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Three Versions of the Self: The Prelude 1798-1806

by

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To Barbara
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Chapter One: Introduction

The Prelude 1798-1806

Between 1798 and 1806 Wordsworth's Prelude developed through three distinct compositional and conceptual stages. The first was a two-part poem completed in late 1799, which describes the poet's development from his earliest years of infancy until his seventeenth year. The second was a much more tentative five-book version, which Wordsworth attempted unsuccessfully to complete in the early months of 1804. Extant manuscript evidence suggests that this version was to have contained various materials from Books I-V, XI, XIII of 1805-06, and that it would have extended the narrative of the two-part Prelude another three or four years to include the poet's first year at Cambridge, his subsequent summer vacation, and his ascent of Snowdon on a walking tour of Wales. The third form of The Prelude is, of course, the thirteen-book poem of 1805-06, which contains not only the poet's crucial experiences during the French Revolution, but also his earlier journeys to the Continent and London.

Although each successive version of The Prelude included more and more of Wordsworth's past into its design, the poem did not grow through any easy or regular process of accretion, with one form incorporating and expanding upon an earlier one. While Wordsworth seldom discarded what he had previously written (even as his perspective on the past changed), he also never just added on to it; instead, as he composed significant new material, he reorganized whole sections of the poem,
relocating key passage, changing emphases and interpretations (often radically), inserting summaries and correctives—all in order to accommodate the old design to the new.

Of these three versions of The Prelude, the one that is most unified, the one in which Wordsworth indicates the clearest conception of both the significance of his own past and the scope of his poem, is the two-part Prelude of 1799. Here the poet traces, in non-chronological sequence, the development of his being from his earliest moments of consciousness until his penultimate perception of the "One Life" in his seventeenth year. The theme throughout this version of the poem is Nature, especially the manner in which Nature's continuing "ministry" to the young poet influenced this growth into selfhood.

While the projected five-book Prelude of 1804 would have opened with a somewhat revised version of this two-part poem, the major theme of this second form of the The Prelude was significantly different. Where the earlier version described how Nature shaped the development of a "favored being," the 1804 Prelude was to deal with how this being suffered change, how he experienced and responded to threats to his selfhood and spiritual integrity through his participation in the larger world of mankind. The principal locale for this new experience of man was Cambridge, although the recurring pattern of decline and recovery established in the account of Cambridge continues through the next book, which narrates the poet's first summer vacation from the
university. Just how the five-book poem would have resolved this theme of identity and continuity is unclear, for we do not know enough about the projected fifth book to make a sound judgment on this matter. However, what we do know about the final book seems to show the poet moving in two opposite directions in trying to conclude his poem, for the version of the ascent of Snowdon which was to open the book is a long tribute to Nature's "ministry," much in the manner of the Two-Part Prelude, while the version of the "spots of time" and the poet's analytic/rationalist crisis revert to the theme of crisis and conversion which had become central to the five-book poem.

The thirteen-book Prelude, in expanding the narrative to include the poet's Revolutionary experience, made two significant extensions of the themes of the five-book poem. First, it substituted for the repeated pattern of decline and recovery one major crisis--the poet's collapse after the Revolution--and structured the entire poem around this crucial period of despair and reaffirmation. Second, in dealing with the process of conversion and reaffirmation the poet explicitly celebrates the powers of consciousness, their role in his recovery and in the reassertion of his identity as a poet. Indeed, the final affirmation of this version of the poem is that man is sustained through life not by Nature's purposeful, tutelary influence, but by the powers of his own mind and his own internal energies.
The purpose of this study, then, is to trace the conceptual and compositional development of The Prelude by examining in detail the structure and the major thematic concerns of the two shorter versions of the poem, and then describing more briefly Wordsworth's incorporation of these two works into the completed poem of 1805-06. Since one of Wordsworth's favorite metaphors for his poetry was architectural, we can describe our efforts as an attempt to understand both the complex structure of 1805-06 and the man who designed it in terms of the two smaller structures which he alternately constructed and disassembled in accordance with his changing conception of that final structure.

In the remainder of this chapter we will, to continue the metaphor, follow Wordsworth's efforts to gather the materials and conceive a design for the Two-Part Prelude of 1799.

Toward The Two-Part Prelude

On March 5, 1798, Dorothy Wordsworth wrote the following to Mary Hutchinson in response to the latter's request for a copy of The Ruined Cottage: "This is impossible for it has grown to the length of 900 lines. I will however send you a copy of that part which is immediately and solely connected with the Cottage. The Pedlar's character now makes a very, certainly the most, considerable part of the poem."^1 Her last reference is, of course, to Wordsworth's expansion of The Ruined Cottage in early 1798 to include a detailed
characterization of the Pedlar, especially in regard to the influence of Nature on his development. While the poet's intentions in revising the poem were probably to portray the Pedlar as a credible interpreter of the stark tale of human suffering which he tells, and thus as a credible mentor to the young poet who hears the story, he succeeded instead in creating such problems of unity that Jonathan Wordsworth, in his book-length study of the poem, begins by separating the story of Margaret from the account of the Pedlar, arguing that tale and teller "benefit from being considered in isolation."  

Another of Jonathan Wordsworth's remarks on the poet's revision of *The Ruined Cottage* bears repeating:

> He did not, as one might expect, gradually increase the part played by the Pedlar until it became necessary to create for him a character and a history: he deliberately returned to the poem as a vehicle for new philosophical beliefs . . . Under the influence of Coleridge, Wordsworth had become interested in the spiritual basis of his own experience, and he saw in the character of the Pedlar a means of exploring it.  

Although we may wonder a bit at the ease with which the critic Wordsworth discerns the poet Wordsworth's original motivation in returning to *The Ruined Cottage*, the revisions do indeed suggest a significantly new conception of the poem, and more important, a new direction in Wordsworth's poetry in general. Whether we assume, with Jonathan Wordsworth, that the poet expanded *The Ruined Cottage* consciously and "deliberately" to explore his own past, or that in the process of creating a past for the Pedlar he began to consider more carefully the development of his own being,
it is clear that in this period Wordsworth tapped a source of inspiration which would lead him eventually to his greatest artistic achievement—not the long philosophical examination of "Nature, Man, and Society" which Coleridge urged him to write, but the introspective, essentially private examination of self which he composed in response to an inner need to discover and articulate the pattern of his own experience.

In the Alfoxden Notebook, which dates from the early months of 1798, we can see some of the first indications of this new direction in Wordsworth's poetry. A long section of the manuscript is devoted to an account of the Pedlar's early history, much of which later appeared in The Ruined Cottage and in the second book of The Prelude. One passage describes his experiencing

\[
\text{whate'er there is of power in sounds} \\
\text{To breathe an elevated mood—by form} \\
\text{Or image unprofaned of sounds that are} \\
\text{The ghostly language of the antient earth} \\
\text{Or make their dim abode in distant winds.} \\
\text{(Alf., 136-140)}
\]

In the second draft of these lines several pages later Wordsworth adds that from these sounds the Pedlar, "did . . . drink the visionary power" (Alf., 218). But in his immediate analysis of this experience, the pronoun changes from third person to first:

\[
\text{I deem not profitless those fleeting moods} \\
\text{Of shadowy exaltation not for this} \\
\text{That they are kindred to our purer mind} \\
\text{And intellectual life . . .} \quad \text{(Alf., 219-222)}
\]

While it is possible that Wordsworth somehow intended these lines either for the Pedlar, or for the Poet who recounts
his history, it seems much more likely that they represent Wordsworth's own response, in his own voice and his own person, to the sort of experience which in the narrative he attributes to his fictional character.

We can see the same movement from third person narrative to first person commentary a few pages later in the manuscript. Apparently describing the Pedlar he states:

One evening when the sun was setting low
And with unusual clearness he perceived
The exceeding beauty of the earth and felt
The loveliness of Nature . . .  (Alf., 266-269)

The passage breaks off here in mid-line but picks up again on the next manuscript page, where he learn that the Pedlar felt

a pleasant consciousness of life
In the impression of that loveliness
Until the sweet sensation called the mind
Into itself by image from without
Unvisited; and all the reflex powers
Wrapp'd in a still Dream forgetfulness . . .
(Alf., 271-277)

After a space of one line the passage then continues:

I lived without the knowledge that I lived
Then by those beauteous forms brought back again
To lose myself again as if my life
Did ebb & flow with a strange mystery . . .
(Alf., 278-281)

Again it is possible that Wordsworth intended this reflection for The Ruined Cottage, despite the obvious difficulties involved in having either the Poet or the Pedlar speak it. But again it seems much more likely that he had turned from narrative, or disguised autobiography, to explicit autobiography, that his efforts to recount the Pedlar's intercourse with Nature had awakened memories which could only find proper expression in his own voice and person.
Later in the notebook there appears another short passage which indicates Wordsworth's new concern for the re-creation of his past experience in his verse. He begins with a scene derived, as Michael Jaye notes, from one of Dorothy's Journal entries:

> These populous slopes
> With all their groves and with their numerous woods
> Giving a curious feeling to the mind
> Of peopled solitude. (Alf., 391-394)

Although a line is drawn across the manuscript page after this description, the passage which follows is clearly related to it, for this next passage also deals with a "grove" and "woods"—not those of the present, preserved on the journal page, but those of the past, preserved in memory:

> There was a spot
> My favourite station when the winds were up
> Three knots of fir trees small & circular
> And for the poets or the painters eye
> Too formally arrange [sic] ... (Alf., 396-400)

After several abortive lines the passage continues:

> right opposite
> The central grove I loved to stand & hear
> The wind come and touch the trees & then
> Elicit all proportion of sweet sound
> As from an instrument. (Alf., 406-409)

This recollection is noteworthy not only for the experience which it relates—the sense of a special place where the forces of Nature made their own music for the young poet—but also for the form in which Wordsworth recounts the memory. In the later manuscripts we shall see this rhetorical formula applied not to a place but to a person, a state of being, for instead of "There was a spot . . ." Wordsworth writes, "There
was a boy . . .," and the boy in question is, of first, himself. And while the phrase "There was a spot" suggests at most a kind of nostalgia for the past and the experiences associated with it, its counterpart, "There was a boy," is considerably different in its implications, since the boy who was may no longer exist; this childhood state of being may have ended either in death or in growing up, growing away from his original habits and enjoyments, and his original relationship with the world around him.

The passage in the Alfoxden Notebook which indicates as clearly as any other Wordsworth's new concern for his past experience is the fragment of what would later become the Vagrant Soldier episode in Book IV of The Prelude. Only the barest details of the incident are included here, but we can see the poet attempting something beyond a simple description of a human being or a natural scene from his past. The fragment begins with an account of a barking village dog and then moves abruptly to the poet's offer to accompany the soldier to a laborer's house, where the man could receive food and shelter. As they begin their journey the poet notes:

He appeared
To travel without pain and I beheld
With ill-suppressed astonishment his thin
And moving at my side
With gentle steps and as our walk advanced
I ask'd him why he tarri'd there alone . . .
(Alf., 75-85)

The passage recreates this experience from the past with something of its original impact upon him, for the poet
focuses both on the figure moving along beside him and on his own mind in the act of perceiving and responding to that figure. We can perhaps best appreciate the significance of this episode by comparing it to his treatment of another solitary figure in the same portion of the manuscript, the Old Cumberland Beggar. In the Fenwick Note to the completed poem Wordsworth remarks that the man upon whom the description was based was "Observed, and with great benefit to my own heart, when I was a child." And while the detailed account of the beggar's appearance and habits does attest to careful and sensitive observation, the poet's interest here is clearly not in recreating the essence of his childhood experience of the man. Indeed, any sense of the beggar having been part of a significant episode in the poet's early life is largely subordinated to the explicit ethical argument of the poem, an argument in which the beggar, for all of Wordsworth's sympathy and concern, finally becomes little more than an exemplum, the occasion for an exhortation on true charity and benevolence. Now, for all we know, the poet may have had a similar rhetorical purpose in mind when he drafted the lines on the Vagrant Soldier, for the incident could easily have led into a more general consideration of human suffering and deprivation or of man's capacity for endurance. Be that as it may, the fragment as it stands illustrates Wordsworth's attempt to project himself into his own past not just as a spectator, an observer, but as a participant, his attempt to recapture in his verse both the events of the past and the emotions which those events generated within him.
While these short, disconnected passages of first-person narrative and commentary in the Alfoxden Notebook represent the opening of a significantly new dimension in Wordworth's poetry, it was not until somewhat later in 1798 that he began in earnest to explore his past experience and its relationship to his present state of being. The real beginnings of this effort are, of course, the long autobiographical sections of MS. JJ, which date from Wordworth's stay in Germany. Unlike the Alfoxden Notebook, the Prelude materials in MS. JJ focus primarily on the theme of Nature's "intervention" in his early life, the sense of Nature as a purposeful, formative influence on his development and of himself as a "favor'd being," Nature's "favourite and joy" (JJ, 361, 118). The most striking of these recollections, those which occupy the most space in the manuscript, are the so-called "ministry of fear" episodes—robbing birds' nests and snares, the stolen boat—which would later become the central incidents in the first book of The Prelude. We can see in JJ not only the succession of drafts through which the events themselves developed, but also the poet's working out of his own conception of these experiences. As with all of Wordworth's manuscripts, the compositional sequence in JJ is unclear, but structurally "after" the account of the nesting and the bird-snaring episodes there appears Wordworth's first attempt to describe the ministry of Nature:

How while I ran where'er the working heat
Of passion drove at that thoughtless time
unknown
A power unknown would open out the clouds
As with the touch of lightning seeking me
With gentle visitation then unknown . . .
(JJ, 245-249)

In his second draft of this passage the poet both identifies
the "unknown power" which reached out to him as a force of
Nature, and also attempts to distinguish between two types
of natural ministry, only one of which played a significant
role in his development:

Yes there are genii which when they would form
? Thus ? often? did
A favour'd spirit open out the clouds
As with the touch of lightning seeking him
With gentle visitation other use
? Less    
interference ministry
Of grosser kind & of their school was I
Though haply aiming at the selfsame end
And made me love them.  (JJ, 254-261)

The manuscript then continues with an early version of the
stolen boat episode (JJ, 262-333), the foremost illustration
of Nature's "ministry/Of grosser kind." In the third and
final draft of the passage the poet both smooths out his
description of the second type of intervention, and provides
a simile to emphasize the purposeful, creative energies involved in shaping a "favor'd being":

The soul of man is fashioned & built-up
Just like a strain of music
    I believe
That there are spirits which when they would form
A favor'd being open out the clouds
As at the touch of lightning
Seeking him with gentle visitation
    and with such
Though rarely in my wanderings I have held
Communion. Others too there are who use
Yet haply aiming at the self-same end
Severer interventions ministry
Of grosser kind & of their school was I
And oft when on the withered mountain slope
The frost & breath . . . (JJ, 358-371)

The final two lines of this passage are the opening of the
bird-snaring incident, three drafts of which appear earlier
in the manuscript (JJ, 131-182). Their inclusion here suggests
that Wordsworth was having second thoughts about the placement
of this interpretive comment on Nature's "Severer intervention"
and perhaps about the sequence of the illustrative episodes
themselves as well. But while these minor stylistic matters
clearly required his further attention, the conception of
himself as the object of Nature's purposeful, formative
influence which he articulates here remained essentially
unchanged throughout the later versions of the poem.¹³

As affirmative as these descriptions of Nature's ministry
are in JJ, it is important to note that the Prelude materials
begin with a rhetorical question that is at least implicitly
an expression of doubt about the development of his being.
Indeed, the repeated variations on "Was it for this . . . ?"
which introduce the recollections of his childhood experiences
of Nature (JJ, 29-59) suggest that his probings into the past
were a response to a sense of loss and inadequacy in the
present. Since no antecedent for the word this appears in
JJ, and since Wordsworth does not return to the theme as he
does in the Two-Part Prelude,¹⁴ it is unclear what aspect
of the present moment was responsible for these feelings.
Mary Moorman asserts that MS. JJ "does not make sense unless
what Wordsworth meant by 'this' in his rhetorical questions had already received mental existence"; she states further that "he had already thought through and mentally composed that description of his frustrated, uncertain search for a subject for an epic poem, which eventually came to occupy the beginning of The Prelude." While Moorman's contention is certainly a possibility (especially considering Wordsworth's capacity to retain long passages of blank verse in his memory), there are some rather significant problems inherent in it. First, to assume that the poet had either the "glad preamble" or the "post-preamble" in mind while composing MS. JJ presupposes a much more elaborate conception of the poem that the manuscript evidence seems to support. Moreover, if Wordsworth had indeed "thought through and mentally composed" an account of his inability to begin some great poetic enterprise, it is curious that he was unable to complete those lines in MS. JJ which deal with this same general topic, the problems of creation. The passage begins with a description of "a mild creative breeze/A gentle inspiration" which "soon becomes/A tempest a redundant energy . . . Creating not but as it may/disturbing things created" (JJ, 4-11). The poet then characterizes this creative energy as

\[
\text{a storm not terrible but strong} \\
\text{And lights and shades and with a rushing power} \\
\text{With loveliness and power . . .}
\]

and finally as "trances of thought/And mountings of the mind" which make the driving wind of autumn seem "meekness"
(JJ, 12-18). The uncertainty and indirection of this passage (which then moves off in a wholly different direction), suggest that instead of having the lines which would later become the opening of the poem in his mind he was here attempting to work some of them out. That he even recognized them as a part of this opening section is also unclear, despite their proximity to the "Was it for this . . . " passage.16

If we need to account for the tone of Wordsworth's rhetorical question in JJ and to identify a specific referent for the word this in it, we may perhaps find both in the poet's own situation in Germany while composing these recollections of his childhood.17 The journey which began in the fall of 1798 as an effort by the Wordsworths and Coleridge to learn German while living cheaply together on the Continent soon changed its course. Within a fortnight of their arrival in Germany, the two poets separated, Coleridge and his companion John Chester departing for Ratzeburg, Dorothy and William travelling to Goslar. There the Wordsworths were soon stranded in rather spare lodging and among uncongenial people, learning little German, and largely cut off from all pleasurable influences beyond their own company. It was in this state of relative physical and spiritual isolation that Wordsworth began to probe more deeply into himself, to examine his past experience as he had begun to do in the Alfoxden Notebook. While this long period of isolation in Goslar was no doubt conducive to the review of his early life which we find in
MS. JJ it was certainly not what he had anticipated or what he had desired when his party left England, and thus it is understandable that he might begin his narrative by asking himself what forces had brought him to this curious juncture in his life, to this present moment of apparent anti-climax and disappointment—a present wholly unlike either the memories he had briefly sketched in the Alfoxden Notebook, or the early history of the Pedlar which he had composed, or the confident version of his own development which he had recently articulated in "Tintern Abbey."

One final passage in MS. JJ which we need to examine is the description of the boy in Winander (JJ, 334-357), who is, as we noted above, Wordsworth himself in this manuscript. The primary question about this passage is why the poet introduces the recollection in the third person continues his description in that person for eleven lines, and then changes abruptly to first person. The shift in person could be a sort of holdover from the frequent alternation between he and I in the Alfoxden Notebook, even though there are no other such lapses in JJ. Another possibility is that the passage represents the poet's attempt to use a rhetorical pattern from the earlier manuscript to structure this episode: "There was a spot . . ." thus became "There was a boy . . .," and necessitated the initial third person pronouns. But a more likely explanation, especially considering the subsequent development of the passage, is that in
referring to his past self first as he, then as I, the poet was asserting, consciously or otherwise, the discontinuity between his past and present self, the sense that, as I suggested above, the boy who was, the boy whom the "rocks/And islands of Winander" knew so well, exists no more, at least not in the same joyous state he once enjoyed. Later, in MS. RV, Wordsworth expresses exactly this conception of his past self as a distinct being, as more an object of his present self's observation than an earlier stage of his self:

A tranquillizing spirit presses now
On my corporeal frame so wide appears
The vacancy between me & those days
Which yet have such selfpresence in my heart
That sometimes when I think of them I seem
Two consciousnesses conscious of myself 18
And of some other being. (RV, 26-32)

That the memories contained in the boy of Winander episode did indeed have a "selfpresence in [his] heart" is obvious from his attempt to integrate the incident into the account of his early development in Nature. But that he could not successfully close the "vacancy between" himself and the "other being," that he could not make the "Two consciousnesses" one is suggested by the fact that when it reappears in MS. 18a the passage is no longer a recollection; instead, it is the conclusion to an argument on education, and the boy himself is both explicitly not Wordsworth and quite literally dead: "for he died when he was ten years old" (18a, 89). 19 This revision thus represents a compromise of sorts, one through
which the poet could express the sense that the boy who was no longer exists, and at the same time deny that he himself was that boy. Jaye's argument that the revision of the boy of Winander passage reflects Wordsworth's guilt over his father's death (the memories of which were recently revived by his composition of the "spots of time") is indeed quite plausible, and quite in keeping with other readings of the poem, but it seems to me unnecessary to go beyond the poem itself, beyond Wordsworth's own description of the dynamics of memory, to interpret this incident.

