventually rejected Hartley's mechanistic view of the human mind, he was greatly influenced by Hartley's theory that "all phenomena, including mental ones, were manifestations of energy" (Piper 31). Piper notes that, while Hartley continued to distinguish between mind and matter as separate entities, Priestley's introduction to *Observations on Man* maintained that "the mind, as an immaterial principle, could be eliminated [because] thought is simply a form of vibratory movement" (31). Piper points to Coleridge's statement in a letter composed in Dec. of 1794 in which the poet announces, "I am a complete Necessitarian and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself, but I go further than Hartley and believe the corporeality of thought, namely, that it is motion" (*Collected Letters*, I, 98).

James Engell provides a compelling discussion of Coleridge's indebtedness to Bishop Berkeley (another eighteenth-century philosopher who promoted associationism). Berkeley maintained that the bodily organs of "eye and ear" provided a means of achieving "harmony and proportion" since "every minutest glance at and notice of the living world" is guided by feeling, which "quickens the heart" (Engell 115). Thus, Engell explains that in those exalted moods "when the senses are rapt in ecstasy—out of the senses—when sight suspends itself in gazing; or, when all was still, a deeper interpretation of sense flashes out" (115). It is precisely this transformative process that enables the injured poet, whose scorched foot prevents him from walking with his friends, to describe in such vivid detail the topography of a landscape which lies outside the reach of his physical sight. See "Imagining into Nature: 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,'" *Critical Essays on Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Leonard Orr (New York: G. K. Hull 1994) 108-23.

vital to the responsive observer's everyday existence and thus to transform reality radically for better (or worse).

Hugh Witemeyer explains that in his progression from youth to maturity, Wordsworth shifted from a "picturesque apprehension" of nature as an exterior force aesthetically distanced from the observer to a more subdued portrait in which the observer blends into the natural landscape ("Landscape").[4] Accordingly, in *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering*, James Averill reaches back to the progression between "The Vale of Esthwaite" and Wordsworth's final version of "An Evening Walk" as an even earlier example of the poet's gradual abandonment of pictorial description. In the former poem, a solitary figure wanders across a vacant landscape, searching desperately for an object to which its affections might attach themselves. In the absence of a human receiver, "Pity" has no choice but to wander aimlessly or surrender itself to self-meditation (146). By projecting Pity and the Pathetic[5] as separate allegorical entities, Wordsworth's early poem reveals the general path of sentimentalism when taken to a literal extreme; the suffering object is wholly overshadowed by the emotions of the observer (146-47).

In "An Evening Walk," the abstract "Pity" vanishes, as feelings of gloom dissolve into the natural surroundings. The metaphysical twilight of Esthwaite transforms into the "feelings of the accordant heart" that beats in agreement with nature as Wordsworth now endows inanimate objects and settings with emotional power (148). In transferring

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[4] See Hugh Witemeyer, *Landscape and the Beholder in George Eliot's Works* (Yale UP, 1979) Victorian Web online book <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/eliot/hw/abbrev.html>.

[5] It is significant to note that the term "pathetic" in Wordsworth's day meant "deep emotion" derived from the Greek *pathos* and did not carry the connotation of "pitiable."

emotions from man to nature, the poet makes himself the pathetic object, evaporating the barrier between the perceiver and the suffering object (151). Witemeyer maintains that the effect of this revamped vantage point is that it enables the poet to move beyond individual surface features of the physical world to emphasize the totality of the natural landscape as a pervasive universal presence ("Landscape"). He cites Christopher Salvesen's assessment that Wordsworth was more than compensated for his "pictorial blindness" by his ability to render, instead, a crystal clear portrait illustrated through the perspective of his mind's eye. In *The Landscape of Memory: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry* (1965), Salvesen explains, "the fundamental landscape of his best poetry is not at all detailed; the unifying force of nature is what creates and holds it together, and this force is conveyed by Wordsworth's emotion rather than his observation. . . . He feels it, almost, rather than sees it" (69).

In "The Ruined Cottage," Wordsworth further extends the "emotionalization" of his landscapes to peculiar portraits of characters that he later created, including the leech gatherer, the discharged soldier, the old Cumberland beggar (and as I will discuss at length in this chapter), Margaret and The Pedlar, who hardly appear as humans, but rather as extensions of the natural environment, whose only link to the human world is the sanctity achieved in their suffering. In response to this aesthetic technique, Jonathan Wordsworth argues in *The Music of Humanity* that the poet's meticulous description of natural landscapes was not projected onto his human characters. He cites David Perkins's assertion in *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity* that

> Throughout Wordsworth's poetry, there is a striking difference between the presentation of natural objects, so vivid, so concrete, and detailed, and

> the presentation of human beings, so often mere, stark abstractions. Nature was loved as a reality, Man as an idea. As an inevitable by-product, love of man was a highly volatile emotion, likely to evaporate in a nearer view of man. (116)

Jonathan Wordsworth further highlights Margaret as prefiguring a host of other ghostly apparitions such as the discharged soldier, "Crazy Kate," and ultimately Michael—"heroes and heroines" whom he describes as emotionalized from an aesthetic distance and who "exist solely in the response they make to their particular situations" (84). Though he is careful to acknowledge the complexity of their individual natures, collectively he points to such characters as evidence of a controversial proposition concerning the poet's affections and intentions, asserting that "though passionately involved, Wordsworth is concerned for humanity, not people" (56).

Without wholly disqualifying Jonathan Wordsworth's argument, I would suggest that the poet's attempts to "naturalize" his characters so that their nonhuman attributes dominate (at times to the point of obliterating their human features) is suggestive of an advanced literary and theoretical experiment in which he sought to fashion a poetry that seamlessly evolves out of the natural world. Indeed, a much neglected aspect of "The Ruined Cottage" is the manner in which Margaret's "tale of silent suffering" (233) organically springs out of the landscape itself. As the poet-narrator first encounters the Pedlar, whom he recognizes as a fellow traveler whom he had walked part way with and then separated from on a previous journey. He finds him stretched out beneath a shade tree with "[t]he shadows of the breezy elms above / Dappl[ing] his face" (47-48).

Upon closer inspection, the parched narrator is relieved to find "his hat / Bedewed with water-drops, as if the brim / Had newly scoop'd a running stream" (49-51). The Pedlar congenially greets his friend (not with words initially but) with a welcoming hand motion that beckons him to cast his glance in the direction of a "sun-flower" (52) and then physically climb over a partition and gain access to the location where "that same gaudy flower / Looked out upon the road" (53-54). Likewise, the narrator's first description of the cottage grounds is shrouded in "green":

> It was a plot
> Of garden-ground, now wild, its matted weeds
> Marked with the steps of those whom as they pass'd,
> The goose-berry trees that shot in long lank slips,
> Or currants hanging from their leafless stems
> In scanty strings, had tempted to o'erleap
> The broken wall. (54-60)

Though it is easy to lose sight of the characters as they wade through the overgrowth, the Pedlar's first words—a universal statement concerning the grim fate of the human condition, personally addressed to a listener he addresses as "my friend"(326) —supports Angus Fletcher's assertion that, though the development of individual characters is of secondary importance in an environmental text, the strength of the relationship between character and audience is crucial given that the extent to which we believe in the validity of an environment is dependent upon our ability to develop human attachments (127). Accordingly, the strongest evidence that Margaret's spirit still survives in and around the

cottage is demonstrated in the lasting imprint of her "human touch," which readily comes to mind as the Pedlar, in her absence, must now draw his own water from the well:

> . . . Beside yon spring I stood
> And eyed its waters till we seemed to feel
> One sadness, they and I. For them a bond
> Of brotherhood is broken: time has been
> When every day the touch of human hand
> Disturbed their stillness, and they ministered
> To human comfort. (82-88)

On one memorable occasion, the Pedlar recalls returning to the well, which once marked a favorite conversation spot where he and other fatigued travelers would stop along their journey for companionship and refreshment. Disappointedly, he finds it corroded by years of neglect—(a spider's web now overhung a "wet and slimy foot-stone") (90). Stooping down to draw water from the abandoned spring he further discovers a broken piece of a wooden bowl, presumably the one Margaret used to draw fresh water for her thirsty friend, and is deeply moved by a dual sense of connection and loss, as he solemnly confesses, "It moved my very heart" (92). Symbolically placing the bowl back into Margaret's hands to begin his narrative, the Pedlar "resuscitates" the broken vessel, restoring its wholeness as he resituates it back into the world of the living.

Clearly, Margaret's tender presence—her every loving movement—remains actively alive for the Pedlar, in every word she speaks and every object she touches. Much like the dreadful eye-witness accounts related by the ancient mariner to the Wedding Guest, his appointed audience, the agony the Pedlar perceives in the grieving

woman's countenance and in her voice continues to exercise a commanding hold over him so that he has no choice but to tell her story and to be continuously heartbroken by the necessity of experiencing it all anew. Unfortunately, the ancient mariner's salvation experience is overshadowed by madness and doom so that each retelling of the bizarre events surrounding his senseless crime fails to lead him toward a clearer understanding of his distinct purpose and place in the universal drama. By contrast, the Pedlar intimately embraces Margaret's "silent suffering" (233) with such tender affection that he feels this virtuous woman to be an inseparable part of his own nature, even imagining her as a Christ-like martyr who suffered for his sake:

> Sir, I feel
> The story linger in my heart. I fear
> 'Tis long and tedious, but my spirit clings
> To that poor woman: so familiarly
> Do I perceive her manner, and her look
> And presence, and so deeply do I feel
> Her goodness, that not seldom in my walks
> A momentary trance comes over me;
> And to myself I seem to muse on one
> By sorrow laid asleep. or borne away,
> A human being destined to awake
> To human life, or something very near
> To human life, when he shall come again
> For whom she suffered. (362-75)

It could be said that the most readily identifiable human attribute in "The Ruined Cottage" is an awareness of maternal presence inherent in both internal and external nature that is best identified as *Love*. This mysterious power, which is physically invisible and yet pervasively active throughout the Pedlar's tragic tale, suggests that the poet found the purest expression for nature's healing capacity within the sacred contours of the feminine spirit. It is worth noting that one useful way to gauge Wordsworth's growing intimacy with the natural world is to compare the distinct relationships between his women characters and the institutions and environments which shape them—a theoretical approach adopted from recent "eco-feminist" theories.

In *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (1992), Carolyn Merchant loosely defines "radical ecology," the larger umbrella beneath which eco-feminism rests under, as a movement focused on two overarching objectives, both grounded in the crucial mental process of perception: to expose the abuse (from an eco-feminist standpoint specifically afflicted upon women and children) by capitalistic dominance and, in turn, to point to a means of transcending this victimization, while resisting the urge to point fingers (7-8). [6] Though not directly referencing eco-criticism in its ideological discussion, Kenneth R. Johnston's "The Romantic Idea-elegy: The Nature of

[6] Merchant further maintains that "[radical ecology] emerges from a sense of crisis in the industrialized world. It acts on a new perception that the domination of nature entails the domination of human beings along the lines of race, class, and gender. Radical Ecology confronts the illusion that people are free to exploit nature and to move in society at the expense of others, with a new consciousness of our responsibility to the rest of nature and to other humans. It seeks a new ethic of the nurture of nature and the nurture of people. It empowers people to make changes in the world consistent with a new social vision and a new ethic" (7-8). *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Politics and the Politics of Nature" supports the radical implications suggested by Merchant's apolitical mission. He explains,

> English Romanticism is born in these moments, when culture recoils from politics, and small groups of like-minded people think about gathering together in isolated places (like Wales or Pennsylvania or the Lake District) to form temporary experimental communities—pantisocracies—as substitutes for public political acts that have been polarized beyond effectiveness, or beyond safety. (31)

Johnston cites New Historicst critics Jerome McGann, James Chandler, Marjorie Levinson and Alan Liu as all expressing dissatisfaction with the poet's handling of the ending of "The Ruined Cottage." He summarizes their collective argument in Chandler's statement that by inspiring "an overflow of sympathy and love for the sufferer" as opposed to what he deems a justifiable "sense of outrage and an overflow of angry judgment upon those . . . accountable for helping to maintain social conditions which generated a surplus of social evil," the poem dodges the heated political debate necessary for initiating social reform (32). Yet turning his attention to the contemporary scene, Johnston contends that the remediation of "real human issues," such as poverty and oppression, cannot wholly be accomplished through governmental policies but rather demands a certain degree of soul-searching (32). He confesses that while he holds "Reaganomics" largely at fault for the surge of homeless people who occupied the American streets in the early 1990s, and thus, casts his vote and voices his opinion in an effort to initiate change, he cannot ignore the harsh reality that "in the meantime, the suffering goes on, and I give, or I don't give the 'spare change' that these people ask for,

and I listen or I don't listen to 'the tales [they] have to tell'" (32). He follows by asserting that "this is not radical action, but it is not mindless quietism, either" (32).

In this same spirit, Merchant's study aims to solve a seemingly irreconcilable contradiction: "Is there a way to move forward both in thought and action that diminishes feelings of helplessness as well as tendencies to 'blame the system?'' (8). For Merchant, the answer involves placing one's hope in two interconnected sources: 1) education, which provides us with both the critical knowledge to identify the root of our problems and to work toward a feasible solution, and 2) social movements, which allow us to connect with people who share our belief in the necessity of change (7). Still, she stresses that where "radical ecology" and its ecofeminist counterpart differ from other politically motivated ideologies is that it views these agencies not as expedient solutions in and of themselves, but merely as the psychological backing that enables individuals to contemplate new ways of attaining a deeper attachment with the environment—a triumph that is gauged not in the acquisition of power but merely in the furtherance of an enriched life on earth (183).

The swift, forward movement of "Salisbury Plain" is not conducive to the mission of forging solid, unbreakable connections to one's environment. Though the poem hints that a faint hope does exist for a happier future, the young Wordsworth in 1793-94 believed that human liberation was attainable only through armed rebellion. Thus, in the closing lines, the poet calls for a startling overthrow of the English monarchy in which the emotional impact of the gruesome "uptear" (541) is lessened because no time is allotted for rational contemplation. Accordingly, one of the most blatant differences between the portrayal of Margaret's suffering and that of the vagrant woman in

"Salisbury Plain" is that in the earlier poem the exact details of her misfortune are hurriedly passed over, for they comprise a tale the widow remarks "would thy brain unsettle even to hear" (319). Truly, it is the sudden speed of her affliction that strikes us as most chilling: "All perished, all in one remorseless year, / Husband and children one by one, by sword /And scourge of fiery fever" (320-22).

Even so, the adversity faced by "Salisbury Plain"'s victim stretches across continents and encompasses numerous phases of her life in which even the darkest, rainiest season leaves room for growth and renewal. When she and her husband can no longer sustain themselves in the family cottage, they vacate it for America. Her "prayers and tears" (304) suggest reluctance, but it is only in retrospect that the widow pauses to reflect at length upon the perils of relinquishing one's home. The move itself is sudden—an instinctual act of desperation: "To join these miserable men he flew. / We reached the western world a poor devoted crew" (305-06). Similarly, having lost her husband and children to war and the uneasy economic conditions surrounding it, she flees back to England to begin anew. Though describing herself as "dried up, despairing, and desolate" (323), she does not remain obsessively rooted like Margaret. Her forward movement ensures that grass will not grow around her feet: "[aboard a] British ship I woke as from a trance restored" (323). Moreover, while she laments the absence of a permanent dwelling place, questioning whether she "has no house in prospect but the tomb?" (393), her three-year trek around her native plains offers a unique vantage point from which to gauge the tribulations of her life. She is the sole survivor of an extinguished family unit and an eye-witness to the moral decline of a nation blinded by hatred. As a forgotten patriot and a grieving wife and mother, she understands the downward spiraling direction in which

England was headed, as did Wordsworth—as a dual betrayal that pained her at the very heart of her being: "My eyes have watched yon sun declining tend / Down to the land where hope to me was lost" (389-90).

By contrast, "The Ruined Cottage" depicts a gradual but steady decline within a tightly constricted space—a vantage point that allows the poet to communicate how traumatic emotional loss gradually degrades the body and mind in subtle gradations of severity. Moreover, the cottage itself diminishes along with Margaret, signifying advanced degrees of her physical and psychological impoverishment. Each subsequent visit yields a different portrait of a declining homestead: a garden left unattended, a cold, untidy floor and hearth, and walls with gaping holes that permit the entry of the winter frost. Still, the most prophetic evidence of the home's impending collapse is the exposure of its cornerstone—the foundation on whose strength the entire structure stands. In his depiction of the crumbling stones, the Pedlar creates a tragic image of how tyranny silently and deceivingly pecks away at the heart's interior:

> The spot though fair seemed very desolate,
> The longer I remained more desolate.
> And, looking round, I saw the corner-stones,
> Till then unmarked, on either side of the door
> With dull red stains discoloured and stuck o'er
> With tufts and hairs of wool, as if the sheep
> That feed upon the commons thither came
> Familiarly and found a couching-place
> Even at her threshold. (328-36)

In spite of the horror this picture evokes, the inclusion of the cornerstone signifies a notable achievement in Wordsworth's depiction of nature. By ascribing to Margaret's residence an identifying marker, he endows it with a rich, personal history unbeknownst to the vagrant woman of Salisbury Plain. Jonathan Wordsworth addresses the poem's careful reliance on "vestiges of human hands," a term coined by Thomas Hardy in his notebooks to describe "an object or mark raised or made by man on a scene" which is "worth ten times any such formed by unconscious nature" (qtd. in Wordsworth 88). Wordsworth contends that it is for this reason that "clouds mists and mountains are unimportant beside the wear on a threshold, or the print of a hand" (88).

Accordingly, he pinpoints the Pedlar's specific reference to exact objects, specific locations, and points of time ("*This* wretched spot," "Have parted *hence*," "*this* rude bench,""And *here* she died," "*these* ruined walls"), which function not merely as props but as active participants in the human drama (89). He surmises that their contribution is vitally important in bridging the past and present into a single, inseparable force, thereby allowing poetry to function in new, innovative ways, namely as a means of bestowing "permanence to what otherwise might be transient" and thus to express "the timelessness of natural forms" (89).

Jonathan Wordsworth's commentary provides a powerful counter-response to James Chandler's accusation that the Pedlar's private musings on Margaret's misery constitute "a region where natural and human history are alike debarred from entry"—a reclusive sphere where the joyfulness one man derives from another's sorrow is conveyed as a "a feeling happier far than what might result from the effort to discover and eliminate

the cause of grief," which persists amongst the greater portion of humanity (138).[7] Though Margaret's attachment to a single, narrow circle prevents her from achieving the same prophetic vision as the Vagrant Woman, the human imprints she leaves upon the cottage grounds as a token of her faithful devotion to home enable the Pedlar to relate the tale with fresh intensity. Wordsworth appears to have discovered in "The Ruined Cottage" that a rude and humble history, explored through encounters with the "lived environment," constitutes an original, groundbreaking theme for poetry.

History does play a central role in the former character's experiences, but the history of the nameless woman of "Salisbury Plain" is presented as a series of distant recollections. Her nostalgic memories of the pastoral paradise she enjoyed both as a child and in the early stages of her marriage are states of mind that time and circumstance have eroded—a dream vanished long ago that she cannot return to nor derive strength from. Moreover, the Spital where she temporarily seeks shelter possesses a fascinating history of its own, but it is not *her* history. Instead, it is a public legend passed down by a hungry old peasant with a rusty gun. Conversely, Margaret's history (related from the lips of a narrator who is not only engrossed but admittedly changed by her story) bespeaks a history that is immediate and enduring.

Hartman identifies Margaret's fatal flaw as rootedness in an unhealthy primitive attachment to home, an attachment which prevents her from reaching outside a narrow social sphere. He maintains that "Older feelings keep her archaically tied to specific place, and make her cottage the fatal center of a circle she cannot expand" (139). Indeed,

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[7] See James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984).

it is easy to speculate that had she ventured beyond the tiny cottage plot—the "blessed home" (494) that becomes her prison—she might have at least enjoyed a few moments of peace, such as the Pedlar experiences in the quietude of nature where his "best companions" are "the driving winds . . . and 'trotting brooks' and whispering trees . . . [or] the music of [his] own sad steps" (294-96). Still, whatever her faults, we must credit Margaret for remaining loyal to her roots. Even at the peak of its destruction when its crumbling walls fail to warm and protect its inhabitants, the crumbling walls of the cottage still house what is most purposeful to her in life. We might easily assume that poor and powerless people embrace their circumstances for lack of choice, but surely we can admire the unswerving devotion of a woman who never entertained the possibility of escape. In essence, it matters little whether she had the capacity to envision consciously a brighter future. There is still power in the one observation that we can surmise with certainty; namely, that for Margaret, there was no choice:

> . . . ["]Yet still
> She loved this wretched spot, nor would for worlds
> Have parted hence; and still that length of road,
> And this rude bench one torturing hope endeared,
> Fast rooted at her heart; and here, my friend,
> In sickness she remained, and here she died,
> Last human tenant of these ruined walls." (486-92)

Perhaps the greatest testament to Margaret's character is that her kindred spirit prevails long after her physical strength falters. Having endured the absence of her husband, not knowing for years whether he lived or died, she now mourns alone the loss of her elder

son who was taken from her by the parish to be apprenticed out as a servant to a local wealthy family (presumably because, by Margaret's own admission, she had neglected him in her search for Robert). The screams of the starving infant on her lap compound the poor woman's horror—a constant reminder of the utter helplessness of her situation. That shrieks of terror should emerge from the mouth of an innocent babe further signifies that madness consumes the domestic sphere—the place Wordsworth's generation revered as the locus of stability and order (not only for the immediate family unit but for the public passerby who seeks a hospitable resting place). The Pedlar attests to how faithfully Margaret exercised her maternal duty, treating every stranger who passed her way with the kindness and compassion of a daughter:

> . . . Many a passenger
> Has blessed poor Margaret for her gentle looks
> When she upheld the cool refreshment drawn
> From that forsaken well, and no one came
> But he was welcome—no one went away
> But that it seemed she loved him. (98-103)

Yet, left to endure the loss of her loved ones within the lonely walls of the cottage, her gentle, welcoming spirit dries up like a wilted flower. The Pedlar describes with vivid detail her shocking physical and emotional transformation over the short span of a few months:

> Her eye-lids droop'd, her eyes were downward cast,
> And when she at her table gave me food
> She did not look at me. Her voice was low,

> Her body was subdued. In every act
> Pertaining to the house-affairs appeared
> The careless stillness which a thinking mind
> Gives to an idle matter—still she sighed,
> But yet no motion of the breast was seen,
> No heaving of the heart. (377-85)

Despite the neglect of her household duties, which Hartman identifies as a gross "betrayal" of nature (138), we can expand upon Merchant's theoretical framework by noting how Margaret exemplifies the perfect embodiment of a character who rises above her helplessness and refuses to become a "victim" by suppressing the desire to accuse her oppressors. Even in the midst of adversity, Margaret makes no excuses for her failures. The first words from her lips are not a condemnation of the oppressive cords that bind her but a humble confession that "'I am changed, / And to myself'. . . 'have done much wrong / And to this helpless infant[']" (352-54). She names one private sin as the selfish tendency to wallow in grief, seeking nothing in life but the pleasurable escape that is denied her. Yet the admission that "my tears / Have flow'd as if my body were not such / As others are, and I could never die" (355-57) suggests an *extra-human* aspect of Margaret's character, a perceptive feminine consciousness unbeknownst to most comprised of flesh and blood. When she prayerfully asks that heaven grant her "the patience to endure the things / Which I behold at home" (359-61), she refers not only to the home that is her physical residence but to her own tormented mind, which to her credit, withstands so much more than any single person could be expected to bear.

Even so, Margaret acknowledges the extent to which harboring negative emotions has sucked up her energy, tainted her thoughts, and thwarted her ability to exercise her full potential for the greater good of others. Wordsworth was particularly sensitive to the tragic reality of how fear, anger, sorrow contaminate the sacred contours of the feminine spirit. In *The Prelude,* he recalls the specific experience in which he first heard a woman utter a blasphemous remark as an incident that "chilled him to the core" (VII. 421-22). Though Margaret's dark thoughts are never exposed, the disturbing way she sits in a fixed location and stares off into the distance, "shaping things / Which made her heart beat quick" (456-57), reflects the adverse effects of allowing the imaginative eye to roam beyond its proper limits.

Like the ancient mariner, Margaret's forbidden knowledge and corresponding guilt widens her imaginative sphere to a greater vision of her unique position within the larger order. Her ability to discern the distinct role she plays in shaping the atmosphere of her surroundings provides compelling evidence that the guilt, which Hartman sees as evidence of the mind's remorse for severing ties to its Universal Parent is, in truth, the result of a maturing awareness that one's attitudes toward a situation (and even the very emotional force one contributes to an environment, particularly in response to suffering) significantly affect both the quality of a person's life and the individual's capacity to influence positively the larger community of which he or she is a part. In this respect, Wordsworth's poetic development between "Salisbury Plain" and "The Ruined Cottage" is illustrated in a more effective depiction of human pathos as he focuses more intently upon how suffering tears away at the soul and yet positively positions one within the

natural world, thereby strengthening the potentiality for relationship between the human heart and nature.

Though the weeds, which shroud Margaret's grave in the closing stanzas of the poem, provide a seemingly unfit memorial for a spirit so genuine, they serve both as a symbol of deep-rooted suffering and (despite our strongest human efforts to impede the process) of the necessary forward movement of life after death. Perhaps most significantly, the poet utilizes the weeds as an emblem for survivors of the healthiest emotional response to the physical decay of individuals and places that are dear to us. Thus, Jonathan Bate concludes his "green" interpretation of "The Ruined Cottage" by attempting to explain what "in the spirit of John Stuart Mill's way of reading . . . Wordsworth's pastoral may do for us" (33). He acknowledges that the poet's politics of love does not exhibit that revolutionary fervor that spreads throughout the masses. However, he echoes Mill's assessment that "beauty, stability, and endurance of nature" are essential to one's social and psychological health (33), indicating that the mature Wordsworth is eager to explore *all* the ways our subjective selves can establish relationships with everything that we perceive through the senses.