The manuscript evidence which has survived between the work in JJ and the completion of the two-part *Prelude* in MSS. U and V is very slight, and it is therefore impossible to trace the subsequent development of the poem in much detail. Entries and stubs in the Christabel Notebook and MS. 18a indicate that both were used, probably during the Goslar period and certainly thereafter, to revise, reorganize, and transcribe the materials previously drafted in JJ. Jonathan Wordsworth and Stephen Gill maintain, in fact, that 18a originally contained a fair copy of 246 lines of the first part of the poem, with directions for the insertion of an additional 145 lines from another manuscript. Only the conclusion of this long passage appears in 18a, but it indicates two important developments in Wordsworth's conception of the poem: his decision to extend his work into a second book, and his discovery of the address to
Coleridge as a rhetorical and structural device. Now this technique was certainly nothing new to the poet, for he uses an address to a previously unacknowledged auditor with considerable success in "Tintern Abbey," where in the final verse paragraph he suspends his retrospective meditation and recapitulates the argument of the poem to his "dear, dear Sister!"24 In addition, he employs a similar technique to provide a subdued but still pointed conclusion to the version of "Nutting" which appears both in his letter to Coleridge of December 1798 and in Lyrical Ballads:

Then, dearest maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
Touch--for there is a spirit in the woods.
(11. 54-56)25

Moreover, in the longer versions of "Nutting" the poet attempts a more elaborate variation on this rhetorical technique, for in both Chr. and 18a the recollection proper develops out of a sort of dramatic monolog the situation, in which the poet addresses first a "Friend," then a "Maid," and then "Lucy," whose "keen look/Half cruel in its eagerness" made him wonder whether he "had pass'd/A houseless being in a human shape,/ An enemy of nature . . . " (18a, 509-520).26 The addresses to Coleridge in The Prelude, however, go far beyond anything he attempted elsewhere, for in addition to providing an opportunity to summarize and comment upon his narrative, to introduce new themes or recall earlier ones (all of which would become increasingly necessary as the poem grew in length and complexity), these addresses also contribute largely to the balance in The Prelude between the public,
rhetorical expression which we normally associate with the long poem, and the private, confessional expression which arises from the mind probing within itself to discover and articulate the pattern of its own development. 27

In the actual addresses to Coleridge in MS. 18a Wordsworth speaks not of progress in or commitment to his poetic efforts, but of indolence and recalcitrance; in the final lines of Part One (which do not appear in the later manuscripts) he states:

Here we pause
Doubtful of lingering with a truant heart
Slow & of stationary character
Rarely adventurous studious more of peace
And soothing quiet which we here have found.
(18a, 102-106)

And immediately following these lines we find a deleted passage headed "2nd Part":

Friend of my heart & genius we had reach'd
A small green island which I was well pleased
To pass not lightly by for though I felt
Strength unabated yet I seem'd to need
Thy cheering voice or ere I could pursue
My voyage, resting else for ever there . . .
(18a, 107-112)

Of course, Wordsworth did not rest "for ever there," for by early December 1799 he had not only composed a "2nd Part" to his poem, but he had also supervised the transcription of duplicate fair copies of the two-part poem in MSS. U and V. 28 Although no manuscripts of this second part exist before the fair copy in MS. RV, it is obvious from the completed texts that the poet's primary interest was in describing the periods before and after the experiences about which he had written at Goslar, and to fill in these
periods he both composed extensive new materials and drew upon the biography of the Pedlar which he had intended for The Ruined Cottage. Thus by December 1799 Wordsworth had transformed those scattered recollections in MS. JJ, which Dorothy referred to as "a description of [his] boyish pleasures," into "a separate and internally coherent form of The Prelude"; or, in J.R. MacGillivray's more appealing phrase, a "proto-Prelude," which we shall examine in the following chapter.
Notes


3. Ibid., p. 17.

4. Michael Jaye, "The Growth of a Poem," Diss. New York University 1969, p. 145, remarks quite aptly that this is essentially "a chicken or egg problem," but that "the answer may well be a fusion of both."


7. Alf., 222-227 reads:

but that the soul
Remembering how she felt but what she felt
Remembering not retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity at which he thought
Even from the very of the thing
With growing faculties she doth aspire . . .


9. Reed notes that leaves removed from the NB. originally contained lines on the Vagrant Soldier (CEY, p. 321).
The blank in the fourth line quoted is filled in with the words, "ghostly figure" in the Chr. NB. and MS. 18a (crit. app. to Alf., 83).

PW, iv, 445.


It is curious in this regard that the later texts omit another equally emphatic expression of this theme in JJ:

ah not for trivial ends
Through snow & sunshine & through rain
The sparkling plains the
Of moonlight frost and through stormy day
Did ye with such assiduous love pursue
Your favourite and your joy . . . (JJ, 113-118)

See below.


The two passages appear on successive pages in the manuscript (Jaye, pp. 402-404).

On the Goslar period in general see Moorman, I, 408-433.

Jaye, p. 516.

Ibid., p. 473. See below.

Ibid., pp. 271-273.

22 Wordsworth/Gill, 507-508.

23 Ibid., 508. They identify the missing lines as the "spots of time."

24 PW, ii, 262-263.


26 See also the drafts in Chr., 234-300. On these passages associated with "Nutting" see Reed, CEY, pp. 331-332.


28 See Wordsworth/Gill, 510.

29 EY, p. 239.

30 The first quotation is from Wordsworth/Gill, 503; the second, from J. R. MacGillivray, "The Three Forms of The Prelude," quoted on the same page of Wordsworth/Gill.
Chapter Two: The Two-Part Prelude

The Two-Part Prelude, as we noted above, begins abruptly with a series of questions, the same questions around which every version of the poem centers, and which each answers in its own very different way. "Was it for this . . . . ? For this didst thou . . . . ? Was it for this that I . . . . ?" Although no explicit antecedent for the word this appears in the opening verse paragraph, the repeated questions nonetheless express a feeling of radical loss and impoverishment, the sense of a present wholly unlike the past--the sense either that the poet had proved inadequate to the promise of the past, or that his perception of that promise had itself been an illusion. The experiences which he invokes as representatives of this past center around the river Derwent. The first two present the river as a purposeful, tutelary force in his early development, reaching out to the child from his earliest moments of consciousness, blending its "murmurs with my nurse's song," sending a "a voice/That flowed along my dreams," directing its soothing rhythms into his mind to compose

my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Among the fretful dwellings of mankind
A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm
Which Nature breathes among the fields and groves.
(Onew, 11-15)
The second set of memories concern a later period in his childhood, when as a "four years" child /A naked boy," he

Made one long bathing of a summer's day,  
Basked in the sun, or plunged into thy streams, 
Alternate, all a summer's day . . .  (One, 17-21)

The successive immersion of the naked child in the cool water and the warm sunshine suggests a completely uninhibited physical integration of self and other, which made the whole "summer's day" a continuous act of self-gratification. Finally, he recalls exercising his energies in the landscape ("coursed/Over the sandy fields, and dashed the flowers /Of yellow grunsel") and later observing and participating in Nature's unleashing of her own awesome energies:

    or, when crag and hill,  
    The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty heights,  
    Were bronzed with a deep radiance, stood alone,  
    A naked savage in the thunder shower.  (One, 21-26)

This opening passage thus presents a moving tribute to Nature's ministry and to the spontaneity and intensity of childhood pleasures, but as we noted the repeated questions turn these recollections from celebration into lament. It is not until Wordsworth's address to Coleridge at the end of Part One that we learn both the source of these feelings of loss, and the primary motivation for this long self-examination:

Meanwhile my hope has been that I might fetch Reproaches from my former years, whose power May spur me on, in manhood now mature, To honorable toil.  (One, 449-452)
Re-creating the past in his verse is thus a possible means of breaking out of a state of lethargy, of literally shaming himself into commencing some work worthy of his "former years," some "honorable toil." But if self-reproach were really all he needed to "spur [him] on" in his efforts, it suggests that his failure to create was more a matter of delinquency than of incapacity or loss of powers. And despite the impassioned tone of his opening questions, it suggests further that his recollections do not "speak of something that is gone" (like the objects of Nature in the "Intimations Ode"),\(^3\) but rather remind him of his as yet unfulfilled obligations. A comparison with the 1805 text is useful here, for while the later version expresses the same concern over the cessation of creative activity, its emphasis is somewhat different:

```
Meanwhile, my hope has been that I might fetch
Invigorating thoughts from former years,
Might fix the wavering balance of my mind,
And haply meet reproaches, too, whose power
May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
To honorable toil. (I, 648-653)
```

We note here that the benefits he anticipates from his re-creation of the past are inspiration, renewed mental stability, and perhaps the stimulus of self-reproach as well. But unlike 1799, he actively seeks the first two, and only prepares himself "hapy [to] meet" the third.

In addition to this rather limited conception of the purpose of his poetic enterprise, the 1799 **Prelude** indicates a surprising readiness to accept the possible failure of
these efforts. Still addressing Coleridge, Wordsworth expresses his belief (in the form of a rhetorical question) that he need not "dread . . . Harsh judgements" from his friend if his attempt to understand himself and to communicate to essence of his being proves in the end to be nothing more than a pleasurable diversion, an exercise in self-gratification:

Need I dread from thee
Harsh judgements if I am so loth to quit
Those recollected hours that have the charm
Of visionary things, and lovely forms
And sweet sensations, that throw back our life
And make our infancy a visible scene
On which the sun is shining? (One, 456-462)

Again the contrast with 1805 is significant, for while Wordsworth acknowledges the same ambivalence about the ultimate value of his efforts, and the same confidence in Coleridge's sympathy (One, 456-462 and I, 657-663 are virtually identical), these doubts are balanced in part by the affirmative ending of Book I:

One end hereby at least hath been attain'd
My mind hath been revived, and if this mood
Desert me not, I will forthwith bring down,
Through later years, the story of my life.
(I, 664-667)

While this confidence in the restoration of his powers is rather tentative, it nonetheless indicates a direction, a sense of purpose in his review of the past, even though the "road" which "lies plain before" him will very soon become "a path/More difficult," one full of "broken windings" (I, 668; II, 287-289). But to the extent to which Wordsworth's address to Coleridge is not just self-conscious posturing, we are left mid-way through the two-part Prelude
with the uneasy feeling that the narrative which originated in an expression of radical loss may amount to only a long exercise in self-indulgence, which Coleridge ("so prompt/In sympathy") will easily excuse.

The two-part Prelude, of course, does end in affirmation, for having brought the account of his life up through his seventeenth year, Wordsworth breaks off his narrative and salutes Nature for the secure state of being he has achieved. His affirmation, however, is expressed in a curiously conditional manner, and speaks not of renewed poetic power or rededication to "honorable toil," but rather of fortitude and endurance, of inner peace and faith in man amid the all-encompassing evil of his day. He states, "If, in my youth, I have been pure in heart"; if he has been content with his "own modest pleasures," and been "removed/From little enmities and low desires"; if he maintains his belief in the goodness of human nature despite every evidence to the contrary, "the gift is yours/Ye mountains, thine O Nature" (Two, 473-492). After this condensed summary of his development from the end of his narrative to the present moment he turns his attention to Coleridge, the like-mind who has "gained/The self same bourne" "by a different road," and whose sympathetic ear has allowed Wordsworth to speak so long and so confidently of his own life. He concludes the poem, then, with a rather subdued valediction to Coleridge, who has now become his virtual alter-ego ("In many things by brother"), wishing him "Health and quiet of a healthful
mind," and expressing the belief (or wish) that his days "happy shall . . . Be many, and a blessing to mankind" (Two, 497-514).

Let us turn now to the actual narrative which led Wordsworth to achieve this curious state of hope and resignation, and this "more than Roman confidence" in "our nature" (Two, 487-488).

The Birth of the Self and the Ministry of Nature

R.D. Laing writes that soon after a child's physical birth he experiences another "birth" whereby he "feels real and alive and has a sense of being an entity, with continuity in time and a location in space." The passage which most clearly corresponds to this moment of existential birth is the account of the "Blessed Babe" (Two, 267-310), which, as Francis Christensen points out, "would have stood at the very beginning" of The Prelude had the poem been arranged chronologically. A good deal of the critical commentary on this key passage focuses on the complex epistemological questions which it raises, especially, whether the poet's description is primarily idealistic or empirical in orientation. Our interest in the passage, however, is not in its elaboration of any systematic theory of mind, but rather in its treatment of the child's coming-to-consciousness, his initial recognition of his own autonomous being, and his first significant encounter with otherness. Now, to be sure, Wordsworth does not immediately identify the experience as his own; like the "ceaseless music" of the Derwent it would
have occurred well before the period of his earliest recollections. Nonetheless, his assertion of the universality of such a moment (it is a crucial stage in "our human life"), insures that we see it as the initial event in the development of his being, even if the account represents not a conscious memory but a part of his "best conjectures" on "The progress of our being" (Two, 268-269).

The otherness which the infant first encounters is, of course, the mother:

Blessed the infant babe,—
For with my best conjectures I would trace
The progress of our being—blessed the babe,
Nursed in his mother's arms, the babe who sleeps
Upon his mother's breast, who, when his soul
Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,
Doth gather passion from his mother's eye.
(Two, 267-273)

The opening lines suggest that the child initially experiences the mother tactually, as the source of basic physical gratification: she is the nourishing, comforting, supportive presence in whose warm embrace he nurses, sleeps, and awakens. Soon, however, the child has a profoundly different response to the mother, for in his first significant act of cognition he recognizes their essential relatedness: in the poet's words the babe "Claims manifest kindred to an earthly soul."
Moreover, this fundamental relational act is accompanied by an animating influx of feeling, "passion" which the infant "doth gather . . . from his mother's eye."

It is noteworthy that Wordsworth here associates the child's coming-to-consciousness with his awareness of the
mother's eye. In discussing such infantile experience, Laing writes, "The mother is not simply a thing which the child can see, but a person who sees the child. Therefore, we suggest that a necessary component in the development of the self is the experience of oneself as a person under the loving eye of mother." The babe's recognition of himself as an autonomous being and of another beyond the self is thus not an experience of alienation and separation; as the poet later states, the child is "No outcast... bewildered and depressed" (Two, 291). Instead, his initial sense of being is affirmed by the comforting awareness of himself as the focus of attention and devotion in the world of the mother, the "earthly soul" to which he may "Claim manifest kindred."

This benign and gratifying existential birth succeeds first in literally animating the self, and then in creating in the child both the capacity and the intense desire for further and more varied encounters with otherness:

Such feelings pass into his torpid life
Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind,
Even in the first trial of its powers,
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
In one appearance all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detached
And loth to coalesce. (Two, 274-280)

The powerful influx of feeling in this first experience of self and other stimulates the mind to individuate and order the particulars of the other, which would be otherwise unintelligible, "detached/And loth to coalesce." Thus invigorated, the self becomes at once aggressively expansive, acquisitive, and receptive of the other:
Thus day by day
Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind spreads,
Tenacious of the forms which it receives.
(Two, 280-284)

Moreover, this mode of coming-to-consciousness has given the child an additional gift, for his subsequent perception of the other is heightened by "A virtue which irradiates and exalts/All objects through all intercourse of sense"
(Two, 289-290). The child is truly "No outcast," for his experience of relatedness to the mother insures a greater sense of relatedness to the non-human other as well: "Along his infant veins are interfused/The gravitation and the filial bond/Of Nature, that connect him with the world"
(Two, 292-294). 10 A being with such powers and such a secure sense of self, Wordsworth continues, lives "Emphatically . . . An inmate of this active universe"
(Two, 295-296), active because experienced, given shape and meaning, by a mind which an intense feeling of human relatedness ("the discipline of love") has awakened, strengthened, and sustained. The capacity to encounter and order this "active universe" allows the mind to operate

   Even as an agent of the one great mind,
   . . . Creator and receiver both,
   Working but in alliance with the works
   Which it beholds.   (Two, 302-305)

a difficult phrase with both Havens and Jack Stillinger compare to Coleridge's concept of primary imagination, the creative act of consciousness by which we impose order upon the otherwise unintelligible particulars of perception. 11
Finally, Wordsworth maintains that the child's dynamic, creative encounters with the world represent the initial manifestation of the poetic faculty: "Such, verily, is the first/Poetic spirit of our human life" (Two, 305-306). But while everyone begins life with this power of the self, only a few succeed in sustaining it as a permanent aspect of their identity, for it is

By uniform controul of after years
In most abated and suppressed, in some
Through every change of growth or of decay
Preeminent till death. (Two, 306-310)

To the state of being which results from the child's earliest experience of his autonomy and of his vital, continuing connection with man and the "active universe," Wordsworth gives the name "infant sensibility," and maintains that in the earlier sections of the poem he had

endeavoured to display the means
Whereby this infant sensibility,
Great birthright of our being, was in me
Augmented and sustained. (Two, 314-317)

The most noteworthy aspect of Wordsworth's narrative is that while the existential birth of the child was effected through human love, this "infant sensibility" was "Augmented and sustained" through his relationship with Nature.

David Ferry remarks that in the opening books of The Prelude the poet's companions seem "shadowy, almost projections of himself, and have no distinct meaning in themselves."12 While this clearly overstates the matter, it does point to the fact that the primary emphasis in the Two-Part Prelude, as in Books I and II of 1805, is the poet's relationship with
Nature, the non-human other. A number of recent critics have argued that Wordsworth's account of the role of Nature in his development is for various reasons inadequate, that it evades, or ignores, or even falsifies what is most crucial to his sense of himself and his experience of the world. Ferry contends that the "Romantic metaphysical poet" viewed Nature "not as a set of objects, events, conditions . . . but as a language to be read, sign-posts to that metaphysical place to which he would go." Thus the poet's "early experience of [Nature] was the beginning of his education in a certain way of seeing things, the building of a structure in the mind which would be able to contain and express and even be certain meanings in and beyond the world."\(^{13}\) David Perkins explains Wordsworth's conception of the formative influence of Nature in terms of "projection" and "empathic psychology," arguing that Nature served a cathartic function "as the language or symbolic representation of feeling."\(^{14}\) Geoffrey Hartman's complex treatment of this question defies any easy formulation, but his basic argument is that the poet's early experiences of Nature establish the tension which informs the entire poem because "they (1) prophesy the independence from nature of his imaginative powers and (2) impress nature ineradicably on them."\(^{15}\) Finally, Richard J. Onorato, in his psychoanalytic study of The Prelude, contends that the poet projected onto Nature his idealized sense of his relationship with his mother and sought through Nature to recapture that lost relationship.\(^{16}\)
There is, however, a way in which we can understand the role of Nature in this development of self which is more in keeping with the poet's own conception of his experience. Wordsworth frequently expresses a sense of having been led, ministered to, formed, observed, all by beneficent, purposeful forces in the external world. As R.D. Havens points out, the frequency of Wordsworth's references to "Powers," "Presences," "spirits," "genii" in Nature, "represents in his case if not a conviction at least a persistent, instinctive feeling."17 The most significant and clearly the most formative childhood experiences of this aspect of Nature are the so-called "ministry of fear" episodes in Part One, which share several important characteristics. First, in each the poet was entirely alone; no one else was present to mediate or diminish the intensity of his experience.18 Second, two of the three major incidents occurred at night, when Nature is at her most mysterious and unknown, and when the capacity of the self to perceive the other is most limited. Third, in these night-time scenes the moon or some other aspect of the landscape functioned as a sort of natural observer *ab extra* on the child's movements. Finally and most important, in each episode Nature seemed to be animate, purposeful, directing her awesome energies at the child in immediate and often dramatic response to his actions.

The poet first recounts roving through the mountains by night, "scudding away from snare to snare" with his heart
panting "among the scattered yew-trees and the crags/ That looked upon me" (One, 37-41). At times a sudden impulse would overpower him and "the bird/Which was the captive of another's toils/Became my prey." And "when the deed was done," he continues,

I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.
(One, 42-49)

Similarly, he recalls when, as a plunderer of birds' nests, he hung "by knots of grass/And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock," as if "Suspended by the blast which blew amain" (One, 57-61). Again, it seemed that an animate, purposeful Nature were reacting to his presence, to his actions on "the naked crag":

oh, at that time,
When on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ears; the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth, and with what motion mov'd the clouds!
(One, 62-66)

The most striking instance of this type of experience is, of course, the stolen-boat episode, the event which explicitly illustrates Nature's "Severer interventions," her "More palpable" "ministry" in the poet's early life (One, 79-80). While the scenario of this incident is considerably more elaborate than the two previous ones, its basic pattern is much the same. From the moment when, "guided" by the "spirits" of Nature (One, 81), he impulsively unloosed the shepherd's boat and began to row away, he heard
around him, as if to announce his presence, "the voice/Of mountain echoes," and saw behind him, like a trail, "Small circles glittering idly in the moon,/Until they melted all into one track/Of sparkling light" (One, 91-96). The climax of the episode occurred when, as he rowed farther from shore, "from behind that rocky steep, . . . a huge cliff,/As if with voluntary power instinct,/Upreared its head" and "like a living thing,/Strode after me" (One, 108-114). So great was the impact upon the poet of Nature's apparent response to his action that not only did he walk "home-ward . . . with grave/And serious thoughts," but he also was unsettled for days afterward by "a dim and undetermined sense /Of unknown modes of being," and by "huge and mighty forms" which "moved slowly through my mind/By day, and were trouble of my dreams" (One, 118-129).