Bate concurs with McGann that, to a modern, progressive society accustomed to political unrest, nature has traditionally served as the center of permanence and order. Nonetheless, he is quick to point out that recent decades have born witness to nature's deterioration as well. He reminds us that Wordsworth wholeheartedly accepted the inevitability of change even as he recoiled at the gross abuses of "social progress" (34). He emphasizes the cutting realism of the poet who recognizes that in the garden of life, the weeds will always overcome the flowers. Yet he also maintains, in reference to the

narrator's intuitive belief that as he stood in close proximity to Margaret's deathbed "bless[ing] her in the impotence of grief" (500), that, "'mid the calm oblivious tendencies / Of nature, 'mid her plants, her weeds, and flowers, / And silent overgrowings," a secret spirit still survived (504-06), the weeds, which sprout over Margaret's grave in the final scene, affirming that "wherever wilderness reasserts itself there the spirit of humanity survives" (Bate 34).

In asserting the significance of what the narrator terms the "secret spirit of humanity" (503), Bate is careful to point out that the poem never suggests that Margaret's soul will live on in Heaven, since only much later did Wordsworth rewrite the final scene in language borrowed from orthodox Christianity (32). Bate concludes with the ambiguous statement that we are left to feel that "since the vegetation lives beyond—lives on— her spirit somehow survives, too" (32). The nature of that spirit, which the narrator begins to trace with reverent devotion, is never wholly described because the Pedlar interrupts with what he perceives to be the clearest lesson taught by nature—and the best way of honoring Margaret's spirit—to"[b]e wise and chearful" and go on his way, not allowing his pleasant thoughts to be overtaken by sorrow (510).

In "Wordsworth, the One Life, and the 'Ruined Cottage,'" William Ulmer calls particular attention to the narrator's uncontrollable urge to remain fixated upon Margaret's individual loss, and so disrupt the wholesomeness of the natural community, asserting that the scene shows him "turning as a brother to mourn for Margaret, his 'nearer interest' transformed into a 'grief' he cannot disclaim despite knowing its impotence" (323). Kurt Fosso further attributes these fundamental "shades of difference" between the narrator's and Pedlar's responses to grief as evidence of Wordsworth's initial

reservations toward adopting the One Life philosophy as a remedy for England's social ailments. He explains that Coleridge more enthusiastically embraced "the confidence and equipoise proffered by a . . . pantheist view of nature and death," believing as he did in what Ulmer describes as "the gradual approximation of all things to ultimate goodness" (112). By contrast, in *The Active Universe*, H.W. Piper surmises that what distinguished Wordsworth from other pantheistic writers and thinkers of his time is that he sought in nature more than temporary "moments of ecstasy," which though exciting the passions "had not been tested by any attempt to explain the miseries of the world, and to those that mourn they had nothing to say" (75). Therefore, it was he who most earnestly sought to uncover in the One Life not only a philosophical perspective but a Miltonic antidote for human suffering.

Fosso explains that the Pedlar, through his carefully rehearsed tale, delivered with "such a tender countenance, an eye / So busy, that the things of which he spake" appeared an immediate reality, serves as a representative spokesperson (of the sort Coleridge describes in *Table Talk)*—"a man in mental repose, whose principles were made up, and so prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy" (14: 1. 307). Such a man, who makes his home "in contact with external nature," is specially commissioned to model to "the present state of degeneration and vice . . . a redemptive process in operation, showing how this idea reconcile[s] all the anomalies and promise[s] future glory and restoration" (I. 308).

Hartman emphasizes the manner in which even in climactic moments of his tale, the Pedlar directs the narrator's gaze away from Margaret to himself—a shift he distinguishes not as an egotistical desire on the part of the storyteller to exaggerate his

own importance, but rather as a conciliatory attempt to instruct the troubled mind about the healthiest way to approach suffering. He points to the first break in the Pedlar's narrative in which his composed demeanor of "easy chearfulness" (201) overtakes the narrator's attention so that "for a little time it stole away / All recollection, and that simple tale / Passed from my mind like a forgotten sound" (202-04). Then he explains that, while the controlling influence the Pedlar exercises over the listener is too potent to be ignored, "the story the pedlar tells is never a rape of truth, a ransacking of the past, or a horror of revelation" (139).

Instead, his emotional tale is fueled by sympathy: "It would have grieved / Your very soul to see her" (375-76). The Pedlar's tale is purified through his humanizing filter of the Pedlar's imaginative consciousness: "He had rehearsed / Her homely tale with such familiar power, / . . . that the things of which he spake / Seemed present" (208-09; 211-12). This tale performs a cathartic service for the despondent heart, the poem's immediate listener and the reader alike, for "it allows us to think about the way in which passion—or vision—is to be faced" (Hartman 139). Like "Salisbury Plain," the poem forces us to stare directly at the hideous maladies of a divisive, war-torn society just as the four barefaced walls of the decayed cottage are left to look upon each other (31-32), the interjection of human agents (the Pedlar, narrator, and Margaret) as channels that flow between the imagination and a seemingly alien nature (the ruin), Wordsworth illustrates the capacity of the "mind's eye," in collaboration with nature, to transform the ugliest, most deplorable aspects of our existence into imaginatively fertile fields from which we can extract power to nurture and sustain our private lives.

We see this transformation process in action when, despite the gut-wrenching pity evoked in Margaret's obsessive attachment to the only "home" she possesses in the world, the Pedlar finds a way to derive sustenance from her sorrow, a stance that many critics attack as positing a smug, self-congratulatory attitude. When strolling through the plot of ground near Margaret's gravesite, he feels completely at peace with all the burdens and evils of human experience. Upon viewing the "mist and silent rain-drops" that sprinkle upon "the high spear-grass" (514-15), he marvels that nature can turn the most unsightly image of waste into a scene so composedly beautiful. Though earlier in the poem the Pedlar maintains that death is the only aspect of life of which we can be completely certain, he now speaks of all life's necessary evils, including all "we feel of sorrow and despair / From ruin and from change" (520-21) as vaporous forces that cannot disrupt the solidity of a life in harmony with itself and its environment. Such painful recollections strike him in that moment as "an idle dream that could not live / Where meditation was" (523-24).

In his article "In Dreams Begins Responsibility: Wordsworth's Ruined Cottage Story" (1984), Evan Radcliffe encourages us not to underestimate the life-altering power the Pedlar ascribes to the "idle dream," suggesting that it offers substantial evidence of the poet's inner growth at this important stage of his career. Radcliffe credits himself as the first to investigate the internal conflicts that surface in the poem from the Pedlar and the narrator's approaches to mourning, as rooted in Wordsworth's self-conscious attempt to defend his recent move from the city to the country. In his biography *William Wordsworth: A Life* (1989), Stephen Gill describes the Wordsworths' move with Coleridge from Racedown to Alfoxden in the summer of 1797—a period in which the

poet worked on "The Ruined Cottage"—as providing a welcoming aura of serenity, which stimulated his creative productivity. He depicts the Alfoxden mansion as "set amidst the kind of natural beauty that [Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy] always responded to—woods, streams, hills, and hidden dells, all raised to the sublime by open prospects to the sea" (124). Even so, Radcliffe points to Coleridge's "Reflections Upon Having Left a Place of Retirement" (1796) as representative of the typical Romantic fear that to indulge in the pleasures of a secluded landscape in the midst of social and political turmoil would appear to the outside world as a gross evasion of duty. In embracing his "duty," Coleridge grieves his own inactive role in the revolution and questions,

> Was it right
> While my unnumbered Brethern Toil'd and bled
> That I should dream away the trusted Hours
> On rose-leaf Beds, pamp'ring the coward Heart
> With feelings all too delicate for use? (44-48)

In response to those who mock his pensive nature in "Expostulation and Reply," Wordsworth responds that deeper imaginative processes are activated when the physical senses retire to peaceful slumber:

> The eye it cannot choose but see,
> We cannot bid the ear be still;
> Our bodies feel, wher'er they be,
> Against, or with our will.
> Nor less I deem that there are powers,
> Which of themselves our minds impress,

That we can feed this mind of ours,

In a wise passiveness. (17-24)

Radcliffe points to the relaxed posture of the Pedlar when the narrator first encounters him stretched out beneath the shadows of the breezy elms as the first instance of dreaming we encounter in the poem. He explains that early on, the fatigued, indiscriminate traveler, engrossed in his own afflictions, misinterprets the Pedlar's reclined position and closed eyes as signifying passiveness and careless ease. Radcliffe explains that, for the mature Wordsworth, "to dream means not to indulge oneself, or to escape a world of suffering, but to exercise a 'distinctive power'" that involves willfully reliving a past experience, in this case a narrative tinged by suffering, and yet "transforming it and—possibly—recounting it so that it can have a 'fructifying virtue for others'" (111). Accordingly, a revelatory breakthrough in the poet's development is achieved when the narrator learns to imitate the meditative pose of the Pedlar, adding the "fructifying virtue" he discovers in quiet contemplation of nature to his own thoughtful contemplation of life, so that he walks away a different person than he came.

Radcliffe further emphasizes the turning point in the poem that comes in the narrator and Pedlar's shared awareness that, as they stop to mull over the tragic circumstances of Margaret's suffering, they become actual participants in her story, for nature lies around them; all the ingredients of the tale, aside from the human characters, remain in their presence (113). He proposes that Margaret's story is simultaneously "the story of how nature and Margaret's tragedy formed the pedlar, and of how the pedlar and Margaret's tale educated the narrator" (119). In turn, he asserts that the poem's success lies in its ability to convince the reader that a richer, more gratifying means of engaging

with the world is available to those who dare to contemplate the transforming power of idleness and especially to those who allow the imaginative insights obtained in dreams to inform their waking reality. Fosso maintains that the probability of this latter mission is weakened by the "problematical implications" raised by the One Life doctrine in a poem like "The Ruined Cottage," in which the story line hinges upon the impending physical and spiritual disintegration of Margaret and her homestead (112). He surmises,

> For the pedlar, this pantheistic vision of nature produces a mood of "easy chearfulness". . . as nature does in the narrator, too, for a time, "stealing away" his own mournful despondency (259-60). But could this ruinous topography really be expected to counteract the sorrow of a history that has revealed it to be a site of loss and its locodescription to be elegy? (113).

He further emphasizes that in the early stages of the Pedlar's tale, his "natural wisdom" (195) is not wholly successful in consoling the narrator. He explains that although the narrator, inspired by the old man's cheerfulness, initially turns from Margaret's tale to partake of the tranquil beauty of the natural scenery, he does so only temporarily before shifting his gaze back to "that poor woman" (207), signifying that, for him, the harmony of the natural world is severed by the loss of a single virtuous woman, whom he has in the short span of the Pedlar's narrative come to know and love (113).

In his analysis of the final scene, Johnston cautions against interpreting the Pedlar's soothing attempts to steer the narrator toward a more positive means of conceptualizing suffering as overly corrective, or even disparaging, of the narrator's style of mourning, since such an assessment of his character is grossly inconsistent with the

sensitivity he demonstrates throughout the poem. He surmises that the two friends' responses need not even be considered contradictory, for "Each reaction has its own integrity, the narrator's emphasizing human survivors ('the world'), while the Pedlar's emphasizes natural continuities ('the earth')" (36). He perceptively observes that in the closing stanzas, "they stand as they have throughout the poem, before evidences of both: the ruins of the cottage and its garden" (36).

While the narrator proves unable to relinquish his focus on Margaret's sufferings even by the tale's conclusion, it is important to note that he willfully adheres to the Pedlar's advice in the closing stanzas, allowing the voices of nature to have the final say. Here, the dialectical exchange between the Pedlar and narrator gives way to silence, and the inspired pair opens their ears to the "lyrical" sound of the natural community:

> We sate on that low bench; and now we felt
> Admonished thus, the sweet hour coming on.
> A linnet warbled from those lofty elms,
> A thrush sang loud, and other melodies,
> At distance heard, peopled the milder air. (529-33)

Apparent in this brief period of tranquil recollection is a notable progression in Wordsworth's awareness of the psycho-emotional attachments we are capable of forging with each other and with the nonhuman world. He is here to answer a still-evolving question of how we can reinterpret suffering in ways that foster loving, healthy relationships, as we witness for the duration of a few beautifully harmonized notes two kindred spirits from disparate walks of life come together to participate in the synchronized song of a perfectly balanced community.

A brief, yet powerful glimpse of the poet's unique vision of the One Life can be ascertained in the Pedlar's comforting assurance to the grieving narrator that "she sleeps in the calm Earth" (512) implying that in death she recovers the peaceful home that war denies her. Her "secret spirit of humanity" survives as a living, breathing part of the natural community—a vital presence that contributes to the peaceful energies and vibrations that constitute what Hartman refers to as "the spirit of place" (136). The hopeful vision achieved in the face of suffering in the poem's final passages further reinforces that in a functional, organically connected society, stories endowed with "natural wisdom," such as the Pedlar's (when received by a mutually responsive audience), have the potential to transform our self-absorbed attitudes, teaching us, in essence how to love and be loved. Thus, by utilizing an enclosed, interdependent rhetorical structure where all members give and receive strength in a system of reciprocal exchange, Wordsworth extends to his readers the love offering of a poem that functions in the same manner as an ecosystem.

For both the narrator and Pedlar, the revamped mode of seeing shared between two fellow mourners at a grave is presented as a temporary vision received in a few moments' rest. Even so, it is a transforming experience that so mesmerized the poet that he would repeatedly seek to attain it (more frequently and with greater force) in a series of "spiritual encounters" that occur frequently as a major narrative pattern in *Lyrical Ballads*—a collection of experimental poems he would soon begin to write in collaboration with Coleridge. In *Natural Supernaturalism*, M. H. Abrams offers a specific interpretation of the poet's quieter turn following his vindictive outbursts in "Salisbury Plain" when he delineates the prevailing creed of his contemporaries (who

would later be called Romantics) as faith in the redemptive process of learning to see anew:

> Whether a man shall live his old life or a new one, in a universe of death or of life, cut off and alienated or afflicted and at home, in a state of servitude or genuine freedom—to the romantic poet all depends on his mind as it engages with the world in the act of perceiving. Hence, the extraordinary emphasis throughout this era on the eye and the object and the relation of the theme. (375)

Abrams pinpoints Wordsworth's revelatory change in visual perception to have occurred when he veered off the public pathway down "lonely roads" and "naked moors," and there recorded the sublime knowledge obtained in a few chance meetings with lowly rustics (405). Following Abrams's lead down a pathway I propose Wordsworth discovered in his treatment of "The Ruined Cottage," the subsequent chapter proposes that examining the poet's intriguing encounters with such extraordinary figures as the discharged soldier, the idiot boy, the old Cumberland beggar, the child of "We Are Seven," and Michael yield new insight into the ability of Wordsworth's humanized (and thus relativized) heart to transcend the suffering, grief, and spiritual failures of a violent and fragmented society in his day (and ours).

This 1797-1798 poem presents two opposing views of suffering in the character of The Pedlar (a self-portrait of the optimistic 'philosophic mind') and Margaret, whose tragic decline, suffering, and death, is conveyed with great realism and pathos that does not sentimentalize or treat her as a victim. Yet, as Carolyn Merchant notes, she is one of those abused by capitalism and the wars that support it, a central focus of radical ecology.

Wordsworth's inability to reconcile these two competing perspectives—the passive acceptance that one's condition is exactly as it should be, versus the unsentimental realism of Margaret's exploitation by the economic and political forces of British colonial capitalism—delayed his ability to finish the poem in 1798. The later version, published in 1814, reflects an older, more experienced Wordsworth whose sympathies were more aligned with the Pedlar's conservative view.

CHAPTER V

A REASON TO COPE: SUFFERING AND TRANSCENDENCE IN *LYRICAL BALLADS*

The lifelong mission of Wordsworth's poetic career was to resurrect a "universal home" in which the wisdom, fortitude, and vitality of even the meanest social outcast contributes to the spiritual potential of a self-sustaining community. Thus, from "The Idiot Boy" to the "Old Cumberland Beggar," his poetry is populated by extraordinary figures who, having endured the weight of human suffering more heavily than the common person, attain in the sphere of private life, the spiritual sanctity of a primal connection with nature. Theirs is not a blind, childlike dependence but a conscious interaction in which the free-flowing energies of the physical world are permitted to come in contact with the most elemental fibers of their humanity.

"The Discharged Soldier" professes himself to be a devout and connected member of a human community when, though graciously accepting the poet's offer of food and shelter, he refuses to look to charitable organizations as his daily source of sustenance: "With the same ghastly mildness in his look / He said, 'My trust is in the God of heaven, / And in the eye of him that passes me'" (161-63).[1] The man's identity is revealed by a faded military garment, marking him as one of a legion of men who, having born witness to one of England's darkest hours, was released back

[1] Quotations from "The Discharged Solider" are taken from the Cornell edition (edited by James Butler and Karen Green) since it provides the version initially intended for use in the *Lyrical Ballads as opposed to the standard de Selincourt version, which incorporates the poem only in the version later* included as part of *The Prelude*.

into civilian life to dwell amongst men with whom he felt no immediate kinship. His condition represents the severest form of alienation imaginable—the feeling of being a stranger in one's own country. Still, in the recesses of solitude, we intuitively feel that he has acquired a revelatory perspective in shifting his gaze away from human company toward his "native home"—the storage house of one's earliest memories and intuitions and the final resting place at the end of life's wearisome journey.

The traveler does not lie far from his desired destination, for his stoic demeanor and reticent disposition signify a life no longer stirred by worldly impulses. Despite the ongoing attempts of the poet to discover his history, he makes no confession concerning to his involvement in heroic wartime adventures as one might expect of an embarrassed destitute eager to cast himself in a more honorable light. Moreover, the figure calls attention to itself through physical peculiarities (touching on the grotesque of exaggeration), including the body's unusual height and long, shapeless bones that force one's gaze away from the corporal body to which they belong and the feeble way he props himself against a mile-stone in a posture of "[h]alf-sitting and half-standing" (53). Indeed, his "ghastly" presence is uniquely proportioned to the broader universe around him in an arrangement quite different from ordinary men.

Though the young poet never fully penetrates the spiritual powers embodied in the "ghostly figure moving at [his] side" (124), we sense that something meshes in their natures over the course of a brief walk in which two incongruent souls are brought together as strangers but part as friends. Wordsworth would wait for "Michael," the final addition to his revised second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, to trace

meticulously the guiding impulses underlying humble, rustic life and, thus, provide a more mature expression of what it means to live contentedly within "the eye of nature" ("Old Cumberland" 188). It was his learning to recognize and appreciate the distinct energies that every living being contributes to the universal order that later enabled Wordsworth to articulate the major tenets of his belief in the One Life in "Tintern Abbey," the first of the *Lyrical Ballads* to explore in depth an evolving awareness of his own esteemed position as a self-conscious element of the universal godhead. Initially, though, he was preoccupied with the mere delight of formulating meaningful relationships with society's most neglected outcasts—an interest he pursued not merely because he pitied their downtrodden condition but because he genuinely recognized in the eccentricities of their private walks with nature an invigorating freshness and innocence that he understood could not lie far from divinity.

In his study *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Encounter* (1971), Frederick Garber maintains that it was the poet's growing awareness of his detachment from humanity that led him to gravitate toward other modes of being, which in their delightful strangeness appeared to him as transported from another world. Garber explains how the recognition that he lived and moved within the same circle as beings who possessed such refreshingly different relationships to their surroundings generated in the poet a sickening response. He argues that

> [t]he thrust of Wordsworth's poetry through *Lyrical Ballads* and into the middle of the great decade was to reach a point of absolute balance among all oppositions he knew were out there and in himself. He came

> to see many possibilities, and eventually, how to work them out. The stranger learned how to face strangeness as he learned more about its opposites and saw that wholes of unimaginable complexity could be looked for and occasionally seen. (124)

This chapter introduces several "quasi-human" characters who aided the poet in his search for alternative modes of non-human existence and essentially pointed the way for him because they seem quite literally to have sprung up from beyond the pale. In their own special right, he and Coleridge, his collaborator, were "Elysian artists" who labored to construct emblematic figures capable of encompassing and withstanding the fragmentation of the modern world. Pointing the way toward a more unified synthesis, the figures that emerge from his first mature work are an enchanting breed of harbingers—excommunicated survivors of the Old World and the first-generation inhabitants of a post-revolutionary and, thus, post-apocalyptic world.

In *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*, Geoffrey Hartman maintains that "Too little has been said about the men and women in this poetry [who] exhibit what Wordsworth describes in his 1802 *Preface* [as] 'a power of real and substantial action of suffering'" (143). He proposes that the oppressed victims who inhabit this volume are subjected to a "peculiar" type of suffering that is so immensely appalling that "we call it natural only to dignify human nature" (143). He explains that in some capacity all hold tight to a piece of "property" (whether it be a stack of firewood, the last lamb of the fold, or an infant's gravesite) as a desperate effort to spare themselves from even deeper separation (143). The end result is that they physically or spiritually

expire, still desperately clutching the beloved object that only serves to drag them down (143).

While Garber centers his discussion on how suffering leads to loss, I suggest that Wordsworth intended to illustrate through the fortitude of his courageous protagonists a sense of something profitably gained. I argue that Wordsworth's solitaries have acquired in the face of tragedy a human and *extra-human* awareness not fully comprehensible to the rational mind. Though all have suffered excessive personal loss, their circumstances have paved for them a unique connection to the natural environment which, if properly exercised, allows them to transcend the fractured state of their human condition and feel themselves at home within the greater cosmos.

Wordsworth recognized that the deepest truths often surface from the *moving accidents* of social outcasts who suffer beyond human destiny. Thus, it should be noted that the sublime insight he achieves in sympathetic contemplation of pitiable characters is illustrative of the process whereby nature leads the poet to a state of moral awareness which, in turn, enables him to discover spiritual unity amongst physical union. Yet it is important to remember that the beauty and stability that Wordsworth sought and uncovered through nature frequently came at the cost of excessive discomfort. Specifically, the ability to perceive wholeness amongst the rubble of a war-torn society demanded a mental framework capable of reconciling discordant elements.[2]

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[2] David D. Joplin emphasizes that as much as Wordsworth was awed by nature's ability "to inspire and bring joy," he realized such advantages were only half of the equation and that to appreciate nature in its full complexity demanded squarely facing its "dark side" ("Moral"). He points to the mixture of light and dark imagery which permeates *The Prelude's* Simplon Pass episode to suggest a

Accordingly, in a lesser-known poem, "The Convict," the speaker pulls away from the pleasures of a beautiful autumn day and enters into the darker side of nature to visit an inmate in his cell. When, with tear-filled eyes, the prisoner asks the reason he is there, the poet assures him that he comes not in judgmental spirit to compare their states but "as a brother thy sorrows to share" (45-48). In the closing stanza, he consoles the convict with the earnest vow that no matter how sordid his crime may have been, '"My care, if the arm of the almighty were mine, / Would plant thee where yet thou might'st blossom again'" (51-52).

Believing as he did that under the proper conditions even the basest social outcast could thrive, Wordsworth's controversial poem "The Idiot Boy" metaphorically experiments with transplanting an unrecognized virtue in more nurturing soil. The poet chooses as his subject what his society considered the lowest form of humanity—an individual lacking control of his mental faculties. Yet in detailing the ghostly ride of Johnny, the mad youth, he spiritualizes the sanctity of the irrational mind that cannot be understood by even the wisest rational individual.

In *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry*, Alan Bewell credits John Locke's well-known treatise "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" (1698) for making the idiot a popular subject of conversation in seventeenth-century society. He notes that Locke's reference to idiots

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location of both "tumult and peace" that when considered side by side are "like the workings of one mind, the features / of the same face, the blossoms upon one tree" (*Prelude* VI. 567-72). Joplin maintains that "insofar as nature is a window into a higher world, metaphysical implications of such imagery are obvious; realities people measure as good and bad share a common source" ("Moral"). Joplin's "The Moral Quality of Wordsworth's Nature" was presented at the 2007 RMMLA Convention in Calgary, Canada.<http://www.barfieldsociety.org/Wordsworth_Moral%20Nature_Conference.pdf>

and children as "tabula rasa" or "blank slates" prompted individuals to reconsider the developmental process of humans and their relationship to the natural world (57). Bewell explains that the idiot child was perceived as occupying an intriguing psychological space, standing as he did on the median between nature and Man, as though bridging the two states. Particularly, he was useful to philosophers who sought to discover if and how humans develop cognition and language skills apart from domesticated settings (63).

Locke and other empiricist thinkers identified the physiology of the idiot mind as operating differently from the ordinary person's in that it lacks the ability to process memory and thus responds to all physical stimuli purely at the level of sensation. Empiricist thinking hinges on the belief that man does not possess in his nature any sacred stamp of divinity that might be categorized as "innate impressions" (57). His very soul, including all capacity to think or feel, was perceived to be dependent upon memory and language acquisition and thus, devoid of any natural creative sensibility. Thus, Bewell asserts that Wordsworth's contention with empiricism was thus much more than a philosophical disagreement. He recognized that making language and memory a prerequisite to thought and feeling "cuts us off from nature and from each other" (66-67). He further explains, "Wordsworth treats language as a primary social institution; but he also recognizes that if we deny its roots in nature and preverbal feeling, we deny ourselves the basis of community" (67). [3]

[3] Bewell notes that in March of 1798, in the same period that Wordsworth was composing "The Idiot Boy," he expressed a similar grievance as the dejected poet of "Lines Written in Early Spring" who

Indeed, it was against the backdrop of a cold, indifferent social climate that Wordsworth fought to assert the value of the lowliest individual. In a letter written to John Wilson, the poet confesses that his fascination with idiots is derived from a personal conviction that "their life is hidden with God" (623).[4] He describes the sympathetic emotions evoked in contemplation of such objects as possessing a transforming effect over his nature that drives out "every feeble sensation of disgust and aversion" (623). Wordsworth further reveres the nurturing affections of parents toward their idiot children as "the great triumph of the human heart," explaining that "it is there that we see the strength, disinterestedness, and grandeur of love" which underlies a truly "hallowed" relationship (623).

Bewell recognizes that one of the greatest novelties of the poem is the unique way that love and affection are communicated between mother and son outside the boundaries of language, most notably through touch. He emphasizes that when the two are reunited, the mother holds the boy, repeatedly kissing him and patting the pony, signifying that "the basic function of language . . . is not to represent ideas, but to create *contact*" (67). Clearly, Wordsworth recognized the power of maternal love in the shaping of an individual's intellect and character. In Book Two of *The Prelude,*

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questions in the closing stanza "Have I not reason to lament / What man has made of man?" (23-24) when in a manuscript fragment the heavy-hearted poet laments,

> Why is it we feel
> So little for each other but for this
> That we with nature have no sympathy
> Or with such things as have no power to hold
> Articulate language. (Alfoxden Notebook, 1798)

[4] "Letter to John Wilson" (7 June 1802), *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. Steven Gill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984) 620-25. Note: As Wordsworth knew, this idea originated in the Christian Middle Ages in which both the mad and the feeble-minded were believed to be God's direct mouthpiece, as in the notion of "the holy fool".

he recalls that as a babe "by intercourse of touch / I held mute dialogues with my mother's heart" (II. 283-84). The lasting imprint of those moving but nonverbal conversations was later recognizable to the poet when, "left alone / Seeking the invisible world / Not knowing why," the influence continued to guide his steps so that though "The props of [his] affections were removed . . . the building stood, / As if sustained / By its own spirit" (II. 292-96).

The narrator initially criticizes the mother for allowing such a defenseless boy (who, by all reasonable standards, should be tucked safely into bed at such hours) to wander unsupervised into the night air, suggesting that he is, by nature, unfit for such an important and potentially dangerous task as fetching the doctor for an ailing neighbor. Though acknowledging the pleasure the errand brings the boy, he begs of her in a tone of mock-anxious rationality, "But, Betty what has he to do / With stirrup, saddle, or with rein?" (15-16). Yet like most mothers, Betty realizes that, though the separation is painful, he cannot reach his full potential wholly enveloped in her care. Bewell recognizes, in a reversal of Enlightenment philosophy which identifies idiocy as a condition created by solitude in nature that, by purposely releasing the idiot into nature, he is "able to argue for nature as an educative power" (65).

We cannot help but envy Johnny. Though we fear for his safety, he experiences much pleasure on a moonlit horse ride in his first surge of freedom apart from parental control. Even the frightening scenarios that Betty Foy conjures up as possibilities of her son's grim fate are steeped in fantasy and superstition and provide an alluring and comic juxtaposition to what we imagine to be an ordinarily useless,

unheroic existence. To immerse oneself completely in the realm of sensation is rarely a possibility given the restrictions imposed upon the self by society and by the dominating faculty of reason that defines such endeavors as acts of madness. Both external and subconscious forces are continually at work to prevent us from liberally embracing our passions in the manner that the Idiot Boy's wild, unruly mannerisms suggest. Released probably for the first time on a solitary mission, he reveals not the slightest semblance of discipline or restraint:

> His heart it was so full of glee,
> That till full fifty yards were gone,
> He quite forgot his holly whip,
> And all his skill in horsemanship. (82-85)

It is not clear whether Betty is fully aware of the service her late night task renders to the boy. His journey into nature represents a symbolic movement away from the broken state of his reality—a world governed by intellect, which his mental handicap makes him incapable of fully engaging with—to a climate of pure joy that he wholly embraces with every ounce of his being.[5]

The mysterious path that Johnny carves for himself through the night and into the wee morning hours becomes the subject of intense curiosity and speculation by all who await a story. Yet his inability to articulate his experiences forces us to accept

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[5] As R. F. Storch explains, "The idiot boy is in a world of beauty and energy (moon and waterfall) but completely unconscious of it" (630). He follows by clarifying that Johnny's incognizance of the landscape is not the product of an undiscriminating eye, but rather of not observing "the world because he is so much part of it" (630). See "Wordsworth's Experimental Ballads: The Radical Uses of Intelligence and Comedy," *SEL, 1500-1900* 11 (1971): 621-35.

that the value of his journey lies not in any earthly purpose but simply in the awe-inspired acknowledgment that "In the moonlight he had been / From eight o'clock till five" (445-46). Through the fragmented state of his closing words— '"The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo / and the sun did shine so cold'"— (450-51) the poet demonstrates the insufficiency of language to represent the wholeness of experience—a clear rejection of Enlightenment ideology because it makes language, a byproduct of rational thought, subordinate to feeling.

Whatever we are to make of Johnny's final statement, it is offered as a conclusive fact, which the poet does not allow to be debated or analyzed by a more intellectual mind. Placing his faith in an arguably unreliable subject (one whose own helpless condition makes him incapable of catering to the needs of another), the poet reveals his reverence for the "unique individual"—one shaped not by societal standards but by a sincere, uncensored expression of the heart. Thus, the poem stands as one of Wordsworth's strongest encouragements to trust in the validity of one's own intuitions as an honest and accurate record of experience.

The poet stresses a similar lesson in "We Are Seven" when, despite the narrator's frustrating attempts to convince a stubborn eight-year-old village girl to accept the loss of her two deceased siblings, she continues to number them in her calculation of the members that comprise her family. Moreover, she professes to live in morbidly close proximity to their burial plots, which lie in a most peculiar location—a mere "[t]welve steps or more from [her] mother's door" (39). Clearly, the family has omitted from their grieving process that stage in which we physically remove the dead from our immediate circle and preserve them in memory so as not to

disrupt the forward movement of our lives. Even more disturbing is the young girl's confession of daily communing and conversing with the dead, as she sits and sings to them while sewing in broad daylight and eats her supper there after dusk (41-48).

Even so, her intimate relations with the deceased have generated in her spirit a seemingly healthy response toward the inevitability of death. She speaks of her siblings' departure as a normal process of life that is as natural as the changing seasons. The shifting weather conditions simultaneously serve to mark the childrens' untimely deaths as possessing distinctly different personalities. One sibling is graciously relieved from her suffering in the dry of summer (54); the other is "forced" into the grave to lie beside his sister in the winter snow (59). The poet seems to suggest that while we cannot predict the hour or conditions of our loved ones' passing, what we *can* decide as survivors is whether to approach the dead as an absence or presence in our lives. Wordsworth's cottage girl has clearly made her choice: "The little maid would have her will, / And said, 'Nay we are seven!" (68-69).

Though it is easy to dismiss the young girl's persistent refutation of the narrator's skepticism as a mark of childish innocence, we admire the strong willpower with which she legitimizes and defends the dignity of her nontraditional home. In *Buried Communities*, Fosso describes the child's triumph as a rebuttal of empiricist notions of death as "annihilation" and "separation" (5) that are inherent in the poet-narrator's statement, '"But they are dead; those two are dead! / Their spirits are in heaven'" (65-67). He explains that the child challenges the "facts" of the materialist position by declaring allegiance to "an alternative notion of human mortality, one that integrates the dead into her natural and social surroundings" (5).

Fosso further accounts for the social relationship the child continues to foster with those who have previously parted by perceiving the ongoing relationship as a dramatized example of Wordsworth's comment in *The Convention of Centra* (1809) that "There is a spiritual community binding together the living and the dead" (339). [6]

Fosso maintains that the bond between the two realms is stronger than the adhesive holding together societal factions because it is not based upon monetary contributions but on the debt we owe to those who are no longer with us—a heavy burden that is eased through the formulation of communal organizations joined together by shared grief. He explains that such communities operate on the underlying premise that "those dead belong to and with the living of this locality as an integral part of their history, affections, and environment" (5). Thus, to exist as a social being in such a community means "to live [alongside] the dead; to count them amongst one's loves, to feel them as part of one's activities, and to see them as a fundamental part of one's familial and social ties" (5).

Wordsworth's "Old Cumberland Beggar" presents yet another example of a community held together not through money but through knitting of a solid moral fabric—a spiritual underpinning largely owing to the rejuvenating presence of a most unlikely source. The beggar's temperament closely resembles the pensive vagrant of "Old Man Travelling" whose calm, subdued spirit endows the landscape with imaginative energy:

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[6] William Wordsworth, "The Convention of Cintra," *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and J. W. Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1974), I: 193-366.

He travels on, and in his face, his step,
His gait, is one expression: every limb,
His look and bending figure, all bespeak
A man who does not move with pain, but moves
With thought. (3-7)

The reclusive Cumberland beggar also "travels on," passively accepting with humble resignation what seems so obviously to the privileged reader to be a cruel and unjust lot. Like so many of Wordsworth's solitaries, the beggar, by virtue of his physical deformities, is uniquely yoked to his surroundings at a strikingly different angle than common persons. The curvature of his spine severely limits the scope of his vision so that his gaze is forced downward, rendering him incapable of glimpsing the "common and habitual sight / Of fields with rural works, of hill and dale / And the blue sky" (48-50). Moreover, his palsied hands can barely hold crumbs of food so that he unintentionally drops some on the ground as he eats (17-20),[7] and the slow pace of his walk brands him as a figure who lingers behind in a fast-paced world where even children and slow-moving wagons consistently pass him by (64-67).

The poet himself knew something of the bitter pangs of poverty. In Book Two of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes the penniless state in which he passed his school days often without the satisfaction of a full stomach. Yet he credits the physical deficiencies of those early years with nourishing his spiritual appetite as he was "taught to feel—perhaps too much— / The self-sufficing power of solitude" (II.

[7] Though a lesser poet would write that the beggar willfully shared his food with the birds, Wordsworth is engaging in serious social commentary while conscientiously attempting to avoid accusations of writing "sentimental" poetry.

77-78). He recognizes the enduring influence of the primal discourse he held with nature in those formative years, recalling how, in traversing down isolated pathways apart from human company, he "conversed with things that really are" (413). Likewise, though "one little span of earth" encompasses "all his prospect"(50-51), we are made to feel that the beggar's private walk with nature puts him daily in contact with powers unavailable to the common person. He inevitably knows more than anyone else in his circle the pleasure that comes from "sweet dependence" on nature, for he embodies what Rousseau identifies in *The Social Contract* (1762) as a state of supreme liberation: "What yoke, indeed," asks one of the eighteenth century's most influential philosophers, "can be imposed on men who stand in need of nothing?" (131).

In *Wordsworth's Vagrant Muse: Poetry, Poverty, and Power* (1994), Gary Harrison places the beggar in his social-historical context as a means of examining Wordsworth's "human politics,"[8] which clearly emerge in the poetry of the 1790s. He

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[8] Wordsworth (like his predecessor Jonathan Swift) strongly opposed the ideas advocated by the long line of later eighteenth and nineteenth-century political economists, including Adam Smith, David Ricardo, T. R. Malthus, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill, whose theories concerning how to amend their generation's "war on poverty" tended to treat human beings as statistics rather than individuals, thus undermining the sanctity and unique character of individual human experience. T. R. Malthus's *Essay on the Principles of Population* (published a year after the composition of "The Old Cumberland Beggar," though his political theories were, by then, well-known) identifies the excessive reproduction rate of the poor as a deterrent to social progress—a controversial proposition credited by Darwin as directly influencing his theory of natural selection.

Proponents of the theory of "utilitarianism," the "classical economists" suggested that the best course for human society is that which benefited the greatest number. Jeremy Bentham wrote in the opening lines of *The Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789) that*

> Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand, the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we say, in all we do, and in all we think. (1)

contends that the poet's disparagement of the Poor Laws was rooted in his fear that centralized government control of the poor would brand them in much the same manner as the albatross cruelly placed around the mariner's neck—as a differentiated other. Thus, in response to his contemporaries who viewed charity as a responsibility of the State, "Wordsworth adopted a paternalistic view of superintendence carried out by individual acts of charity within the strictly defined boundaries of the local community" (Harrison 157). The advantages to such a system, as the beggar of his poem so clearly exemplifies, are three-fold: the poor could avoid objectification, maintain their independence, and continue to serve as an active force within the community. [9]

Indeed, while Wordsworth's beggar clearly stands on the periphery of human society, his presence is indisputably felt. The poet's reference to the beggar as one whom "from my childhood I have known" immediately identifies him as a permanent and acknowledged fixture of the community (22). Moreover, the townspeople visibly go out of their way to offer their provisions, signifying their commitment to sustaining a detached, though distinguishable relationship: the traveler dismounts from his horse and safely secures the coin in the beggar's hand as opposed to dropping it on the ground (27-30), the keeper of the toll booth suspends her duties to unlatch the gate for him (32-36), and though the beggar is unmindful of the Post-

[9] Sociologist Georg Simmel lends fascinating insight into the status that beggars occupy in society as both insiders and outsiders, a duality which enables them to achieve oneness with the world despite their seemingly disconnected position. Simmel contends that while poverty certainly marginalizes individuals as existing separate from the status quo, it simultaneously serves as "a peculiar mode of interaction which binds them into a unity with the whole in its widest sense" (125). See Georg Simmel, "The Poor," trans. Claire Jacboson, *Social Problems* 13.2 (1965): 118-40.

boy's shouts as he approaches in his wagon, he takes no offense when forced gently to swerve his noisy wheels on the road to avoid collision (37-43).

In *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790's* (2000), David Bromwich observes the severity of the beggar's alienation from human society, asserting, "If the beggar once owned or was owned by a particular place, it does not know him now" (31). Even so, he contends that Wordsworth's sympathetic interest in this peculiar individual is meant to proclaim a simple truth, namely, "*that this man matters*. His incorporation into the lives of other people humanizes the life of the community" (32). Likewise, Harrison draws attention to the unique psychological space occupied by Wordsworth's beggar, emphasizing that the community of Cumberland County operates according to a system of mutual understanding in which both parties participate as givers and recipients. In essence, the town provides the beggar with the physical resources essential for his survival; in exchange, he offers his beneficiaries the moral sentiment necessary to sustain their spiritual health as he stirs their hearts to acts of kindness and generosity.

The poet suggests that while some individuals inevitably abuse charity as a means of boosting their egos, those who sincerely delight in the virtuousness of their giving should not be judged harshly since even

> [t]he poorest poor
> Long for some moments in a weary life
> When they can know and feel that they have been,
> Themselves, the fathers and the dealers-out
> Of some small blessings, for this single cause,

That we have all of us one human heart. (147-52)

Wordsworth knew all too well, however, that individuals frequently do not demonstrate care and compassion toward their neighbors, and many of his characters prove unable to see beyond their self-centered perspectives. Consequently, their tragic fates serve as cautionary examples of the perils of narcissistic behavior and, thus, of the poet's belief in the absolute necessity of altering our consciousness and seeking new definitions of what it means to be human.

Through the story of Martha Ray in "The Thorn," we come to see how the damaging psychological effects of village gossip work to tear apart the camaraderie of the community. In the opening stanzas of the poem, nature herself acts out the processes by which humanity fails to utilize its potential for the greater good. At the peak of a tall mountain, a tiny "heap of earth" (49), rumored to be the burial plot of an infant, is shrouded in a colorful spectrum of mosses, which turns a most detestable spot into a beautiful memorial:

Ah me! What lovely tints are there!
Of olive green and scarlet bright,
In spikes, in branches, and in stars,
Green, red, and pearly white!
This heap of earth o'ergrown with moss,
Which close beside the Thorn you see,
So fresh in all its beauteous dyes,
Is like an infant's grave in size,
As like as like can be:

But never, never any where,

An infant's grave was half so fair. (45-55)

Yet a mere five yards from this delightful portrait of unity, nature reveals a much uglier face. Here, a group of mosses band together to choke monstrously a lone, defenseless thorn:

Up from the earth these mosses creep,

And this poor Thorn they clasp it round

So close, you'd say that they were bent

With plain and manifest intent,

To drag it to the ground;

And all had joined in one endeavor

To bury this poor Thorn forever. (16-22)

In placing these opposing images side by side, Wordsworth demonstrates an ironic duality of human nature in noting that when like-minded individuals from all walks of life contribute their unique personalities and talents in a spirit of good will, they are capable of making even life's most deplorable circumstances more tolerable. However, when a body of people expends its energies bringing down a single member, they become destructive oppressors, as Martha's pitiable condition illustrates. Fosso describes the string of potential half-truths and/or outright lies, labeling Martha as a murderess of her own infant, as proceeding from the lips of a "garrulous, rumor-mongering narrator [whose] superficial discourse produces only a superficial, parasitical kind of community, based upon this poor woman's exploitation, subordination, and exclusion" (154). Still he is careful to point out that

despite the cruelty of the community's insubstantiated allegations against Martha, those involved in keeping the haunting story alive within the oral history of the area successfully create a perverted version of "social cohesion, one organized by her interminable mourning" (154).

In being continually summoned to the mountain to grieve (as though driven there by some larger magnetic force), Martha exhibits an unusual attachment to the natural world that is not readily understood by the outside observer:

> "At all times of the day and night
> This wretched woman thither goes,
> And she is known to every star,
> And every wind that blows;
> And there beside the Thorn she sits
> When the blue day-light's in the skies,
> And when the whirlwinds on the hill,
> Or frosty air is keen and still,
> And to herself she cries,
> 'Oh misery! Oh misery!
> "Oh woe is me! Oh misery!" (67-77)

The community's rash interpretation of Martha's bizarre form of grief as signifying an automatic sign of guilt suggests that humans are, by nature, fearful and distrustful of individuals who exemplify behaviors deviating from the norm. Thus, rather than embracing those differences as a mark of novelty or eccentricity to be admired and celebrated, our first instinct is to cast out the "other" and hover around those who

more closely fit our definition of normalcy. It is, nonetheless, important to remember that Martha's neighbors, too, are victims of a lower-class, oppressed society and that their response to her suffering does not necessarily stem from malice so much as fear.[10] Even so, when used to single out a member of one's own community, the sense of comfort one receives from displaced imaginative power is superficial and merely serves to tighten what William Blake refers to as the "mind-forged manacles" that abused subjects subconsciously place around their own calloused hearts.

Tragically, no one will ever know the truth of Martha's story, for no single person has bothered to approach her. The manner in which she is ostracized by her own small community as an "untouchable" provides an extreme example of an aspect of English society that greatly perturbed the poet. In Book Seven of *The Prelude,* Wordsworth notes that, of all the sights and sounds he experienced during his travels in London, what remained foremost in his thought is the incomprehensible question of "how men lived / Even next-door neighbors, as we say, yet still / Not knowing each other's names" (118-20). The poet once again takes up this question in "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," two next door neighbors whose incompatible class leads them to view the same narrow world in distinctly different ways:

> Young Harry was a lusty drover,
>
> And who so stout of limb as he?
>
> His cheeks were red as ruddy clover,

[10] In his introductory commentary to Emma Bell Miles's *The Spirit of the Mountains*, Roger Abrahams contends that to a small, enclosed community, superstitious beliefs are much more than proverbs or ghost stories intended morally to instruct or pleasurably to haunt. In a very real sense, they are survival tactics, which function to give order to a troubled existence and thus "are important to the way individuals live in a real (and often hostile) environment" (vi).

His voice was like the voice of three.

Auld Goody Blake was old and poor;

Ill-fed she was, and thinly clad;

And any man who pass'd her door,

Might see how poor a hut she had. (17-24)

The petty quarrel between the two stems from a few scant pieces of firewood that Goody steals from Harry in a desperate attempt to survive the winter. On a deeper level, though, the argument stems from two contrasting viewpoints concerning who is entitled to ownership of nature's resources. For Harry, firewood is his material property—the tangible reward of his labor, which is unjustly removed from his hands. For Goody, firewood does not belong to any sole individual. It symbolizes warmth, a necessary element of survival that she regards as a universal right. By allowing Goody's curse of her attacker—that he should "never be warm again" (100)—to come to fruition so that his teeth should "chatter, chatter, chatter still" (4), —the poet seems to sympathize most with Goody's position though both characters' perspectives are inherently flawed. The reason that Harry and Goody cannot peaceably come together is because each perceives nature as existing first and foremost to serve his or her own personal needs.

Though Wordsworth clearly valued the unique impulses that guide every human life, in this poem he warns that one's self-absorbed interests, when not tempered by regard for the welfare of the larger relational entity (whether community, neighborhood, or natural world) produce a shortsighted perspective and, in turn, prohibit satisfaction in belonging to a larger whole. Such an individual is subject to the same tragic demise as

Coleridge's ancient mariner, who relates to the wedding guest the horrifying consequences of his senseless killing of the albatross, an inadvertent violation of a sacred social norm of nature. In return, a vengeful nature takes the life of the mariner's crewmates and sentences the culprit, guilty of little more than killing a bird, to linger through a state of psychic torment—an agonizing purgatory, positioned in an eerie interval between life and death. [11]

The most terrifying aspect of the mariner's curse is his resolve to resign his tortured mind to peaceful slumber or to die:

> The many men so beautiful
>
> And they all dead did lie!
>
> And a million million slimy things
>
> Lived on—and so did I. (228-31)

It is not surprising that guilt should play such an important role in the experience of the outsider. Similarly feelings of guilt are prominent in the psychology of ethical commitment to any political position or outcome, whether it be republicans who seek to wrest power from monarchies or environmentalists who aim to expose and curtail human violations of the natural world. However, guilt takes on special connotations

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[11] In reference to Wordsworth's "Salisbury Plain," Geoffrey Hartman refers to this frightening "no place" as indicative of the traveler's compulsive "spot syndrome– the obsession with specific place"–a typical defense mechanism used by the disoriented soul in its attempt to resist a growing awareness of its detachment from nature (122). Harold Bloom refers to this hellish position as "but the sleep of death in life"– a retaliatory attack launched by the dark shadow of consciousness—the battered remnants of an annihilated social self, which constitutes the "high cost of Romantic internalization, that is, of finding paradises within a renovated man" (6). Keats further attests to this horrifying affliction in his "Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds" (25 March 1818) where he expresses his desire that "our dreamings all of sleep or wake / Would all their colors from the sunset take /. . . Rather than shadow our soul's daytime / In the dark void of night" (67-68, 70-71).

in an ecosystem where every member contributes equally and receives its share of the "one life" common to all. Such a community demands a shared responsibility for the failings of the whole.

It is, in part, the failure of the mariner's shipmates to accept responsibility for their own faults that severs the unity of the community and ultimately leads to its demise. As with Goody Blake and Harry Gill, the mistake of the mariner's fellow crewmen is that they only appreciate nature to the extent that it provides for their own comfort and convenience. Though they initially condemn the mariner for killing the bird who "made the breeze to blow" (92), the fickle seamen change their minds and say his deed "twas right" (97) upon discovering that the albatross's disappearance eliminates the fog and mist that obscures their vision. When a vengeful predator pursues the ship, however, they cast the entire blame upon a single member, cruelly identifying the guilty perpetrator:

> Ah wel-a-day! what evil looks
> Had I from old and young
> Instead of the Cross the Albatross
> Around my neck was hung. (135-38)

Despite the betrayal of his shipmates, the Christ-like mariner woefully endures his punishment, resignedly taking upon himself the sin of the entire body. Though nature eventually forgives him, she does so in ironic fashion. His redemption is attained not in reverent contemplation but in the same seemingly haphazard manner that superstitions impose themselves upon an uncultured mind:

Beyond the shadow of the ship,

I watched the water-snakes

. . . . . .

O happy living things! no tongue

Their beauty might declare:

A spring of love gushed from my heart,

And I blessed them unaware.

. . . . . .

The self-same moment I could pray;

And from my neck so free

The Albatross fell off, and sank

Like lead into the sea. (264-65; 274-77; 280-83)

In this passage, Coleridge pinpoints the supernatural power of the sublime encounter in its mystical ability to reach beyond the intelligible mind to the rude, elemental parts of our being. In this manner, the mariner's spiritual encounter retains a primitive mode of "nature worship" that transcends aesthetic pleasure and is described less as a public spectacle than a simple inward delight. Indeed, his worship experience is not marked by an outward display of emotion before a host of admiring spectators but is instead a private moment (which he almost blushingly describes in recollecting the raw, uncensored nature of his experience) when, moved with love for one of nature's lowliest creatures, he instinctively lifts a hand of praise in the quiet recesses of his heart. Almost instantly, his perturbed mind is soothed to sleep, the winds calm, the dead men revive, and harmony and order are restored. Even so (as is often the case

with Coleridge), we are hesitant to place too much trust in nature since, even in exercising her redemptive power, she acts upon the mind more like an unpredictable force than a reliable friend. Throughout the poem, her erratic character is demonstrated through sudden shifts between periods of calm and storm, and in the end she continues to hold the mariner captive for the seemingly trivial offense he is doomed to repeat.

Truly, one of the most perplexing aspects of Coleridge's poem is revealed in the mixture of beauty and terror that underlies a vibrant, yet sinister psychological landscape. In "The Sad Wisdom of the Mariner," A. M. Buchan addresses the binary nature of the mariner's strange fate, which turns out to be both a blessing and a curse, as it is foreshadowed in the scene with the sea serpents:

> The Mariner is utterly alone and a sharer in the "body of this death." He is on the verge of learning that mysterious and omnipotent spirits govern his destiny. . . . Even so, the water-snakes are beautiful, the air radiant with life, and from the stiff bodies on the deck a troop of spirits sings with angelic music. Though he will always go in fear and dread, after this moment of joy and blessing a light and crimson colors signal to the land toward which he is driven. (98)

What Buchan so eloquently articulates is the painful price of imaginative endeavor—the blend of pleasure and horror that comes in recognizing oneself as governed by different laws than common men. He illustrates this difference in perspectives by explaining that the wedding guests can experience the pleasure of the moonlight on an enchanting evening and unaffectedly return to their everyday lives. He is careful to

point out that they no doubt absorb and carry with them more of the power of these sublime impressions than they realize. Even so, as creatures who structure their lives according to will and reason, they are able to select isolated elements of sensory experience judiciously (just enough to give them joy in the present moment) and disregard the rest so as to avoid being imprisoned in the realm of sensation. He contends that even Wordsworth was able to "confine and intensify" his imaginative life so as to retain its healing properties (107). In the face of political and personal failures, it was through "the sights and sounds of nature," Buchan explains, that Wordsworth "gained a joy and calm secure enough to atone for the desolation of his imprudent years" (107).

In basic agreement with Buchan, in *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature* (1985) Raimonda Modiano suggests that Coleridge's personal relationship with nature was contentious at best. He at least never fully inherited like Wordsworth the tranquil spirit of a mind that wholly offered itself to nature. Moreover, she explains that the poet insisted upon the primacy of the mind, avoiding the urge to succumb to sensory perception or to disengage himself from external objects because he feared that "if nature is to be given priority and the self is to be 'sent . . . abroad' to partake of a higher realm of being" the danger exists that it could be swept away by an external force and rendered a passive chain in a link of interconnected parts (57). In essence, Coleridge believed that without maintaining control of one's rational faculty, such a mind subjected itself to madness. Accordingly, Buchan surmises that as entranced as Coleridge was by the experience of basking in the sheer delight of sensory impressions, "Whether the sights and sounds with which poetry must be

filled came from objects around him or from their bright echo within his mind, he had come to mistrust them and the excitement they kindled" (107).