Such incidents were no doubt of great importance to Wordsworth's moral development. His own comment on their influence is that they served to humanize him by glorifying, even "sanctifying," the essential passions of the human heart; the "beings of the hills" who arranged these experiences,

    did . . . love to intertwine
    The passions that build up our human soul,
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, and eternal things,
With life and Nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying by such discipline
Both pain and fear, until we recognize
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.
(One, 130-141)
Moreover, such events must have demonstrated that one's actions are never without consequence, that despite one's sense of isolation and self-sufficiency his actions affect the relationship of self and other. (Just how conscious the child was of this lesson is, of course, a legitimate question, one we cannot pursue here.) But whatever their contribution to the poet's ethical growth, these experiences were also of importance simply as confirmation of the self's own reality, and of its unique, vital relationship with the other. We have noted that Laing defines self-consciousness as a two-fold process, since it involves one's own awareness of himself, as well as his recognition of the other's awareness of him. ¹⁹ Laing writes elsewhere that a secure sense of being requires "some other in and through a relationship with whom self-identity is actualized."²⁰ For this reason, "The unresponsive or impervious other induces a sense of emptiness and impotence in the self."²¹ Not to be perceived by the other, not to elicit a response from the other, is to be, in the language of the "Blessed Babe" passage, an "outcast . . . bewildered or abandoned] and depressed."²² Thus these experiences of Nature's "Severer interventions," even the terror of the stolen boat episode,²³ were profound experiences of self, experiences which affirmed not just the reality of his being (for the self which is the focus of Nature's energies is clearly, in Laing's terms, an "ontologically real" self), but also his unique relationship with Nature, the sense of himself as "A favored being" (One, 70).
Crisis: "The props of my affections were removed"

Following the internal chronology of the poem we turn again to Part Two, to one of the most difficult passages in the entire poem. Wordsworth himself was clearly aware of the complexity of his topic (and perhaps of the obscurity of his account of it), for in observing the topography of self lying before him he remarks that to traverse "its broken windings we shall need/The chamois' sinews and the eagle's wing" (Two, 319-320). He continues:

> For now a trouble came into my mind
> From obscure causes: I was left alone
> Seeking this visible world, nor knowing why,
> The props of my affections were removed,
> And yet the building stood, as if sustained
> By its own spirit.  (Two, 321-326)

There are two major problems here: the nature of the "trouble," and the meaning of the "props of my affections" metaphor. Despite Havens' earlier and rather convincing refutation of this interpretation, Richard Onorato argues that both phrases in question refer to the death of Wordsworth's parents, here conflated into one psychic event. Havens offers the rather curious view that the "trouble" represents the onset of puberty. His paraphrase of the rest of the passage, however, is a good deal more persuasive: "'The props of my affections were removed,/And yet the building stood.'" Finally, Stillinger hazards no opinion on the "trouble" (he merely observes that it "has never been satisfactorily explained"), but he maintains that the rest of the passage, "seems to deal with the boy's first conscious awareness of memory."
A later text which, I think, helps to illuminate this passage is the long and very interesting section of MS. Y which Wordsworth never incorporated into the poem.\(^{28}\) Although it was written well after the lines in the two-part Prelude,\(^{29}\) and although its purpose is to illustrate the general argument of Book VIII ("Love of Nature Leading to Love of Mankind"),\(^{30}\) it nonetheless relates, in considerably clearer language, a dramatic, radical transformation in the child, one which added a significant dimension to his sense of self, to his awareness of his own powers, and to his conception of the other. In MS. Y Wordsworth states that after the child's initial capacity for wonder has been diminished and channelled into a taste for romantic, exotic literature (11. 1-134), he undergoes a profound conversion, a "second birth" (1. 168): to the self-centered child ("his own person, senses, faculties,/Centre and soul of all" [11. 133-134]), there comes "Another soul, spring, centre of his being,/And that is Nature" (11. 138-139). With Nature as the "centre of his being," he perceives the world anew, in all its glorious particularity (11. 139-148), and experiences at the same time an expansion, and intensification, of the powers of consciousness: "he takes /The optic tube of thought" and "Without the glass of Galileo sees /What Galileo saw" (11. 148-152). In this seemingly visionary state he becomes a wholly unified being, for body and soul, sense and spirit, are as one: "and as it were/Resolving into one great faculty/Of being bodily eye and spiritual need,/The converse which
he holds is limitless" (11. 152-155). Finally, he recognizes at this moment of "second birth" that no matter how extreme the demands of consciousness may become, the other will be adequate to satisfy them:

He feels that, be his mind however great
In aspiration, the universe in which
He lives is equal to his mind, that each
Is worthy of the other; if the one
Be insatiate, the other is inexhaustible.
(11. 171-175)

The final outcome of this stage of the experience is thus a new awareness both of the self's infinite capacity for striving, and of the other's corresponding capacity to accommodate these aspirations.31

While many of the details and the emphases of this account are different from the "props of my affections" passage, the basic pattern, and more important, the major consequences of the two experiences, are much the same. We must note, however, that the MS.Y passage does not speak of this transformation in the relation of self and other as a traumatic or even a very disturbing experience. For an explanation of how such a "second birth" could indeed be a "trouble," we can turn to Wordsworth's earlier description of the Pedlar in "The Ruined Cottage,"32 a poem from which he drew the lines on "the sentiment of being" which appear later in Part Two (Two, 448-464). In "The Ruined Cottage" the Pedlar experienced a major crisis "before his twentieth year was pass'd":


Accumulated feelings press'd his heart
With an encreasing weight; he was o'er power'd
By Nature, and his mind became disturbed . . .
(11. 221-224)

But the Pedlar found no permanent relief from this "trouble,"
from "the fever of his heart" which this new awareness of
Nature produced (1. 237). Although he felt contentment in
his perception of "the sentiment of being," he finally
"resolved to quit his native hills" in what seems to be an
attempt to escape the overpowering effort of Nature to
become the center of his being (11. 240-262).

In The Prelude, of course, we see a much briefer moment
of crisis and a much different response to it, for Wordsworth
did not "quit his native hills" but sought "the visible
world" of Nature. And if we accept Havens' interpretation of
the "props" metaphor—that after a period in which the poet
experienced Nature only indirectly, through the typical,
self-gratifying activities of childhood, he began actively
and consciously to seek "the visible world," to pursue and
appreciate Nature for her own sake—then the similarities
between the MS.Y passage and The Prelude become even clearer.

We recall that in MS.Y the child's "second birth," in which
Nature became the new "centre of his being," involved an
intensification of his perception of the world about him;
in The Prelude the poet states that "the building stood"
after its "props" were removed because

... now to Nature's finer influxes
My mind lay open--to that more exact
And intimate communion which our hearts
Maintain with the minuter properties
Of objects which already are beloved,
And of those only. (Two, 328-333)

This new mode of perception was not simply a matter of passive
receptivity, an opening of the self to "Nature's finer
influxes"; in addition, it included the mind's active
examination and deeper appreciation of the other in all its
particularity: he now experienced "gentle agitations of the
mind/From manifold distinctions, difference / Perceived in
things where to the common eye/ No difference is"
(Two, 347-350). As he states in MS. Y:

He is not like a man who sees in the heavens
A blue vault merely and a glittering cloud,
One old familiar likeness over all,
A superficial pageant, known too well
To be regarded; he looks nearer, calls
The stars out of their shy retreats, and part(s)
The milky stream into its separate forms,
Loses and finds again, when baffled most
Not least delighted. (11. 140-148)

Finally, the climax of both episodes involves the
child's initial exercise of the visionary powers of conscious-
ness. In MS.Y, as we have seen, he took "The optic tube of
thought" and "Without the glass of Galileo [saw] / What
Galileo saw" (11. 149-152). In Book II the poet recalls
standing

Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
Thence did I drink the visionary power.
(Two, 357-360)

And as in MS.Y, the first recognition of these powers of
mind led to the affirmation of the "insatiate" energies of
the self, and the "inexhaustible" universe in which the self
operates (MS.Y, 1. 175); through the memory of "these fleeting moods/Of shadowy exaltation" the soul retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, to which
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still
That whatsoever point they gain they still Have something to purse.  (Two, 364-371)

Indeed, these growing faculties of mind proved so powerful that at times the physical landscape around him seemed no more than a projection, and externalization, of the objects of consciousness:

Oft in these moments such a holy calm
Did overspread my soul that I forgot
The agency of sight, and what I saw
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
A prospect in my mind.  (Two, 397-401)

In addition to this sort of Blakean identification of subject and object, he also experienced other, less radical, manifestations of these new powers of self. As proof that he "retain'd" his "first creative sensibility," he describes "A plastic power," "a form ing hand" within him, a capacity seemingly to transform the other, to augment and intensify its magnificence:

An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds, The gentle breezes, fountains that ran on Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed A like dominion, and the midnight storm Grew darker in the presence of my eye.  (Two, 417-423)34

His apparent ability to transform the other with this "plastic power" of mind did not, however, diminish his appreciation of the vitality and grandeur of the world
around him. The narrative portion of Part Two concludes with his experience, in his "seventeenth year," of "the sentiment of being," the One Life:

I was only then
Contented when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of being spread
O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart, . . .
. . . . for in all things now
I say one life, and felt that it was joy;
One song they sang, and it was audible—
Most audible then when the fleshly ear,
O'ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
Forgot its function, and slept undisturbed.
(Two, 448-464)

Thus if the preceding passages emphasize the operations of consciousness, this passage with its celebration of his relation to a unified, living creation serves to restore the balance between mind and Nature in the poem, to affirm his belief that, as he states in MS.Y, "the universe in which / He lives in equal to his mind, that each / Is worthy of the other" (11. 172-174).

In considering the source of his experience of the One Life, however, he mentions three different possibilities, one of which suggests that the capacity to perceive the One Life depends on the powers of the self, while another suggests that the phenomenon itself was actually created by the self. His first surmise is that the experience developed naturally from his "observation of affinities/ In objects where no brotherhood exists/To common minds," a "habit" which was "rooted now/So deeply in my mind" (Two, 433-437). His perception of the One Life was related, then, to his practice of detecting
similarities, "affinities," which do in fact exist, but which only the properly attuned consciousness can detect. His second suggestion is that

from excess
Of the great social principle of life
Coercing all things into sympathy,
To unorganic natures I transferred
My own enjoyments (Two, 437-441)

that is, he projected his own secure, pleasurable sense of relatedness outward onto all aspects of the other, and therefore experienced them as part of one greater unity. That this process involved "Coercing" things "into sympathy" seems to indicate that the consequent unity was largely the product of consciousness. His final comment, however, asserts just the opposite, that his recognition of the One Life may have provided a fundamental insight into metaphysical reality: "or, the power of truth/Coming in revelation, I conversed/With things that really are . . . " (Two, 441-443). Our own assessment of the metaphysical validity of his perception of the One Life is finally irrelevant, however, for what is significant here is not the poet's retrospective surmises but his original experience, the "bliss ineffable" which he felt when viewing this living, unified creation to which he belonged, and which, with his newly awakened powers of mind, he experienced intensely, in all its vitality and particularity.

This experience represents, in fact, the narrative climax of the two-part Prelude, for here Wordsworth breaks off this narrative and concludes with his tribute to Nature
and his farewell address to Coleridge. Although we have left the question "Was it for this . . . ?" far behind us, the final apostrophe to Nature indicates a renewal in his belief that his development as a "favored being" in Nature had been continuous and purposeful—that it had indeed brought him, if not power and commitment, at least inner strength and contentment, and a faith in human potentialities strong enough to withstand the assaults of a degenerate age upon it.

The Drowned Man and the Spots of Time

I have reserved until last our consideration of the passages which most clearly distinguish the two-part *Prelude* from Books I and II of the longer versions of the poem: the drowned man of Esthwaite and the "spots of time," which appear together just over half-way through Part One of 1799. There are two points about Wordsworth's treatment of these incidents which we should note. First, he does not associate the "spots" even loosely with any specific crisis in his life; thus we can approach them directly as generalized restorative experiences without trying to relate them to other events in his narrative, as we must do in the later texts. Second, he narrates the drowned man and the "spots" consecutively here, and while he does not link them explicitly, his interpretive comments on the drowned man provide us with a useful insight into his attempt to deal with the mysterious power of the "spots."
Wordsworth introduces this material into the poem rather cautiously, asserting that, although it differs in kind from what has gone before, it is nonetheless crucial to his narrative. He "might protract unblamed," he states, the recollections of his childhood sports,

but I perceive
That much is overlooked, and we should ill
Attain our object if, from delicate fears
Of breaking in upon the unity
Of this my argument, I should omit
To speak of such effects as cannot here
Be regularly classed, yet tend no less
To the same point, the growth of mental power
And love of Nature's works. (One, 250-258)

Now, the one aspect of these three episodes which would make the poet fearful of "breaking in upon the unity" of his argument, which would make him feel that they could not be "regularly classed" with the other incidents in the poem, is no doubt their common concern with the experience of death, a theme which Wordsworth attempts to deal with through each version of the poem. Rollo May writes that the "unique and crucial fact" about man is that he "knows he is going to die," that he "anticipates his own death. The crucial question thus is how he relates to the fact of death . . . " May states further that "the confronting of death gives the most positive reality to life itself. It makes the individual existence real, absolute, and concrete." Wordsworth in his famous comment on the "Intimations Ode" asserted how difficult it was for him to conceive of his own death:
Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood that to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being. I have said elsewhere -

'A simple child, 
That lightly draws its breath, 
And feels its life in every limb, 
What should it know of death!' -

But it was not so much from feelings of animal vivacity that my difficulty came as from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me. I used to brood over the stories of Enoch and Elijah, and almost persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated, in something of the same way, to heaven.  

While he made this comment to his seventies, he said much the same thing about "We Are Seven" in the "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads, that the poem sought to illustrate "the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion." Thus what is most significant about the drowned man and the "spots" is that Wordsworth treats them as something other than direct confrontations with human death, something which contributed instead to "the growth of mental power/And love of Nature's works."

Wordsworth locates with unusual accuracy the time and place of his sighting of the drowned man: "'twas in the very week/When I was first transplanted to they vale,/Beloved Hawkshead"; that is, while he was first exploring and orienting himself to a new physical environment, one which was, as yet, "like a dream of novelty/To my half infant mind" (One, 259-263). Happening to cross out onto one of
the "green peninsulas on Esthwaite's lake," he spotted through the "gloom" of "Twilight" "a heap of graments, as if left by one/Who there was bathing" (One, 264-269). For reasons that we do not learn the sight so attracted him that he stood watching it for "Half an hour," while the scene around him grew more and more foreboding: "the calm lake/Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast," its "breathless stillness" broken at intervals by "leaping fish," as if to given evidence of something about to emerge from its depths (One, 270-274). His revelation, however, was to come not in this ominous gloom but in the light of day, when he witnessed "a company" of men drag for the corpse until "At length the dead man . . . bolt upright /Rose with his ghastly fact" (One 274-279).

At this moment of narrative intensity, at the child's actual confrontation with death, the poet breaks off his recollection and assets that the significance of this experience (and of the "numerous" similar examples to which he "might avert") is that they "impressed my mind/With images . . . with forms/That yet exist with independent life . . . " (One, 278-287). But while these images, the physical details of the scene--the grotesque figure emerging suddenly in "that beauteous scene / Of trees and hills and water"--remain firmly implanted in his memory, they have lost their original impact, for "in following years/Far other feelings were attached" to them (One, 284-285). If his original response was shock and terror, the sense that his
world had changed from "a dream of novelty" into a nightmare, the "Far other feelings" must have been something less disturbing, something at least emotionally neutral if not pleasant and comforting. Thus the process of mind which Wordsworth describes here works not to distance or even repress traumatic experiences from the past, but rather to transform, to falsify them, to strip them of their emotive content and to substitute something quite different. Now Wordsworth's argument is clearly related to this description of one of the ways in which he came to love Nature: in his childhood Nature "impressed" images on his mind which remained

lifeless then, and doomed to sleep
Until maturer seasons called them forth
To impregnate and to elevate the mind. (One, 420-25)

But with these images the movement is from unconscious, "vulgar joy" which "Wearied itself out of the memory," to a more intense response in later years, when these same scenes "were by invisible links/Allied to the affections" (One, 425-440). With incidents like the drowned man, however, it is not "vulgar joy" but terror which is lost, and this feeling does not really disappear with time ("Weary itself out"); instead, "Far other feelings were attached" to the original memory, which suggests a more active process. 39

But whatever we make of his argument about the operations of memory, the very fact that he places the drowned man episode in such an interpretive context obscures its
significance as an actual experience, making it seem more an exemplum than a vital incident from his childhood.

With no transitional remarks whatever Wordsworth moves from his interpretation of the drowned man to his consideration of the "spots of time," as if the latter were a further extension of the same analysis of the workings of the memory. Indeed, like the previous episode, the "spots" also impressed images on the mind which "know no decay," but these memories perform an explicitly restorative function: their "fructifying virtue" renews the mind when it is deadened "By trivial occupations and the round of ordinary intercourse" (One, 288-294). The first of the "spots: is a childhood experience which predates the drowned man incident, a horseback ride taken when he was "Yet an urchin--one who scarsely/Could hold a bridle" (One, 297-298). It too involved a short physical journey which led to an unexpected and dramatic confrontation with death, and again the poet subsumes the experience into a larger interpretive context. Although the child rode off toward the hills "with ambitious hopes," he was soon separated from "honest James . . . my encourager and guide" (One, 298-301). In his anxiety over being lost and unsupported, he dismounted, and walking haltingly "down the rough and stony moor," he literally stumbled into his moment of insight, for as he "Came to a bottom" he found himself in the place "where in former times/A man, the murderer of his wife, was hung/In irons" (One, 303-308). Paradoxically, the child recognizes that
the most graphic evidence of the execution was missing, and seems almost to conjure it up in his mind: "Mouldered was the gibbet mast; / The bones were gone, the iron and the wood" (One, 308-309). But there remains one thing which he interprets as a sign of what had taken place: "a long green ridge of turf . . . Whose shape was like a grave (One, 310-311).

Again we do not learn precisely how the child responded to this sudden encounter with death, but we can infer something of its impact on him from his description of the landscape which he then entered (One, 312-325). The slope which had been "rough and stony" was "bare" as he reascended; below him he saw a "naked pool," above, a beacon on a "lonely eminence"; and "more near," a girl advancing slowly against a strong "blowing wind" which "vexed and tossed" "her garments." The barrenness and desolation in the scene, the stark juxtaposition of human and non-human energies, was accentuated, moreover, by an atmosphere not its own, a "visionary dreariness"--"visionary" in the sense that the sight had both a dreamlike unreality and the quality of a revelation. And since only the child's own mind could produce this heightening and intensification, the scene which he surveyed represents a sort of projection of the internal drama arising from his encounter with death--the lone, isolated, human figure journeying through a wasteland, struggling against a contrary force which would not only deny her progress but strip her of her protective
coverings, and render her as "naked" and "bare" as the landscape around her.

The second "spot," the wait for the horses at Christmas-time, repeats some of the same elements we noted in the gibbet scene. Again it centers around a physical journey, the return home for the Christmas holidays, and the realization of the child's expectations in a way he could not have foreseen. The poet, "impatient for the sight" of the horses that would bring him home, climbed "a crag,/An eminence" to survey the two roads by which the horses might arrive. The scene about him as he waited recalls the barrenness of the landscape in the previous incident, for he "sate half-sheltered by a naked wall" from the stormy wind, with "a single sheep" and a "whistling hawthorne" as his "two companions." Wordsworth's return home, which he had anticipated with "such anxiety of hope," reunited the family (or what was left of it) in a ceremony not of life and love but of death:

Ere I to school returned
That dreary time, ere I had been ten days
A dweller in my father's house, he died,
And I and my brothers, orphans then,
Followed his body to the grave. (One, 347-351)

The child's initial and rather harsh interpretation of his father's death as a "chastisement" for his immoderate desires is less significant than the subsequent impact of the event, for what his mind retains, what his mind returns to for renewal, is not a death scene or funeral, not his immediate confrontation with death, but rather the details of the
forbidding and desolate landscape in which he had waited for the horses. The "spectacles and sounds to which/I would repair, and thence would drink/As at a fountain" were

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 line of each of those two roads
Advanced in such indisputable shapes . . .
(One, 359-368)

How could such "spectacles and sounds," or his recollection of the "visionary dreariness" which "Did . . . invest" the scene in the previous "spot" make these memories "retain/A fructifying virtue"? On the one hand we can look to Wordsworth's description of the way the mind works upon experiences like the drowned many episode--that is, impressing the scene on the memory but neutralizing or transforming the original emotional impact. But I think that the details of both incidents suggest clearly enough that they were moments of anxiety and deprivation, and were remembered as such despite the lack of overt emphasis on these emotions in the narrative. While his specific interpretation of the drowned man may not be useful here, his basic technique in dealing with that incident is, for with the "spots" he has again taken traumatic episodes from his past and inserted them into an interpretive context in which they function as exampla, as experiences which point to larger thematic concerns. Their contribution to the development of the self was, then, not the beginning of an acceptance of death as a human possibility, not any real accommodation with the
"tragic facts/ Of rural history," but the creation of a store of powerful images in the mind to counteract the oppressive effects of "trivial occupations" and "ordinary intercourse" in later life. Thus the contention of Jonathan Wordsworth and Stephen Gill (which they assert rather than argue) that the thought of the Two-Part Prelude turns on the "spots of time" seems true neither in terms of structure nor theme, for they are at best tangential to the poet's account of the shaping of a "favored being" in Nature, despite his attempts to integrate them into that argument. What the "spots" and the drowned man do illustrate is Wordsworth's searching effort to master these powerful memories and the type of human experience which they represent, an effort which he continues throughout the subsequent versions of the poem and which is never altogether successful.
Notes

1. The "Two-Part Prelude," Part One, 1-26. All quotations from this version of the poem are from the text printed in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Major Authors Edition, ed. M. H. Abrams et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), pp. 1450-1471. To avoid confusion, the two parts of 1799 are cited as "One" and "Two" when identifying quotations, while the books of 1805-06 are cited with the conventional Roman numerals.

2. The language of the passage recalls "Tintern Abbey," in which the characteristic sound of the landscape is a "soft inland murmur" of the "mountain-springs" (ll. 3-4), while ordinary human experience is "the fretful stir/ Unprofitable" (ll. 52-53). PW, ii, 259-260.

3. PW, iv, 280.


7. Two, 306. Moreover, he later states that the previous account of his childhood was designed "to display the means/ Whereby this infant sensibility"--the state of being attributed to the "Blessed Babe"--"was in me/ Augmented and sustained" (Two, 314-317, my emphasis). See below.

9. The earlier MS. RV reads, significantly, "No outcast, he, abandon'd and depress'd" (Prelude, II, 261, crit. app., my emphasis).

10. A deleted passage in MS. D states that this vital connection with the world extends "From the new world of man and his concerns/ Up to the silent wilderness of stars" (Prelude, II, 244-257, crit. app.).


13. Ibid., pp. 10, 120.


18. In a revision of MS. D (retained in E and 1850), Wordsworth changed the I of the egg-stealing episode to we (Prelude, I, 336, crit. app.).

19. See above, n. 8.


21. Ibid., p. 68.
Laing remarks that in early childhood, "percipi-esse" (Divided Self, p. 118).

In discussing children's fear of the dark, Laing states, "Even worse, perhaps, than the possible presence of bad things in the dark is nothing and no one. Not to be conscious of oneself, therefore, may be equated with nonentity" (Divided Self, p. 119). And as he notes elsewhere, consciousness of self necessarily entails an awareness of the other's consciousness of the self as well.


Havens, pp. 325-327.

Ibid., p. 325.

Stillinger, p. 546.

Printed in the notes to Book VIII (Prelude, pp. 569-578); subsequent line notations refer to de Selincourt's numbering of the passage.

De Selincourt dates this section of the MS in early 1804; the MSS from which Wordsworth composed Part Two are, of course, all pre-1800. See Prelude, pp. lii and xlvi-xlvii, and Wordsworth/Gill, 503-525.

This subtitle first appears in MS. B (Prelude, p. 264).

In the remainder of the passage Wordsworth discusses briefly the means by which this new love of Nature develops into a love of Man, the major theme of Book VIII.

Quotations are from MS. B of the poem, printed in the notes to Book I of The Excursion, PW, v, 379ff.

Havens, p. 325.

Cf. Coleridge, who maintained that all the "moments awful" in the poem illustrate the workings of this internal
light:

moments awful,
Now in thy inner life, and now abroad,
When power streamed from thee, and thy soul received
The light reflected, as a light bestowed.


36 PW, iv, 463.

37 See Moorman, II, 592-593.


40 Eakin (394) contends that all these episodes involve a "correction" of the child's feelings, but the implications of this term seem appropriate only to the third episode, where the poet speaks of "chastisement." The others seem to involve more of an unexpected countering or an ironic fulfillment of his expectations than an actual "correction."