Coleridge's mariner, like his creator, is plagued by torment when at unexpected moments he is overcome with a sense of "anguish" that forces him to relive his guilt by sharing his story. Because he can never predict when the dark powers of his mind will overtake his better reason, he lives in a constant state of anxiety.[12] Buchan explains that evil forces throughout his voyage continuously lurk in the shadows of Beauty, generating "a fear that is deceitful, for a thick cloud hangs by the side of the moon, a wicked whisper breaks into prayer, [and] the limbs of the crew are raised like lifeless tools" (101). Consequently, the mariner has learned to approach Beauty with a cautious sense of dread, for he knows that the mesmerizing world of light, sound, and color possesses an uncanny ability to steal one away to an ulterior reality where reason and will have no controlling influence in determining one's fate.

We can safely assume that the perturbed mariner shares Keats's confession that "Imaginary grievances have always been more my torture than real ones. . . . The imaginary nails a man down for a sufferer, as on a cross. The real spurs him up into an agent."[13] There is no reason to suggest that either Keats or Coleridge was ever

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[12] John Keats also confessed to be haunted by certain repressed fears, which expectedly surfaced during his "dark moods," such as the one he recounts in an intriguing letter to J. H. Reynolds dated March 25, 1818. Here, he attests to being home alone one quiet, pleasurable evening when suddenly his mind took a dark turn, peering too far into the depths of the sea and there revealing glimpses of the predatory / destructive nature of every living thing. In a terrifying negation of Wordsworth's doctrine of the One Life, he comes to terms with the realization that all things are monstrously linked together so that even the gentle robin ravishes the helpless worm.

[13] Letter to Benjamin Bailey, Sept. 23, 1819.

enslaved by passions; however, both embodied Lord Byron's comment that "The great object of life is Sensation—to feel that we exist—even though in pain."[14] Based upon this overarching principle, Byron expressed the need to reside always (as does the mariner) in a constant state of motion. He confesses, "I can't stagnate . . . . [I]f I must sail let it be on the ocean no matter how stormy—anything but a dull cruise on a level lake without ever losing sight of the same insipid shores by which it is surrounded." Similarly, though landing safely on shore, the mariner is never able to reintegrate wholly into the human world or to settle even into a permanent residence. Instead, taking on the persona of the "Wandering Jew," he moves from place to place, relating the dangerous perils that await the individual who fails to appreciate and protect the interests of non-human nature. Though often criticized as an oversimplified summation of his incomprehensible experience, the mariner's didactic parting words challenge us to curb our egocentric mentalities and embrace the joy of envisioning ourselves as cohabitants of a complexly organized system:

> He prayeth best who liveth best,
> All things both great and small:
> For the dear God, who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all. (647-50)

The death of the reclusive traveler in "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree" also foreshadows the self-destructive future of the individual who lacks sympathy for the plight of others. The fault of the once ambitious youth who initially set out with

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[14] Letter to Annabella Milbanke, September 6, 1813.

the purest intention of setting himself against "the taint / Of dissolute tongues, 'gainst jealousy and hate, / And scorn" was that he sequestered himself in the solitude of nature (17-20). Turning his back on society, he sought to absorb selfishly the wonders of the universe through his own cultivated imagination. Most tragic is the realization that such a person leaves behind no mourners: "In this deep vale / He died,—this seat his only monument" (46-47). The speaker then warns the reader that "pride, / Howe'er disguised in its own majesty, / Is littleness" (50-52) and that such a calloused individual is unreceptive to the sweetest pleasures of human experience, for "he, who feels contempt / For any living thing, hath faculties / Which he has never used" (52-54). [15]

In contrast to the bleak images of separation denoted in the aforementioned poems, perhaps nowhere is Wordsworth's depiction of the interconnected relationship between "love of nature" and "love of man" stronger than in "Michael," the last poem he wrote for the 1800 second edition of *Lyrical Ballads.* It is the poet's homely, yet moving tale of an aged shepherd who favors frugality over extravagance and finds satisfaction in his daily communion with nature:

> Those fields, those hills—what could they less? had laid
> Strong hold on his affections, were to him

[15] In his *Defence of Poetry*, Percy Shelley maintains that "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine himself in the place of another and many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own" (33). Wordsworth communicates a similar message in the closing lines of the poem when his speaker advises the reader that "true knowledge leads to love" and that the individual who harbors even the purest knowledge in his breast but does not share it with his neighbor becomes a destructive reservoir of piety and self-pity. See Percy Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," *Shelley's Poetry and Prose, 2nd ed.*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: WW Norton, 2001) 509-35.

A pleasurable feeling of blind love,

The pleasure which there is in life itself. (74-77)

Both the physical and spiritual composition of the shepherd suggests a life in harmony with the natural landscape.[16] In the seclusion of this pastoral setting, the shepherd has acquired a strong body and an exceptionally astute mind (42-45). Not only does he possess the practical knowledge characteristic of his vocation, but he is adept in using a preternatural ability to hear and interpret the "subterraneous music" of the wind and able to predict when a storm is approaching by carefully discriminating between its different blasts and tones (51). Possessing as he does a primitive sensitivity to the voice of nature, he instinctively responds to her message as though she spoke directly to him: "The shepherd, at such warning, of his flock / Bethought him, and he to himself would say, / The winds are now devising work for me" (53-55). Moreover, the shepherd carries mystical powers in his imaginative storage house, derived in the company of the sublime, for "he had been alone / Amid the heart of many thousand mists, / That came to him, and left him, on the heights" (58-60). Regardless of what impressions we might go on to formulate about the shepherd as the tale progresses, the poet makes clear that there should be no mistake about his loyalty to nature: ". . . grossly that man errs who should suppose / That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks, / Were things indifferent to the shepherd's thoughts" (62-64).

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[16] Marjorie Levinson correctly observes that Michael is a dialectical thinker, for "through his habitual mental and physical structuring of his environment, Michael forms nature as it forms him" (711). See Marjorie Levinson, "Spiritual Economics: A Reading of Wordsworth's Michael," *ELH* 52.3 (1985): 707-31.

Bate contends that Wordsworth's placement of the shepherd in direct communion with nature supplants images of romantic love with the stronger, more permanent "love of mankind" (31). Indeed, the shepherd's solitude in nature awakens him to what the poet refers to in "Tintern Abbey" as "little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love," for his mind often turns to some small animal he had fed, housed, or rescued (71-72). Still, the lasting imprint of nature's gentle upbringing of the shepherd is demonstrated in the strong maternal instinct with which he rears up his own son:

> For often-times
> Old Michael, while [Luke] was a babe in arms,
> Had done him female service, not alone
> For pasttime and delight, as is the use
> Of Fathers, but with patient mind enforc'd
> To acts of tenderness; and he had rocked
> His cradle, as with a woman's gentle hand. (152-58)

In "Wordsworth and His 'Michael': The Pastor Passes," Sydney Lea observes that because the infant was almost supernaturally conceived when the shepherd and his wife were so advanced in age, Michael perceives his son to be a literal "gift from the earth" (61). As the latest in the blood line, Luke is the anointed successor of the estate that Michael had inherited from his own father. Moreover, as the pastoral fields were gradually diminishing in the face of enclosure and industrial farming, Lea points out that the devoted shepherd realized much more was at stake than property: "His emotional investments, the values which he has believed instinctively, even blindly,

face a potential bankruptcy" (61). So much of his life blood had Michael poured into the landscape that he deems himself scarcely capable of serving another master (379-80). Therefore, from the moment that Luke is old enough to be a nuisance to his father while at work, Michael impresses upon the young boy's mind through gentle love and firm discipline the value of a life endowed by nature.

The shepherd and his family (much like the old Cumberland beggar) are an empowering spiritual presence within the community, for they educate the public through their quiet example. When their outdoor work is finished, the father and son return home to a simple but nourishing meal before continuing their labor beneath the light of an old lamp. The narrator explains that the lighted cottage illuminated the surrounding plains with such consistency that it was known by neighboring villages as "The Evening Star" (139). In "Spiritual Economics: A Reading of Wordsworth's 'Michael,'" Levinson explains that while the family produces all the resources necessary to sustain its own livelihood, in exchange for monetary contributions, its value to the community lies solely in its existence (712). The neighborhood finds pleasure and inspiration in the light of the shepherd's work lamp, which they construe as a sacred emblem of "homely virtue"—a guidepost pointing the way to a mode of life that was increasingly losing its possibility in modern society (712).

While Michael's untainted passion for nature and humanity is repeatedly proven through a life of selfless giving, the great tragedy of the poem is that man does not reciprocate the love of the shepherd. After years of faithful service, a nephew's unpaid debt falls upon the shoulders of the innocent. The grieved Michael recognizes the unfairness of his fate in the sincere statement that "the sun himself / Has scarcely

been more diligent than I" (233-34). Still greater is the ultimate betrayal in the broken covenant when Luke's wicked dealings in the city lead to the loss of the cottage and land—the ancestral possession of the aged shepherd's life.

Unquestionably, "politics" lie at the center of Wordsworth's poem. The evils of city life intrude into the shepherd's pastoral haven, collapsing his idyllic paradise. Yet the poet does not dwell upon the nature of evil, nor does he offer his poem as a portrait of social ills but as a "history, homely and rude" narrated "[f]or the delight of a few natural hearts" (36). To this extent, the sanctity of the shepherd's story is dependent upon his enduring labor of kindness, most strikingly revealed when years after Luke had abandoned his promise, the grieved shepherd continues to toil for the well-being of his sheep and for the land that brought happiness to the greater portion of his life. The narrator commends the noble spirit of the shepherd in asserting, "There is a comfort in the strength of love; / 'Twill make a thing endurable, which else / Would overset the brain, or break the heart" (448-50).

The shepherd's unwavering devotion to man and nature lingers in our minds long after the tale is concluded, affirming Bate's assertion that Wordsworth's pastoral poetry derives power from its mystical ability to leave lasting impressions upon the mind (18). It is a comfort greatly needed, for at the end of the poem, the shepherd's homely dwelling is torn down to make way for the plough, and in the opening passages we find that nature has restored itself, signifying the inevitability of change. Indeed, if we should learn anything from the weeds that overtake Margaret's grave in the closing stanzas of "The Ruined Cottage," it is that nature has a right to exist uninhibited by human interference. Still, when left to her own devices, nature does

not seek to shut out the human world, but rather (as we see in the pathway she weaves for the traveler through the mountainous terrain to the spot of "utter solitude" and even more directly to the pile of unhewn stones from which the shepherd's tale originates) she openly invites human contact. The poem stands as a charming invitation to exchange temporarily the everyday toilsome labors for more serene surroundings. Though the shepherd's cottage no longer stands in plain view of the surrounding communities as a towering beacon of virtue and stability, the poet hints that Eden lies just beyond the rugged terrain and is always accessible to those who will take a few moments to step outside the business of modern life and meditate, however "random and imperfectly, / . . . On man; the heart of man and human life" (32-33).

A similar portrait of life springing out of death is displayed in "Tintern Abbey" as Wordsworth departs from the triumphs and struggles of fictional characters to relate his own internal development as an anointed child of nature. In the opening stanzas, the poet describes a joyous personal reunion when, after a five-year absence, he eagerly returns to the place of his upbringing with a newfound appreciation for the delights of its tranquil setting. Despite the massive overgrowth he sees, his perceptive eye lands upon patches of green interspersed throughout images of barrenness and decay:

> These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
> Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
> Are clad in one green hue, . . . lose themselves
> 'Mid groves and copses. (11-14)

Clearly a sense of optimism prevails in the face of ruin as a seemingly infertile landscape reveals its generative capacity. Ironically, Wordsworth dates the composition of the poem as July 13, 1798, the day before the ninth anniversary of the storming of the Bastille—an insight that lends deeper significance to his mournful observance throughout the poem regarding a sense of something irreparably lost: "That time is past / And all its aching joys are now no more / And all its dizzy raptures" (83-85). In "The Politicized Landscape of Tintern Abbey," William Richey argues that if, indeed, Wordsworth returned to the abbey hoping to find "renewal" or "rebirth," we can safely assume that he left with the sad realization that things will never be as they once were (204). He explains that in spite of the "idyllic reimmersion" into the joys of rural life that the opening stanza appears to indicate, his composition of the poem a few miles "above" Tintern Abbey signifies that he grimly overlooks a Promised Land he is barred from, similar to the image of Moses on Mount Pisgah or Satan viewing a paradise lost (204).

Similarly, in *The Romantic Reformation* (1997), Robert Ryan reminds us that "Tintern Abbey" was composed not only on the heels of violent warfare but amidst the rubble of a crumbling religious infrastructure. He notes how deeply significant it is that Wordsworth set the poem, recognized as the first great manifesto of his One Life philosophy, amongst the literal ruins of one of England's most prominent churches, since here he is advocating the replacement of orthodox Christianity with a controversial doctrine claiming that "nature and sensation are enough for spiritual sustenance" (90). He further delineates the radical implications of Wordsworth's

unconventional religious philosophy, explaining that his revamped faith rested on the belief that "Nature had its own power to instruct the mind and sanctify the soul, not as the manifestation or the agent of God but as all the divinity we need on Earth" (90). Indeed, what happiness the poet does discover in the poem is found not in government, politics, or religion but in close contemplation of nature.

Just as Wordsworth presents so many of his characters as singularly aligned to the natural landscape, in this poem he charts his own distinctive relationship to the environment at various stages of his physical and spiritual development. Though he does not dwell long on "the coarser pleasures of [his] boyish days" (73), he maintains in the "Intimations Ode" that as young children we frequently experience "visionary gleams" (56)—innate impressions of our immortality—which in later years lead us to revere this period as sacred. Yet, as Ernest Bernbaum explains in his detailed description of Wordsworth's "three ages," for the most part, childhood is a thoughtless stage during which one revels in external stimuli but cannot conceptualize its meaning. He characterizes such a life as guided by "physical sensations, vivid awareness, 'glad animal movements,' and unreflecting absorption in natural phenomena" (93).[17] Bernbaum further contends that, in adolescence, individuals become aware of themselves as existing outside of nature. This period he describes as one of nervous restlessness, marked by "extraordinary bodily and mental activity [and a] highly emotional response to life—feverish, rebellious, passionate, and fanciful" (93). The poet says of himself at this early stage of his self-conscious maturation,

[17] Ernest Bernbaum, *Guide through the Romantic Movement,* 2nd ed. (New York: Ronald P, 1949).

I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colors and their forms, were then to me
An appetite: a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. (75-83)

The advantage of this interval of human development is that one is not weighed down by burdens and responsibilities. Age and experience sharpen our vision to a conscious awareness that the world is full of pain and sorrow. Initially, this mature phase, which Keats recognized as the middle chamber of his "Mansion of Many Apartments," can be debilitating as the newfound knowledge of evil and distress dampens our spirit so that we cannot see beyond our afflictions: "We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a Mist. We are now in that State. We feel the 'burthen of the Mystery'" (90), a direct allusion to "Tintern Abbey." However, he proposes that if we go on living and thinking, we will eventually penetrate this seemingly insurmountable wall, wherein lies the promise of a hopeful future: "I know—the truth is there is something real in the world. Your third chamber of life shall be a lucky and gentle one—stored with the wine of love and the bread of Friendship" (1818). Likewise, though Wordsworth laments his inability to retrieve that state of early innocence, he has, he says, been more than compensated for his loss,

For I have learned

To look on nature, not as in the hour

Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes

The still, sad music of humanity,

Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power

To chasten and subdue. (89-94)

In these lines, Wordsworth recognizes that in adulthood one's egocentric conceptions of the world are qualified by an awareness of human suffering embodied in that "still, sad music" (92). Many of the Romantic poets used music as a symbolic representation of the unifying power of Imagination, which cuts across class boundaries and unites us as one human race. Shelley's entire "Defence of Poetry" might be assessed as a lesson in musical composition. Drawing upon the cognitive powers of the Imagination to ascertain new knowledge from old truths, he perceives poetry as the music which arouses man's impulses—the mysterious breath of wind, which awakens and animates one's inner nature. Borrowing from Coleridge's metaphor of the Eolian harp in "Ode to the West Wind," he envisions man as an instrument, which by its divine nature, is highly susceptible to both internal and external stimuli. Therefore, the job of the poet is to respond to the breeze of life with its vibrating strings. When the correct chords are struck in proper harmony, a beautiful song is produced (511). He contends that the first duty of the poet is to touch the individual soul with poetry, bringing readers to an awareness of their relationship with the larger world. His engaging reference to the poet as "a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet

sounds" (516) addresses the personalized power of poetry—its therapeutic capacity to fortify the solitary traveler, who seeks refuge in the quietude of nature.

It is this capacity that Keats acknowledges as the immortal quality of his nightingale's soothing voice. The "self-same song" that lands upon the dejected poet's ears is what was "heard / In ancient days by emperor and clown" and what comforted and sustained the homesick Ruth as she "stood in tears amid the alien corn" (63-67). Shelley and Keats believed that true poetry does not arouse selfish pleasures but inspires a greater understanding of the individual's relationship to all of humanity. It is this recognition that leads Keats to abandon the charmed world of the nightingale, for he fears that from within the grave, he will not be able to hear its song. To experience truly the power of music, as Wordsworth's "still sad music" of humanity exemplifies, one must know what it is to suffer.

Even so, Wordsworth did not approach life as something that has to be endured in preparation for any pleasurable escape in death. Through Imagination, as Wordsworth's solitaries so clearly model, every individual person is capable of adding to his or her social and emotional existence, achieving even in the face of suffering not only a glimpse of a higher order but a sense of belonging to the greater cosmos—that "universal home" to which every living being is securely connected by virtue of the same life-giving source:

> . . . And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. (93-102)

In the span between "Salisbury Plain" and "Tintern Abbey," the poet's imaginative debts are realized in *Lyrical Ballads*. In youth, the poet appreciated nature merely to the extent that it aroused sensual pleasures, brought comfort in times of distress, or impressed upon his heart the sanctity of the human spirit engaged in acts of goodness. In maturity, he now upholds it as possessing an immortal and sacral power that survives the life and death of individual organisms:

. . . Nor less, I trust,
To [these forms of natural beauty] I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burden of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until the breath of this corporeal frame,
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep

In body and become a living soul:

While with an eye made quiet by the power

Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

We see into the life of things. (35-49)

In *The Active Universe*, H. W. Piper identifies Wordsworth's personal and artistic progression as a stage of imaginative growth in which the poet moves from "communication to communion" with nature (122). He notes that the young Wordsworth always sensed that the landscape possessed its own language, that it contained "qualities of human personality or human feeling," which the observant mind could actively engage (122). However, it was the mature poet who, through the habitual practice of training his mind to seek out the animated attributes of the landscape, came to accept that natural forms were not merely endowed with human characteristics but that "the forms themselves have a life which is not that of men" (122). Thus, he maintains that the Imagination came to signify for Wordsworth the mental capacity not only to recognize the spiritual power of natural objects but "to enter into a relationship with them in which all their qualities as living things could be experienced—qualities of character, emotional significance, and moral reassurance" (122). [18]

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[18] It is significant to note that these sublime impressions do not lose their splendor but instead become more sacred in his mind as vehicles that lead to an enriched state of consciousness:

Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both of what they half-create,
And half perceive; well pleased to recognize

Evidence of the poet's heightened appreciation of nature's spiritual powers is further reflected in his presentation of the natural landscape. While once nature impressed upon the poet's mind a grim reflection of his own despondent hopes, his sharp creative eye now penetrates a beautifully picturesque scene, revealing first a sweeping image of the "waters, rolling from their mountain-springs" (3) and the "steep and lofty cliffs" (5) before zooming in on the smaller wonders of landscape endowed with"hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines / Of sportive wood run wild" (15-16). Perhaps the most impressive feature of this animated landscape is that the subliminal sphere does not encroach upon the lowly orders but each embraces the other as sacred halves of one harmonious whole.

In "The New Sublimity in 'Tintern Abbey,'" Carl Woodring points to Albert O. Wlecke's observation that the Romantics did much more than implant their unique personalities into the landscape. He maintains that they projected the sublime not as a force residing outside the self but as a creative exercise of the sovereign faculty of Imagination that occurs when "consciousness becomes reflexively aware of itself as an interfusing energy dwelling within the phenomena of nature" (95). To further illustrate his point, Woodring cites Coleridge's comment that "I meet, I *find* the Beautiful—but I give, contribute, or rather attribute the Sublime" (95). Taken at face value, such claims would obviously be shocking to their contemporary audience

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In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (103-112)

though Woodring suggests that the Romantics' quiet, meditative style cushioned the radical implications of their message. He points to Wordsworth's picturesque portrayal of sublime nature as representative of a shifting artistic movement in eighteenth-century English landscape painting. He explains that like Constable and Turner, the poet found that by moving human subjects further into the background, he was able to demonstrate "far more deeply interfused, the strengths of ordinary human life, with its silent sufferings and its quiet joys—in Constable's vernacular, its wet planks" (98).

Accordingly, in "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth tucks away humans into the nooks and crannies of the rural landscape as a means of showing (as the smoke from the hermit's cottage so pointedly illustrates) that the silent power of one's imaginative life—all that we "half create, / [And half] perceive" (106-07)—offers both a more profitable mode of existence and a more potent capacity to exercise an authentic and lasting change in one's world than participation in a social network could afford. Realizing that these flashes of inspiration were rare and transient, the poet strained deeply to keep them in mind. Thus, throughout *Lyrical Ballads*, the moments akin to his childhood "spots of time" he experiences in encounters with lowly outcasts are frequently presented as fleeting visitations—a series of gentle brushes with strange, yet familiar types, that pass quickly but stamp upon the heart permanent, life-altering impressions. It was in absorbing the power of these transforming experiences and adding them to the repertoire of his imaginative life, along with his commitment to

social progress and humanitarianism, that Wordsworth later found inspiration to write an epic poem on the development of his own evolving mind under the stimulating tutelage of nature.

CHAPTER VI

THE MARRIAGE OF MIND AND NATURE: THE SPOUSAL RELATIONSHIP IN WORDSWORTH'S PRELUDE

While the premature death of both parents left Wordsworth searching for a place to call "home," his lifelong identification with dispossessed subjects, poignantly illustrated in *Lyrical Ballads*, offers substantial proof that he recognized the importance of developing strong relationships with the environment as a necessary component of human health and happiness. Moreover, for Wordsworth, securing these ties meant constantly striving to preserve the past, thereby keeping distant memories fresh and accessible in his imaginative consciousness. In an early passage of his 1799 *Prelude*[1] that could arguably be extracted as the first "spot of time,"[2] the poet pinpoints the mission of his work as an endeavor to recreate those enduring conversations that "throw back our life / And almost make our infancy itself / A visible scene on which the sun is shining" (I. 662-64). In questioning "who shall parcel out? / His intellect by geometric rules / Split like a province into round and square" (II. 208-10), he surmises that the human spirit is

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[1] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: A Norton Critical Edition,* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes are cited from the 1805 version in this edition.

[2] Wordsworth first designates the phrase "spots of time" in The Two-Part *Prelude* of 1799 in reference to trance-like moments, typically experienced in earliest childhood, in which "our minds— / Especially the imaginative power— / Are nourished and invisibly repaired" (XI. 262-64). This chapter illustrates that the "spots of time" yield fascinating insight regarding Wordsworth's earliest impressions of the human condition and, furthermore, that these flashbacks are direct embodiments of his mature poetic vision. Through the process of "internal revision," Wordsworth reasserts himself into a previous experience, allowing his former mindset to come into contact with his present knowledge and enabling him to formulate fresh insights that are original to the moment but nonetheless suggest truths that he intuitively believed and gradually articulated with greater power and conviction as they became more solidified in his poetic consciousness.

too vast an entity for us to ascertain rationally which part of our being originated from where. Still, throughout his radically retrospective and epic poem, he does not hesitate to express gratitude to the people and things in his life to which he feels most indebted.

Wordsworth's earlier poem "The Brothers," included in the second revised edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), presents a moving example of the value Wordsworth placed upon maintaining strong relational ties with one's childhood home. The tale centers on Leonard, a young mariner who returns to his homely village, longing to be reunited with his brother, his soul mate since earliest childhood. We later learn that he had gone to sea following his father's death in an effort to support himself and his brother, together representing "the last of all their race" (76). Yet his heart is never far from the pastoral hills of his upbringing, so that he is tenderly referred to as "half a shepherd on stormy seas" (46). So attuned is he to the natural landscape with its "tones of waterfalls, and inland sounds / Of caves and trees" (48-49) that while far removed in the tropics on lonesome days when, for hours on end, he stood on the deck of his ship and watched the wind create waves and sea foam, his eye would gaze beyond the surface of the water to the "bosom of the deep" (610), and instantly he was home again amongst "forms of sheep that graz'd / On verdant hills, with dwellings among Trees / And shepherds clad in the same country grey / Which he himself had worn" (62-65).

In a like spirit, the poet opens Book IV of *The Prelude* with a moving description of the glorious homecoming that awaited him when he returned for summer vacation to the rural village of Hawkshead, where he had attended grammar school. The old ferryman, his gentle "dame" (Ann Tyson), and even the loyal dog all eagerly receive

him, while the "snow-white church upon its hill" issues forth its own special greeting, "sit[ting] like a throne'd lady, [and] sending out / A gracious look all over its domain" (IV. 14-15). He reassumes his place at the "domestic table"—a favorite family gathering place where we learn earlier in the poem that the Wordsworth brothers busied themselves with their school lessons or in pedestrian games "too humble to be named in verse" (IV. 541)—and reacquaints himself with the very bed where he had frequently listened to "the roaring wind / And clamorous rain" and watched with steadfast eyes through his bedroom window as "to and fro / In the dark summit of the moving [ash] tree / She rocked with every impulse of the wind" (IV. 76-77, 81-83). Thus while often criticized as an egotistical project intended to glorify the intellectual and spiritual achievements of its creator, a close examination of *The Prelude* reveals a poet who, though conscientiously choosing to inhabit isolated places and states of mind, never ceases to exist in intimate relationship with even the most humble and insignificant aspects of his physical surroundings.

In *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814,* Geoffrey Hartman reads Wordsworth's culminating poetic achievement in *The Prelude* as the crucial realization that what in childhood he mistook for nature's power was, in truth, a reflection of his own imaginative potential. He explains that because the child's mind is incapable of distinguishing "the impact of the scenes . . . from overwhelming sense impressions," the adult experiences the thrilling breakthrough of recollections denoted as "spots of time," memories intensified in the poet's recognition that the strength he once blindly drew from nature as physical and spiritual nourishment was, even then, derived not from the external world but from within (215).

In Hartman's analogy, nature, the entrusted caretaker of that sacred power, "does the best it can to act as Heaven's substitute," providing the child with only a veiled intuition of his or her mental capacities until the mind develops sufficiently to serve as the appointed receptacle (215-16). He suggests that the sheer force of imagination may eventually prove too great for the "milder, perishable beauties of nature" to hold, with the result that "[t]he shadow of its power often erases the reality of the familiar world or is affixed to parts of it with overwhelming psychic effect" (216). He praises this state of forgetfulness as a positive stage of development, insisting that to retain a clear mental image of one's native home would lock one inside the past and thereby obstruct an individual from becoming, in Wordsworth's famous formulation, "an inmate of this active universe" (Hartman 216). He thus suggests that the function of Wordsworth's "spots of time" is to bring the child into more intimate contact with "the power or mystery of its own imagination" (216), which he, in turn, defines as "the special consciousness that brings a man home to himself" (211).

I would qualify Hartman's argument by insisting that his overemphasis upon imagination as a power divorced from nature discredits the vast majority of Wordsworth's poetry that does indeed glorify nature and the feelings it inspires in the human heart. Though Hartman's central assertion that nature leads the poet beyond nature is accurate enough, I would add that this claim does not suffice as a summation of Wordsworth's principal achievement. This chapter therefore seeks to reestablish an appropriate balance between the power of the imagination and the natural world, emphasizing nature as the necessary origin and inspiration of all imaginative activity.

While not always understanding nature's purposes, the poet reveals in Book One that he has learned to trust in the natural world as a more dependable source of guidance and direction than his own indecisive mind, which aimlessly wanders from one extreme to another. In the closing lines of the opening book, Wordsworth explains the aim of his early childhood recollections as "the hope . . . that I might fetch / Invigorating thoughts from former years" as a means of stabilizing the "wavering balance of my mind" and thus communicating to the reader how "the heart was framed" by nature to pursue its poetic calling (I. 668-70). Indeed, as the story of his life unfolds, we find that oftentimes throughout his career the poet admittedly steered off course, mistakenly chasing dark phantoms disguised as agents of liberty. Nonetheless, the comforting insight of the aged shepherd to his son in Book Eight provides an exemplary model of the poet's own intuitive nature, which allows him to find his way back to the fold no matter what storms might impede his journey. The father consoles his heartbroken son with a reminder of the lamb's instinctual and powerful will to survive, explaining with comforting assurance,

> . . . though the storm [were to]
> Drive one of these poor creatures miles and miles,
> If he can crawl he will return again
> To his own hills, the spots where when a lamb
> He learnt to pasture at his mother's side. (VIII. 254-58)

Likewise, as he embarks upon his most ambitious creative endeavor, the poet looks to nature as a stable lantern, which securely lights his way. He confidently declares,

> The earth is all before me[3]—with a heart
> Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty,
> I look about, and should the guide I chuse
> Be nothing better than a wandering cloud
> I cannot miss my way. (I. 15-19)

The poet further confesses that more than any human companion, the "sands of Westmoreland" and "the creeks and bays / Of Cumbria's rocky limits" could testify to the richest experiences of his childhood years (I. 594-95). He fondly recalls the perceptive eye that scanned the "shining water, gathering, as it seemed, / Through every hair-breadth of that field of light, / New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers" (I. 606-08). Especially as a young child who frequently withdrew from human contact into the solitude of nature, the would-be poet absorbed and accumulated *extra-human* powers, which in later years gradually shaped his perspective of the human condition and contributed to his ideology of social reform.

Wordsworth reveals in *The Prelude* a specific facet of his unique propensity and authorial talent: his capacity to "shape the image of a place" (III. 110), a specific "spot" or point in time encapsulated in memory by means of an acute sensitivity to his

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[3] This line is an echo of the poet-narrator's statement in the concluding book of Milton's *Paradise Lost* just as Adam and Eve are driven out of Eden:

> The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
> They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
> Through Eden took their solitary way. (XII. 646-49)

In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth reverses this process to underscore the possibility of Paradise in the commonality of the everyday.

surroundings. Thus, in opposition to Hartman's theory that Wordsworth's "spot syndrome," which he defines as the compulsive "obsession with specific place"[4] (122), and is symbolic of the wary poet's resistance to separating from nature, I contend that Wordsworth's tendency to cling to specific places was not a desperate crutch that subconsciously impeded growth. Relying upon memory rather than a muse as his source of poetic inspiration, the poet's conceptualization of the spots (in their evocation of past suffering) provide an inkling of the tragedy in human experience that enables Wordsworth's underlying theory of poetry—the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling"—to operate. In this manner, the spots serve as a mode of transport that permits the poet to relive the intensity of feeling and, thus, to expand the range of his imaginative consciousness.

In the period between 1799 and 1805, the poet struggled to come to terms with what happened to his younger self as well as to understand how those experiences contributed to his imaginative growth, thereby allowing him to overcome these strong and potentially overwhelming feelings of separation and devastation.[5] It is especially

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[4] Hartman maintains that the Imagination's disengagement from nature takes on an extraordinary strength by first attaching the full weight of its power to a single fixed place (122). He explains that "[i]ts showplace is still nature but reduced to one center as dangerous as any holy site. This site is an *omphalos*: the naval point in which powers meet, the 'one' place leading to a vision of the One" (122).

[5] Jonathan Bishop provides a comprehensive listing of many of *The Prelude's* key "spots" as well as a valuable discussion of recurring motifs in Wordsworth's use of memory in *The Prelude*. In the majority of the spots, he finds "a repeated action," generally involving a solitary figure who detaches himself from a crowd (52), and suggests that the protagonist's action typically implies "guilty overtones, expressive of power and pride, rising as it proceeds to a boundary, there to be checked and retaliated from without, by countermotion, or by a voice or the appearance of a grim shape, whose arrival precipitates an oppressive catastrophe" (52). He adds to these abstract features the reappearance of natural objects, such as wind, moonlight, and horses (46-47). "Wordsworth and the Spots of Time," *ELH* 26 (1959): 44-63.

important to remember, then, that Wordsworth's perception of Imagination as a connecting force that enabled relationship between oneself and one's environment was a notion he gradually arrived at upon learning to utilize his creative powers in original ways that had never before been exercised through poetry. Specifically, the poet of 1804 discovered that the power of those sustaining memories he had crafted and termed "spots of time" provided the necessary methodology to expand significantly and so complete the remainder of *The Prelude*, which he would fashion solely out of the autobiographical materials of his own life.

In brief, after initially examining the original "spots" of his Two-Part *Prelude* of 1799, this chapter advances to a focus on how, in his revised 1805 version, Wordsworth drew upon those early memories, recasting those powerful childhood recollections (so poignantly characterized by detachment and loss) with other threshold experiences, signifying the poet's more mature understanding that imaginative growth entails forging intimate relationships with people, objects, and states of mind existing outside oneself. Consequently, the adult experiences outlined in the 1805 *Prelude* conversely function to signify an awareness of relationship and confirm a sense of connection to the world, which is the center of Wordsworth's idea of home outlined in his great epic poem.

As a follow-up to Bishop's work, David Ellis offers a more detailed analysis of the psychological ramifications of Wordsworth's spots. In his much more recent study, he reads the terror relayed in the gibbet scene, for example, as representative of the lost child's traumatic fear of separation. Moreover, he views the child's brief detachment from his servant in the fog as symbolic of a deeper, more permanent feeling of abandonment, which accompanied the child's grieving process following the death of his mother at an extremely vulnerable and impressionable point in his young life (71). See *Wordsworth, Freud, and the Spots of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985).

I. The Dark Spots

It is no secret that from earliest childhood, Wordsworth believed himself an endowed child of nature. He disliked the confinement of formal education and turned instead to nature's teaching. *The Prelude* abounds with passages indicating that the most joyful moments of boyhood were spent hill-climbing and bird-snatching—solitary adventures that he far preferred to both human company and book knowledge. Still, as the violent hailstorm of "Salisbury Plain" suggests, Wordsworth's encounters with nature were often not pleasurable. Indeed, from early youth, they constituted some of the most torturous experiences of his life. In Book One of his 1799 *Prelude*, the poet recounts the story of a childish adventure on a stolen row boat as an experience inherently marred, "an act of stealth and troubled pleasure" ("Two-Part *Prelude*" I. 90-91). As he rows alone on the lake with his unlawful prize, nature chases him down and demands retribution—an act that troubles his conscience well into maturity:

> [A]fter I had seen
> That spectacle, for many days my brain
> Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
> Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts
> There was a darkness—call it solitude
> Of blank desertion—no familiar shapes
> Of hourly objects, images of trees,
> Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,
> But huge and mighty forms that do not live

Like living men moved slowly through my mind

By day, and were the trouble of my dreams. (1799; I. 119-29)

As an adult, he praises the disciplinary duty of nature that reprimands self-absorbed behavior as a means of molding the mind toward higher purposes "until we recognize / A grandeur in the beatings of the heart" (1799; I. 140-41). Liberty, he somehow always felt, was not a tangible possession that could be forcefully snatched from another's hands, nor a mode of self-gratification achieved in sport or at another's expense. Rather it was for Wordsworth principally an inward potential that, properly exercised, could bring about real and permanent personal change initiated from within. Yet as a child when nature took on monstrous forms, such as the mountain that rises up from the edge of the water and chases him across the lake or the "heavy breathings" and "sounds / Of undistinguishable motion" that pursued him after having upset a bird's nest (1799; I. 48-49), he did not perceive her stern correction as a positive stage of social conditioning. Instead, the threatening behavior of the landscape reveals a temperament so drastically incongruous with natural processes that it compounded his fears that the security of his attachment to the physical world was unraveling. With no supporting anchor on which to fasten, he felt himself for the first time in his brief existence in danger of annihilation.

In a separate scene, nature stirs the poet to yet another frightening mental image in which he feels indicted for wrongdoing (this time for a crime he did not personally commit). At the age of six, while riding horseback through the woods, he becomes separated from his companion and stumbles upon the execution site of a murderer. The 1799 version relates only that the gibbet-mast was "mouldered," and the bones, iron, and wood were gone (1799; I. 310-11). Not until the 1805 version do we learn that the

criminal's name was scrawled upon the ground as an identifying marker of his heinous act (XI. 291-93). Thereafter, the poet explains that the "superstition" of the community led many curious onlookers to gather around the gibbet, brushing away the grassy overgrowth to read the offender's name (XI. 297).

Having arrived at such an hour that "the letters are fresh and visible" (298), the inquisitive child attempts to decipher the handwriting when his eyes land upon the horrific image (also alluded to in the earlier version) of "a naked pool" and "A girl who bore a pitcher on her head / And seemed with difficult steps to force her way / Against the blowing wind" (XI. 306-08). In both versions, as he looks back upon the incident as an adult, he admits the images themselves to be fairly ordinary though he clearly recalls that they stirred within his mind a sudden fear that led him to flee in terror. Finding himself even now incapable of articulating the source of his deep dread, he maintains that it would require "Colours and words that are unknown to man / To paint the visionary dreariness" that plagued him as he frantically searched for his fellow traveler and guide (XI. 309-10).

It is difficult to ascertain why the burial plot of a complete stranger would evoke such a seemingly personal reaction of grief and horror from the child. Perhaps the answer lies in the young boy's unsettling association of his own private pangs of separation and being lost with death when it first dawns as a concept for the living. When read in this light, the frightful episode pinpoints an early moment in the poet's emotional and intellectual development where his young mind began to "domesticate" death, cleansing it of its supernatural characteristics and situating it in the intensely personal domain of home. The image of the child looking down upon the name scrawled upon the grave

marker is reminiscent of a later episode at Mount Snowdon when, from high upon a mountain, he stares straight down into an abysmal pit,[6] thus coming face to face with his own mortality in an experience that at this early stage serves to weaken his faith in the indestructible strength of the mortal human frame. Moreover, the unshakable attachment that the poet describes between the infant child and "mother nature," an attachment in which he suggests we can trace "the progress of our being" (II. 239), is here subverted in the image of a lost child who comes to feel most acutely the sheer terror of losing his bearings and finding himself utterly alone.

In still another chilling scene, first written in 1799, the thirteen-year-old boy recalls impatiently waiting with his brothers high upon a cliff, which overlooked the intersection of two highways. On a day described as "stormy, and rough, and wild," the three brothers took partial covering in the grass beside a "naked wall" in the company of only "a single sheep" and "a whistling hawthorn" (1799; I. 356-59). Here, they feverishly anticipated the horses that would at any moment appear on one of two roads in the valley below to transport them home from school for the Christmas season. The uncertainty of the designated path upon which his "deliverer" would arrive to rescue him from bondage fills his young mind with imaginative delight. Yet ten days later, his father's untimely death jars him to an awareness of the darker realities of fate, making his childish reflections on the nature of liberty and human destiny appear embarrassingly and

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[6] Hartman maintains that the omphalos frequently takes the form of an abyss, which he describes as "a kind of verticalized point and a variant of the 'narrow chasm' and 'gloomy straight,' such as the one the poet actually crosses in the Simplon Pass episode or the one he confronts at Mt. Snowdon where he suddenly glimpses imagination in a 'breach' or 'dark deep thoroughfare'"(122). He contends that "[i]n its quality of omphalos, this place of places is at once breach and nexus, a breach in nature and a nexus for it and a different world" (122).

inappropriately callow. The poet explains that "the event, / With all the sorrow which it brought, appeared a chastisement" (1799; I. 369). [7]

In *Buried Communities*, Kurt Fosso pays particular attention to the would-be poet's position at a symbolic "crossroads." He explains that the death of his father represented a pivotal turning point in both his personal and artistic development, for he was "bound, thereafter, to imagine and establish new and old communities" (181). He reads the scene as a historical journey in which the poet reconstructs not only a deeply painful moment from his childhood but "his poetic origination and elegiac genealogy . . . the foundations of his art and social vision . . . from glad birth to grave" (181).

Critics have not gone so far as to compare the self-portrait of the poet at Hawkshead as he waited with his brothers for the arrival of the horses to a nativity scene though the resemblance is striking. In addition to the incident taking place just before Christmas, the "still-life" image of the boy (vulnerable, yet endowed with special powers), who is housed only by a feeble shelter that half-protects him from the natural elements, bears similarity to the Christ child born in a lowly stable. Moreover, the lamb on his one side and the tree on the other provide a prophetic omen of his preordained calling to serve as an ambassador—even a martyr—for the poor and powerless and to deliver an oppressed people from bondage.

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[7] Richard E. Matlak maintains that "Looking at the boy looking into the mist, the poet [of 1805] returns to this memory because it becomes one of hope for the father's mysterious return to relieve him of guilt" (186). He explains that Wordsworth desperately desires a visitation, such as the ghostly apparatus that appeared to Hamlet as an incarnation of his dead father to offer clarification concerning the true source of his death and to provide a clear sense of purpose and direction as to how his grieving son should proceed in the future. Yet, according to Matlak, the poet's hopes are unsuccessful, for "he can only hope that his power of mind might control and shape the reality he wished for, but of course, he was only seeing things" (186). *The Poetry of Relationship: The Wordsworths and Coleridge, 1797-1800* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1997).

Fosso points to the adult poet's seemingly fresh sense of guilt and terror in reliving the scene as originating from an inability to mourn sufficiently though he does not specify the cause of the poet's unsuccessful efforts. Whatever the source of the mature poet's self-blame, which continues to afflict him with the immediacy of a fresh wound, he kneels down to nature's stern, corrective measures with contrite heart and is able to view the experience anew:

> And afterwards the wind and sleety rain,
> And all the business of the elements,
> The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
> And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
> The noise of wood and water, and the mist
> Which on the line of those two roads
> Advanced in such indisputable shapes—
> All these were spectacles and sounds to which
> I often would repair, and thence would drink
> As at a fountain. ("Two-Part *Prelude*" 361-70)

In this passage, he describes the process of gathering powerful insights from the bleak images associated with that painful memory and safeguarding them within the store house of his mind as nourishment for future years. Moreover, just as the aforementioned "spots" illustrate how Wordsworth makes use of the powers derived in quiet contemplation of nature, they also depict tellingly the power these encounters exert over the poet. Much like the ancient mariner who is doomed to live in a state of uneasy terror, the "dark spots," in particular, which sporadically appear at inopportune moments,

embody key episodes when the poet has no choice but to admit that the world holds sway over him—that his destiny is governed by forces outside himself. Still, while nature's fierce gravitational pull led Coleridge to distrust her as a friend and guide, the mature Wordsworth recognized that even in her dark phases, nature possessed revelatory powers that he longed to be in contact with because they gradually led him to a renewed understanding of his responsibilities as a contributing, participatory member of the greater cosmic community.

II. Revolutionary Fever: Cambridge, France, and Grasmere Fair

Though the poet experienced his original "spots of time" in the solitude of the natural world, in later years he soaked up the energies of the social sphere, adding them to the expansive catalogue of sublime impressions from which he shaped his transformative vision. From his movement in various social circles, particularly during the early stages of the Revolution, he learned the revelatory potential of engaging with extraordinary modes of consciousness, particularly in that glorious season when both the highest and lowest orders of society seemed to march in unison to the same upbeat tempo and all things great and small appeared radiant in his eye, as though bathed in the same celestial light.

On his first day at Cambridge, a student dressed in cap and gown captivates his attention, so much so that he confesses, "I was [not] master of my eyes / Till he was left one hundred yards behind" (III. 8-9). He explains that the place had a magnetic attraction about it—an "eddy's force" that lured him in with each advancing step (III. 10-11). So mesmerized was he by the surreal aura of university life that he describes his first tour of

the campus as an out-of-body experience: "From street to street with loose and careless heart / I was the dreamer, they the dream" (III. 27-28). Still, early on, we find the first clue of the poet's subtle detachment from scholastic pursuits when, dressed in his pompous schoolboy attire, he appears hardly recognizable to himself. Moreover, as he surveys the studious atmosphere of the classrooms and dormitories—the feverish quest for knowledge, the competition amongst the students, the nervous agitation surrounding examinations—he admits to knowing all along that he was not an academic:

> Not seldom had I of melancholy thoughts
> From personal and family regards,
> Wishing to hope without a hope—some fears
> About my future worldly maintenance.
> And more than all, a strangeness in my mind
> A feeling that I was not for that hour
> Nor for that place. (III. 76-82)

Even so, the alluring atmosphere of this distinguished institution, with its conglomeration of human energies, fed his poetic soul and confirmed his long-held suspicion that he was intended for higher purposes. Energized by the aggregation of passions that circulated within a single sphere, he ventured into his own comfortable arena with the boldness of a spiritual exorcist whose magic wand brought to life everything he touched:

> To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,
> Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
> I gave a moral life—I saw them feel,
> Or linked them to some feeling.

. . . . . .

I had a world about me—'twas my own,

I made it; for it only lived to me,

And to the God who looked into my mind. (III. 125-28, 142-44)

In Book Nine, a seemingly less confident, though equally inspired Wordsworth recounts his second sojourn in France in 1792 when he moved in the circles of some of the most radical political minds of his day. Here he describes himself as an outsider taking in the spectacle of an impending revolution:

In both her clamorous halls,

The National Synod and the Jacobins,

I saw the revolutionary power

Toss like a ship at anchor, rocked by storms;

. . . . . .

Great rendezvous of worst and best, the walk

Of all who had a purpose, or had not;

I stared and listened with a stranger's ears

To hawkers and haranguers, hubbub wild,

And hissing factionists with ardent eyes. (IX. 49-52, 55-59)

Indeed, though the One Life philosophy is generally thought to have been conceived in contemplation of nature as a remedy for the divided state of humanity, the poet reveals its earliest origins as rooted in the common spirit and likeminded purpose of radical revolutionaries in France:

In age and temper differing, they had yet

One spirit ruling in them all—alike

(Save only one, hereafter to be named)[8]

Were bent upon undoing what was done.

This was their rest, and only hope. (IX. 134-38)

Similarly, in the Grasmere Fair that opens Book Eight, Wordsworth presents himself as stimulated by the aggregate of human personalities and talents directed toward a common cause:

What sounds are those, Helvellyn, which are heard

Up to thy summit [?]

. . . . . .

What crowd

Is yon, assembled in the gay green field?

. . . . . .

It is a summer festival, a fair,

Such as—on this side now, and now on that,

Repeated through his tributary vales—

Helvellyn, in the silence of his rest

Sees annually, if storms be not abroad

And mists have left him an unshrouded head.

Delightful day it is for all who dwell

In this secluded glen, and eagerly

[8] The reference is to Michel Beaupuy, discussed hereafter, pp. 178-80.

They give it welcome. (VIII. 1-2, 4-5, 10-18)

Traditionally, a town festival[9] brings together men, women, and children from the same community in a spirit of celebration, giving members an opportunity to embrace their past successes and look forward to their future aspirations.[10] Ironically, it is on the two-mile walk home from a much earlier but similar celebration where, in the "company of maids and youths, / Old men and matrons / . . . A medley of all tempers," he had earlier "passed / The night in dancing, gaiety and mirth" (IV. 317-20) that Wordsworth experiences his great Dawn Dedication:

> As on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch
> A heart that had been disconsolate,
> Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
> At least not felt; and restoration came
> Like an intruder knocking at the door
> Of unacknowledged weariness. (IV. 143-48)

This passage describes his poetic ordination as a silent contract drawn between himself and nature in which he accepted his calling as a chosen ambassador, keenly set apart:

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[9] In "Lines Written a Short Distance from My House," the poet expresses his belief that the very atmosphere of a place has its own distinct energies. The singing of the red breast, along with the green grass, bare trees and mountains, and "the blessing in the air," all help usher in the changing season, signaling that emotional conditions are ripe for revolutionary change: "Love now an universal birth / From heart to heart is stealing / From earth to man, from man to earth / It is the hour of feeling" (21-24).

[10] In reference to Keats's depiction of a similar festival in *Endymion*, a public gathering in the sequestered forest, which combines social gaieties of dance and sport with deep observations of nature, H. Clement Notcutt highlights the festivities as indicative of the origins of the great Romantic Revival that began to take root in England. He explains, "It is not only in the mind of the poet that such a movement stirs and grows; there must be a stirring, too, in the minds of others who will never be poets, and they must be ready to share in the ideas and emotions in such degree as they are capable" (10). See *Keats'sEndymion* (New York: Haskell House, 1964) 10.

I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be—else sinning greatly—
A dedicated spirit. On I walked
In blessedness, which even yet remains. (IV. 341-45)

It is significant that the poet could not envision himself as a "dedicated spirit" intended for higher purposes until he returned to his childhood home after a relatively long absence with a renewed reverence toward its most mundane features. With "new delight" (IV. 211) he observes his elderly dame as she made her way to church in her "short velvet cloak" and matching bonnet or as she drifted off to sleep reading her Bible on lazy Sunday afternoons (IV. 219-22). He further describes a deeper affection, "a human-heartedness about my love / For [natural] objects" so that while once he regarded them as gentle and fragile, they now appear "strong, / Deep, gloomy . . . and severe" (242-43). Not merely "scatterings of childhood," they are sturdy emblems of mature human emotions, such as "beauty," "love," "delight," and "joy" (IV. 242-46).

The hometown fair or celebration also provides an appropriate backdrop for the poet to embrace his prophetic calling since a feeling of momentum generally permeates the enchanting ambience of a festival as a collective prepares to move forward as a unit. Because these annual rites are typically held at the turn of the season, a greater degree of indulgence is accepted as a means of reviving the passions after a long, difficult period of labor. Wordsworth describes his own spiritual awakening as marked by the revitalization of dormant passions which were brought to life as with the melting of the winter snow:

> . . . I had hopes and peace
> And swellings of the spirits, was rapt and soothed,
> Conversed with promises, had glimmering views
> How life pervades the undecaying mind,
> How the immortal soul with godlike power
> Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep
> That time can lay on her. (IV. 151-57)

Town festivals, such as the Grasmere Fair, are also historical occasions when friends and neighbors reflect upon the storied cultural traditions (music, art, crafts, etc.) that contribute to the unique identity of the community. By bringing these ancient customs back to engage contemporary town life, festivals invite individuals to suspend temporarily the busyness—and business—of their current society and reconnect with their ancestral roots. In this same fashion, Wordsworth expresses a renewed reverence for the sanctity of common life:

> I read, without design, the opinions, thoughts,
> Of those plain-living people, in a sense
> Of love and knowledge: with another eye
> I saw the quiet woodman in the woods,
> The shepherd on the hills. (IV. 203-07)

In *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering*, James Averill pinpoints the central theme of Book Eight, crowded with memorable anecdotes of rural suffering and heroism required by the shepherding families of Wordsworth's native Cumberland and Westmoreland Counties, as "the poet's relation to human existence outside himself," a

level of experience that leads us to consider intently "how we feel, think, and dream about our fellow men" (26). Indeed, the quaint images of the Grasmere Fair, particularly the moving sight of a beautiful young girl who "stoops" on this special occasion to sell fruit from her father's orchard and thus moves about the village, basket in hand, "half pleased with, half ashamed / Of her new calling" (VIII. 43-44), touches a soft spot in the heart of the poet, who temporarily loses himself in contemplation of the scene. He notes that a festive mood of exchange, very similar to the give-and-take barter that underlies the self-sufficient economy of Cumberland County, pervades the invigorated life of the community: "The children now are rich, the old man now / Is generous, so gaiety prevails / Which all partake of, young and old" (VIII. 45-47). The poet marvels at the wholesome existence of the shepherd community whose parochial exterior disguises a flamboyant interior:

> Immense
> Is the recess, the circumambient world
> Magnificent, by which they are embraced,
> They move about upon the soft green field;
> How little they and their doings seem,
> . . . . . .
> And yet how great,
> For all things serve them. (VIII. 47-51, 55-56)

The beautiful portrait of the sunlight gently touching the "silent rocks," the "reposed clouds" that hover above the murmuring brooks, the "blue sky that roofs their calm abode," and even "old Helvellyn," one of the most majestic mountains of the Lake

District that stares down upon the village festival "conscious of the stir," all depict a charming world safely enveloped in nature's warm embrace (VIII. 55-61). Likewise, in Book IV, having departed from the dance at the break of dawn, the poet describes the "sea . . . laughing at a distance" and "the solid mountains . . . bright as clouds," both "drenched in empyrean light" (IV. 334-36). This celestial dawn extends further throughout "the meadows and the lower grounds [and the] Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds" warm and gladden the early-rising "labourers going forth into the fields," so man and nature equally are blessed by the same sublime power (IV. 339).