41 We recall that the drowned man had likewise stripped off his clothes before his death.

42 Wordsworth/Gill, 504.
In their discussion of the Two-Part Prelude, Jonathan Wordsworth and Stephen Gill point out that Dorothy Wordsworth wrote "End of the Second Part" rather than "The End" at the conclusion of her transcriptions of MSS. RV and V. The significance of this notation, as they later state, is that it "implies that she, and presumably her brother, expected there to be a third." Just when the poet began this third part, and how he initially intended to expand his poem, cannot be determined with any certainty. Dorothy recorded in her Journal on 26 December 1801 that "Wm. wrote part of the poem to Coleridge," and on the following day that "Mary wrote some of the lines of the third part of Williams poem." If these entries refer to the same materials, as they seem to, they indicate first, that by late 1801 Wordsworth had decided to extend his work to include some account of his later life, and second, that when he returned to the poem he composed enough to require that a copy be made; a copy which apparently has not survived. But if he did make any significant progress on The Prelude at this time, he seems not to have sustained his efforts to continue the poem for long, since we hear nothing further about his work until January of 1803, when Dorothy noted simply that "William was working at his poem to C." Again we have no evidence which would indicate what this work involved; whether it was new composition of any sort is unclear, for as Jaye suggests, the
reference could well be to the poet's revisions of MS. V, which were later incorporated into the MS. M version of Book I and II.⁶

Indeed, it was not until another full year had passed that Wordsworth began in earnest to expand and reshape the poem on his own life. In mid-January of 1804 the poet wrote to John Thelwell: "I am now after a long sleep busily engaged in writing a Poem of considerable labour, and I am apprehensive least [sic] the fit should leave me, so that I wish to make the most of it while it is upon me."⁷ It is possible that Wordsworth exaggerated both the "long sleep" which preceded this period of composition and his fears over losing his present "fit" of inspiration, for in the letter he used his work on the poem as an excuse for not writing a detailed commentary on Thelwell's latest publication: "I read your Pamphlet with [great] interest, and sincerely congratulate you [on] the drubbing you have given the cowardly wretches. As to the criticisms which you request of me, if I thought they would be of any value, I should be really sorry to say that I cannot at present find time to make them. I am now after a long sleep busily engaged . . ."⁸ But whatever we make of this statement to Thelwell, it is clear from a subsequent letter that by late January Wordsworth was deeply involved in new composition on The Prelude, for his remarks to Francis Wrangham indicate that he had already conceived the five-book structure, and that he was, in his own opinion, far advanced toward its completion: "At present I am engaged
in a Poem on my own earlier life which will take five parts
or books to complete, three of which are nearly finished."¹⁹
And in two letters written on 6 March, the poet both revealed
the number of lines he had composed for The Prelude, and
announced the beginning of the fifth and final book. To De
Quincey he stated that the poem "on my own life ... is
better than half complete: viz 4 Books amounting to about
2500 lines"; and to Coleridge he reported:

I finished five or six days ago another
Book of my Poem amounting to 650 lines.
And now I am positively arrived at the
subject I spoke of in my last. When this
next book is done which I shall begin in
two or three days time, I shall consider
the work as finish'd.¹⁰

Before we examine the actual development of the poem in
this period, we should consider a more general question:
What inspired this remarkable outpouring of verse in early
1804, which would expand his poem from two parts to five, and
finally to thirteen? Certainly a major factor in Wordsworth's
resumption of work was the complex and somewhat contradictory
influence of Coleridge upon him. In mid-October, 1803,
Coleridge informed Thomas Poole that Wordsworth had "made a
Beginning to his Recluse."¹¹ But as Mary Moorman argues, this
comment could mean any number of things: that he had com-
pleted some portion of the opening of Book I as it would
appear in MS. M, or that he had simply acceded to what
Coleridge in the same letter called his "urgent & repeated--
almost unremitting--requests & remonstrances--[to] go on with
the Recluse exclusively."¹² That the latter is the more
likely choice is suggested by Dorothy's letter of 13 November 1803, in which she noted that "William has not yet done any thing of importance at his great work . . ."\textsuperscript{13}

Moreover, the poetry which we can ascribe with certainty to the last few months of 1803 indicates that his attention was largely given up to the poems arising from his recent tour of Scotland, and to a few occasional pieces and translations.\textsuperscript{14}

It is noteworthy in this regard that in extracting his promise from Wordsworth to "go on with the Recluse exclusively," Coleridge saw himself as saving his friend from the "hurtful" "habit . . . of writing such a multitude a small Poems . . . ."\textsuperscript{15} Although Coleridge referred primarily to \textit{Lyrical Ballads} in his letter to Poole, he also mentioned some sonnets contributed to the \textit{Morning Post} in 1803, and perhaps had in mind those other short poems which Wordsworth was currently composing, and which he did in fact go on to complete and publish. If Wordsworth himself shared Coleridge's conception of this exclusive commitment of his energies to \textit{The Recluse}, then these minor poems--and perhaps his subsequent work on \textit{The Prelude}--must have seemed to him, at best another temporary diversion from his \textit{magnum opus}, and at worst an evasion of it, but in either case an activity wholly contrary to his friend's urgent "requests & remonstrances."

And as we shall see, it is just this sense of delinquency and self-doubt which Wordsworth expresses in the revised opening of Book I.

Later in 1803 Coleridge paid an extended visit to the
Wordsworth household, and if his presence did not itself inspire the poet to expand *The Prelude*, it clearly contributed to the mood in which Wordsworth returned to the poem. Although Coleridge originally intended to stay with the Wordsworths only "a couple of Days,"16 ill health and bad weather kept him there from 20 December to 14 January, 1804. Despite both the weather and his physical state, Coleridge was up and about frequently, and on one such occasion he traveled to a place "in the highest and outermost of Grasmere" and listened as Wordsworth read "the second Part of his divine Self-biography."17 The event must have generated some rather mixed emotions in both poets, for from the very beginning Coleridge had quite emphatically subordinated *The Prelude* to *The Recluse*. Indeed, when he learned in October of 1799 that the "description of William's boyish pleasures" had become a considerable work in its own right, and that it was to be addressed to him, he wrote:

I long to see what you have been doing.  
O let it be the tail-piece of 'The Recluse!'  
for of nothing but 'The Recluse' can I hear patiently. That it is to be addressed to me makes me more desirous that it should not be a poem of itself. To be addressed, as a beloved man, by a thinker, at the close of such a poem as 'The Recluse' a poem non unius populi, is the only event, I believe capable of inciting in me an hour's vanity . . . 18

And as Coleridge valued *The Prelude* only for its relationship to *The Recluse*, so too did he judge Wordsworth's poetic achievement largely in terms of this never-to-be-finished masterwork. Typical of Coleridge's sentiments is his remark in a letter to Richard Sharp, written the day after his departure from Grasmere:
Wordsworth is a Poet, and I feel myself a better Poet, in knowing how to honour him, than in all my own poetic Compositions, all I have done or hope to do— and I prophesy immortality to his Recluse, as the first & finest philosophical Poem if only it be (as it undoubtedly will be) a Faithful Transcription of his own most august & innocent Life, of his own habitual Feelings & Modes of seeing and hearing.19

Wordsworth may indeed have composed a "divine Self-biography," and addressed it to Coleridge, but that poem was clearly not The Recluse, for which Coleridge longed so intensely. Whether Coleridge actually expressed such feelings, whether he in fact even needed to do so for them to be communicated, is, of course, something we cannot know. But we can speculate about a related matter which was very likely a topic of discussion during this period. Mary Moorman points out that Coleridge's notebooks "reveal that on January 9th and 10th he conducted an investigation with himself into the nature and origin of the dislike of doing one's duty—something of which he was deeply conscious in his being . . . . It seems natural to suppose that he pursued this idea in conversations with William and Dorothy."20 Although Moorman stresses Coleridge's painful consciousness of his inability to do his duty, the subject would perhaps have struck an equally responsive note in Wordsworth's own being, especially in the presence of Coleridge, who was, as I suggested above, a sort of living reminder of his failure to compose The Recluse.

What lends credence to this type of speculation is the fact that during these early months of 1804, probably after
Coleridge's departure and certainly before mid-March, Wordsworth composed his "Ode to Duty."²¹ The poem is at once a confession of delinquency and a supplication for "control," for release from "the weight of chance-desires" (ll. 35-38). At the risk of committing the fallacy of imitative form, we should note at the outset that the poet appeals for "control" and renounces "perpetual [later corrected to "uncharted"] freedom" not in fluid lines of blank verse but in stiff, regular Horatian stanzas, which are themselves, as Carl Woodring remarks, an "enforcement of order."²² The Duty which the poem invokes is less the personification of a moral or ethical ideal than an absolute metaphysical principle, the guarantor of cosmic order and harmony: "Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;/And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are fresh and strong (ll. 55-56). Or, as he states in the stanza which appears at the head of the poem in MS. M: "O'er earth, o'er heaven thy yoke is thrown/All Natures thy behests obey" (ll. 8/9, crit. app.).²³ The only part of creation which does not submit to Duty's "yoke" is mankind: "Man only murmurs; he alone/In wilfulness rejects thy sway." But this rejection of Duty, this separation of self from the principle of order, renders man not immoral or depraved, but anxiety-ridden, ineffectual, the victim of futile desires and doubts about his future being:

Him empty terrors overawe
And vain temptations are his law,
He bids his better mind be dumb,
And foresight does but breed remorse for times to come . . . (ll. 8/9, crit. app.)
The central contrast in the poem, as these lines suggest, is between the operations of the individual will and the demands of Duty, between self-direction and submission to an external pattern of order, and therein lies the largely unresolved tension in the "Ode." In confessing those failings which have moved him to seek Duty's steadying influence, he acknowledges both a misplaced dependence on self, and a previous unwillingness to respond to Duty's "timely mandate":

I, loving freedom, and untried;
No sport of every random gust,
Yet being to myself a guide,
Too blindly have reposed my trust:
And oft, when in my heart was heard
Thy timely mandate, I deferred
The task, in smoother walks to stray;
But thee I now would serve more strictly, if I may.
(ll. 25-32)

This passage is quite clearly an admission of personal failure, for his inability to direct himself purposefully has shown him to be unworthy of the "trust" he had placed in his own powers. In a later stanza, however, Wordsworth emphasizes his desire that serving Duty "more strictly," that submitting to her "control," should be a process of educating and redirecting his will, and not an act of resignation or renunciation:

Yet not the less would I throughout
Still act according to the voice
Of my own wish; and feel past doubt
That my submissiveness was choice:
Not seeking in the school of pride
For "precepts over dignified";
Denial and restraint I prize
No farther than they breed a second Will more wise.
(ll. 41-48)

But the sentiment of this stanza (expressed as it is with the
tentative and conditional verb would), the wish that
"submissiveness" be "choice," is wholly unsupported by the
rest of the poem, for elsewhere it is quite obvious that sub-
mission to Duty is "Denial and restraint" and no more. In
the previous stanza we learn that one of the burdens of
"uncharted freedom" is "the weight of chance-desires" which
cannot be fulfilled. But the solution to this problem is not
to be found in attuning the will to those ends which can be
attained, but in renouncing striving of any sort, and thus
precluding all possibility of failure: "My hopes no more must
change their name,/I long for repose that ever is the same"
(ll. 37-40). Indeed, if the final lines of the poem speak
of the birth of a "second Will more wise," it is a will to
serve unquestionably, to be led by dictates from beyond the
self:

I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour,
Oh, let my weakness have an end!
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give;
And in the light of truth thy Bondman let me live!
(ll. 58-64)

The exchange which the poem envisions is thus self-direction
for strength, uncertain striving for peaceful "repose that
ever is the same."

How intensely Wordsworth felt the penitential sentiments
expressed in the "Ode to Duty," and how largely Coleridge con-
tributed to that state of mind, are matters about which we can
only speculate. Before we leave the poem, however, we should
note a minor theme which Wordsworth introduces here, for it is
a theme which we shall see the poet deal with more directly in *The Prelude* and the other major poems of early 1804. Although in *MS. M* the "Ode" begins with a generalized statement of mankind's failure to "obey" Duty's "behests," we learn in the second stanza that some people do manage to live according to her "sway." These people seem to have an unconscious, intuitive perception of the right, for instead of supplicating for control and guidance they

Without misgiving do rely
Upon the genial sense of youth;
Glad Hearts! without reproach or blot;
Who do thy work and know it not.

(ll. 11-14 and crit. app.)

The source of their insight is, then, some aspect of the self which has remained constant since youth. Those who must appeal to Duty, on the other hand, are those who either never experienced "the genial sense of youth," or more probably, those who have lost it through the years. Indeed, in the Longman MS. of the poem Wordsworth's wish for the "Glad Hearts . . . Who do the right, and know it not" is: "May joy be theirs while life shall last/And may a genial sense remain, when Youth is past" (ll. 13-24, crit. app.) Such a wish derives its urgency from the recognition that identity is not constant, that one's present self may be wholly other than his past self, that "the genial sense of youth" may not "remain, when Youth is past."

The theme of identity and the continuity of one's being in time is, to be sure, a minor consideration in the "Ode to Duty." But in "To H.C." and the "Immortality Ode," two other
poems which, according to Reed, Wordsworth completed in early 1804,²⁵ we see the poet dealing quite explicitly with the problem of identity, and thus the two poems offer us further insight into the concerns out of which the five-book Prelude developed. Both "To H.C." and the "Ode" have a basic two-part structure, which may reflect their common genesis in Wordsworth's crisis period of 1802, and their common resolution nearly two years later.²⁶ The two-part structure in "To H.C."²⁷ is essentially temporal, although it approximates the problem/resolution structure which we shall see in the "Ode." The first stanza of the poem begins with a lyric invocation of the child, in which he is pictured as an unearthly being, inhabiting a special realm in which heaven and earth are as one:

Thou faery voyager! that dost float
In such clear water, that thy boat
May rather seem
To brood on air than on an earthly stream;
Suspended in a stream as clear as sky,
Where earth and heaven do make one imagery. .. (5-10)

The poet's joy in regarding this "blessed vision! happy child!" soon gives way to sorrow, for the sight of the child in his present state brings with it painful thoughts about the effects of time on his being:

Thou art so exquisitely wild,
I think of thee with many fears
For what may be thy lot in future years. (11. 11-14)

With this expression of his "fears" for the child's development, the first section of the poem breaks off. At the beginning of the second stanza we find the poet at some later date recalling his lament for the child:
I thought of times when Pain might be thy guest,  
Lord of thy house and hospitality;  
And Grief, uneasy lover! Never rest  
But when she sate within the touch of thee. (15-18)

But from his new perspective on this incident he can label  
his earlier fears, "O too industrious folly!/O vain and cause-  
less melancholy!" (ll. 19-20). The source of his renewed  
confidence is his faith in Nature's capacity to protect the  
child not only from pain and grief, but from any change what-  
soever: Nature will "Preserve for thee, by individual right,  
/A young lamb's heart among the full-grown flocks" (ll. 23-24).  
The alternative which the poet envisions to this state of  
permanent innocence is a grim one to say the least, for rather  
than submit the child to the world of change, to "the injuries  
of to-morrow," "Nature will . . . end thee quite" (ll. 26-21).  
And that the poet foresaw a sudden, untimely end to the child's  
being as the more likely possibility is suggested by the con-  
clusion of the poem, which pictures the child living in a  
state of extreme vulnerability and radical impermanence:

    Thou art a dew-drop, which the morn brings forth,  
    Ill fitted to sustain unkindly shocks,  
    Or to be trailed along the soiling earth,  
    A gem that glitters while it lives,  
    And no forewarning gives;  
    But, at the touch of wrong, without a strife  
    Slips in a moment out of life. (ll. 27-33)

The child is, then, poised precariously on the edge of non-  
being, ready to give up its life rather than "be trailed  
along the soiling earth," rather than be a part of the world  
of process and change. Indeed, the poem represents the senti-  
ment of "My Heart Leaps Up. . . ."28 pushed to its furthest  
extreme, for the point at which life becomes unliveable occurs
not when one loses the intensity of his childhood experience
of Nature, but when he loses his "young lamb's heart," when
he takes his first step toward becoming a member of "the
full-grown flocks" (l. 24). And if this approach to the prob-
lem of growth and the continuity of identity recalls "My Heart
Leaps Up," it also anticipates a passage in The Prelude which
expresses the same sentiment even more graphically. In Book
VII Wordsworth recalls a child he saw in a London theater, a
boy, like H.C., who seemed "A sort of Alien scatter'd from
the clouds" (VII, 377). And as he saw the child at the time
miraculously preserved from the influence of "the wretched and
the falsely gay," he likewise imagined him in later years
removed from the world of process:

    He hath since
    Appear'd to me oft-times as if embalm'd
    By Nature; through some special privilege,
    Stopp'd at the growth he had; destined to live,
    To be, to have been, come and go a Child
    And nothing more, no partner in the years
    That bear us forward to distress and guilt,
    Pain and abasement . . . (VII, 398-405)

Although the poet imagines the child as being alive while
enjoying Nature's "special privilege" ("destined to live/To
be, to have been" etc.), the darker implications of the pass-
age are clear from the ghastly phrase "embalm'd/By Nature." The
two alternatives, permanent innocence or death, which re-
main ostensibly separate in "To H.C.," have here become one,
for the child's escape from the world of process is achieved
through death, or death-in-life, being "embalm'd/By Nature . . .
Stopp'd at the growth he had."
The extremity of this solution to the problem of growth and the continuity of the self in "To H.C." indicates quite clearly the urgency with which Wordsworth was pursuing this theme in early 1804. The major document in this poetic quest for certainty (outside of The Prelude) is, of course, the "Immortality Ode," which, like "To H.C.," the poet completed while he was struggling with the abortive five-book version of The Prelude. In his famous essay on the "Ode," Lionel Trilling succinctly describes the problem/resolution structure in the poem to which I alluded above:

Both formally and in the history of its composition the poem is divided into two main parts. The first part, consisting of four stanzas, states an optical phenomenon and asks a question about it. The second part, consisting of seven stanzas, answers that question and is itself divided into two parts of which the first is despairing, the second hopeful. 30

While Trilling's remarks do point up the basic structure and thematic development of the poem, we must note the fundamental stylistic difference between the two major divisions in the poem. Indeed, as significant as the answer (or answers) of stanzas V-XI of the"Ode" is the form in which that response is expressed, for the poem which begins in 1802 as an intensely personal experience of loss and decline finds its resolution in 1804 in a complex metaphysical statement on time, change, and the nature of human existence in general.

The opening stanza of the poem, which introduces this personal loss, is primarily expository in function: it describes a past when "every common sight" was extraordinary, "Apparel'd
in celestial light," and contrasts to that time a present of seemingly absolute impoverishment:

    It is not now as it has been of yore
    Turn whereso'er I may
    By night or day
    The things which I have seen I see them now no more . . . (ll. 1-9) 31

We do not learn here when his perception of the "celestial light" began, or when and how it failed. Nor do we learn much about the nature of the "light" itself, except that it bestowed upon things "The glory and the freshness of a dream" (l. 5). In stanza II, however, we learn that it had little if anything to do with his responsiveness to the beauty around him, for he feels this loss despite his perception both of Nature's beauty and of the apparent capacity of her objects to share in this same aesthetic pleasure:

    The Rainbow comes and goes
    And lovely is the rose
    The moon doth with delight
    Look round her when the heavens are bare
    Waters on a starry night
    Are beautiful and fair
    The sunshine is a glorious birth
    But yet I know wher' er I go
    That there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth.
    (ll. 10-18)

The poet then turns from exposition and lament to narration, to a dramatic situation in which we see enacted the effects of this inescapable sense of loss upon his spiritual and emotional stability. The setting for this incident is a "sweet May morning" (l. 44), a time when

    . . . all the earth is gay
    Land and sea
    Give themselves up to jollity
    And with the heart of May
    Doth every Beast keep holiday . . . (ll. 29-33)
Where the imagery of stanzas I-II had been primarily visual, that of III-IV emphasizes the auditory: the "Birds thus sing a joyous song"; "young lambs bound/As to the tabor's sound"; "cataracts blow their trumpets"; "echoes" sound through the mountains; a "happy Shepherd boy" shouts (ll. 19-35). And in striking contrast to the unrelieved despair which the sights of stanzas I-II produce, the predominantly auditory scene of III-IV seems to offer a wholly different experience to the poet, the experience of communal joy. As Alan Grob points out, this contrast is part of a larger imagistic pattern in the poem, the counterpointing of the two primary modes of sense perception, sight and sound, which give contrary testimony as to the identity and the spiritual well-being of the self. Clearly the most crucial auditory phenomenon in stanza III is the "timely utterance" which counters an unidentified (but from stanzas I-II not unknown) "thought of grief," a thought which no doubt could have frustrated any attempt to participate in the joyous spring scene all around him (ll. 22-24). But the poet's resolution not to permit another such thought to destroy this moment of fullness reveals a fundamental misconception of his own condition, for his confident assertion, "No more shall grief of mine the season wrong" (l. 26), suggests that the "timely utterance" had rendered him permanently "strong," that he could sustain this communion and control the disquieting associations which threaten it, through an act of will.
We see how mistaken he is in stanza IV, where his attempt to integrate himself fully into Nature's "jubilee" ends in a total spiritual collapse. Addressing the "blessed Creatures" whose joyful "call" he hears, he states: "My heart is at your festival/My head hath its coronal" (ll. 39). But while he rejoices in his innermost being, while he wears the outward insignia of a celebrant, he cannot escape the consciousness of loss; and as if to repudiate the "timely utterance" which had restored him before, the sights which precipitate his final moment of crisis are themselves transformed into utterances with a very different message:

But there's a tree of many one  
A single field which I have look'd upon  
Both of them speak of something that is gone  
The pansy at my feet  
Doth the same tale repeat  
Whither is fled the visionary gleam  
Where is it gone the glory and the dream.(ll. 51-57)

It is far from certain that Wordsworth broke off here when he stopped work on the poem in 1802; but what is clear is that with the final lines of stanza IV Wordsworth reached a narrative impasse, a point beyond which his own experience could not take him. The shift from the private and the personal to the mythic is signaled by a shift from "I see . . . I hear . . . My heart . . . " to

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.(ll. 58-61)

David Perkins asserts the following about the function of the myth of pre-existence in the second section of the poem:
Now one seldom believes a myth in the same way that one believes a mathematical proposition. At the same time, in Wordsworth's ode the myth is more than a way of conveying or talking about something which is otherwise conceived and understood. The use of myth is to provide some account of experience which remains inscrutable except in mythic terms. It fulfills, that is, a psychological need, and we accept it for the sake of the order and peace that it brings. 34

To the first sentence in this quotation I would add that one responds differently not only to a myth and a "mathematical proposition," but also to a myth and a lyric utterance. Indeed, the latter two are in many ways incompatible modes of expression, for the lyric at its most intense probes into the self and attempts to articulate one's deepest, perhaps most complex and contradictory feelings about the nature of his being, while myth attempts to transform such feelings into an account of human experience in general, into a pattern which every man's existence can or must repeat. Thus if, as Perkins asserts, the motivation for the resort to myth is a psychic need for "order and peace." then it follows that with the poignant questions about identity and the continuity of the self at the end of stanza IV of the "Ode", Wordsworth reached the final limits of lyric expression and thus turned to myth to render his experience intelligible. And he achieved this "order and peace" by constructing a myth which subsumed his previously unique, personal sense of loss into the design of the universe, and which presented decline and discontinuity
as the inescapable consequence of being born into earthly life.

The central premise of stanzas V-XI of the "Ode" is that from birth to death every man undergoes two concurrent but radically opposed processes of development, one physical, the other spiritual. This pattern is most succinctly outlined in stanza V:

Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home.
Heaven lies about us in our infancy
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy
But he beholds the light and whence it flows
He sees it in his joy (ll. 62-70)

But while the "Youth" retains his own perception of "the vision splendid," "At length the Man beholds it die away/And fade into the light of common day" (ll. 71-76). The "celestial light" which once seemed to clothe all of creation was thus the atmosphere of divinity, the "clouds of glory," which surrounded the child when he came into this life "From God who is our home." And the heavenly vision gave way to the "Shades of the prison-house" and faded "into the light of common day" not through some inadequacy in the self, but simply by virtue of his temporal journey through life, which moves every man "daily farther from the East," farther from the brief influx of divine light which occurs at birth.

But while this myth, with its strongly deterministic explanation of human growth and decline, no doubt provided a
context in which the experience of loss was intelligible, it created some problems when Wordsworth sought to describe the consolation which the adult finds for the loss of his earlier perception of the "celestial light." The compensation which the poem offers is two-fold: first, the adult is not relegated to a state of unrelieved spiritual darkness, for there are moments of illumination when, through the operations of memory, "Our souls have sight of that immortal sea/Which brought them hither" (ll. 161-162), and presumably, of our subsequent return to that other realm. Second, this insight into the other-worldly origin and destiny of one's being leads to a new accommodation between the self and his earthly home (or foster-home), a new understanding and acceptance of human suffering and mortality. Now, the memories of the past which "breed/Perpetual benediction" do not recall "that which is most worthy to be blest/Delight and liberty," or the child's capacity for hope; instead they recall the child's early, unsettling recognition of the world as an unknown, alien place, and his uncertain remembrances of another existence:

Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise
But for those blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized
High instincts before which our mortal nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprized
But for those first affections
Those shadowy recollections (ll. 140-147)

And while the poet is himself unclear about the nature of these recollections ("be they what they may"), he considers them the basis of our mortal existence, "the fountain of all
our day/ . . . the master light of all our seeing" (ll. 148-150).
In elaborating on this point, the poet maintains that these
memories not only comfort and support us through our life
(they "Uphold us cherish us"), but they also provide a very
special perspective on that life, for they "make/Our noisy
years seem moments in the being/Of the eternal silence" (ll.
151-152). These "truths that wake/To perish never," these
glimpses of the spiritual realm from which we came and to
which we shall return, thus teach us the transience, the
impermanence, even the comparative insignificance, of the
turmoil of our earthly years, which are but a brief interrup-
tion in "the being/Of the eternal silence."

In the final two stanzas of the poem, however, Wordsworth
strikes a very different stance, for he seeks to describe the
second type of compensation which he feels for the loss of
the "celestial light." Stanza X is imagistically and themati-
cally a reprise of stanzas III-IV, for the poet again introduces
the joyous celebration in May, complete with a chorus of
singing birds and "young lambs" bounding "As to the Tabor's
sound!" (ll. 166-168). But where the poet had once sought to
become a literal participant in the scene ("My heart is at
your festival/My head hath its coronal") he now engages the
celebrants only through an act of mind:

We in thought will join your throng
Ye that pipe and ye that play
Ye that through your hearts today
Feel the gladness of the May.  (ll. 169-172)

And while this spectacle is, to the adult's eye, diminished
in its magnificence, the consciousness of loss is balanced by a new type of consolation:

What though it be past the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower,
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death;
In years that bring the philosophic mind.(ll. 173-179)

Where has this "Strength" come from? The opening lines of stanza X suggests that it came from the "shadowy recollections" of infancy, for immediately after the description of these memories and their ability to transport the soul from its "inland" locale to the shore of "that immortal sea," the next stanza begins: "Then sing ye Birds sing sing a joyous song . . . . We will grieve not" etc. The word Then indicates that both his new invocation of the world of natural joy, and his resolution to find new strength despite his losses, were inspired by his knowledge of man's spiritual condition. Moreover, in the passage added to the Longman MS. before publication of the poem in 1807, the poet asserts that this strength derives from "the primal sympathy/which having been must ever be"\(^{35}\) --that is, man's vital connection to his infant state of being and its communication with the divine. We can see how this strength would involve a new and more confident attitude toward death ("the faith that looks through death") but the reason why "thoughts that spring/Out of human suffering" should be "soothing" is unclear. One answer is that if his new metaphysical insights "make/Our noisy years seem
moments in the being/Of the eternal silence," then the evils attendant upon mortal life must necessarily lose their unsettling impact. But this is apparently not the meaning Wordsworth seeks to express, for the last stanza of the poem emphasizes the dramatic humanization of self which had occurred; while his recollections of childhood experience "breed/Perpetual benedictions" in him, it is his heart, chastened by a new understanding of human life, which he salutes in the final lines of the "Ode":

The clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality:
Another race hath been and other palms are won
Thanks to the human heart by which we live
Thanks to its tenderness its joys and fears
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.
(11. 189-196)

Although Trilling lays great emphasis on these closing lines -- indeed, they are for Trilling the final evidence that the "Ode" is about "growing up" and not "growing old"-- it is hard to dispute Cleanth Brooks' feeling that at the end of the poem "the solution is asserted rather than dramatized."36 While we certainly need not accept David Ferry's contention that there is "a kind of sublime sour grapes about the conclusion in general," we may wonder with him how adequately it resolves the central issues of the poem.37 Alan Grob makes an interesting connection between "the meanest flower" of stanza XI and the "pansy" of stanza IV,38 but we need to bear in mind that the latter was part of a landscape which had all repeated the "same tale," which spoke to the poet "of something
that is gone" (ll. 51-55). If the poet now understands the "tale" of the landscape in terms of the myth he has formulated, why does the sight of this mean flower inspire "thoughts ... too deep for tears," emotions to which the self's normal responses are inadequate? Perhaps a better question is whether simply understanding this "tale," knowing where the "celestial light" originated and why it departed, is in fact compensation for its loss; indeed, whether the articulation of design and purpose necessarily leads to a full acceptance of it. These questions, I think, point to the same sorts of problems implicit in our discussion of the shift from the lyric mode to myth in the poem, and like those earlier considerations they are, if not finally insoluble, clearly beyond the scope of our study. But what is of utmost importance to our understanding of The Prelude is that while the poet was engaged in expanding his own personal history he was struggling elsewhere with the problem of growth and decline, and the continuity of the self through time, the same themes that figure so largely in both the five and thirteen-book versions of the "poem on his own life." And whatever we make of the complex transcendental resolution of the "Ode," we shall see some echoes of it in the Five-Book Prelude, and more important, we shall see that the poet was unable to draw his "poem on his own life" to a satisfactory conclusion until he had incorporated something of this argument into it.
Notes

1 Wordsworth/Gill, 505. They also note that the companion MS. U has no colophon (505, n. 9).

2 Ibid., 519. For an argument that this and other evidence indicates that the Two-Part Prelude was never viewed as a completed work see Mark L. Reed, Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), p. 635 n. 3 (cited hereafter as CMY).


4 Wordsworth/Gill argue from some rough drafts toward the opening of Book III that the work of late 1801 was III, 1-167 (523-524). For a more skeptical view of this evidence see Reed, CMY, pp. 632-633.

5 Journals, p. 166, entry for 11 Jan., 1803.

6 Jaye, pp. 103-106.

7 EY, p. 432.

8 EY, loc. cit. On the controversy that inspired Thelwell's pamphlet see EY, pp. 431-435 and notes.

9 EY, p. 436. The editors date this letter "between 24 Jan. and Feb. 7, 1804."

10 EY, pp. 454 and 452, respectively.


12 Moorman, I, 603-605; STCL, II, 1013. Moorman, however, finally opts for Prelude, I, 1-271 as the best explanation for Coleridge's remarks, as do de Selincourt and Darbishire (Prelude, p. xlviii). But see Reed, CMY, p. 633.
See Reed, CMV, pp. 34-36, 236-246.

STCL, loc. cit.

Ibid., II, 1024. See also II, 1035.

The quotation is from Coleridge's Notebook, cited in Moorman, II, 1.

STCL, I, 538.

Ibid., II, 1034.

Moorman, II, 2.

PW, iv, 83-86. March 18 is the latest date by which Wordsworth could have sent MS. M (which contains a shortened version of "Ode to Duty") to Coleridge before the latter's departure from London. See Reed, CMV, p. 637.


The stanza beginning "Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!" does not appear in MS. M, although according to Reed, "space is carefully marked out for it in the MS." (CMV, p. 247).

In the versions of the poem published in 1815 and thereafter, this problematical stanza is omitted. See crit. app. to ll. 41-48.

Reed, CMV, p. 247.

Ibid., pp. 156, 180, 247. On Wordsworth's "crisis"

27
PW, i, 247.

28
PW, i, 226.

29
This phrase is removed from MSS. A and B and does not appear thereafter. See *Prelude*, VII, 398-408, crit. app.

30

31
Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from the MS. M version of the "Ode" printed in Curtis, op. cit., pp. 164-170.

32
Grob, pp. 232-262, et. seq.

33

34
Perkins, *The Quest For Permanence*, p. 73.

35
PW, iv, 284, ll. 182-183.

36

37
Ferry, *The Limits of Mortality*, p. 49.

38
Grob, p. 261.
Chapter Four: The Five-Book Prelude

Unlike the Two-Part Prelude, of which we have one partial and two complete fair copies, no fair copy of the Five-Book Prelude exists, if indeed one was ever made. The bases for our conjectural reconstruction of this version of the poem are, then, Wordsworth's own comments on the progress of his work; MSS. W and WW, which suggest the general contents of the fourth and fifth books;¹ and the fair copy of Books I-V of the thirteen-book Prelude in MS. M, which was prepared with such rapidity that much of it must have already been extant, and intended for the shorter version of the poem.²

Our first source of evidence, the poet's own description of the development of his poem, is complicated and contradictory; as Reed states, some remarks are "incapable of perfect reconciliation or complete explanation."³ But despite these difficulties I think that with the help of our other sources of evidence we can make more sense of these comments than Reed does. Wordsworth's important statements are as follows:⁴

(a) to Francis Wrangham, between 24 Jan. and 7 Feb. 1804: "... I am engaged in a Poem on my own earlier life which will take five parts or books to complete, three of which are nearly finished."

(b) to Hazlitt, 5 Mar.: "I have been tolerably busy this last month having written about 1200 lines of the Poem on my own life."
(c) to DeQuincey, 6 Mar.: "I . . . have just finished that part in which I speak of my residence at the University; the poem "is better [than] half complete: viz 4 Books amounting to about 2500 lines."

(d) to Coleridge, 6 Mar.: "I finished five or six days ago another Book of my Poem amounting to 650 lines. And now I am positively arrived at the subject I spoke of in my last. When this next book is done which I shall begin in two or three days time, I shall consider the work as finish'd."

When Reed sets about trying to reconcile the numbers in these statements, he makes the rather curious assumption that book lengths in the five-book Prelude corresponded to those in the longer poem. He states:

One problem posed by W's remarks of 6 Mar. is that the book which he then speaks of having recently finished is said to have 650 lines—a total that fits Book III of the completed poem (672 lines) nicely, but fits Book IV (504 lines) rather poorly. Books I-III as now known, on the other hand, do not contain "about 2500" lines, the total mentioned to DeQ, or anything like that number, while I-IV contain 2331 lines, a sum not greatly divergent from W's rough total. 5

But by considering what we know of the poem as it existed in early 1804 we can do much better than this. First, Wordsworth had available to him the fair copies of the Two-Part Prelude; the version of Books I and II contained therein amounts to some 976 lines. MS. W, however, indicates that the poet intended to excise the drowned man and the "spots of time" for use in the last two books of the poem, and subtracting these 124 lines from the total leaves 852 lines for Books I and II. Subtracting this total from the figure of 2500 lines given in (c) as the total of the first four books, we arrive at 1648 as the number of lines unaccounted for. Now, from
(d) we know that either Book III or IV was about 650 lines long; let us assume for the moment that it was IV, and subtract the 650 from our total, which leaves us with about 998 lines. Turning to MS. M we find that Book III is there about 660 lines long;⁶ if the version of Book III referred to in (c) was of comparable length, then we have some 330 odd lines unaccounted for. But in an earlier passage in letter (d) Dorothy noted that she and Mary had already begun transcribing The Prelude (among other things) for Coleridge,⁷ and thus the opening passage of Book I (271 lines long) as it appears in MS. M must have been composed by this date, and thus must have been included in the 2500 lines mentioned in (c). While 330 is not 271, the discrepancy is certainly less than between 2331 and 2500, and in any case it is remarkably accurate considering the round figures given in these letters.

While this conjectural reconstruction works out quite nicely in terms of line counts, it forces two assumptions upon us. The first is that the version of Book III written for the five-book Prelude was essentially the same as that given in MS. M. But, as we noted above, the sheer rapidity with which the poet transformed the materials of the abortive five-book poem into Books I–V of the longer version makes this hardly a daring speculation. The second assumption which we must make, however, is that Book IV of the five-book poem amounted to some 650 lines of verse, and we cannot appeal to any later text to support this conjecture. One piece of evidence which points to such a length is (b) above, for the
1200 lines composed "this last month" could well be Books III and IV, both of approximately 600 lines. However, we know that the 271 lines of the "preamble" and the "post-preamble" were in existence by this date, and if they were composed during February they must figure somehow in the 1200 line total. Letter (a) is, unfortunately, too vague about the three books of the poem which were "nearly finished" by early February to be of much help in this regard.

We must turn, therefore, from these letters to MSS. W and WW to determine the probable length and content of this earliest Book IV. The drafts of the fourth book in these manuscripts suggest that it was to have contained both the narrative of the poet's first summer vacation from Cambridge and a long digression on books and education in general. That these topics were to be joined in one book is clear from an important link passage in MS. W published for the first time by Paul D. Sheats. As Sheats points out, Wordsworth's final words on his summer vacation in W are: "For surely at that time a falling off/Had taken place . . ." After several pages of materials irrelevant to this topic (and, according to Reed, probably added to MS. W at a later time), Wordsworth refers back to this "falling off" in his introduction of the digression on books:

Enough of private sorrow longest \[? \text{ lived}\]
Is transient & severest doth not lack
A mitigation in \[? \text{ th assured trust}\]
Of the grave's quiet comfort \[??\]
perhaps
Inheritance vouchsafed, te-mai-perhaps, to man
Alone of all that suffer on the earth
And yet it grieves me for-the-it-oh-man
Yet \[? \text{ even}\]
Even in the steadiest mood of reason, when
All sorrow for thy transient pains
Goes out it grieves me for thy lot O Man . . . \(11\)

The number of lines dealing with the summer vacation and
books in MS. W is, by Sheats' count, 287.\(12\) To this figure
we must add the 150 or so lines on the Vagrant Soldier in
MS. 18a, for one of the drafts in W is of a transitional
passage for this incident.\(13\) Our total is now about 437
lines; where do we find the other 200 odd lines we need to
bring our count above 600? One indication of the sort
of material involved appears in the first passage in MS. W
related to Book IV, since it clearly refers to some preceeding
incident in the narrative:

Auspicious was this outset and the days
That follow'd marched in flattering symphony
With such a fair presage; but 'twas not long
Ere fallings off and indirect desires
Told of an inner weakness. (IV, 270, crit. app.)

The incident which corresponds most clearly to an "Auspici-
cious . . . outset," to a "fair presage," is the poet's
evening walk around the lake soon after his return from
Cambridge (Prelude, IV, 121-180), a passage which first
appears in MS. M. That the poet had composed other lines
on the "outset" of his summer vacation is obvious from drafts
in MS. WW, which Reed identifies as corresponding to IV,
183-192, 201, and 204-221 (the new "freshness" in human
life passage and the tribute to Ann Tyson).\(14\) But since
these lines do not deal with any "fair pressage" which succeeded
his year at the university, we must assume that the evening
walk incident, and perhaps the introductory lines preceeding
it in the later versions of Book IV, existed in another
manuscript which is now lost. If so, these additional lines would bring our total to about 620 lines, which corresponds very closely in length to the 650 line book Wordsworth says (d) he completed before beginning the final book of the poem.

Wordsworth made no reference to the fifth book of the 1804 Prelude other than his statements in (a) that there would be a fifth book and in (d) that he was ready to begin it and thus complete his poem. We therefore do not have even a rough idea of its projected length or of the poet's progress in it before he abandoned the five-part structure. But again MS. W provides us with some useful insight into the content of this book. About mid-way through the manuscript there appears the notation "5th book," which is followed immediately by a fair copy, in Mary Wordsworth's hand, of the first 65 lines of the ascent of Mt. Snowdon.15 The manuscript clearly indicates that the poet intended the Snowdon episode to introduce the final book of the poem, and that he had this passage transcribed from another manuscript for this purpose. The version of the incident in W, as we shall see, is considerably different than that in Book XIII of 1805, for it focuses primarily on Nature and not on Imagination or the "higher mind." Following the poet's vision on Snowdon and the long digression it inspires, we find in W drafts of passages related to Book XI of the longer poem. The most important of these are the additions to the "spots of time," which along with other passages, suggest that the "5th book" was to contain, if not conclude with, a general account of
Wordsworth's rationalist/analytic crisis and his recovery from it through Nature and the "spots."

With this broad overview of the form and content of the Five-Book Prelude in mind, let us begin our examination of this second version of the poem.

Books I and II

The first two books of the 1804 Prelude recount essentially the same narrative as the Two-Part Prelude; that is, they relate in the same non-chronological sequence the existential birth of the self, the ministry of Nature, the brief "props of my affections" crisis, and the penultimate experience of the One Life in his early youth. However, as we noted above, the poet removed the problematical drowned man episode and the "spots of time" from Book I and relocated them in considerably different contexts later in the poem.

The most significant addition to Books I and II of the five-book poem was the introductory "glad preamble" and the "post-preamble." Although speculation on the date of composition of this passage ranges from late 1799 to March of 1804, its theme is so similar to the concerns of the other poetry of early 1804 that it seems reasonable to assume that it too may have been composed (or perhaps given its final form) in this same period. Like the "Ode to Duty," these lines speak of intense frustration, ineffectuality, of unrealized desires which indicate either delinquency or increasing incapacity to create or even direct himself purposefully. Although the poet sought to satisfy his "longing . . . To brace myself
to some determin'd end," he encountered nothing but "Impediments":

    But I have been discouraged; gleams of light
Flash often from the East, then disappear
And mock me with a sky that ripes not
Into a steady morning: if my mind,
Remembering the sweet promise of the past,
Would gladly grapple with some noble theme,
Vain is her wish; where'er she turns she finds
Impediments from day to day renew'd. (I, 123-141)

What made this present period of inactivity so frustrating
was that it was wholly inconsistent with "the sweet promise
of the past," as if the past self which experienced "vernal
promises, the hope/Of active days, of dignity and thought/Of
prowess in an honorable field" (I, 50-52), was in no way
related to the present self which would act according to
these "promises." And as in the "Immortality Ode," this
apparent discontinuity in the self was illustrated in
experiences which offered painfully contrary evidence on his
identity and spiritual well-being.

Wordsworth achieves the juxtaposition of his past and
present self through a temporal shift much like that in
"To H.C." Although the opening lines of Book I are in the
present tense, we learn in line 55 that this "glad preamble"
was in fact spoken at some earlier time. When, at the present
moment of composition, the poet recalls the original recitation
of the passage, he notes that it resulted in a feeling of
spiritual election, in a sense of being chosen to undertake
some glorious task:
to the open fields I told
A prophecy: poetic numbers came
Spontaneously, and cloth'd in priestly robe
My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem,
For holy services: great hopes were mine;
My own voice cheer'd me, and far more, the mind's
Internal echo of the imperfect sound;
To both I listen'd, drawing from them both
A cheerful confidence in things to come. (I, 59-67)

This "cheerful confidence in things to come" was further reinforced during a later moment of "gentler happiness,"
when he beheld a vision of "the very house and fields" of his new home, and then felt

... assurance of some work
Of glory, there forthwith to be begun,
Perhaps, too, there perform'd. (I, 73, 83-87)

But when, at sunset, his "Soul/Did once again make trial of the strength/Restored to her afresh," his efforts ended in total failure, for despite "Eolian visitations,"

the harp
Was soon defrauded, and the banded host
Of harmony dispers'd in straggling sounds
And, lastly, utter silence. (I, 101-107)

His initial inability to fulfill the "great hopes" which he entertained for himself seems not to have had much immediate impact upon him:

"Be it so,
It is an injury," said I, "to this day,
To think of any thing but present joy." (I, 107-109)

But his subsequent failings were less easily dismissed. Despite his "determin'd aid" to pursue some productive activity; despite the "rigorous inquisition" of his powers, which showed him to be not unfit for "glorious work"; he still had not begun any significant poetic enterprise and had thus become, in his own estimation, "Like a false steward who hath much received/
And renders nothing back" (I, 124, 159, 270-271). And that he recognized his own failure of will as the cause of this state of anxious confusion is clear from his description of himself as

. . . baffled by a mind that every hour
Turns recreant to her task, takes heart again
Then feels immediately some hollow thought
Hang like an interdict upon her hopes.
This is my lot; (I, 259-263)

Whether the opening lines of Book I were composed at the same time as the two "Odes," whether this passage was influenced by or was an influence upon these other poems, it clearly reflects the sorts of concerns with which Wordsworth was pre-occupied in early 1804. And in having the narrative of his poem issue out of an apparent experience of loss, in providing a definite antecedent for the phrase "Was it for this . . .?" (now in line 271), Wordsworth also introduced into his poem the thematic and structural motif which controls both the five-book and the thirteen-book Prelude, the alternation of spiritual ascent and falling off, the recurring pattern of crisis and recovery which is not fully resolved in either version of the poem until that version's final book.