In "The Power of Distance in Wordsworth's *Prelude*," John T. Ogden pinpoints in Book VIII an important shift in the observer's portrait of the value of human relationships as the significance of their daily affairs swells from trivial to great, a shift he attributes not only to a change in scenery but to a notable difference in the poet's point-of-view. He notes that while the "soft green turf" (49) in the opening lines of the Helvellyn scene serve to overshadow the people, the morning sunlight in the closing stanzas envelops them in heavenly light. Thus, he observes that the poet transfigures a picture of a homely festival into a deeper universal symbol of "man's position in nature" (249). Accordingly, the poet closes the curtain on this picturesque scene by pausing to pay homage to his loyal companion and faithful muse:

> With deep devotion, Nature did I feel
> In that great city what I owed to thee:
> High thoughts of God and man, and love of man,
> Triumphant over all those loathsome sights
> Of wretchedness and vice, a watchful eye,

Which, with the outside of our human life

Not satisfied, must read the inner mind. (VIII. 62-68)

The thread that joins these seemingly disparate human societies together is perhaps best exemplified in the poet's genuine remark that he rejoined the "noisier world" of human society after a temporary leave with a "heart . . . all / Given to the people" (IX. 124-25). Whether in a college of ambitious scholars, a band of revolutionary reformers, a festive small town community, or even a series of lone hermits in the woods, Wordsworth discovered at the core of the human spirit a species bound together through shared hopes and fears that stood on the threshold of dark and uncertain times. For all their human imperfections, they (more than birds, beasts, or forests) were the true focus of the "nature-poet's" revolutionary campaign.

The poet's conscientious attention to the compelling forces that embody the unique spirit of a specific place further enabled him to detect and interpret even the slightest variations in climate (such as shifts in the collective temperament of a group or even subtle changes in momentum which serve to alter the natural flow of the system) as evidence of how global movements evolve both at the macro and micro levels and infiltrate all ranks of society. His "proto-ecological awareness" is, thus, discernible in the innovative manner with which he presents the grandiose tale of the Revolution's origins as he perceived them both in the higher stations (within the halls of esteemed institutions and public gathering places) and amongst the lowest orders of common life where its strongest hopes and disappointments were most passionately felt.

III. Encounters with Solitaries

Above all, it was Wordsworth's growing knowledge of how to love and to tend to the needs of humanity, the most important of many lessons impressed upon his heart by nature, that allowed him to communicate through poetry a way to find assurance and acceptance in an antagonistic world and, in this way, set up home in the most hostile of climates. Given the exhaustive nature of this poem as an autobiographical epic, it may still seem surprising that Wordsworth populates *The Prelude* with a relatively small number of human characters, only a handful of whom he knew personally. As pioneered in *Lyrical Ballads*, though here extended with more variety and range of human passion, he records numerous meetings with complete strangers in wild and lonely settings or on crowded streets, whose unique expressivity nonetheless permanently altered his way of thinking. As arranged in *The Prelude*, such encounters are far from random, but rather are carefully selected and presented in a similar manner—as symbols of strength, loyalty to others, and stability which stand out against the backdrop of a dark and often sordid society.

As the only revolutionary sympathizer in a garrison comprised of Royalists, Michel Beaupuy commanded an eminent position in the mind of the poet. In private strolls along the groves of the Loire, the two shared their impassioned hopes of "rational liberty and hope in man / Justice and peace" (IX. 395-96). Beaupuy's presence in Book IX provides a welcome antidote to the apparent numbness Wordsworth feels as a supporter of the French cause. From the rubble of the Bastille, the poet confesses to pocketing a stone as a souvenir, an act performed in the self-conscious "guise / Of an enthusiast," though he was, in truth, unmoved by its symbolic power (IX. 66-67). He

maintains that what he truly longed for (a deeper peace and contentment), he sought in vain. Thus, to a young, impressionable poet, Beaupuy's influence was most notable in that he lent human faces to the cruelest deeds of monarchial and economic oppression. When, on a walk, the two came across "a hunger-bitten girl / Who crept along fitting her languid self / Unto a heifer's motion–by a cord tied to her arm," the humanitarian reformist points directly to the victim and says to the poet, "Tis against that / Which we are fighting" (IX. 517-18).

Though Wordsworth would later turn from the violent reform tactics supported by his venerated companion, he was nonetheless moved by the courageous spirit of one determined to put ideology into action—to give liberty an "outward shape" through a swift process of social and political renovation (IX. 409). Beaupuy's gentle, benevolent nature and superior powers of foresight single him out amongst his contemporaries as one cast "of other mold" than common men (IX. 295). We find in the delightful company of the two friends a shared vision of a renovated Earth where the rudest creatures band together as "single spirits that catch the flame from heaven / . . . A living confirmation of the whole / . . . a people risen up / Fresh as the morning star" (IX. 377, 391-93). [11]

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[11] Herbert Lindenberger emphasizes that Wordsworth's characterization of Beaupuy utilizes water imagery, a key symbol that he identifies alongside the wind as displaying two vastly different personalities. He notes that its calm face is distinguishable for its "flowing, transforming quality [and its] ability to interact with other natural elements," thus serving as a vehicle, which smoothly transports the poet between the visible and invisible world (644), while its stern, potentially destructive face establishes itself as "a manifestation of power and vitality in the universe" (646). He reminds us that Wordsworth's spirited conversations with Beaupuy took place along the banks of the Loire with the water "set[ting] the scene for political as well as visionary meditation" and that even the officer's death (erroneously—as it turns out) was recorded by the poet to have occurred "Upon the borders of the unhappy Loire" (IX. 430-31). Note: Though originally published in Chapter Three of his book *On Wordsworth's* Prelude (Princeton UP, 1963), a small section of Lindenberger's commentary is incorporated in the Norton Critical edition of *The Prelude* and is there entitled "Images of Interaction," pp. 642-63.

Having been struck down by war too soon to see the fruits of his vision materialize, Beaupuy becomes something of a "fallen angel" in the poet's optimistic dream of recapturing a lost Paradise. Clearly, the poet's fond remembrances of his deceased comrade retain their original idealization and put him back in touch with the fundamental principles of liberty and equality, the very foundations on which his lifelong poetic mission rested. Perhaps only in retrospect does he fully comprehend the depth of Beaupuy's philanthropic soul and the power it exerted in shaping his perception of poetry as an offering of love to others, for the ideas exchanged in the impassioned discussions of Wordsworth and Beaupuy were not driven by self-serving interests but genuinely grounded in love and concern for their fellow man.[12]

In Book VII, the poet encounters another angelic being when at the theatre—a place where decorative stage props, elaborate costumes, and trained actors create a superficial spectacle of gaiety. There he observes a beautiful child surrounded, yet mysteriously unaffected, by the sensual appetites, vulgar language, and disingenuous fellowship of the adults around him. Though the faces of the crowd, including that of the mother who held the innocent babe on her lap, blur together in Wordsworth's memory, his mind preserves a crystal clear image of the child, "Among the wretched and falsely

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[12] In his *Philosphical Lectures* (1818-19), Coleridge maintains that the presence of "self" tarnishes the splendor of authentic genius, which he defines as a universal feeling rather than an individual success. The poet explains,

> . . . all genius exists in a participation of a common spirit. In joy individuality is lost and it therefore is liveliest in youth. . . . To have a genius is to live in the universal, to know no self but that which is reflected not only from the faces of all around us, our fellow creatures, but reflected from the flowers, the trees, the beasts, yea, from the very surface of the [sea and] sands of the desert. A man of genius finds a reflex to himself, were it only in the mystery of being. (179)

See *The Philosophical Lectures*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Pilot P, 1949) 179.

gay / Like one of those who walked by hair unsinged / Amid the fiery furnace"[13] (VII. 398-400). His depiction of the child as "embalmed / by Nature—[and] through some special privilege" (VII. 401-02), able to retain his blissful ignorance and thereby delay the pain and sorrow that comes with age and experience, suggests a desire to recapture a glimpse of that heavenly state from which he fell.

Earlier in his "Intimations Ode" (1802), Wordsworth contends that, like a rebellious youth who departs his home to find his own way in the world, we remove ourselves so far from our birthplace with each passing day that the source of our being eventually appears to us a faint recollection (in those rare moments that it appears to us at all). Nonetheless, as the beloved offspring of nature, we carry with us certain distinguishable traits of our Universal Parent and are never completely loosened from our ties:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting
>
> The soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
>
> Hath had elsewhere its setting,
>
> And cometh from afar

[13] The source of this allusion is taken from the Old Testament story of Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego (recounted in the King James "authorized" version of the Bible in the third chapter of the book of Daniel). When in obedience to God the three refuse King Nebuchadnezzar's command that the entire province of Babylon bow down to a golden idol, they are thrown by the king's orders in a fiery furnace and left for dead. Yet miraculously the king discovers them walking unharmed amongst the flames, along with a fourth man who appears as "a son of the gods" (verse 25). In comparing the child at the theatre to the remarkable courageousness of these Biblical figures, Wordsworth seems at least to entertain the idea that innocence may withstand corruption unscathed and that nature supplies an alternative form of immunity for the souls of those who follow her uprightly, despite their early departure from the physical world. The poet, too, rewards the purity of these intriguing solitaries by immortalizing them in verse, capturing them in a moment of transcendence (similar to the one he experiences at Mount Snowdon) in which their sense of interconnectedness to the greater cosmos is so strong that "neither listlessness, nor mad endeavor, / Nor man nor Boy, / Nor all that is at enmity with joy, / can utterly abolish or destroy!" ("Ode: Intimations" 162-64).

And not in entire forgetfulness,

And not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God, who is our home. (58-65)

The poet assures us that, no matter how far inland we travel from the natal shore, "Our souls have sight of that immortal sea / Which brought us hither" (166-67). In essence, so long as we are creatures of nature, we never quite forget the celestial ground of our being. Consequently, many key passages of Wordsworth's *Prelude* are offered up as celebrations of the endearing spirit of childhood—that stage of careless pleasure alternating with fear when, in retrospect, he realizes we are all securely connected to the central, life-sustaining force of nature.

One such episode appears in Book V in the form of a eulogy for the unnamed Boy of Winander, a ten-year-old child who, taken from life prematurely rather like Beaupuy, possesses (in the same spirit as the Idiot Boy) an intuitive, uncanny relationship to the physical universe that compels the poet to memorialize him in verse. Kurt Fosso reminds us that an informed reading of the scene must consider significant revisions made to the original narrative, which was initially written in first person and incorporated as an individual poem in the revised version of *Lyrical Ballads*. He notes that the earlier account does not include a direct reference to the child's untimely death, an addendum, he argues that drastically changes the focus, as Geoffrey Hartman also observes, from a poem centered on the expansive quality of the Imagination, concluding with "the visible scene" which "enter[ed] unaware into his mind" (V. 409-10), to a tragic tale of grief and loss. Drawing upon Hartman's interpretation, with an added focus upon the connection

between "mourning" and "dwelling," Fosso reads "The Boy of Winader" as demonstrative of "the debts and troubles of an Orphic community, where silence—muteness stemming from nature's disconcerting quiet—operates as a mysterious legacy and a decidedly social force" (167).

Fosso begins his discussion with a close examination of the passage detailing the child's dialogue with the natural world:

> [W]ith fingers interwoven, both hands
> Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth
> Uplifted, he as through an instrument
> Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls
> That they might answer him. And they would shout
> Across the wat'ry vale, and shout again,
> Responsive to his call, with quivering peals
> And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud,
> Redoubled and redoubled—concourse wild
> Of mirth and jocund din. (V. 395-405)

Fosso points to the position of the boy's hands—his "intertwined fingers, his palms joined and uplifted" (V. 395-96)—as signifying not only the customary posture suitable for bird calling but the boy's worshipful attitude toward nature. In the vocal exchange between the boy and the owls—the "halloos," "screams," and "echoes" (V. 402)—Fosso notes that it is clear that the boy and nature are responsive to each other's presence though he goes no further in acknowledging the conversation between the two as indicative of any larger pattern. In my view, however, Wordsworth's desire to obliterate

boundaries and reestablish relationships between the human and nonhuman world is powerfully suggested by this scene, which claims that it is possible not only to *feel* or *sense* sublime power in nature but also to converse with it directly.

Fosso focuses the bulk of his discussion instead on the lapses in communication alluded to later in the passage when the receptive child, whose calls are momentarily unanswered by the owls, willfully subjects himself to the breathtaking splendour of other natural forms, such as "the voice of mountain torrents" with its "solemn imagery, its rocks, / Its woods and that uncertain heaven, received / Into the bosom of the steady lake" (V. 411-13). Fosso maintains that what on the surface appears a glorious encounter is, in truth, a dangerous enterprise. Like Hartman, he suggests that the owl's "lack of articulation," which leaves the child in a state of "suspended consciousness to the all in all of surrounding nature," results in the boy's being literally engulfed by the lake (V. 169). As he explains, "The implication is that the boy has become a (sacrificed) part of Winander and of the Lakeland's dead, converged with those death-intimating, death-imitating owls and this void-like, heaven-reflecting lake" (V. 169).

Hartman maintains that, much like the Drowned Man episode that closely follows, Wordsworth's nature proves to be an abysmal pit—"a breeding place for terrible conceptions because nature can never wholly satisfy imagination" (233). He follows with some cautionary advice against passively surrendering the mind to a dormant physical world, claiming that "[t]he calm that leads to fear is the void-in-nature. . . . True imagination . . . needs a more active body" (233). He further surmises that "Wordsworth's man, characterized by natural rather than spiritual energy, will never escape the cycle of generation which he mistakes for regeneration" (233). Still, such an

interpretation only carries weight if we accept the notion of an entropic universe, one that devours human energies, heedlessly depositing them into a sea of oblivion. I would argue that there is no textual evidence to suggest that the Boy of Winander is ever swallowed up by the sights and sounds of external nature, but rather that he literally "carries [them] far into his heart" (V. 409), absorbing the entirety of the scene into his imaginative consciousness to such an extent that the reflection in the water becomes an image permanently stamped upon his mind.[14] The boy, thus, does not lose himself to nature, but instead the physical world becomes an extension of his mind (and vice versa) as he opens himself up to her beauty and grandeur.

Unlike Hartman, Fosso contends that the scene offers a means of reconciliation between the mind and nature though for him this relationship entails merging into the world of the dead. He notes that, as the poet stands before the boy's grave unable to speak, he unintentionally imitates the mute child (now forever silenced by death) and the owls that failed to respond to his calling so that "the entranced poet now becomes one of the dead, at least a tributary part, of their surrounding, silent neighborhood" as all are joined in the quietude of grief and loss (170).

Though I support Fosso's argument that the poet blends into the natural scenery in the closing stanzas of the episode, I see the world he reenters, though a universe of death, as not an "omphalos" or "void" but still very much alive and capable of putting the poet back in touch with the strength and vitality of his childhood. In "The Brothers," a poem alluded to earlier, the village minister paints a touching portrait of young Leonard and

[14] This reading is certainly consistent with the credo recently announced in "Tintern Abbey," written just a year before these lines on the mysterious Boy of Winander were first drafted in 1799 but then excluded from The Two-Part (1799) *Prelude*.

Walter, brothers and soulmates since earliest youth, who on windy days would toss their books onto a dry stone and wade knee-deep in the babbling brook. He fondly recollects being so touched by the loveliness of that sight that as he stared upon the "rocks / And hills on which we all of us were born," his heart was moved by the comforting assurance "that God who made the great book of the world / Would bless such piety" (268-71).

Likewise, as the poet relives the cherished memories of his Hawkshead years in Book V of *The Prelude*, he playfully confesses that a greater portion of his boyhood might have been better spent in study and a little less in sport. Even so, his description of the schoolyard, peopled by a new class of budding men—"a race of real children, not too wise, / Too learned or too good, but wanton, fresh, / fierce, moody, patient, venturous, modest, shy" who roam the grounds "mad at their sports like withered leaves in winds" (436-40) —provides a moving portrait of the wholesome nature of youth and gives the impression of immortality though death lurks closely in its shadows. While he mourns the passing of one who did not live to undergo the thrills and sorrows of manhood, he is revived by the recognition that, for a little while on the schoolyard green, this fallen angel had a brief opportunity to participate in the most rewarding endeavor attainable in human experience—the privilege to access nature's higher knowledge—a knowledge "rightly honored with that name [because] not purchased with the loss of power" (448).

Much like the homeless solitaries who roam the countryside in *Lyrical Ballads*, the sparse delineation of human character that epitomizes *The Prelude* exhibits a preternatural attachment to the physical world, as though endowed with a stamp of immortality that is paradoxically achieved with one foot in the grave. As Hartman notes, "Each of them is 'A Border dwelling between life and death,' so ghastly is their calm, so

vitally steadfast their mind" (225). In reference to the astonishing strength attained by these individuals, despite the obvious frailty of their condition, Hartman asks, "What sustains them?" and then offers the following explanation:

> Their acceptance of the injuries of time evokes the idea of a soul that is invulnerable, because it dwells in Abraham's bosom or nature's. One of these is life, the other death, but in such border figures life and death, like natural and supernatural faith, are no longer separable. (225)

Throughout Wordsworth's poetry, the image of a child nursing at its mother's breast serves as the paramount symbol of the "filial bond" between humanity and "mother nature," the universal parent whose love and affection are so tender and so strong that the most admirable maternal figures in our lives serve as inadequate surrogates. The poet surmises that, as children of nature, the feeblest individuals remain securely fastened to the One Life and are never truly without a home:

> No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:
> Along his infant veins are interfused
> The gravitation and the filial bond
> Of nature that connect him with the world. (II. 276-79)

Most notably, more than any poet of his time, Wordsworth came to recognize the sublime power of rustic life, which led him to seek out the glory of God in the humblest beings, thus exposing the beauty and grandeur of spiritual creation *everywhere*. In "The Design of Wordsworth's *Prelude*," E. A. Horsman asserts that the principle aim of *The Prelude* is to ascertain "what is to be prized in our being" (99). He further maintains that Wordsworth offers his own life as an illustration of "the diversity of relations that are

possible between the mind of man and the rest of the universe" (104)—a goal that demands seeing beyond the "false imagination," the term which the poet ascribes to intellectual powers, which are divorced from feeling or those which resist associating with common life (107). As Horsman explains,

> Wordsworth [proves] himself constantly aware of "the might of Souls, And what they do within themselves" (III. 178-79). . . . Our heart's heart and home may be finally "with infinitude," but it is plain, from the experience embodied [within] the poem as a whole, that constituted as we are, we shall be lost, Wordsworth believes, in "the abyss of idealism," unless infinitude clothe itself in finiteness. (104)

In Book VIII, the poet praises the shepherds he encountered on his walks through Goslar, (who represent the solitary side of the social health praised at Grasmere Fair) as individuals truly in touch with themselves and their surroundings. He implies that, though their daily tasks were mundanely predictable, the primitive attachment to the natural world attained by these solitaries exemplified a posture he desired to emulate. He says of the shepherd's life he witnessed in the Harz Mountains,

> He feels himself
> In those vast regions where his service is
> A freeman, wedded to his life of hope
> And hazard, and hard labour interchanged
> With that majestic indolence so dear
> To native man. (VIII. 385-91)

Wordsworth identifies the shepherd as his "first human love" (VIII. 178), noting that the plain and meager lifestyle of these humble country people lent an aura of sanctity to their presence. He admits that in childhood these awe-inspiring beings of the Lake District held such a commanding sway over him that on more than one occasion when he encountered a shepherd alone with his flock in the field, his figure took on a larger-than-life appearance so that even from a short distance away he resembled "In size a giant, stalking through the fog / His sheep like Greenland bears" (VIII. 401-02). At other unexpected moments, the child would turn from a shady cliff when suddenly the shepherd's form "flashed upon [him] glorified / By the deep radiance of the setting sun" (VIII. 404-05) or else he would spot the image of the shepherd "in distant sky, / A solitary object and sublime," which he compares to an "aerial cross" set high upon the Chartreuse as a symbol of worship (VIII. 408-10).

The shepherd, thus, serves as the epitome of the manner in which Wordsworth elevated the lowest orders of humanity to the highest ranks of natural nobility, thereby discovering the grandeur in what his society considered the mean and vulgar. The sense of dread with which the young Wordsworth initially approached the shepherds, much as he did the other solitaries who appeared as "monitory" figures in his early "spots of time," further illustrates how conditions of "solitude" and/or "homelessness" appear threatening to underdeveloped minds. However, the mature mind dispels the frightening aspects of experience which are often rooted in mere ignorance or prejudice and, thus, welcomes the opportunity to engage with alternative modes of consciousness as a gateway into a higher mode of being.

A moving example of the poet's reverence for the depth of passion he ascertained in the sphere of common life is revealed in the tale of a shepherd and his son who venture out in stormy conditions in search of a single lost lamb. Having spotted the young sheep upon a grassy plot of land "right in the middle of a roaring stream," the child impulsively leaps upon the island to rescue the animal in distress and becomes, himself, stranded (VIII. 305). Upon discovering the child in danger, the levelheaded shepherd answers the frightened child's call, calmly extending his staff toward the boy, who grasps the lifeline and jumps with joy into his father's arms (VIII. 309-12).

In a later scene, the poet fixes his attention upon a man standing on the open square of a London street and cradling a sick child in his arms, whom he had brought outside to take in the warm sunshine and fresh air. With his thoughts wholly focused upon the babe in his arms, he ignored every passerby on the busy street apart from the one prized object of his heart's affections, and, hunching over the infant as though to guard it from the very sunshine and air he sought, "he eyed it with unutterable love" (VIII. 860). In this manner, Wordsworth exhibits through the unshakable connection between father and son, the purest, most sacrificial form of love imaginable as it is silently expressed through the hearts of two entities, neither one cognizant of itself as a separate being outside of the *relationship* that gives it strength and purpose. It was the observance of such tender moments that sustained the poet in times of deepest doubt, restoring his faith in the dignity of humanity and in all that we are capable of becoming.

IV. Discovery of the Imagination: Paris, the Alps, and Mount Snowdon

The sense of belonging to the natural world that Wordsworth discovered in moments of tranquil reflection on his past (even as he pondered upon dark, frightening experiences) suggests that he perceived the concept of "home" as a "resting spot" in which the burdened mind discovers a suitable sanctuary from which to assess its suffering and contemplate its unique relationship to the larger world. Ironically, it was in moments of deepest despair when the last flicker of hope within his soul appeared to be extinguished that Imagination powerfully unveiled itself to the poet, rekindling his love for nature and humanity and revealing the capacity of his own inner strength to endure life's gravest challenges with dignity and to perceive those obstacles as opportunities for intellectual and spiritual development.

In Book IX, an enthusiastic poet with hopes still bent upon political reform reflects (in the same spirit as the Pedlar) upon the unfortunate state of the human condition as he surveys a world where "meanest [tendencies] thrive"—a world where "good and evil never have the name, / That which they ought to have, but wrong prevails, / And vice at home" (IX. 355, 539-61). In response to these grim observations, perhaps the most profound illustration of the reformed Wordsworthian "home" is presented in Book X where the poet recalls the experience of returning to Paris in October of 1792, shortly after the imprisonment of King Louis XVI. As he walks through the "square of the Carousel" where a "black and empty" void now replaces the piles of dead bodies that had occupied the same space only a few weeks before, he feels like a stranger in a city he once claimed as a second home (X. 46-48). He depicts himself as one without the know-

how to decipher the contents of a book and who in frustration and despair gives up as "a mute [who] leaves with pain and half upbraids their silence" (X. 54-55).

Later that same night, in quiet contemplation, his imaginative spirit (a power conceptualized in the tranquil image of a mind lost in books and guided by the dim light of an "extinguished taper") transforms the terror he experienced in the light of day and creates, by night, a peaceful haven in the quiet contours of the mind. In Book V, the poet explains,

> Visionary power
> Attends upon the motions of the winds
> Embodied in the mystery of words;
> There darkness makes abode, and all the host
> Of shadowy things do work their changes there
> As in a mansion like their proper home. (V. 619-24)

Accordingly, he now surmises that "the mind whose rest / Was where it ought to be, in self-restraint, / In circumspection and simplicity / Fell rarely in entire discomfiture" (IX. 155-57). The shaky narrative voice of "Salisbury Plain," which advises the traveler and his new widow friend to go back inside their shelter and "pretend" that "life is like this desert broad, / Where all the happiest find is but a shed / And a green spot 'mid wastes interminably spread" (421-23), now emerges as a confident, assertive voice which offers this tribute to the mind's renewing capacity:

> And as the desert hath green spots, the sea
> Small islands in the midst of stormy waves,
> So that disastrous period did not want

Such sprinklings of all human excellence

As were a joy to hear of. Yet—nor less

For those bright spots, those fair examples given

Of fortitude, and energy, and love,

And human nature faithful to itself

Under worst trials—was I impelled to think

Of the glad time when first I traversed France. (X. 440-49)

Perhaps the truest testament to the sincerity underlying the Romantic poets' great "humanitarian mission" is evident in how emphatically they repented their own human error as contributing to the enslavement of their age. [15] In Book IX, Wordsworth recalls the passionate enthusiasm, with which he first embraced France's quest for independence, stating in reference to the fiery political debates and radical displays of protest he witnessed in both the private halls and public streets of Paris,

… they seemed

Like arguments from Heaven that 'twas a cause

Good, and which no one could stand up against

Who was not lost, abandoned, selfish, proud,

---

[15] In "France: An Ode" (1798), Coleridge exposes the torturous bond of a militant-minded nation that breaks free from political tyranny only to be imprisoned by its own base thoughts as a model of his own deep delusion. The grave apology that permeates the poem is not only addressed to his fellow countrymen but more forcefully to the Spirit of Liberty herself—that revered entity whom he has betrayed, not in deed and action, but in the sacred repository of the mind:

Forgive me that I cherised
One Thought, that ever blessed your cruel foes!
To scatter trait'rous guilt
Where peace her home had built. (70-73)

Mean, miserable, willfully depraved,

Hater perverse of equity and truth. (IX. 288-93)

The mature poet shamefully looks back with remorse upon how he "exulted in the triumph of his soul / When Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown" (X. 264-62), confessing that while his countrymen offered up in churches prayers of thankfulness for their successes in battle, in the silent recesses of his heart he "[f]ed on the day of vengeance yet to come!" (X. 275). Still, having acknowledged his misguided aims, Wordsworth interjects in Book Twelve a surprising return to the dismal recesses of Salisbury Plain, as he revisits a journey undertaken shortly after his return to England from Revolutionary France at a point in his life when violent impulses raged within his young breast, impeding true revelatory powers from taking hold. His return to the "dead house"—that gruesome scene of Druid rites with their legends of human sacrifices—nonetheless stirs up the poet's early dream of apocalyptic reform. He confesses,

I was gently charmed,

Albeit with an antiquarian's dream,

And saw the bearded teachers, with white wands

Uplifted, pointing to the starry sky,

Alternately, and plain below, while breath

Of music seemed to guide them, and the waste

Was cheared with stillness and a pleasant sound. (XII. 347-53)

How, we might ask, could Wordsworth look so fondly upon a period of his life, which was wrought with so much pain and suffering, recasting it as an enchanting source of imaginative stimulation? Perhaps the answer lies in the recognition that Salisbury Plain,

like so many dark memories in the poet's past, served as a hopeful reminder that he had faced (and even unwittingly participated in) some of the severest acts of human violence against man and nature and had survived that spiritual nadir to see the light of more hopeful days. The scene confirms his faith that imagination—that sweet "breath of music" bestowed upon the human soul by nature—does not permit the trusting heart to fall into complete despair but actively seeks out beauty and harmony in the very midst of fragmentation and ruin. The poet's experiences in France proved instrumental in opening his mind to the capacity of Imagination to inspire and guide the agitated spirit when faith diminishes and the light of sense goes out.

Wordworth's memory of his ascent of Simplon Pass to cross the Alps in 1790 with Robert Jones further inspires perhaps his boldest declaration of Imagination's cathartic powers. The poet recalls this incident in Book Six when, fourteen years after receiving the disheartening news from a passing peasant that he had unknowingly reached the top of the mountain pass, he suddenly realizes (as if in the very act of composition) that in the absence of external nature the inner power of Imagination strives on its own accord to reach newfound heights:

> Imagination!—lifting up itself
> Before the eye and progress of my song
> Like an unfathomed vapour, here that power,
> In all the might of its endowments, came
> Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud,
> Halted without a struggle to break through,
> And now, recovering, to my soul I say

'I recognize thy glory.' In such strength
Of usurpation, in such visitings
Of awful promise, when the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours whether we be young or old.
Our destiny, our nature, and our home,
Is with infinitude—and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.
The mind beneath such banners militant
Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward—
Strong in itself, and in the access of joy
Which hides it like the overflowing Nile. (VI. 525-48)

The poet's evolving awareness of the Imagination as a power of self is further evidenced at Simplon Pass, where he encounters what on the surface appears to be malevolent forces at work within the landscape, very similar to the ones he experiences in the "dark spots" of his childhood where nature assumed a hostile, even predatory stance. While virtually every feature of the "gloomy pass" produces an eerie, unwelcoming appearance, the poet now remarkably feels himself at home and integrated with even the most

daunting and, therefore, sublime postures of the human spirit. Assuming a godlike, omniscient view of this dismal, yet strangely alluring, region from the peak of the mountain, he paints a beautiful portrait of connection and cohesion that testifies to the Imagination's extraordinary ability to fuse discordant elements into a unified whole: [16]

> The immeasurable height
> Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
> The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
> And everywhere along the hollow rent
> Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
> The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
> The rocks that muttered close upon our ears—
> As if a voice were in them—the sick sight
> And giddy prospect of the raving stream, [and]
> The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,
> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light,
> Were all like workings of one mind, the features
> Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
> Characters of the great apocalypse
> The types and symbols of eternity,
> Of first, and last, and midst, and without end. (VI. 565-80)

[16] Wordsworth states in Book One that "[t]he mind of man is framed even like the breath / And harmony of music. There Is a dark / Invisible workmanship that reconciles / Discordant elements, and makes them move / In one society" (352-56).

Indeed, Wordsworth presents himself in *The Prelude* much in the same manner that he describes the revelation he beholds at Mount Snowdon, as "the perfect image of a mighty mind" (XIII. 70) that has been tested, yet never overtaken, by the forces it has confronted. Even the most potent powers of violence and hatred that permeated the atmosphere of his war-torn society are not successful in displacing the human mind from its rightful "home" on earth; neither does the sublime power of nature prove too dominant for the human spirit to contain. Instead, the poet credits nature for consecrating the strong, unbreakable human mind as a suitable reservoir for housing the sacred power of Imagination, observing that she supplies "that happy stillness of the mind / Which fits him to receive it when unsought" (XII. 11-14).

Perhaps nowhere is the attainment of this mission so beautifully rendered than in the Mount Snowdon episode, which opens the concluding book of Wordsworth's uniquely Romantic epic. Having set out on foot in the company of a close friend and a Welsh guide to observe the sunrise at the top of Snowdon, the poet's casual conversation with his two companions gives way to private musings as the damp and fog obscure their vision and encourage their thoughts to sink into a pleasurable sort of gloom (XII. 15-20). On a dull, uneventful night when the barking of a shepherd's dog in the woods after having spotted a wayward hedgehog on the mountain produces the largest amount of excitement, the poet depicts himself as little prepared for the glorious vision that awaits him when suddenly a beam of light pierces through the fog and unveils a spectacular scene. Through a sea of mist, the poet beholds

> A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
> All over this still ocean, and beyond,

Far, far beyond the vapours shot themselves
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the sea, the real sea, that seemed
To dwindle and give up its majesty,
Usurped upon as far as sight could reach. (XIII. 46-52)

Shifting his gaze downward, the view into the fathomless abyss proves equally breathtaking. Through the luminous rays of the moonlight, which draw the human figures into the scene by casting light upon their feet, the poet surveys

. . . a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour,
A deep and gloomy breathing-place, through which
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice.
The universal spectacle throughout
Was shaped for admiration and delight,
Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodged
The soul, the imagination of the whole. (55-64)

Hartman notes the synthesizing, coalescing power of Imagination revealed through the fog, which binds the entire scene like adhesive glue. He observes,

> At first the upper sphere dominates, with the moon in single glory, the hills like worshippers, the real ocean usurped upon, and the second ocean of mist meek and silent. Then, in a reversal, the lower sphere recovers its

> realness and breaks so strongly upward that its voice seems to be felt by the starry heavens. (256)

Though criticizing the poet for glimpsing the sheer force of Imagination standing on its own and yet attributing it to nature, Hartman upholds the metaphorical image of the creative mind unveiled at Mount Snowdon as "the utmost Wordsworth can achieve as a poet" (254). He calls attention to how the human mind "naturalizes the supernaturalistic imagination" (255), so the poet is not engulfed but rather lends his own energies to the scene. In this way, Wordsworth moves the Burkean definition of the sublime into new territory, as he depicts the triumph of the self, which feels its power in resisting whatever threatens to destroy and now knows that it can never be overcome. With his feet firmly planted on that majestic mountain, the poet feels himself at home in that celestial region, thus confirming what Hartman maintains is the ultimate mission of *The Prelude*, namely that it "tells us what lies behind fiction: the hope that the hopes of man can be wedded to this earth," a union that Benedetto Croce, an early twentieth-century Italian aesthetician, disparagingly refers to as "the marriage of mind and mud" (qtd. in Hartman 259).

In "The Spots of Time in Early Versions of the *Prelude*," Sybil S. Eakin points to the Mount Snowdon episode as marking a pivotal turning point in the poet's perception of himself in relation to nature, noting that while the child of the boat-stealing incident "had participated actively in the effects of the landscape—the faster he rowed the higher goes the black cliff," at Snowdon he presents himself as an outside observer taking in the scene before him (399). Eakin explains, "This new stance implies a consciousness of the self apart from nature, a sense of a distinct human identity that permitted the poet to transform the scene into a symbol" (399). She emphasizes that the magnificent view of

Snowdon rises out of the poet's dream-like state of ecstasy as conversation gave way to private reflection, and consequently, the landscape became more radiant in his view (in much the same way that he had earlier pronounced that "an auxiliar light / Came from my mind, which on the setting sun / Bestowed new splendor" and "the midnight storm / Grew darker in the presence of my eye") ("The Two Part *Prelude"* 417-19).

Likewise, the spectacular image thrust upon him on Snowdon gives shape and form to the invisible powers of his creative mind. His eyes fix upon an opening in the chasm through which the sound of innumerable, invisible torrents rises to the surface, a metaphorical representation of the unleashing of subconscious and perhaps suppressed memories, lodged deep in the recesses of his consciousness, which are now provided an opening through which they can emerge. Upon being released into the atmosphere where they blend into the unity of the scene, they no longer impede the poet but become part of that expansive imaginative power to unify and synthesize all experience, a source of energy that sustains him as he advances to the midpoint of his life.

Eakin explains that after completing the Mount Snowdon scene, Wordsworth redirected his attention back to the spots of time, which thereafter, in his 1805 version, encompassed the renewed perspective obtained from that transforming experience as he was "led to revise his faith in the agency of nature to include his deeper understanding of the participation of the human mind" (403). Still, she is careful to note that the poet's newfound confidence in his own human potential did not completely obliterate his trust in nature, for "if his strength resided in the activity of his imagination, in the power that transformed the 'dim and vast' instincts of the soul into palpable scenes and the thought

that fed on them," he was, nonetheless, indebted to nature for "thrusting upon his notice the forms and images that activated this power in the first place" (403).

To illustrate how Wordsworth's exploration of the "spots of time" led to his maturing awareness of the relationship between his mind, "growing steadily in powers that were both human and divine, and the scenes and objects that had nourished it" (403), Eakin pinpoints Wordsworth's return to the gibbet scene, now moved to Book XI of the 1805 *Prelude*. Here, the renovated mind imbues the impressions stamped upon it in former times with an "independent life" that attaches itself to new feelings (403) so that "the spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam" might replace the terror once associated with that dismal spot, enabling the poet to draw energy from "the power / [these remembrances] left behind" (XI. 322; 325-26).

Eakin highlights the poet's commentary directly following the gibbet episode,[17] taking note of the references to "hiding-places of . . . power," which in "days gone by / Come back . . . from the dawn almost / Of life" (XI. 334-36), as reminiscent of the vaporous chasms described on Mount Snowdon—those fortunate "breathing places" (XIII. 57) where distant memories are permitted to resurface (no longer as painful blows afflicted upon the passive mind) but as powerful symbols of man's private thoughts rising to "reach the light of consciousness"—a process that could not come to fruition apart

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[17] Frank McDonnell concurs that when the poet revisits the gibbet scene in much different spirits—being blessed by the love and companionship of his friends as opposed to alone, having been separated from his guide, "he drew a special imaginative strength from it [signifying] that the scene and implicitly all the visual world, is benign when encountered as an avatar of time and of the continuity of the integrated self" (144-45). He explains that the "rejuvenated man" is no longer bound by dark memories associated with his former self but rather "the world of evidences is safe for [him] because he has no need of them as evidences" (145). *The Confessional Imagination: A Reading of Wordsworth's* Prelude (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974).

from those "Impressions . . . early and . . . strong," made visible to the imaginative mind through images supplied by nature (405).

In Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode," the poet cautions the child— "yet glorious in the might / Of heaven-born freedoms, on thy being's height" (124-25)—against growing up too fast, warning that with age comes responsibility and with it heavy heartache: "Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight, / And custom lie upon thee with a weight, / Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!" (127-29). Thus, he praises nature for providing the circumstances of those memories, which are most critical to our internal development and bringing them back into the forefront of consciousness as compensations for the burdens and sorrows of adulthood:

> But for those first affections,
> Those shadowy recollections,
> Which, be they what they may,
> Are yet a fountain light of all our day,
> Are yet a master light of all our seeing;
> Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
> Our noisy years seem moments in the being
> Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
> To perish never;
> Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavor,
> Nor Man nor Boy,
> Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
> Can utterly abolish or destroy! (149-61)

Accordingly, as "shadowy recollections" of foregone years, both the original "spots of time" and the sustaining memories recorded by the more mature Wordsworth serve as educative moments in the poet's upbringing and resurface in his adult mind as powerful testaments of the innate powers of his human potential as well as of the careful manner that nature has purposefully reared him from birth to maturity. Though the flicker of that "celestial light,"[18] which shone most radiantly in childhood, grows dim over time, the Imagination, activated by the vivifying powers of nature, reconnects him with that sacred state of infancy where "heaven lies all about [him]"("Intimations" 66), so that each time he retrieves a tiny drop of refreshment from that celestial fountain, he is reminded that their joint energies have guided him through dark and trying circumstances to those remarkable moments when he feels the strength of his presence as a vital, contributing member of the universal community.

V. Back Home at Grasmere: Wordsworth's Journey Comes Full-Circle

In "The Design of the Prelude: Wordsworth's Long Journey Home,"[19] M. H. Abrams offers a summation of *The Prelude's* "high argument," a passage drawn from

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[18] In contrast to the "celestial light," which the poet suggests fades with time and experience and is replaced in maturity by Imagination, the "auxiliar light" mentioned in Book Two of the 1805 *Prelude* as the poet's "first creative sensibility" (II. 379) ("An auxiliar light / Came from my mind, which on the setting sun / Bestowed new splendor) (II. 387-89) records the child's first incommunicable glimpse of Imagination as a power within himself, which he gradually discovers in a self-conscious way under the direction of nature and articulates most explicitly at Mount Snowdon.

[19] Originally published as "Wordsworth: The Long Journey Home" in M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism,* Rpt. in *The Prelude: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979) 585-98.

"Home at Grasmere" that then became part of the "Prospectus" to *The Recluse*, the work he long hoped would be his culminating poetic achievement. Here, Wordsworth declares his endeavor to gauge the extent of the mind's capacity when "wedded to this goodly universe / In love and holy passion" to transform a dark, obscure world into a heaven on earth whose radiance is but "a simple produce of the common day" (53-55). This Miltonic quest to make "darkness visible" sets the precedent for a backwards journey into the dismal past of his personal consciousness, a solitary quest to recapture a lost connection to nature and thus to feel "at home" in his world once more. Abrams sees Wordsworth's quest for creative autonomy as a bold, yet quietly internalized stance whose impact remains overshadowed by more jarring modernist techniques. He conjectures that,

> [i]n this era of constant and drastic experimentation with literary materials and forms, it is easy to overlook the radical novelty of *The Prelude* when it was completed in 1805. The poem aptly justified Wordsworth's claim to have demonstrated Original Genius which he defined as "The introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe," of which the "infallible sign is the widening the sphere of human sensibility." (586)

He follows with a detailed description of the "widening sphere" as it is demonstrated by the circular structure of *The Prelude*, which ends at the beginning with a detailed account of the "literal" journey that the "spiritual" journey points toward. This "beginning" then wraps around and connects with the opening book, which is quite literally the final destination—the "home" that is "Home at Grasmere." Much like the circular pattern of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, the idealized vale simultaneously

functions as a harmonic Eden envisioned as through the wondering eyes of an infantile sensibility as well as of a state of pure joy arrived at through intense periods of prolonged struggle and suffering. As Abrams explains, "The journey to this ultimate stage has taken [Wordsworth] through 'the realities of life so cold,' but this had been a fortunate fall into experience, for 'the cost' of what he has lost from the earlier stage of his life is greatly outweighed by 'what I keep, have gain'd / shall gain'" (595).

The structure of this study has, likewise, mirrored the circular nature of Wordsworth's poetic career—a design that paradoxically moves forward and backward at the same time, first through the dismal trenches of widespread physical and spiritual warfare in "Salisbury Plain" and then to more personalized narratives and tableaus of suffering and transcendence in "The Ruined Cottage" and *The Lyrical Ballads*. These early works pose the troubling questions which are then resolved in the creation of *The Prelude*, the famous self-portrait in which Wordsworth confronts and overcomes the dark afflictions of his past and then lovingly lights his way back home—not to his literal birthplace but to a "foster home" of choice—an imaginative, egalitarian society, such as Buell discovers in the Thoreauvean mindscape, where peace of mind is attainable to the soul that learns to embrace suffering as a means of creating a path to an elevated consciousness.

In reference to "Home at Grasmere," Karl Kroeber observes that the structure and shape of the vale, a perfectly enclosed, vertically-shaped sphere in which the "linking of the Earth and sky is climactically imaged by the lake below reflecting the heavenly dome—between which the swirling birds rise and fall," mirrors the speaker's vertical position in the poem as he stands in one fixed location and allows a myriad of "reiterated

impressions" to circulate through him (133-34). The poet resumes this same posture in the closing passages of *The Prelude* when, having returned to his chosen vale, he looks back over the many years of his life when he wandered freely without a permanent residence and, thus, "call[s] back to mind / The mood in which the poem was begun" (XIII. 370-71). When, in a moment of weakness, his exhausted mind questions the value of the tumultuous journey it has undertaken, his spirits are uplifted and he surveys with tender gratitude the expansive territory he has covered: [20]

> Anon I rose
>
> As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretched
>
> Vast prospect of the world which I had been,
>
> And was; and hence this song, which like a lark
>
> I have protracted, in the unwearied heavens

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[20] The image of the experienced poet who finds his way home in the final book of *The Prelude* provides a positive contrast to the wandering poet of Shelley's "Alastor." Lacking a feeling of "at home-ness" in his own country, the latter figure ventures abroad to more remote places where he perceives that "bare truth" is more easily accessible in the absence of cultivation. But like Wordsworth's traveler on Sarum Plain, in this spiritually impoverished wilderness, he finds no suitable resting spot:

> He would linger long
> In lonesome vales, making the wild his home,
> Until the doves and squirrels would partake
> From his innocuous hand his bloodless food. (98-101)

The despondent poet-speaker, exhausted by years of toilsome labor, has this message for the beautiful swan that soars above him into the heavens:

> Thou hast a home,
> Beautiful bird; thou voyagest to thine home,
> Where thy sweet mate will twine her downy neck
> With thine. (280-83)

Yet his own efforts to discover a sense of *connectedness* and *belonging* within the natural world are unfruitful and, thus, he dies alone in a remote glen of the Indus Valley. The contrast between Wordsworth's and Shelley's perceptions of childhood and home (one embracing it, the other rejecting it) as well as their attitudes toward the conflicting faces of nature (one learning to view even her harshest reprimands as stimulating spiritual and intellectual growth, the other turned callous by her hostile, ambivalent side) clearly speaks to Wordsworth's distinction amongst his Romantic contemporaries as a poet who flourished principally because he learned to find favor with the natural world.

> Singing, and often with more plaintive voice
> Attempered to the sorrows of the earth—
> Yet centering all in love, and in the end
> All gratulant if rightly understood. (XIII. 377-85)

While Wordsworth welcomes Grasmere as the most "permanent abode" he has inhabited over the course of his way-wandering life, having reached a pleasurable point of retirement, his thoughts remain in a state of constant motion, signaling that the scope of his imaginative mind is much too vast to be contained within a static location. Having spread the "love offering" of his poetry far and wide, the assurance of "home" he discovers near the end of his poetic masterpiece transcends conventional notions of the domestic sphere as an endearing attachment to a single isolated spot, encompassing instead a triumphant sense of "belonging" forged between himself and the greater cosmos.

In "Wordsworth's Departed Swans: Sublimation and Sublimity in 'Home at Grasmere,'" Bruce Clark adds to Kroeber's description of the natural configuration of the vale, envisioning it as "an enclosure that opens out in two unfathomable directions: at once toward the epic heavens and toward the natural heart" (360). He maintains that the poet's internal growth mirrors this movement so that "he sounds his epic aspirations only to renounce them, to propose instead the marriage that keeps him earthbound and that makes Grasmere a resting-place and termination" (365). Why, then, would the mature Wordsworth, at the pinnacle of his success, be so eager to relive that earlier state in which the poem begins, when as a roving school boy he first came to love the vale, staking a

claim to it even then in his bold pronouncement that "here / Should be my home, this valley be my world" ("Home at Grasmere" 42-43)?

In his essay "Is *The Prelude* a Philosophical Poem?" W. B. Gallie proposes that the novelty of *The Prelude* is achieved in its mixture of lofty and banal language—a duality that bridges two disparate, yet equally powerful sides of the poetic consciousness: the refined, rational side that carefully broods over a situation and assesses its deeper significance and the impulsive, childish side that delights in the wonder of the moment. Thus, he perceives that Wordsworth's past and present posed a problematic challenge he labored to overcome, namely, how to reconcile the "spontaneous receptivity" of his former self with the "self-mastery, the calm of mind, the conscientiousness of the mature artist" (666).

Gallie contends that Wordsworth refused to relinquish either aspect of his persona since his own life experience taught him that both were necessary to any experience of happiness—a state of consciousness he upheld as a means rather than an end. As Gallie explains, the poet was "interested not in the transcendental assurance of happiness (or the justification of misery) but in the way of happiness, the art of it" (667). In essence, he sought to discover how much of man's happiness he was capable of contributing through his own "inward resources" (as the spiritual transcendence of the solitaries comprising *Lyrical Ballads* so poignantly suggests) and how much was dependent on the "aid, stimulation, infection, 'grace,'" of outside sources, whether from other people or from nature (667).

Gallie stresses that Wordsworth distinguished himself amongst his Romantic contemporaries in that he was less concerned with the "shaping, creative power" of

Imagination than with its "revealing power"—not so much with the discovery it illuminates but rather with the strength of the imprint it leaves behind. He explains the poet was most intrigued by the unfinished nature of the truths that Imagination yields and that serve to create a longing in the soul of man—"a sense of something to pursue—of something evermore about to be—and a sense of how little we know about ourselves and of the universe" (668). Therefore, he maintains that the primary attraction of the poet's "spots of time" is that they provided an artistic vantage point that simultaneously allowed him to convey a sense of indebtedness to his past and to impress upon his readers a desire to change those aspects of their existence that prevent them from achieving happiness in their present situation. Gallie distinguishes the "spots of time" as those unpredictable moments when Imagination taps into secret, undisclosed sources of human potential, leading us to acknowledge and cherish our home-place as the root of our soul's desires and yet reminding us that, despite our greatest successes, there are still missions to pursue (667).

Indeed, the circuitous nature of *The Prelude's* conclusion, which resists both the poet's and reader's natural desire for closure, demands instead that we daily maintain a sense of life as a series of journeys in which we strive to lend our unique talents and energies to the preservation of a happier world for ourselves and those with whom we share this sacred space. In Book XII, the poet provides an answer to the doubtful hypothesis of the narrator in "Tintern Abbey" ("If this be but a vain belief") in asserting that if the ideals of Western pastoral literature are no longer our modern reality then we can nonetheless access this joy through other venues:

> Or if that fountain be indeed, no more,
> Then near some other spring which by the name
> Thou gratulatest, willingly deceived—
> Shall linger as a gladsome votary,
> And not a captive pining for his home. (1035-39)

By stretching out his life as an open book and inviting readers to partake intimately of his experiences (similar to a communion ritual), the poet provides an avenue for the common individual to access immediately the utmost reward of nature and Imagination's wedded union: the gift of poetry. *The Prelude* strives to demonstrate that the conception of true poetry, the beloved offspring of these superior powers, which he elsewhere terms "creation (by no lower name / Can it be called)" ("Home" 1012-13), comes to fruition when the receptive hearts of the audience are emotionally stirred to reach beyond the fragmented nature of their individual existence and envision themselves part of that One Life whose shared heart beats in accordance with nature and whose energy brings the isolated mind of man into spousal union with the world in which it finds itself a captive but also a willing votary.

Wordsworth's "spots" and other compelling encounters serve as repositories of energy which he could tap into and receive strength from to nurture him in his daily life. Moreover, these reservoirs of power retain a rejuvenating potential for readers as well. Though the sense of "connectedness" we experience either in direct communion with nature or through the imaginative experience of reading and engaging with poetry extinguishes quickly (as the milk from a mother's breast during a single feeding fully satisfies only for a short time), these fortunate encounters add to our stored experience,

thus producing a yearning to latch on and feed once more. In *Natural Supernaturalism*, M. H. Abrams contends that "the mature mind possesses powers, together with an added range, depth, and sensitivity of awareness, which are the product of the critical experiences it has undergone" (77). Likewise, Wordsworth's 1805 *Prelude* can summarily be described as the story of how nature formed the poet. In turn, it is a chronicle passed down to the reader (not only as a means of furthering his own legacy) but as a challenge to forge one's own private intimacy with Nature, a process that entails habitually casting away egotistical notions of "self" and entering into relationship with that greater community, which is the cosmos itself.

EPILOGUE

A TEST OF FAITH: REFLECTIONS ON CHANGE AND LOSS IN WORDSWORTH'S LATER WRITINGS

In "When First I Journeyed Hither" (a poem composed between 1800 and 1804 and then renamed "To the Attractions of the Busy World" when published in 1817), the poet describes a "stately fir-grove" not far from his Grasmere home that first caught his attention as a new occupant of this reclusive region (7). He tenderly describes the pleasure it brought him to rest in this peaceful space alone, save for the company of a nest of thrushes "who in that house / Of Nature and love had made their home / Among the fir trees" (21-22) or a few straggling sheep that had separated from the fold. In these early days, he recalls the firs as so thickly planted that he struggled to find a wide enough opening to pass through and, thus, felt a bit annoyed and inconvenienced by nature's mastery over human comfort, admitting that "for this cause, I loved the shady grove / Less than I wished to love a place so sweet" (39-40).