Book III: Cambridge

Although Wordsworth offers several quite different assessments of the significance of his first year at Cambridge, the statement which is most general and inclusive appears near the end of the book, where he concludes that the university provided an experience of initiation for him, a necessary transition
. . . from the smooth delights,
And wild outlandish walks of simple youth,
To something that resembled an approach
Toward mortal business . . . (III, 550-553)

Cambridge, he continues, was a "midway residence," where the "Visionary mind" was introduced gradually into human life, and not "Thrust out abruptly into Fortune's way/Among the conflicts of substantial life" (III, 554-559). Prior to this period he had, by his own admission,

stood
In my own mind remote from human life,
At least from what we commonly so name,
Even as a shepherd on a promontory,
Who, lacking occupation, looks far forth
Into the endless sea, and rather makes
Than finds what he beholds. (III, 543-549)

In this "privileg'd world/Within a world" (III, 553), however, he experienced his first sustained involvement in a large human community, his first direct and personal exposure to a variety of new people, places, and situations. And as Man replaces Nature as the second term in the dynamic of self and other, we see the first real enactment of the pattern of spiritual ascent and decline, of loss and recovery, out of which the five-part poem was born.

The poet's experiences during his first year at school were of a very mixed nature. On the one hand there were moments which confirmed his highest conception of himself, his capacity to feel and create, and his unique relation to and participation in an all-inclusive context of being, "the Life/Of the great whole" (III, 130-131). On the other hand there were times when he was completely enthralled and the energies of his self dissipated by the wonderous new spectacle
around him; and still other times of irresolution and idleness, of easy, unreflective pleasures, times given up to "empty noise/And superficial pastimes" (III, 211-212). These different types of experience, however, were not extremes between which the poet alternated randomly throughout this period; instead, they represent a sequence, a series of stages through which he progressed: an initial period of distraction and bewilderment, followed by a brief recovery and reaffirmation, and finally a long and apparently unbroken period of unproductive lethargy and "superficial pastimes."

Wordsworth attributes his early feelings of disorientation and unreality to the variety and novelty of his new situation, the "glitter of the show" and the "dazzle of the taper light" (III, 9495), to which he responded with a mixture of pleasure and vague anxiety. On the "dreary morning" of his arrival at Cambridge, the first thing he noticed after King's College Chapel loomed into view was a student "cloth'd in Gown and tassell'd Cap," a sight which so transfixed him that he was not "master of my eyes/Till he was left a hundred yards behind" (III, 19). As he entered this new world he felt as if he were being drawn in by an irresistible and possibly threatening power of attraction:

The Place, as we approach'd, seem'd more and more
To have an eddy's force, and suck'd us in
More eagerly at every step we took. (III, 10-12)

The "eddy" metaphor suggests a feeling of helplessness and confusion in the self, as if he were losing control to a force which grew increasing stronger, as if he were being drawn steadily into an alien, engulfing medium.
Despite the rather ominous overtones of the poet's language here, he describes his initial entry into his new world as, on the whole, pleasurable. He was greeted by "welcome faces," "acquaintances who there/Seem'd Friends." The barrage of "Questions, directions, counsel and advice," his sense of himself as a "man of business and expense" going "From shop to shop about my own affairs"—all combined to make his arrival seem a "fresh day/Of pride and pleasure!" (III, 16-25). While he recognized the unreality of his new surroundings and his behavior there ("I was the Dreamer, they the Dream"), he nonetheless "roam'd/Delighted through the motley spectacle" (III, 2829, my emphasis). The "Strange transformation" of a "mountain Yough,/A northern Villager," into a richly attired, bewigged "Gentleman" was a sort of enchantment, effected "by word of magic or some Fairy's power" (III, 32-43). We soon learn, however, that the poet's response to this magical spectical was not entirely favorable, for he asserts that from the beginning, "even so early, from the first crude days/Of settling time in this my new abode," he was depressed by "melancholy thoughts" about himself, his family, and his own "future worldly maintenance" (III, 72-78). But most troubling of all was a powerful sense of unreality and unrelatedness, of alienation from the world of the university:

And, more than all, a strangeness in my mind,
A feeling that I was not for that hour,
Nor for that place. (III, 79-81)

It is at this point in his narrative—immediately following his description of the "melancholy thoughts" and his anxious sense of unreality at Cambridge—that Wordsworth recalls
(with a curious confusion of verb tenses) his rapid recovery from this state of being:

But wherefore be cast down?

Why should I grieve? I was a chosen Son.

For hither I had come with holy powers . . .

When the first glitter of the show was pass'd,

And the first dazzle of the taper light,

As if with a rebound my mind return'd

Into its former self. (III, 81-83, 94-97)

The "rebound" simile suggests a quality of mental toughness, a flexibility and resiliency in the self, which allowed the poet to endure moments of bewilderment and remain essentially unchanged. If his enchantment by the "glitter of the show" was in any way debilitating, he was not radically or permanently impaired, for as soon as the initial shock of his new situation passed away, his mind returned immediately and vigorously into "its former self." And with his mind thus restored, he recognized anew both his unique relation to the world and those "holy powers" which he as a "chosen Son" could exercise. Wordsworth describes the various aspects of his experience in characteristically vague and abstract language, but they clearly relate to the sort of experience we examined in an earlier chapter: the ability to "apprehend all passions and all moods" impressed upon "the visible universe, and work/Like changes there by force of my own mind" (III, 85-88); the pursuit of "universal things," by which the mind becomes both intensely introspective and expansive until it feels "Incumbences more awful, visitings/Of the Upholder of the Tranquil Soul . . ." (III, 110-116); and finally, the perception of and participation in the One Life, which the poet
here refers to as "the one Presence, and the Life/Of the great whole," (III, 121-131).

While Wordsworth describes thos moment as strongly confirmatory of his identity as a "chosen Son" endowed with "holy powers," we should not that his affirmation was essentially a private experience, both in the sense that it was wholly internalized, and that by its very nature it tended to separate the poet from his fellows. After describing his perception of "the Life/Of the great whole," and the heightened receptivity of mind which made him "wakeful" to "Nature's daily face," he asserts that the presence or absence of other people in no way affected his powers: "So was it with me in my solitude;/So often among multitudes of men" (III, 139-140). Later, he again emphasizes the distinction, even the discontinuity, between these internal and external worlds, for the account of his renewal of self deals only with the former:

not of outward things
Done visibly for other minds, words, signs,
Symbols or actions; but of my own heart
Have I been speaking, and of my youthful mind.
(III, 174-177)

The "awful . . . might of Souls," he continues, is revealed in "what they do within themselves" (III, 178-179, my emphasis). Indeed, so antithetical are these two worlds that revealing to others the effect of this internal life on the self leaves one open to the charge of "madness":

Such sympathies would sometimes shew themselves
By outward gestures and by visible looks.
Some call'd it madness: . . . (III, 145-147)

The sense of identity and relatedness which Wordsworth achieved through such experience was of a very special sort.
He was somehow related, on the one hand, to an ultimate metaphysical reality ("... I was ascending now/To such community with highest truth" [III, 119-120]); and, on the other hand, to a sort of primitivistic, prophetic tradition:

Some call'd it madness: such indeed it was,
If prophecy be madness; if things view'd
By Poets of old time, and higher up,
By the first men, earth's first inhabitants,
May in these tutor'd days no more be seen
With undisorder'd sight ... (III, 147-155)

But what he was not related to was other people and the world of human concerns; to continue a passage quoted in part above:

So was it with me in my solitude;
So often among multitudes of men.
Unknown, unthought of, yet I was most rich;
I had a world about me; 'twas my own,
I made it; for it only liv'd to me,
And to the God who look'd into my mind.
(III, 139-144)

At such moments his sense of being was dependent not on successful encounters with other people but on the self's capacity to create a world of its own, an exclusive internal world shared only by the self and "the God who look'd into my mind." To the human community he was insignificant, "Unknown, unthought of"; in the self-generated world of consciousness, a world with its own order and meaning, he was "most rich."

Although it is never quite explicit here (or elsewhere in Book III for that matter), it seems clear that Wordsworth's experience of internal richness was at least in part a compensatory response to his sense of outward impoverishment, that internal and external were not complementary but alternative realms of experience. As we noted earlier, Laing argues
that since identity is essentially a relational process, the "unresponsive or impervious other" can induce a sense of unreality and impotence in the self.\textsuperscript{20} It was just this sort of emptiness and unrelatedness ("... a strangeness in my mind/A feeling that I was not for that hour,/Nor for that place" \{III, 79-81\}), which the glorious reassertion of his powers served to relieve. Indeed, when the poet is finally moved "to speak/A higher language," he states that at this moment of re-affirmation, "I felt/The strength and consolation which were mind" (III, 106-108), consolation obviously suggesting a prior state of deprivation or loss.

The third phase of Wordsworth's development at Cambridge was a long period of idleness and easy pleasures, of "Observance less devout" (III, 207). The poet introduces this portion of his narrative with a very significant spatial and topographical metaphor. Earlier, in surveying the account of his brief restoration, he remarks to Coleridge:

\begin{quote}
And here, O Friend! have I retrac'd my life
Up to an eminence, and told a tale
Of matters which, not falsely, I may call
The glory of my youth. \textsuperscript{(III, 168-171)}\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

Then, as he beings the "tale" of his sudden decline from this "eminence," he states: "Enough: for now into a populous Plain/We must descend" (III, 195-196). The eminence/populous Plain metaphor indicates that the change in his mode of being was two-fold, both a falling-off from the "glory of \{his\} youth" to "Observance less devout," and a movement from private, internalized experience to attempts at engaging and participating in the world of the university.
One obvious opportunity for such engagement was through competition with other students for academic distinction. Competition with one's fellows provides a means of asserting and validating the self, a means of demonstrating one's abilities and having one's worth openly judged and recognized. In Wordsworth's own phrase, "Examinations" were a time "when the Man was weigh'd/As in the balance" (III, 65-66). The danger of competition, as this image suggests, is that the self will not be validated and recognized as significant through this performance, that "the Man" weighed in the balance will be found wanting by others, and perhaps by himself as well. Early in Book III by poet asserts that he refused to strive for such honors, presumably because of the anxieties, the extremes of hope and fear, which the competition generated (III, 66-69). Later he makes much the same point more explicitly:

Far more I grieve'd to see among the Band
Of those who in the field of contest stood
As combatants, passions that did to me
Seem low and mean . . . (III, 511-514)

An earlier episode of boyhood competition provides a useful contrast to Wordsworth's response to his situation at Cambridge. In Book II the poet recalls summer afternoon boat races, in which his competitive spirit was checked rather than stimulated:

In such race,
So ended, disappointment could be none,
Uneasiness, or pain, or jealousy:
We rested in the shade, all pleas'd alike,
Conquer'd and Conqueror. Thus the pride of strength,
And the vain-glory of superior skill
Were interfus'd with objects which subdue'd
And temper'd them, and gradually produc'd
A quiet independence of the heart. (II, 65-73)
Since the end of such competition was not distinction or recognition but pure pleasure in the physical activity itself, there was no anxiety about winning and losing; "Conquer'd and Conqueror" were "all pleas'd alike," as the landscape "subdu'd/And temper'd" the boys' natural inclination toward aggressive self-assertion.23

At Cambridge the situation was entirely different: the striving for achievement was, at least to the poet's mind, a form of demeaning and dispiriting combat. And while he could not or would not seek the type of public confirmation of self which he might gain through this competition, he did not find any other form of public or private affirmation as an alternative. Instead, he resorted to a clearly unreflective, unselfconscious, irresolute existence, travelling, as he states,

.... with the shoal
Of more unthinking Natures; easy Minds
And pillowy; and not wanting love that makes
The day pass lightly on, when foresight sleeps,
And wisdom, and the pledges interchanged
With our inner being are forgot. (III, 518-523)

While the tone of this passage is perhaps not wholly condemnatory, the mode of being it describes is nonetheless quite negative, since living solely for the moment apparently involved for Wordsworth the loss or rejection of any sense of himself as a continuous being in time. In this state, he lost the capacity to consider the relation between present and future (his "foresight" slept), as well as the abiding sense of a past to which he must remain faithful ("the pledges interchanged" with his "inner being" were forgotten).

In the course of his narrative Wordsworth offers several different accounts of the changes in his mode of being during
the long period of his decline into "Observance less devout." He first states: "I had made a change/In climate; and my nature's outward coat/Changed also, slowly and insensibly" (III, 207-209). In one sense this passage indicates nothing more than the poet's awareness of and responsiveness to his new surroundings: Cambridge was for him a new "climate," and as it changed, he changed. But the metaphor with which he describes this process suggests something further about his experience. An animal which grows an "outward coat" "slowly and insensibly" does so to protect itself from changes in its environment which threaten its well-being. If the poet responded in this manner to life at the university, it reveals not a strong, resilient self, one which can "rebound" after periods of stress, but one which in its new situation felt exposed and vulnerable, in need of a protective "outward coat" to separate it from a threatening other. The metaphor also suggests a certain duality in Wordsworth's being, for the transformation in his "outward coat" presumably left his innermost being unaffected. If so, his inner self and outer self were in such moments essentially independent and discontinuous, the former constant and untouched by changes in its environment, the later flexible and responsive to these changes. The metaphor is thus a naturalistic version of the conventional "clothes" metaphor, since implicit in both is the recognition of the problematical relation between outer and inner, between form and essence.

Later Wordsworth describes this period of decline somewhat differently:
easily I pass'd
From the remembrance of better things,
And slipp'd into the weekday works of youth,
Unburthen'd, unalarm'd, and unprofan'd.
Caverns there were within my mind, which sun
Could never penetrate, yet did there not
Want store of leafy arbours where the light
Might enter at will. Companionships,
Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all.
(III, 242-250)

In reading these lines, the first thing we note is the curious
language with which the poet characterizes what did not happen
to him: although he lost "the remembrance of better things,"
and participated in "the weekday works of youth," he was nei-
ther burdened, nor alarmed, nor profaned: His preservation
from this sort of debilitating violation of his being is
explained in the topography of self which follows. Inverting
the metaphor of eminence and plain which he had used earlier
to describe his development at Cambridge, Wordsworth here
asserts that his mind was comprised of sunny, leafy "arbours,"
and dark, impenetrable "caverns." (The 1850 text makes the
counterpoint more emphatic by italicizing the two words.)
That the light in the bowers represents human interaction
is clear from two additional lines in MS. M:

Companionships,
Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all;
The meanest found some leaf or wither'd bough
To shine upon, and aid the gladsome shew.
(III, 249-250, crit. app.)

If the "cavern" imagery brings to mind Hopkins' version of
the irregularities of the mental landscape ("O the mind,
mind has mountains; cliffs of fall/Frightful, sheer, no-man-
fathomed"),24 we must recall that this insight into the nature
of the self is part of Hopkins' experience of anguish and
terror. Wordsworth's "no-man-fathomed" depths are instead a
source of assurance, a guarantee of the continuity of the self, for whatever happened in the outer, sun-lit "arbours," the inner-most recesses of his being were unaffected, "unprofan'd."

Moreover, like the "nature's outward coat" metaphor, his landscape imagery suggests a basic discontinuity between the poet's inner and outer being. But unlike the earlier metaphor it describes not a process (the growth of a protective "outer coat") but a fundamental structure of the self, portions of which are involved in human interaction, while others are wholly inaccessible. Despite this apparent inconsistency, however, both metaphors illustrate the same point, that his inner being was unaffected by the experiences in the period following his "eminence" because that part of the self simply was not engaged in these activities. The persistence of this conception of self and other is further indicated in its reappearance near the end of Book III, where Wordsworth describes his imperviousness to the "deeper passions working round" him, passions which were

by me
Unshar'd; and only now and then observ'd,
So little was their hold upon my being,
As outward things that might administer
To knowledge or instruction. Hush'd, meanwhile,
Was the under soul, lock'd up in such a calm,
That not a leaf of the great nature stirr'd.
(III, 536-541)²⁵

The image of the "under soul" (in MS. M "under mind")²⁶ retains both the spatial dimension of the "cavern" metaphor and the sense of a special area in the self, a sort of inner sanctum, which remained undisturbed by the storm of "deeper passions" all around.
What is the significance of these images of outer and inner self, the one engaged in human intercourse, the other wholly withdrawn and insulated? As noted earlier, Wordsworth states that from his earliest moments in Cambridge he experienced a feeling of unreality, which was sometimes a pleasant sense of being in a dream ("I was the Dreamer, they the Dream; I roam'd/Delighted. . . .), and sometimes a very unpleasant, anxious sense of total unrelatedness ("a strange-ness in my mind,/A feeling that I was not for that hour,/Nor for that place"). In addition, I suggested that his celebration of internal richness during his "eminence" stands in direct contrast to his inability to engage meaningfully in the external, public world of the university: "Unknown, unthought of, yet I was most rich,/I had a world about me; 'twas my own,/I made it. . ." (III, 141-143). Furthermore, the "outward coat" metaphor indicates that after this "short liv'd" affirmation, his response to the world of Cambridge was not a confident act of engagement and participation, but rather an attempt to protect the self from what he considered a threat to his being.

I think we can gain a very useful insight into these passages by reverting again to Laing's writings. In his analysis of schizoid behavior, Laing describes a radical psychic strategy which some people employ to deal with an unresponsive and threatening other--the creation of a "false self." According to Laing, when the self feels its autonomy sufficiently endangered by contact with the world, it withdraws, engaging the other only through another entity,
a sort of surrogate self which is emphatically not the inner or true self. The inner self then becomes primarily a spectator, observing but taking no part in the transactions between "false self" and other. The inner self is thus insulated against any real involvement with the other, and more important, protected from the anxiety which such participation generates. Although I do not maintain that Wordsworth's narrative points to any sort of psychic imbalance during this period of his life, I do suggest that he achieves in his poem an effect much like the creation of a false self by describing the emptiness and unreality of his life at Cambridge, his inability to maintain any satisfying, self-affirming, anxiety-free relation with his world, but emphasizing that all the while his inner self was unaffected by this experience— that the "caverns" in his being remained "Unburthen'd, unalarm'd, and unprofan'd." And I suggest further that the metaphors of the protective "outward coat" and the "caverns," the image of the impervious "under mind," indicate Wordsworth's ambivalence toward the implications of his own narrative, his inability or unwillingness fully to embrace the dynamics of loss and recompense which he had earlier introduced into the poem. But that he did indeed recognize and could articulate the radical impoverishment of his being at Cambridge is clear from another passage in Book III:

Rotted as by a charm, my life became  
A floating island, an amphibious thing,  
Unsound, of spongy texture, yet withal,  
Not wanting a fair face of water-weeds  
And pleasant flowers.  (III, 339-343)
Again we see the juxtaposition of inner and outer in this metaphor but now the outer self is not protective but ornamental, obscuring the essential barrenness, the "amphibious," "Unsound," "spongy texture," of his inner being.

Much the same uneasiness and ambivalence appears in Wordsworth's final assessment of Cambridge at the end of Book III. He states first that he was exposed to the "surfaces of artificial life/And manners finely spun," an "inferior exhibition, play'd/By wooden images" (III, 590-591, 607-608).

The university had shown him "The limbs of the great world," but only "in dwarf proportions,"

as in mock fight
A Tournament of blows, some hardly dealt,
Though short of mortal combat. (III, 615-619)

He then draws back from his assertion and concedes that

... this spectacle may well demand
A more substantial name, no mimic shew,
Itself a living part of a live whole,
A creek of the vast sea. (III, 623-626)

But his final characterization of his experience reverts to the Cambridge-as-spectacle notion, and stresses even more clearly its grotesque unreality, for now he recalls the university as having been like "a Cabinet/Or wide Museum," in which he wandered looking at its bizarre exhibits with "an aching and a barren sense/Of gay confusion" (III, 652-668).

Whether Cambridge was to the poet's mind a "mimic shew," or a "Museum," or "A creek of the vast sea of life, seems a matter of some consequence, for the first two necessarily preclude any direct involvement of the self. One observes but does not participate in a performance or an exhibition,
while "a living part of a live whole" may engage one's whole being and may thus demand a different response from the self. And while Wordsworth admits the latter possibility, that the world of the university "may well demand/A more substantial name . . .," the weight of the passage is largely in the opposite direction, toward the view that he had been no more than a spectator, one who watched people playing at life, or one who inspected objects on display before him, but who did not become a part of this new and estranging world. This argument is, then, another avoidance of the implications of his own narrative, one achieved not by showing his imperviousness to external influence on his inner being, but by denying the essential reality of Cambridge, by reducing its people and its activities to a "mimic shew" or a "Museum" filled with unusual but lifeless objects, which could confuse and disorient him ("The head turns round, and cannot right itself") but which could not threaten his identity or autonomy.

Book IV: Summer Vacation and "Books"

The fourth book of the Five-Book *Prelude* appears to have contained three major narrative episodes—an "Auspicious . . . outset" upon the poet's return from Cambridge (which I have identified conjecturally as his evening walk around the lake); the Vagrant Soldier incident; and the sunrise dedication—plus a digression on books and childhood education in general. These three episodes and the transitional passages
which join them indicate the poet's increasing concern with dramatizing the process of loss and recovery, the same theme which he had dealt with so ambiguously in Book III. Indeed, despite their many differences, these three incidents are all essentially conversion experiences, moments of renewal and restoration when, after a brief period of decline, the self seemed to regain and reassert something of its old powers. And while these episodes illustrate a capacity to recover from moments of impairment, the fact that they are narrated consecutively illustrates the impermanence of each restoration, the self's continuing susceptibility to "falling-off" after each recovery.