The next stanza relates that a revelatory discovery within the crowded fir grove powerfully transformed his perspective of this endearing, yet underappreciated spot. On a morning walk one hot spring day when the sun had melted the snow-covered ground, the poet stumbled upon a "hoary pathway" (57) extending through the trees with such natural ease that he finds it puzzling that he should not have noticed it before. His heart floods with joy upon the instant recognition that the winding path was paved by the steps of his brother, who after a fourteen year absence

when he had left the comforts of his "native hills" to "sail on barren seas" (46-47) briefly returned to visit William and Dorothy at the cottage.[1]

As the poet retraces the same course where John's feet had earlier trod, soaking in "every impulse of the moving breeze" (110), he imaginatively synchronizes his steps with his brother's, thereby bridging the distance between them so that they walk this weathered path together in spirit (113). Thereafter, his grieving heart is comforted as he looks ahead to that anticipated reunion when he should meet with John and other loved ones "a second time in Grasmere's happy vale" (117). The poem stands as a moving testament to how deeply human relationships are rooted in

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[1] Wordsworth's younger brother John attended the Hawkshead Grammar school with William before joining the East India Company's Earl of Abergavenny in 1799. He tragically drowned at sea when his ship sank in February of 1805. In *William Wordsworth: A Life*, Gill quotes this passage written by Wordsworth to Sir George Beaumont shortly after John's death:

> [M]y departed Brother . . . walked all his life pure among the impure. Except a little hastiness of temper when any thing was done in a clumsy or bungling way, or when improperly contradicted upon occasions of not much importance, he had not one vice of his profession. I never heard an oath or even an indelicate expression or allusion from him in my life, his modesty was equal to that of purest Women. In prudence, in meekness, in self-denial, in fortitude, in just desires, and elegant and refined enjoyments, with an entire simplicity of manners, life and habit, he was all that could be wished-for in man . . . (240)

Gill maintains that, despite his obvious sorrow, Wordsworth came to view John's loss as a test of faith, as is evidenced by his comment in a letter to Beaumont dated June 3, 1805, in which he credits his brother with

> encourag[ing] me to persist, and to keep my eye steady on its object. He would work for me (that was his language), for me, and his Sister; and I was to endeavor to do something for the world . . . This is the end of his part of the agreement, of his efforts for my welfare! God grant me life and strength to fulfill mine! I shall never forget him, never lose sight of him, there is a bond between us yet, the same as if he were living, nay far more sacred, calling upon me to do my utmost, as he to the last did utmost to live in honour and worthiness. (240)

the "spirit of place" and likewise how indebted we are to our home-place as the creator and preserver of the most vital aspects of our humanity.[2]

The theme of the human heart's literal and metaphorical journey "homeward" serves as a compelling subject of interest in Laurence Goldstein's article "The Auburn Syndrome: Change and Loss in 'The Deserted Village' and Wordsworth's 'Home at Grasmere.'" He cites the poet's reflections in his "Reply to Mathetes" upon the natural progression of the species—a discursive process that he perceives "may be justly compared to that of a river, which both in its smaller reaches and larger turnings, is frequently forced back toward its fountains by objects which otherwise cannot be eluded or overcome" (11).[3] Though a return to the spot of the water's origin

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[2] For another moving example of the manner in which Wordsworth associates human relationships with specific place, see his poem "To M. H," included in his "Poems on the Naming of Places," a collection of poetry composed shortly after his move to Grasmere that reflects the poet's early efforts to forge meaningful attachments with his new home-place. Inspired by an invigorating walk with his soon-to-be wife Mary Hutchinson along a rugged pathway leading to a stream in the woods, he names the tranquil pool of water and the green field surrounding it in her honor:

> The spot was made by Nature for herself:
> The travelers know it not, and 'twill remain
> Unknown to them; but it is beautiful,
> And if a man should plant his cottage near,
> Should sleep beneath the shelter of its trees,
> And blend its waters with his daily meal,
> He would so love it that in his death-hour
> Its image would survive among his thoughts,
> And, therefore, my sweet MARY, this still nook
> With all its beeches we have named from You. (15-24)

[3] Wordsworth opens Book Nine with a similar analogy comparing the winding course the reader takes in examining the poet's life to that of a river:

> As oftentimes a river, it might seem,
> Yielding in part to old remembrances,
> Part swayed by fear to tread an onward road
> That leads direct to the devouring sea,
> Turns and will measure back his course—far back,
> Towards the very regions which he crossed

might appear a digression from its future course, the poet maintains that the surge of energy derived through contact with the parent source "contributes as effectively to further [the river] in its course as when it moves forward uninterrupted in a line" (11).

In this same letter, Wordsworth laments that we cannot turn back and begin our journey anew; neither can memory wholly restore "the sacred light of childhood [that] is and must be for [us] no more than a remembrance" (16). Even so, he surmises that reconnecting with those repositories of power "will bring reformation and timely support; and the two powers of reason and nature, thus reciprocally teacher and taught, may advance together in a track to which there is no limit" (16). As Goldstein further explains, "[b]y reflection or by involuntary stimulus the adult can travel back to his sources of power, the 'spots of time' that created in him amplitude of soul" (353). He cites the following passage from Oliver Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* to describe the natural inclination that leads us all to gravitate toward home:

> There is something so seducing in that spot in which we first had existence, that nothing but it can please; whatever vicissitudes we experience in life, however we toil, or wheresoever we wander, our fatigued wishes still recur to home for tranquility, we long to die in that spot which gave us birth, and in that pleasing expectation opiate every calamity. (405)

In his first outset—so have we long time
Made motions retrograde, in like pursuit
Detained. (1-9)

A similar sentiment is expressed by the poet-narrator of "The Deserted Village," who confesses that thoughts of home sustained him through his solitary travels:

> In all my wandering round this world of care,
> In all my griefs—and God has given my share—
> I still had hopes my latest hours to Crown,
> Amidst those humble bowers to lay me down
> To husband out life's taper at the close,
> And keep the flame from wasting by repose
> I still had hopes, for Pride attends us still,
> Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill
> Around my fire an evening group to draw.
> And tell of all I felt and all I saw;
> And as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,
> Pants to the place from whence at first she flew,
> I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
> Here to return—and die at home at last. (83-96)

Goldstein contends that the wanderer's yearnings demonstrate that "continuity of self" is impossible to attain through memory alone, but rather requires the "continuity of place"—a mission accomplished in this poem when "the mortal traveler [like the Pedlar of "The Ruined Cottage" or the first person speaker of *The Prelude*] moves in a wide circle, gathering experience, [in order that he might] retire in his birthplace and pass on his wisdom to others of the community" (356).

Nonetheless, as any one of us who has ever packed up our bags and journeyed far from home can attest, the return to one's birthplace is often as painful as the initial departure, since neither we nor the consecrated spot of our heart's affections is ever quite the same as before. Beginning with Wordsworth's return to Grasmere in 1799, following a ten-year absence, and looking ahead to the destructive changes to the landscape of the English Lake District during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, Goldstein surmises that the poet's homecoming affected him in two diverse ways. On one hand, it provided him with the "absolute confidence in a new philosophy of landscape," which enabled him to write a long poem, whose theme was "the circular odyssey of the poetic soul back to the natural sources of its energy" (361). However, he explains that the pristine nature of the vale, which the poet idealized as existing "outside the force of history" (and, thus, as unsusceptible to change) made him "vulnerable to external 'obstacles,' which radically altered his philosophy of nature" (361).

Building upon Goldstein's assertions, this final chapter briefly looks to selected passages from Wordsworth's poetry and personal correspondence in the years following his completion of the 1805 *Prelude* for his answer to the age-old question: "Can we ever go home again?" Ultimately, it seeks to determine whether the damaging alterations to the Lake District's idyllic landscape—changes ushered in under the deceptive guise of "progress"—served to weaken the poet's faith in the sanctity of "home" that he had come to revere in Grasmere as both physical and spiritual place.

Goldstein explains that noticeable changes to the physical composition of the vale were evident by 1805. He notes that "[a]s the nearby industrial cities became wealthier and uglier the popularity of country houses and Ornamental Gardening increased. Grasmere, inevitably, became one object of these fashions" (366).

In a letter addressed to Richard Sharp dated February 7, 1805, Wordsworth expresses his disdain to a certain Mr. Crump because of his plans to erect a large house that the poet calls "a temple of abomination" (534). He writes, "Seriously this is a great vexation to us, as this House will stare you in the face from every part of the Vale, and utterly destroy its character of simplicity and seclusion" (534). [4] On November 7 of that same year, Dorothy wrote to Lady Beaumount, confirming that the Crump mansion was completed and complaining that the farmhouse adjacent to their own had been purchased by a gentleman who promised to make a "*fine place*" of it and who had additionally gained ownership of the Island that she supposes will be converted into a pavilion or an obelisk (638). Furthermore, she grimly reports that after Christmas, the appraisal of Sir Michael Fleming's woods would be finalized, and "the Ax is to be lifted against them, and not one tree left, so the whole eastern side of the Lake will be entirely naked, even to the very edge of the water!" (638). She explains that such behavior is to be expected of a man who constructed a large fence that splits the hill behind his house into a straight line "and to make his doings visible to all men . . . whitewashed it, as white as snow" (638). She surmises that such

[4] Reference to Wordsworths' correspondence from this period are drawn from *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth 1787-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967).

a self-righteous individual lacks "a sense which others have. To him there is no 'Spirit in the Wood.'"[5] (638).

Wordsworth's "The Tuft of Primroses," a poem composed in 1807 that was most likely intended to become part of *The Recluse*, expresses the poet's longing to preserve a little sacred plot of earth from the destructive changes going on around it. In this secluded region, he deems it safe from the sheep and goats who feed on vegetation or from the greedy hands of adventurous children whose uncontrolled appetites might tempt them to pluck her gentle fruits. Moreover, should a "Taller Passenger" be compelled to assert his power over her fragile blossoms, he assures her that "Thought of love / Would hold him back, check'd in the first conceit / And impulse of such rapine" (23-25).

The poet imagines how the flower's beauty would uplift the hearts of the "sick, poor, or weary, or disconsolate" traveler, offering "genial promises to those who droop" [and] "[b]rightening at once the winter of their souls" (33-35). He further marvels that even the prisoner, released from his cell, will find in her the essence of true liberty where "all the toil / And labours of this sharp ascent shall melt / Before [her] mild assurance" (57-59). For his own part, the poet admits that in the dead of winter or the drought of summer when he passes by this rock and finds the primrose not in bloom, his soul still feels her presence, for though generations of strong, healthy human bloodlines have perished, this tender plant persists (69-70). Still, as we

[5] This phrase is taken from Wordworth's early poem, "Nutting," which relates the story of how the poet's untamed impulses led him to haphazardly destroy the hazel grove as a child—an incident that plagued his consciousness well into adulthood. The "spirit of the wood" refers to a live and active presence that exists in nature, which has power both to heal and punish.

come to see in the climactic "dark turn" of the poem that so abruptly follows the poet's worshipful admiration of the flowers, the primroses surface as frail symbols of immortality amidst a fallen Eden. Having returned to Grasmere from Coleorton in July of 1806 (a nine month absence), the poet is devastated to find the natural landscape of the vale so drastically disfigured:

> Ah, what a welcome! when from absence long
> Returning on the centre of the Vale
> I looked a first glad look and saw them not!
> Was it a dream ? th' aerial grove, no more
> Right in the centre of the lovely Vale
> Suspended like a stationary cloud,
> Had vanish'd like a cloud—yet say not so
> For here and there a straggling Tree was left
> To mourn in blanc and monumental grief,
> To pine and wither for its fellows gone. (94-103)

The churchyard, once surrounded by ash-trees, whose soothing breeze lent an aura of "holy grace" to the vicar's Sabbath morning walks, is now bleakly exposed:

> Now stands the Steeple naked and forlorn,
> And from the Haven, the "last Central Home,"
> To which all change conducts the Thought, looks round
> Upon the changes of this peaceful vale. (127-30)

Lashing out against the human hands responsible for the destruction of this serene property, he questions whether there is any limit to man's need to prove his dominance over nature:

> Yes I was moved and to this hour am moved.
> What man would bring to nothing if he might
> A natural power or element? and who,
> If the ability were his, would dare
> To kill a species of insensate life,
> Or to the bird of meanest wing would say,
> Thou and thy kind must perish? (528-34)

In *A Guide through the District of the Lakes* (1837), Wordsworth looks back over three decades of unsightly changes to the natural architecture of the vale and laments with heavy heart,

> It was well for the undisturbed pleasure of the Poet that he had no forebodings of the change which was soon to take place; and it might have been hoped that these words, indicating how much the charm of what *was,* depended upon what was *not*, would of themselves have preserved the ancient franchises of this and other kindred mountain retirements from trespass; or (shall I dare to say?) would have secured scenes so consecrated from profanation. (208)

Goldstein maintains that in order to conceptualize how deeply these ruinous changes afflicted the poet, we must remember that Grasmere embodied the very essence of his lifelong mission—the attainment of "home" as a wedded union between nature and

the human mind. He offers this description of the intimacy forged between the poet's soul and virtually every inch of this sacred spot:

> . . . the vale becomes an emblem of one creative mind, its physical properties extensions of the poetic intelligence that perceives them . . . [T]here is no significant object . . . which Wordsworth would not have met with in childhood. By evoking these perennial images of continuity [in "Home at Grasmere"] Wordsworth preserves a unified self experienced as landscape. (Goldstein 362-63)

Truly, for he who had breathed life into the minutest objects of this pastoral haven, the needless intrusion and violence inflicted upon the vale could have felt like nothing less than a personal violation—a "spiritual rape" that pained him to the very core. As Goldstein explains, "if we consider the natural figuration that man creates as an extension of his own self, then the decay of that order is the complete obliteration of the self" (368). He further asserts that while pain, separation, and loss are accounted for in *The Prelude* as a necessary stage of human development, the same paradigm of evil as a prerequisite for creative growth cannot equally be applied to Grasmere, which "is itself the symbolic alpha and omega of Wordsworth's circuitous journey . . . the unitary source and end of the poet's pilgrimage" (370). Even so, he is careful to clarify that the threats imposed upon his beloved home do not, by any stretch of the imagination, obliterate the poet's previous achievements since "Wordsworth would never have retracted the central beliefs of his visionary poetry" (Goldstein 370).

Nonetheless, the sudden demolition of the natural scenery that had directly inspired his mature poetic masterpieces provoked the poet in his later writings to

engage in fiery protest against the despoiling of the English countryside due to the rising growth of urbanization, tourism, and the construction of lavish vacation homes for a burgeoning bourgeoisie. Consequently, after 1805, Wordsworth's verse is discernibly less a poetry of *relationship*, depicting man in intimate contact with his surroundings. Instead, it embodies a search for unblemished symbols of permanence far removed from human access and recognizable only to the privileged poetic eye. In "The Stars Are Mansions Built by Nature's Hand" (1820), the gentle stirrings of the spring season—the song of birds, insect murmuring, and blooming plant life—lead the poet to shift his gaze to the heavenly realm where he admires those celestial bodies, shut off from mortal beings, as "[a]bodes where self-disturbance hath no part" (21). Likewise, in "September, 1819" he seeks out a peaceful grove unperturbed by human cares, proclaiming,

> This, this is holy;—while I hear
> These vespers of another year,
> This hymn of thanks and praise,
> My spirit seems to mount above
> The anxieties of human love,
> And earth's precarious days. (19-24)

In the closing stanza, he urges the inhabitants of this tranquil space to look to a higher power to supply its needs and, thereby, amend human failings:

> But list!—though winter storms be nigh,
> Unchecked is that soft harmony:
> There lives Who can provide

> For all his creatures; and in Him,
>
> Even like the radiant Seraphim,
>
> These choristers confide. (25-30)

In his article "And Earth and Stars Composed a Universal Heaven: A View of Wordsworth's Later Poetry," Richard D. McGhee comments upon the fundamental differences between Wordsworth's early and later style, explaining,

> [H]is earlier poetry embodied an existential discovery of meaning and beauty in the natural creation, [while] his later poetry sought to escape the bounds of natural existence and penetrate to a perception of the essential values which transcend and give ultimate meaning to earthly beauty. (643)

He observes that, though retaining passion, the poet's later verse, steeped in religious dogma and often employing a more "controlled" classical approach in its use of formal diction and veiled imagery, clearly lacks the "warmth" (and as David Perkins puts it, the "sincerity") of his earlier poetry (643-44). Even so, McGhee points to poems such as "Laodamia" (1815) and "The Vernal Ode" (1817) as embodying "a message of hope brought from the regions beyond to the regions of nature" (645). As he explains, "the hope is that man may recover the permanence of repose after the afflictions of time's wearisome changes" (645). In "Laodamia," the heavenly messenger Hermes relates to the Queen tales of far superior worlds existing beyond the scope of human perception:

> He spake of love, such love as Spirits feel
>
> In worlds whose course is equable and pure;

No fears to beat away—no strife to heal—
The past unsighed for, and the future sure;
Spake of heroic arts in graver mood
Revived, with finer harmony pursued.
Of all that is most beauteous—imaged there
In happier beauty; more pellucid streams,
An ampler ether, a diviner air,
And fields invested with purpureal gleams;
Climes which the sun, who sheds the
brightest day
Earth knows is all unworthy to survey. (97-108)

Likewise, in "The Vernal Ode," an angelic being sings hymns of celebration to the hills of Rydale, piously praising the imperishable beauties of his eternal home:

"No wintry desolations,
Scorching light or noxious dew,
Affect my native habitations;
Buried in glory, far beyond the scope
Of man's inquiring gaze, but to his hope
Imaged though faintly, in the hue
Profound of night's ethereal blue." (25-31)

Despite the refreshing optimism of the poet's claims that such places do exist, which are sheltered from the forces of time and change in their evocation of otherworldly powers, these poems depart from the poet's earlier claims that paradise is attainable

solely in the relationship between man and his world—a sacred union wherein, Bate observes, "we find our happiness or not at all" (33). Thus, in an age where man-inflicted destruction of the natural world rendered few things impervious to ruin or decay, Wordsworth seemingly shifted his attention away from utilizing poetry as a means of forging ties with one's environment to poetry as a means of preserving the timelessness of natural objects and thus safeguarding them from destruction—a transformation that clearly reflects his anger and disappointment with humanity's failure to appreciate nature's cathartic power. He even goes so far as to suggest that man has so destroyed the sacred spot of Winandermere (a tiny island in close proximity to Grasmere) that the only hope of its redemption lies in completely abandoning the property to the natural elements. He asks,

> Could not the margin of this noble island be given back to nature? Winds and waves work with a careless and graceful hand: and, should they in some places carry away a portion of the soil, the trifling loss would be amply compensated by the additional spirit, dignity, and loveliness, which these agents and the other powers of nature would soon communicate to what was left behind. (*A Guide* 209)

As the century progressed, perhaps no industrial advancement perturbed the poet quite so much as the proposal to install a railway system stretching from Kendal to Windermere. In an 1840 sonnet which appeared in the *Morning Post*, he expresses his opposition to the controversial plan that threatened to destroy the peaceful climate and scenic beauty of the Lake District:

Is then no nook of English ground secure
From rash assault? Schemes of retirement sown
In youth, and mid the busy world kept pure
As when their earliest flowers of hope were blown,
Must perish:—how can they this blight endure?
And must he, too, the ruthless change bemoan
Who scorns a false utilitarian lure
Mid his paternal fields at random thrown? (1-8)

In perhaps his most passionate attempt to serve as a spokesperson for land preservation, he calls upon nature to reassert her dominance and demand her rights:

Baffle the threat, bright Scene, from Orrest-head
Given to the passing traveller's rapturous glance:
Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance
Of nature; and if human hearts be dead,
Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong
And constant voice, protest against the wrong. (9-14)

In a letter addressed to the editor of *The Morning Post* dated December 9, 1844, Wordsworth insists that while the beauty reflected in the simplicity of rude natural objects is not typically appreciated by the average individual, the acquisition of such taste is a process that "is not to be implanted at once; it must be gradually developed both in nations and individuals" (343). [6] He vehemently argues,

[6] Gill describes Wordsworth's opposition to the railroad proposal as a two-part argument. First, the project did not supply a need for industry but rather threatened to destroy the beauty of the

> The wide-spread waters of these regions are in their nature peaceful; so are the steep mountains and the rocky glens; nor can they be profitably enjoyed but by a mind disposed to peace. Go to a pantomime, a farce, or a puppet-show if you want noisy pleasure . . . , but may those who have given proof that they prefer other gratifications continue to be safe from the molestation of cheap trains pouring out their hundreds at a time along the margin of the Windermere. (345-46)

In a letter composed to the same editor dated December 18, 1844, the poet writes in calmer language about how destructive changes to the national and international countryside have personally affected him, particularly in regards to the threats they pose to his artistic vision. Having passed by the same route that thirty years earlier had inspired the Simplon Pass episode of his 1805 *Prelude*—the passage so often regarded as the seminal statement of his One Life philosophy—he finds that the

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landscape purely for touristic purposes. Secondly, only a "tutored eye" is capable of appreciating beauty and while such a taste could be acquired through "books, pictures, [and especially] from repeated personal exploration, from familiarization," it is foolish to suggest that such refinement could be obtained on a short trip to a foreign place (qtd. in 413). Gill maintains that both assertions are plausible and that had Wordsworth stopped there, his stance would have raised little commotion. However, his comment in a letter to John Gibson Lockhart, dated April 21, 1819 in which he states that the unrefined amusements of "'wrestling matches, horse and boat races [,] pot-houses and beer-shops'" which spread to Durham and the borderers of Cumberland and Northumberland from Lancashire and Yorkshire served to debase the region and make spectacles of an already lower-class population was met with much criticism both for the fear it inspired of the masses and for its seemingly condescending attitude toward the poor (qtd. in 414). Mary Moorman points out the flaw in Wordsworth's approach, stating "It was unfortunate that Wordsworth's fear of the proletarian holiday crowds made him use language which many interpreted as an attempt to keep working people from entering the Lake District at all" (563). See *LY* Oxford: Clarendon P, 1965.
Without either supporting or defending Wordsworth against such accusations, Gill offers this objective observation concerning public response to Wordsworth's campaign: "By the end of April 1847 trains were steaming into the station, giving Manchester labourers their first glimpse of the lake and the mountains beyond" (414).

recent construction of the military road has replaced "the old muleteer track with its primitive simplicities" (354). He is disheartened to discover how drastically art had interfered with natural processes, so that the once free-flowing stream was reduced to a trickle, the rustic bridges were torn down, and where curious travelers once leisurely meandered along the pathway on foot "to observe and feel," now fashionable tourists hurried by in carriages unmindful of the scenery (353-54). Surveying the area in light of these disruptive modifications, he reports that, though "some places [continued to] excite admiration, it was impossible to suppress with regret for what had vanished forever" (354).

Though Wordsworth's later writings lament the gross abuses of destruction and loss imposed upon his cherished Grasmere home, his best poetry reflects the kind of intimate connection with one's world he knew to be possible. In a letter addressed to Sir George Beaumont and dated October 17, 1805, a period in which he witnessed the first wave of unsightly alterations encroach upon the vale, Wordsworth incorporates a fragment of a poem that expresses his confidence in the purity of heart that can withstand the dark perils of change. He writes,

> His hope is treacherous only whose love dies
> With beauty, which is varying every hour:
> But in chaste hearts, uninfluenc'd by the power
> Of outward change, there blooms a deathless flow'r,
> That breathes on Earth the air of Paradise. (10-14)

Despite his heated frustrations with a self-serving society that failed to comprehend his message, the theme of the human soul in touch with nature remained internally at

all stages of Wordsworth's career the "preamble" and "benediction" of his heart's song. He writes in this same letter to Beaumont,

> In a word, if I were disposed to write a sermon . . . upon the subject of taste in natural beauty I should take for my text the little pathway in Lowther Woods, and all which I had to say would begin and end in the human heart, as, under the direction of the divine Nature conferring value on the objects of the senses and pointing out what is valuable in them. (627-28)

Though Wordsworth would never have considered himself an advocate for land preservation, his efforts to preserve the sanctity of natural habitations establish him as an early forerunner of a movement that has increasingly gained vigor in recent decades. Still, what distinguishes the poet from even modern political efforts dedicated to the preservation of deserts, exotic rain forests, and other remote regions, that, as Karl Kroeber points out, are now idealized as "territorial sanctuaries," is his belief in the life-altering power of maintaining a mindset which continuously seeks to formulate fresh relationships with the most familiar aspects of one's environment.

It is notable that even as Wordsworth's intellectual curiosities and artistic talents led him to explore a great deal of the European countryside, including extensive walking tours of France, Switzerland, Scotland, and Germany, his best poetry was produced within the thirty-four mile radius of the English Lake District where he attended grammar school at Hawkshead and then later lived with Dorothy, first to Grasmere (1799-1813) and then at Rydal Mount, where he resided until his death in 1850. In this regard, perhaps the most significant truth we find in examining

the circular structure of Wordsworth's storied poetic journey is that his life and art provide an exemplary reflection of T.S. Eliot's assertion that

> We shall not cease from exploration,
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we first started
> And know the place for the first time. (241-44)[7]

Furthermore, like Eliot's contemporary, W. B. Yeats, Wordsworth discovered the source of his creative powers in a most unlikely place: within the "foul rag-and-bone-shop of the heart" (40). [8]

Wordsworth's zealous passion for exploring the subtle and intricate delights of the landscape, enthusiastically familiarizing himself with its minutest species of plant and animal life and taking a particular interest in the "lower" orders of humanity—the many homeless beggars who in the war years became permanent fixtures of the Lake District community—offers a powerful incentive to readers of a fast-paced, "progressive" society to break occasionally from their widespread air travels and reacquaint themselves with their own neighborhoods, learning thereby to appreciate the distinct energies that they both contribute to and receive from their day-to-day surroundings. Most significantly, in a modern, progressive society where self-centered interests have so severely severed people's ties with nature and with

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[7] Eliot, T. S., "Little Gidding," *The Four Quartets, Modern British Literature: The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, Ed. Frank Kermode and John Hollander (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 496-503.

[8] W.B. Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," *Modern British Literature: The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, ed. Frank Kermode and John Hollander (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 211-12.

other human beings, Wordsworth's poetry provides a useful road map that lovingly models the renewed relationship between the self and the world whereby a lost generation of wanderers can learn to overcome feelings of separation and displacement and gradually find its way back home.

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