The first of these incidents, the evening walk around the lake, had a two-fold significance for the poet, since it revealed to him the extent to which his being was diminished while at Cambridge, and his apparent ability to regain his spiritual integrity. Such walks, as he states, were a favorite pastime of his youth, and thus his repetition of the action created in him a powerful feeling of renewal: "Those walks, . . . richly laden with all good . . . did now, like a returning spring,/Come back on me again" (IV, 121-127). As these memories rushed upon him he felt a "consummate happiness. . . wide-spreading, steady, calm and contemplative," and soon he experienced a moment of climactic spiritual regeneration:

Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and self-transmuted, stood
Naked as in the presence of her God.
(IV, 130-131, 140-142)
Havens offers no specific interpretation of his passage, but his gloss refers the reader to an earlier chapter on Wordsworth's mysticism, where the lines are quoted as illustrations of such experience.\(^3\) Jack Stillinger remarks: "'Veil' may refer to the unreality in which he participated at Cambridge"; his comment is particularly to the point since he goes on the cite "the more than literal attirement" described in Book III.\(^2\) Indeed, as Stillinger suggests, the metaphor describes Wordsworth's recovery of his spiritual integrity, the removal of the barrier between self and other, a conversion of such intensity that the poet compares it to the direct, unmediated contact with the divine. Moreover, this experience brought renewal to a self which did not recognize its own spiritual impoverishment:

As on I walked, a comfort seem'd to touch
A heart that had not been disconsolate,
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
At least not felt; and restoration came,
Like an intruder, knocking at the door
Of unacknowledg'd weakness.

(IV, 143-146, and crit. app.)

There are two significant aspects of this conversion which we should note. First, it was essentially self-generated and self-sustained. Once the external action, the walk around the lake, had awakened his memory, it was the energies of the self which effected his restoration: his soul was "self-transmuted." In fact, the details of the physical scene are in many ways incompatible with the state of inner peace which he achieved; while the poet enjoyed a "Wide-spreading" meditative calm,
the] evening soon brought on
A sober hour, not winning or serene,
For cold and raw the air was, and untun'd.
(IV. 133-135)

What made this disharmonious, "untun'd" setting appropriate
for his experience was not something in Nature, but the
"fulness" of his heart, some power within the self, as the
second half of Wordsworth's simile suggests:

But, as a face we love is sweetest then
When sorrow damps it, or, whatever look
It chance to wear is sweetest if the heart
Have fulness in itself, even so with me
It fared that evening.  (IV, 136-140)

Second, the experience was essentially forward-looking, for
the poet interpreted this moment of renewal as a guarantee
of his ability to recover from any future impairment. Although
there seems to be some serious question as to the role of the
will in this conversion, especially since the poet describes
his restoration as wholly unexpected ("restoration . . .
Knocking at the door/Of unacknowled'd weakness"), he concludes
from it that his self was active, dynamic, unlimited in its
capacity to triumph over spiritual adversity of any sort:

[I] had glimmering views
How Life pervades the undecaying mind,
How the immortal Soul with God-like power
Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep
That time can lay upon her.  (IV, 154-158)

Thus while his insight into his self seems fleeting and partial
("glimmering views"), his assertion of present and future
spiritual well-being was nonetheless unequivocally (and
perhaps excessively) confident.
The first link passage in MS. W indicates, however, that this confidence in his continued spiritual integrity was, if not unfounded, at least premature:

Auspicious was this outset and the days
That follow'd march'd in flattering symphony
With such a fair presage; but 'twas not long
Ere fallings off and indirect desires
Told of an inner weakness. (IV, 270, crit. app.)

As was the case in his account of Cambridge, the poet again associates his decline with his participation in public, social activities: "feasts, and dances, and public revelry,/
And sports and games," activities which he later characterizes collectively as "This flitting idleness, this giddy chase/Of trivial pleasures" (IV, 274-275, 304-305 and crit. app.) And while he admits that these "fallings off and indirect desires" revealed "an inner weakness," he seems less certain in a subsequent passage that his pursuit of "trivial pleasures" was in fact the result of a personal failing. Although he has not the time "To unfold, even to myself, these vanities,/And how they wrought," one thing is nonetheless "sure":

that now
Contagious air did oft environ me
Unknown among these haunts in former days.
(IV, 286-291 and crit. app.)

Indeed, when he asserts that, "Something there was about me that perplex'd/Th' authentic sight of reason" (IV, 295-296), it appears that he means something around him, like "Contagious air," not something within him, like an "inner weakness," unless we see this weakness as the result of the infectious atmosphere in his old "haunts."
Moreover, to further mitigate any sense that his decline was permanent, he narrates the sunrise dedication incident, the memories of which rose up against him as he reviewed his period of "flitting idleness." Like his earlier walk around the lake, this scene led to a moment of intense spiritual renewal. Prior to his morning walk he "had pass'd/The night in dancing, gaity and mirth" in an atmosphere of deafening noise, fitful movement, and undirected, meaningless conversation:

With din of instruments, and shuffling feet,  
And glancing forms, and tapers glittering,  
And unaim'd prattle flying up and down. . .  
(IV, 316-323)33

Returning home from these hectic festivities, the poet viewed a spectacular sunrise, the sight of which aroused in him a sense of inescapable, even sacred obligation, a continuing commitment to some great but unspecified goal:

to the brim  
My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows  
Were made for me; bond unknown to me  
Was given that I should be else sinning greatly,  
A dedicated Spirit. On I walk'd  
In blessedness, which even yet remains. (IV, 340-345)

Both Havens and Stillinger rightly note how vague and generalized this affirmation was; and, as Havens remarks, the poet asserts a future end without "any consciousness as to means."34 Indeed, his confidence in his future mode of being recalls both the earlier evening walk and more important, the similar insight achieved during the "eminence" of his Cambridge period, when he also perceived a self of awesome but undefined potentiality:
I was a Freeman; in the purest sense
Was free, and to majestic ends was strong.
I do not speak of learning, moral truth,
Or understanding; 'twas enough for me
To know that I was otherwise endow'd.

(III, 89-93)

Moreover, this "dedication" is a considerably different
conversion experience than the evening walk. As before he
was alone, travelling through a natural setting, and
suffering from his participation in what he considered to
be a purposeless social activity. Again he was restored, but
the stimulus for his recovery, the brilliant sunrise, was
wholly fortuitous, and wholly external to him. In fact,
throughout the incident he remained entirely passive: his
"Vows/Were then made" for him; his "bond . . . Was given."
There is no sense here on the self being an agent in its own
restoration, as before when, with the memories of the past
rushing to consciousness, his "soul" was "self-transmuted"
(IV, 140-141). Although he was clearly transformed and
renewed by this experience ("On I walk'd/In blessedness . . ."),
the force which made his vows for him and which gave him
his bond remains, like the bond itself, mysterious, "unknown."
Now, what we could reasonably expect here is some tribute
to Nature for arranging the timely sunrise which renewed his
spirits, but we have no such indication. The passive voice
verbs clearly indicate the workings of some purposeful force
beyond the self in this episode, and, to be sure, the role of
Nature could be understood though never explicitly recognized.
But it is curious that after two opening books on the develop-
ment of the self through Nature's ministry, the poet would
make no mention of Nature (other than the details of the physical landscape itself) in what appears to be an essentially naturalistic experience.

The climactic narrative episode of the book was the poet's meeting with the Vagrant Soldier. The incident is introduced with the most affirmative passage in MS. W, but it alludes to an earlier experience of loss to which the encounter is juxtaposed:

That summer was not seldom interspersed
With primitive hours when by these hindrances
Uncross'd I recogniz'd within myself
Conformity as just as that of old
To the end and written spirit of God's works
Whether held forth in Nature or in Man.
(IV, 353-359 and crit. app.)

The actual incident itself, of course, does not appear in the manuscript, since Wordsworth had a complete version of it in MS. 18a, and earlier ones in Chr. and (at one time) in Alf. as well.35 The ease with which he transferred the episode from 18a to Book IV is clear from the former manuscript, for after the first five lines of the passage in Dorothy's hand there appears one line in the poet's hand: "Once, ere these summer month's were passed away" (18a, 207), thereby locating the experience in Wordsworth's summer vacation from Cambridge.

The episode begins with the poet walking along a lonely, wet, moon-lit road. His mood was tranquil, but it was clearly not a meditative calm, for his mind was "exhausted . . . worn out by toil,/And all unworthy of the deeper joy" which the natural scene could impart (IV, 363-384). The solitude and
stillness of the scene then began to affect him: he felt a
"restoration like the calm of sleep,/But sweeter far"
(IV, 387-388). In this "happy state" his attention focused
inward; "from some distant region of my soul," he states, a
succession of "beauteous pictures now/Rise in harmonious
imagery" (IV, 392-394). The poet's response to this dreamlike
flood of images was sensual pleasure ("animal delight") and
a feeling of complete composure and self-command, "A self-
possession felt in every pause/And every gentle movement of
my frame" (IV, 398-399). With all the faculties of body and
mind thus engaged in reviewing the "beauteous" and "harmon-
ious" forms of consciousness, he suddenly encountered a
grotesque, "uncouth shape" in the external world. His
immediate reaction was to withdraw and survey the man from
behind "a thick hawthorne," "myself unseen" (IV, 400-405),
but he soon overcame his "specious cowardise," listened to
the soldier's tale, and brought him to a cottage where he
received food and lodging.

Several significant changes occurred during this encoun-
ter, changes both in the poet and in the soldier. When the
man first told "his history," he delivered this "Soldier's
tale" deliberately and unemotionally, "with a quiet, uncom-
plaining voice" and a "stately air of mild indifference" (IV,
441-445, my emphasis). But if the poet at first saw dignity
and fortitude in the soldier's manner, he soon changed his
mind. As they walked to the laborer's cottage, Wordsworth ques-
tioned the man further about his experiences, and the man was
again "in demeanour calm,/Concise in answer" (IV, 472-473), but the poet's response to him was altogether different:

solemn and sublime
He might have seem'd, but that in all he said
There was a strange half-absence, and a tone
Of weakness and indifference, as of one
Remembering the importance of his theme
But feeling it no longer. (IV, 473-478)

Thus what had seemed a sign of fortitude and patient endurance of suffering was really a sign of exhaustion, enfeeblement, and a loss of feeling. At the door of the cottage Wordsworth urged the soldier, in effect, to beg rather than "linger in the public ways," to which the man responded, "my trust is in the God of Heaven/And in the eye of him that passes me" (IV, 489-495). Although the soldier obviously repudiated the poet's rather pretentious advice, his final words indicate a least minimal renewal of his spirits, of his will to live: "and in a voice that seem'd/To speak with a reviving interest,/Till then unfelt, he thank'd me" (IV, 489-500).

Wordsworth's own change during the incident, however, is for our purposes far more important. Just before meeting the soldier, as we have seen, the poet was withdrawn into the wholly private, internalized world of "beauteous pictures" and "harmonious imagery," a state as far removed from the realities of human suffering as it could possibly be. His immediate response to the ghastly human figure whose appearance disrupted his pleasurable revery was clearly surprise and fear, but fear which seemed to give way to a sort of voyeuristic pleasure in observing the man while the poet himself remained hidden in the dark. And when the poet
finally revealed his presence, his main concern was interrogating the poor man; even on their journey to the cottage he could not "forbear/To question him . . ." (IV, 469-470). Nonetheless, Wordsworth did in the end deal successfully and responsibly with the situation; he did take care that the man find food and shelter, and more important, his act of charity revived the soldier's spirits. The poet had thus come full circle from total isolation in the self-generated and self-gratifying world of consciousness to participation through effective moral action in the world of mankind. And while this engagement with the world of man was brief, while the soldier's demands upon the poet were temporary and rather minimal, the episode nonetheless provides a significant contrast to the rest of Book IV, in which the poet characterizes his social activities as empty and meaningless, even threatening to his spiritual well-being. Indeed, the incident illustrates the sort of humanization of his self which Wordsworth mentions in MS. WW, and which he describes at greater length in the MS. M version of Book IV.37

The final passage in MS. W which is related to what we now know as Book IV is another transitional passage, which like the others speaks of the recurring pattern of recovery and "falling off":

Thus deep enjoyments did not fail me then
   Even deeper sometimes, as they found a mind
   Engross'd with other matters and estranged
   Instructing it to value, and to know
   What it possess'd though slighted and unused.
   For surely at that time a falling off
   Had taken place . . . 38
But the refrain "For surely at that time a falling off/Had
taken place" leads in this section of MS. W not to another
affirmative incident to counterbalance the "falling off,"
but to the introduction of a wholly new topic, one intended
specifically to raise the poem above the level of personal
recollection:

Enough of private sorrow longest [lived]
Is transient & severest doth not lack
A mitigation in [th assured trust
Of the grave's quiet comfort . . .
Yet [even]

Even in the steadiest mood of reason, when
All sorrow for thy transitory pains
Goes out it grieves me for thy lot O man . . . 39

These lines are, as we noted above, the introduction to the
digression on books and education which formed a part of the
original fourth book of the poem. The grief which persists
after the poet dismisses his own "private sorrow" and his
awareness of mankind's "transitory pains," arises from his
recognition that man's artistic creations, "Things worthy
of unconquerable life," must inevitably "perish" from the
earth (V, 1-21). His consideration of the impermanence of
art then leads him to relate a recurring thought, that should
the world be destroyed "by inward throes" or "fire . . . sent
from far,"

Yet would the vital spirit of her frame
Subsist victoriously and peace ensue
And kindlings like the morning; presage sure,
Though slow, perhaps, of a returning day.
(V, 28-36 and crit. app.)

But his confidence in the regenerative powers of earth provides
no assurance as to the fate of "all the meditations of mankind,"
for the passage ends with the impassioned questions:
O! why hath not the mind
Some element to stamp her image on
In nature something nearer to her own?
Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?
(v, 37-38)

MS. W offers no real answer to these questions, nor do the later texts of the poem for that matter. Beginning with MS. M this passage is followed by the Dream of the "Arab Quixote" (V, 49-139), which ends not with the poet's acceptance of the impermanence of art, but with his expression of "reverence" for the Arab in his "quest" to preserve art from the "great overthrow," and his own resolution to "go/Upon like errand" himself (V, 140-165).

In MS. W, however, the poet breaks off his meditation and turns to an account of the "dwarf Man" produced by modern educational techniques, and to a brief description of the influence of books on his own development. Wordsworth's antipathy toward the system which he satirizes is, basically, that it is a system, that it prescribes and proscribes, that it chokes "the path in which [the child] treads/. . . with grammars" and forces him to "live/Knowing that he grows wiser every day" (V, 324-325, 341-342). The greatest casualty of this system is the child's imagination, for if ever a thought could arise

To carry him toward a better clime
Some busy helper still is on the watch
To drive him back and pound him like a Stray
Within the pinfold of his own conceit . . .
(v, 359-362)

The alternatives to such a stultifying regimen are works of adventure and romance, works dealing with the fantastic:
the Wishing-Cap
Of Fortunatas, and the invisible Coat
Of Jack the Giant-Killer, Robin Hood,
And Sabra in the Forest with St. George . . .
(V, 364-367)

The result of the child's early exposure to such works and to Nature ("May books and nature be their early joy!"); is, according to the poet, the acquisition of knowledge, but unlike that of the infant prodigy, it is "Knowledge not purchas'd with the loss of power!" (V, 449).

To illustrate his point about the efficacy with which such works impart "knowledge" without impairing imaginative "power," Wordsworth removes the drowned man episode from its place in Part One of the 1799 Prelude and narrates it here. We recall that in the Two-Part Prelude the drowned man appeared as an example of the

Distresses and disasters, tragic facts
Of rural history, that impressed my mind
With images, to which in following years
Far other feelings were attached--(One, 382-285)

When he retells the incident in MS. W, however, he offers a very different interpretation of its significance. Again he denies that the sight had any immediate impact upon him, but now he admits that under other circumstances it might well have terrified a child. In fact, the "ghastly face" was "a spectre shape/Of terror even" (V, 472-473), but his own reading had, as it were, prepared him for the sight:

    for my inner eye had seen
Such sights before, among the shining streams
Of Fairy Land, the Forests of Romance:
Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
With decoration and ideal grace;
A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
Of grecian Art, and purest Poesy. (V, 475-481)
Jack Stillinger is perhaps too charitable when he remarks
that this passage (11. 453-459 in 1850) is "A lame explanation"
of the incident it purports to interpret. Indeed, the poet's
second attempt to deal with this powerful memory is even more
inadequate than his first, for it flatly contradicts his
previous argument. In satirizing the infant prodigy, he had
remarked, only a few lines earlier, that the child was
protected from the experience of fear:

He is fenc'd round, nay arm'd for aught we know
In panoply complete; and fear itself,
Natural or supernatural alike,
Unless it leap upon him in a dream,
Touches him not. (V, 314-318)

Now, in describing his own experience, he asserts that he too
was protected from an intense experience of fear; not physi-
cally, through a "panoply," but psychologically, through
this early exposure to literature, which served to mediate
the incident. His prior encounters with such sights in books,
then, permitted him to transform the "spectre shape" of the
dead man, to hallow "what I saw/With decoration and ideal
grace," so that it to became like an object in a work or art,
and not a grotesque corpse staring him in the face.

After a brief tribute to the Arabian Nights and the
"golden store of books" in his father's library (V, 482-515),
the digression ends, like so many other similar passages,
with an apologetic address to Coleridge:

Thus far by tedious Retrospect I fear
Have I my Friend endeavored to bring down
The Register of what I owed to Books,
In early life, their later Gifts do yet
Remain untold. (V, 630-632, crit. app.)
But if this fourth book was in fact designed as I have described it, the poet's fears about trying his auditor's patience were not unfounded, for this book would have been perhaps the longest and certainly the most complex and paradoxical book in the poem. While its narrative section gives Wordsworth's fullest acknowledgement of his recurring experience of loss and "inner weakness," its digression not only deals with the largely impersonal topics of books and education, but also dismisses at the outset his own "private sorrow" and mankind's "transitory pains" with a rather stoic and perfunctory appeal to "the grave's quiet comfort." The relationship between this passage and Wordsworth's assertion in the "Immortality Ode" that his recollections of childhood "Make/Our noisy years seem moments in the being/Of the eternal silence," cannot be known with any certainty, although both seem to be expressions of the same basic frame of mind, one perhaps more conducive to rhetorical digression than retrospective narration. Indeed, one of the pressures which contributed to the abandonment of the five-book structure may well have been its inability to accommodate this long digression, for we have seen in MS. M that by mid-March 1804, the digression had grown to over 600 lines and had become a separate book in its own right, one related only structurally to the narrative of Book IV.

Book V: Snowdon and the "Spots of Time"

The complexities of MS. W, the absence of any substantive comments by the poet on the projected fifth book, and the fact
that Book V in MS. M bears no relationship to the drafts of
the "5th book" which appear in W, all make our speculation
about its form and content more difficult than the other
four books. It is clear, however, that this final book was
to begin with the ascent of Snowdon and the digressions
which developed out of it. The first 65 lines of the episode
in MS. W, the faircopy of the ascent and the vision proper,
corresponds very closely to the version of the incident in
Book XIII of the 1805 Prelude. The manuscript gives two
versions of the opening lines of the passage. The first
seeks to establish the chronological relationship between
the ascent and the events of his summer vacation narrated in
Book IV:

Once (but I must premise that several years
Are overlap'd to reach this incident . . .
(XIII, 1. crit. app.)

Although such a chronological link would have been appropriate
after his long digression on books, the poet deleted these
lines and substituted another opening for them, which intro-
duces the incident more abruptly:

Once when a Youth and with a youthful friend
Travelling along the region of North Wales
We left Bethkelet's huts at Couching time . . .
(XIII, 1-3, crit. app.)

While the original opening was awkward enough that the poet
may have deleted it for purely aesthetic reasons, we should
note that in addition to improving the style, his revision
omits the allusion to the major episodes of Book IV; now the
incident occurred "Once" during his youth rather than "several
years" after his first summer vacation from Cambridge. This
revised opening in effect detaches the ascent from the rest of the narrative and presents it as an incident whose significance is apparently independent of its place in Wordsworth's personal history.

The actual details of the episode are much the same as in the later text. The poet and his companion set out on a "close warm" "Summer's night," and under the guidance of a shepherd began their ascent (XIII, 10-15). One point which Wordsworth emphasizes in MS. W is his state of mind as he emerged from the "fog and damp" which surround the party as they climbed the mountain. As in the A text, he was deep in meditation, but in W he was so completely withdrawn that when the scene around him first began to brighten he questioned his perception of the event:

When at my feet the ground in gentle sort
Brighten'd, at least I fancied that it looked
More bright in that half dream which wrapp'd me up
Nor had I time to ask if it were so
For instantly a light before my eyes
Fell like a flash . . . (XIII, 36-40, crit. app.)

In her discussion of the ascent, Sybil Eakin argues from these lines that Wordsworth's intensely introspective state of mind was in fact a state of heightened consciousness, which enhanced his perception of the event: "The inward-turning state of mind, the 'half dream which wrapp'd me up,' heightened the effect of the light which 'before my eyes/Fell like a flash.'" The point of Wordsworth's comment seems rather that the sudden illumination brought him out of this "inward-turning" state of mind in order to view the spectacle which the moonlight had revealed. Since he describes his thoughts as "eager" (XIII, 32),
the "half dream" was clearly not some sort of lethargic and
debilitating revery, but it was nonetheless an absorption into
self which prevented or at least confused his immediate
response to the external world. Indeed, the movement from
internalized experience to the perception of an external
scene recalls the opening of the Vagrant Soldier episode,
where the sight of the old man jolted the poet out of his
revery to engage the world outside the self.

The language with which Wordsworth describes his subse-
quent vision emphasizes the energy and power of Nature, and
the apparent animation of her objects. In the scene which
the poet surveys, the moon "stood naked in the Heavens"; a
"hundred hills . . . upheaved" their "backs" above the mist;
vapors "shot themselves" out into the sea (XIII, 41-49). A
similar effect is produced in the description of the "blue
chasm," the "deep and gloomy breathing-place" through which
roared the single "voice" of a multitude of waters (XIII,
55-59). The insistent personification plus the "action"
verbs create an atmosphere of power and animation, the sense
of a landscape charged with the most dynamic and awesome
energy. Having recalled this succession of natural wonders,
the poet then offers his first comment upon it, again empha-
sizing the power of the scene as well as suggesting the
purposefulness with which Nature has created it:

The universal spectacle throughout
Was shaped for admiration and delight,
Grand in its single self, but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark and deep thoroughfare had Nature lodg'd
The Soul, the Imagination of the whole.

(XIII, 60-65, and crit. app.)
The meaning of the first two lines of this passage is fairly clear: Nature had "shaped" this awesome spectacle both to delight and to impress the viewer— one, as we noted, who had previously been completely withdrawn into his own private meditation. The final three lines, however, are not nearly so simple. It is easy to understand that the scene was "Grand in its single self," but the special significance of the "breach" is obscure to say the least. The primary difficulty is the rather unusual linking of the words "Soul" and "Imagination." Jonathan Wordworth may be correct in stating that the reader at first responds to the terms as "radically opposed," but his elaborate explanation of the poet's reconciliation of this apparent contradiction serves to confuse further rather than to clarify the matter.\(^{43}\) It seems more reasonable to accept Robert Langbaum's assertion (noted but rejected by J. Wordsworth) that the poet uses these two words interchangeably,\(^{44}\) especially since the construction of the passage places them in apposition. An example of a similar association of "Soul" and "Imagination" is the often-quoted "Imagination" passage, which Wordworth composed somewhat later in 1804:\(^{45}\)

```
Imagination! lifting up itself
Before the eye and progress of my Song
Like an unfather'd vapour: here that Power,
In all the might of its endowments, came
Awhart 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 . . .
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(VI, 525–536)
Although in this passage the words "Soul" and "Imagination" are not in apposition, hence are not necessarily synonymous, they are clearly not "opposed"; rather it appears that the poet here conceives of Imagination as a power of the Soul, and their relation is thus the relation between a faculty of man and that part of him which controls and exercises it.

It seems, then, that in identifying the "breach" as the "Soul, the Imagination" of the entire scene, Wordsworth was anticipating his later analogy between Nature and the mind of man by locating in Nature a controlling and shaping force, one analogous to the human Imagination, which had wrought this spectacle for man. Such an interpretation is strengthened by several obvious verbal and imagistic parallels between the description of the powers of Nature in the Snowdon passage, and those of the mind in the lines on "Imagination" quoted above. In both cases a revalation is associated with a sudden flash of light, one flash giving the observer insight into the physical world, the other into the mind's "invisible world." In both the poet is similarly engulfed, surrounded in one by the literal sea of mist, in the other by a more clearly metaphorical "cloud." In one the "homeless voice" of the roaring waters rises before the poet's outward senses: in the other, the "unfather'd vapour" of the Imagination rises before him, blocking his outward perception and leading to an inner revelation. Thus the two passages describe in strikingly similar terms Nature's control over the operations of the physical world, and the Imagination's equally awesome power in the "invisible world" of the mind.
After this description of his ascent and his vision on Snowdon, Wordsworth in MS. W begins the first of three separate but clearly related digressions on the powers of Nature revealed to him in this event from his past. He opens the first with an address to Coleridge, in which he asks him to "vouchsafe an ear" to his "winding but no [sic] devious song" (XIII, 66-70, crit. app.). He then announces that his "present aim"—that is, his intention as he is composing the poem in 1804—is to suspend his retrospective narrative and "contemplate for a needful while"

The diverse manner in which Nature works
Oft times, upon the outward face of things,
As if with an imaginative power . . .
(XIII, 77-79, crit. app.)

The concept of Nature's "imaginative power" to shape "the outward face of things," the subject introduced in the difficult "The Soul, the Imagination of the whole" passage, is here made quite clear, for Wordsworth offers his own explicit definition of this power:

    I mean so moulds, exalts, indues, combines,
    Impregnates, separates, adds, takes away
    And makes one object sway another so
    By unhabitual influence or abrupt
    That even the grossest minds must see and hear
    And cannot chuse but feel . . .

(XIII, 80-85, crit. app.)

This description of the way in which Nature impresses man with manifestations of power and apparent animation recalls several incidents in The Prelude prior to the vision on Snowdon: the "low-breathings" and silent footsteps which seemed to pursue the poet after this theft of another's
trapped bird; the "strange utterance" of the wind which
admonished him after robbing birds' nests; and most notable
of all, the stolen boat eiposde, in which a huge cliff, "as
if with voluntary power instinct;/Uprear'd its head"
(I, 407-408). Although these earlier incidents are examples
of the shaping of a "favor'd being" through Nature's continuing
"ministry," they nonetheless illustrate the same sort of
dynamic energy, Nature's power to manipulate the physical
world and direct her awesome powers at the self so that "even
the grossest minds must see and hear/And cannot chuse but
feel."

At this point in MS. W, near the end of his address to
Coleridge, Wordsworth makes his first and only reference to
the "higher mind," a topic which becomes of central concern
when Wordsworth moves the ascent to Book XIII of the 1805
Prelude. In MS. W, he describes the power of such minds
only briefly, and in terms which recall quite clearly the
preceding description of the powers of Nature:

These from their native selves can deal about
Like transformation, to one life impart:
The functions of another, shift, create,
Trafficking with immeasurable thoughts . . .
(XIII, 93-96, crit. app.)

Moreover, the introduction of this consideration of the
"higher mind" does not shift Wordsworth's attention from
Nature to the mind of man; instead, it leads into a second
digression, this time a retrospective one, on these same
powers of Nature:

Oft tracing this analogy betwixt
The mind of man and nature, doth the scene
Which from the side of Snowden [sic] I beheld
Rise up before me, followed too in turn
By sundry others, whence I will select
A portion, living pictures to embody
This pleasing argument. (Prelude, p. 623)

That the theme of this "pleasing argument" will again be
Nature's "imaginative power" is clear from the alternate
introductory lines included in MS. W:

To this one scene which I from Snowdon's breast
Beheld might more be added to set forth
The manner in which oftener Nature works
Herself upon the outward face of things
As if with an imaginative power. (Prelude, p. 623)

The first of the "living pictures" which Wordsworth presents
is his recollection of a violent, stormy day "upon the edge
of Autumn," presumably meaning a day in late summer/early
autumn, since the leaves on the trees are still green. The
scene is one of virtual apocalyptic fury and destruction:
water, the mountains, darkness, light, silence, and a din
which "Pealed in the traveller's ear" are all experienced
as an undifferentiated phenomenon. There then appeared a
rainbow arching over the vale, the only source of stability
and continuity in this vision of elemental chaos:

Meanwhile, by what strange chance I cannot tell,
What combination of the wind and the clouds,
A large unmutilated rainbow stood
Immovable in heav'n kept standing there
With colossal stride bridging the vale,
The substance thin as dreams, lovelier than day.—
Amid the deafening uproar stood unmov'd,
Sustain'd itself through many minutes space;
As if it were pinn'd down by adamant.
(Prelude, pp. 623-24)

The second incident which Snowdon brings to Wordsworth's
mind is a vision not of a "boundary" time, but of a boundary
creature, a horse which the poet describes as "A Borderer
dwelling betwixt life and death/A living Statue or a statued Life" (p. 624). The horse which the poet viewed silhouetted against a moon-lit sky showed no signs of breathing, no motion, no color; no indication of life except "shape and substance." Its stance was equally striking, for motionless, with one leg elevated above the ground, it seemed frozen between stasis and some sort of movement. Indeed, it appeared to be, as the poet states, "Like an amphibious work of Nature's hand," something which combined apparently antithetical modes of being.

Wordsworth offers no specific interpretive comment on these two recollections from his past, but the passage with which he begins his third and final digression on Nature's powers indicates quite clearly his own conception of the rainbow and the horse. Like the vision on Snowdon they were spectacles which Nature had created purposefully to impress the viewer. And Wordsworth now makes explicit what was perhaps only implicit in the Snowdon incident, namely that man is simply an observer in such events, that the operations of human consciousness in no way enhance or intensify man's perception of them:

To these appearances which Nature thrusts
Upon our notice, her own naked work
Self-wrought, unaided by the human mind,
Add others more imperious; those I mean
Which on our sight she forces, calling man
To give new grandeur to her ministry.
Man suffering or enjoying. Meanest minds
Want not these monuments, though overlook'd
Or little prized; and books are full of them . . .

(p. 624)

To illustrate his point about the ability of books to supply man with instances of Nature's power, Wordsworth selects
incidents from the lives of Columbus, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Mungo Park, and Dampier (pp. 624-28). These passages are undeveloped and unrealized at best, and as examples of the powers of Nature they are qualitatively different from the preceding incidents, since what is most apparent in these four episodes is each explorer's experience of Nature's destructive might. Perhaps these lines are best explained as a sort of imaginative overflow from Wordsworth's discussion of books which, as we have seen, appears just prior to Snowdon in the manuscript. But however one accounts for these passages they are clearly inadequate as a conclusion to the long digression on Nature's "imaginative Power," not only because they are thematically inconsistent with what has preceded them, but also because they apparently led Wordsworth to a dead end instead of back to the vision on Snowdon as he had originally planned. That the poet did in fact intend to return to his narrative is clear from a somewhat confused but still intelligible passage near the opening of his address to Coleridge:

Following a track which would in season
(Passage which will conduct in season due
Back to the tale we have left behind . . .
(XIII, 66-69, crit. app.)

Wordsworth did not, however, manage to "conduct" his auditor "Back to the tale we . . . left behind," for at the end of the digression on the explorers he breaks off and turns to the other topics with which he would deal in this "5th book." We can, nonetheless, make some general observations about the ascent of Snowdon as it appears in MS. W. The first and by far the most important is that from the beginning to end, from
the actual narrative through all the digressions which it inspires, the theme of the episode is Nature, especially Nature's capacity to act as if with "imaginative power." In its conception of Nature, in its celebration of her vital relationship to man, the incident harkens back to some of the earliest passages in the poem, those which emphasized Nature's purposeful, tutelary influence on man, her ability to manipulate her objects and thereby impress images on the mind which remain undisturbed through the years. As he states in MS. W, these spectacles which Nature creates are so awesome, "That even grossest minds must see and hear/And cannot chuse but feel" (XIII, 84-85, crit. app.). Once properly organized and revised, this version of Snowdon would have been an impressive tribute to Nature's continuing ministry to the "favor'd being" whose earlier development she had influenced so strongly. But the very fact that the episode seems to revert so far back thematically suggests its inadequacy as the climax of the poem, for the burden of Books III and IV had been to show how this "favor'd being" had undergone change, how he had suffered "inner weakness," spiritual "falling off" and impoverishment, and how he had recovered from these experiences of loss. And to this recurring pattern of spiritual highs and lows the vision on Snowdon and the subsequent discourse on the operations of Nature were largely extraneous, since they offered neither insight into nor a resolution of the major concerns of the two previous books.

But if the ascent of Snowdon does not address itself to this theme, the manuscript passages which follow it suggest
that, like Books III and IV, Book V was to be structured according to the same pattern of decline and recovery. The clearest indication of this is the addition to the "spots of time" which appears later in W. We noted in an earlier chapter that in the Two-Part Prelude the "spots" are presented as generalized restorative experience, that they are not related to any specific event in Wordsworth's narrative. The new transitional passage which was to join the gibbet and the Christmas vacation scenes, however, illustrates that the poet intended to use the "spots" directly in his narrative to account for his recovery from some experience of loss:

Yet have I singled out not satisfied
With general feelings, here and there have cull'd
Some incidents that may explain whence came
My restoration, and with yet one (more) of these
I will conclude. One Christmas time . . .
(XI, 338-345, crit. app.)

Exactly what sort of loss the "functifying Virtue" of the "spots" was to have countered in the narrative is unclear from MS. W, although several passages suggest that it may have been the poet's rationalist/analytic crisis. Just before the revision of the "spots" there appears a draft of the following lines:

There comes a time when Reason, not the grand
And Simple Reason, but that humbler power
Which carries on its no inglorious work
By logic and minute analysis
Is of all Idols that which pleases most
The growing mind.  
(XI, 123-128)

Although in MS. W the poet describes little of his own enthrallment with analytic reason, he notes, in what is probably one of the last passages added to the manuscript,46
that the experiences of his earlier life preserved him from any prolonged or serious impairment:

In truth this malady of which I speak
Though aided by the times whose deeper sound
Without my knowledge sometimes might per chance
Make rural Nature's milder minstrelies
Inaudible did never take in me
Deep(root) hold or longer action. I had received
Impressions far too early and too strong
For this to last: I threw the habit off
Entirely and for ever, and again
In Nature's presence stood as I do now
A meditative and creative Soul.

(XI, 243-257, crit. app.)

These "Impressions" which he had "received . . . far too early and too strong" were, of course, the "spots of time," by which the mind is "nourished and invisibly repair'd" (XI, 265). Later, in MS. Z, Wordsworth would assert that the "efficacious spirit" of these memories, which "enables us to mount/When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen"

chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will.

(XI, 266-273, crit. app.)

Moreover, in MS. Z he does not credit his success in throwing "the habit off" to images of Nature implanted in consciousness, those "Impressions" "received . . . far too early and too strong"; instead, he emphasizes that he "had felt"

Too deeply and too early in my life,
Visitings of imaginative power
For this to last: I shook the habit off
 Entirely and for ever . . . (XI, 251-255 and crit. app.)

In March of 1804 Wordsworth was perhaps not ready to argue for the supremacy of consciousness and its creative energies over the senses; in MS. W the "meditative and
creative Soul" who stood "again/In Nature's presence" was perhaps still the "favor'd being" whose growth Nature had shaped and directed. But another passage in W suggests that the poet had to take only a very short step to assert that the mind is "lord and master," that what he had felt from earliest childhood had been "Visitings of imaginative power."
At the end of the gibbet scene he states that through such memories he gained a profound though fleeting insight into his own being and into mankind in general:

Oh! mystery of Man, from what a depth Proceed thy honours! I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base On which thy greatness stands, but this I feel,
That from thyself it is that thou must give, Else never canst receive. The days gone by Come back upon me from the dawn almost Of life: the hiding-places of my power
Seem open; I approach, and then they close . . .
(XI, 329-337)

This passage combines two very important ideas: first, that true strength and true restoration arise from within the self, and second, that memories of earliest childhood have a special significance in revealing the "depth" from which man's "honours" proceed and the "hiding-places" of his power. And we have seen both of these assertions, especially the latter, in our earlier discussion of the "Immortality Ode," where the poet proposed to "raise/The song of thanks and praise,"

... for those first affections
Those shadowy recollections
Which be they what they may
Are yet the fountain light of all our day
Are yet the master light of all our seeing
Uphold us cherish us . . .
(11. 145-151)

And we find a further parallel between the "spots" and the "Ode" in another addition to the gibbet incident, for after
describing the original scene he recalls returning "Long afterwards" to the same place, when

Upon the naked pool and dreary crags
And on the melancholy Beacon, fell
The spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam;
And think ye not with radiance more divine
From these remembrances, and from the power
They left behind? So feeling comes in aid
Of feeling, and diversity of strength
Attends on him who hath but once been strong.

(XI, 319-328 and crit. app.)

Thus these memories not only provided "diversity of strength," they also transformed the landscape by allowing him to project outward onto it "youth's golden gleam," a "radiance more divine," which quite clearly recalls or anticipates his description of the special perception of the world -- the "celestial light" and "the visionary gleam" -- which he attributes to the child in the "Ode." But in MS. W this radiant atmosphere has nothing to do with any temporal proximity to the source of divine illumination; instead, it was generated solely by consciousness and the operations of memory: the mind acting as "lord and master" over "outward sense," as he would later phrase it in MS. Z.

Thus MS. W shows the poet moving in opposite directions in his attempt to conclude his poem in five books. While the celebration of Nature in the Snowdon ascent represents a sort of regression to themes expressed in the earliest sections of the poem, the revisions of the "spots of time," with their celebration of mind, represent a movement toward the theme of the thirteen-book Prelude, which turns upon Wordsworth's experiences in Revolutionary France and their
disastrous aftermath, and thereby becomes even more emphatically a crisis poem, an account of "Imagination, How Impaired and Restored." The poet's decision to abandon the five-part structure may indeed have been dictated by his recognition of the increasing incompatibility of his original argument about Nature's "ministry" to man and his new concern for the autonomous powers of the mind. Although no simple mind-for-Nature substitution occurs in the longer version of the poem, the emphasis is clearly on the former, especially its role in the dynamics of decline and recovery narrated in the final three books.
Notes

1 On MS. WW (not described in Prelude) see Reed, CMY, pp. 641-642.

2 Reed dates the abandonment of the five-part structure c. 6-12 March, 1804, and the completion of MS. M 18 March at the latest (CMY, p. 638). See below.

3 Ibid., p. 640.

4 The quotations are from EV, pp. 436, 447, 454, and 452, respectively.

5 Reed, CMY, p. 638.

6 My estimate based on crit. app. to Book III, Prelude, pp. 70-106.

7 EV, p. 448.


9 Prelude, p.535 (note to IV, 345).

10 Reed, CMY, p. 643.

11 Sheats, loc. cit. The final three lines are, of course, the beginning of the digression proper. See Prelude, V, 1-48.

12 Ibid. My count, based on the description of the MS in Prelude, p. xxix, is over 300 lines, but Sheats points out several inaccuracies in this description.

13 My count of the lines in 18a is 155, but since Jaye prints and numbers all deleted lines it is difficult to come up with an accurate figure. The poet's own line count at the end of the episode in 18a is 152 (Jaye, p. 497, crit. app. to
11. 428-429), and the incident is 142 lines long in 1805. Thus 150 seems a reasonable total to use.

14
Reed, CMY, p. 641.

15
See Prelude, xxix.

16
Wordsworth/Gill contend that the "preamble" dates from mid-Nov. 1799 (519 and n. 43); Jaye suggests 1803 (p.317). Reed surveys the evidence and notes possible composition dates from 1799-1803, but concludes that "Lines 1-271 as a whole cannot be assigned a date before 13 Feb 1804" (CMY, p. 634).

17

18
See Chapter Three above.

19
Wordsworth introduces the climactic passage on the One Life with the line, "A track pursuing not untrod before" (III, 121). For a useful listing of comparable passages see Havens, pp. 344-345.

20
Laing, Self and Others, p. 68. See Chapter Two above.

21
It is noteworthy that Wordsworth here identifies this period of primarily internalized experience as an "eminence"; for an excellent study of this paradoxical aspect of spatial imagery in Romantic poetry see Northrup Frye, "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism," in Romanticism Reconsidered, ed. Frye (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 1-25.

22

23
We should note that the eventual outcome of such boyhood competition was not the strengthening of Wordsworth's sense of relatedness to others but just the opposite, for his "quiet independence of the heart" subsequently developed into "a diffidence and modesty," as well as a pronounced, even excessive, desire for isolation: "And I was taught to feel, perhaps too much,/ The self-sufficing power of solitude" (II, 76-78).

These lines are the conclusion of a verse paragraph later deleted from MS. A and omitted from subsequent MSS; see III, 524-541, crit. app.:

Prelude, III, 540, crit. app.

Ibid., III, 28-29, 79-81.

See Divided Self, esp. pp. 79-105.

In the 1850 text Wordsworth changed this metaphor into a tentative and rather awkwardly phrased simile: "Such life might not inaptly be compared/ To a floating island . . ." (III, 333-336, 1850).

Prelude, III, 663.


Stillinger, p. 549.

Cf. Prelude, III, 95-96, where Wordsworth describes the enthralling atmosphere of Cambridge as the "glitter of the show" and the "dazzle of the taper light."

Havens, pp. 365-366; Stillinger, p. 549.

See above.

Cf. Prelude, IV, 429-430: "I wish'd to see him move; but he remain'd/ Fix'd to his place . . . ."

See above.

Prelude, p. 535 (note to IV, 345).
39  Sheats, loc. cit.

40  Stillinger, p. 551.

41  Curtis, op. cit., p. 169 ("Ode," ll. 151-153). We should also note the similarities between this passage in MS. W and the lines in the MS. M version of the "Ode" which describe the child as one

    unto whom the grave  
    Is but a lovely bed without the sense or sight  
    Of day or the warm light  
    A living place where we in waiting lie

(l. 120-123)

that is, not a place of annihilation but a place of rest and release in which we wait, presumably to be transported to another realm.


45  MS. W is dated Jan.-Feb. 1804, and Book VI between late March and late April (Prelude, pp. xxix, li).

46  Reed, CMY, p. 463.

47  This phrase, the subtitle of Book XI, first appears in MS. B (Prelude, p. 430).
Chapter Five: The Thirteen-Book Prelude

We saw in the previous chapter that Wordsworth abandoned his attempts to conclude The Prelude in five books sometime after March 6, when he announced his preparations to begin the fifth and final book, and before March 18, when the transcription of MS. M, containing Books I-V as we now know them, was completed. But while we can determine approximately when the poet decided to revise and reshape the "poem on his own life," we can only speculate on a far more significant matter, why he did so. One influence on his decision to expand the poem, as we noted above, was probably the inability of the five-book structure to accommodate his long digression on books and education; and although it was perhaps not the most compelling consideration, it was the first one acted upon, for in MS. M this topic is developed at great length in its own separate book. A second possibility is that the poet recognized the incompatibility of the materials he was trying to integrate into his "5th book": the tribute to Nature's purposeful, tutelary influence on man, her ability to manipulate the physical world and "thrust" images upon the mind, as revealed in the ascent of Snowdon; and his subsequent celebration of the autonomous powers of consciousness, his discovery of "the hiding-places of his power" in childhood and in the "depth" of his own being (XI, 329-337). Finally, he may have realized that he had not fully pursued the problem of identity and the continuity of the self through time, the theme which had become central to the abortive
Five-Book **Prelude**. That these last two conjectures are at least a part of the explanation is clear from the increasing emphasis on the powers of mind in the 1805 **Prelude**, and from the fact that this longer version of the poem focuses not on a recurring pattern of minor impairment and restoration, but on one major cirsis, his spiritual collapse after the French Revolution, and his eventual recovery from this debilitating experience.

Book VI, in which the poet resumes his narrative after the long digression in the previous book, is of great significance to our understanding of the 1805 **Prelude**, for it introduces the major thematic concerns of the longer poem and points to the sort of resolution achieved in the final books. In Book VI Wordsworth describes in summary form his last two years at Cambridge, and, in greater detail, his subsequent walking tour of the Alps. Although the latter event was by far the most significant experience of the entire period, the poet's remarks on his later years at school provide a useful portrait of his state of being prior to this journey.

We learn from the poet's brief survey of his university life that he was again unable to participate in any meaningful way in the world at Cambridge. Although upon his arrival he felt a sense of release from "the bonds/Of indolent and vague society" (VI, 20-21), he eventually lapsed into the same sort of idleness and indirection that characterized much of his first year at school. But the reason for his inability to pursue a "settled plan" was not, as before, the distracting novelty and variety all around him, nor was it simply
his unwillingness to engage in academic competition. Although
the latter was again the case ("I was detached/Internally
from academic cares,/From every hope of prowess and reward"),
he did conceive an alternative other than associating solely
with "unthinking Natures" and "pillowy" minds (III, 519-520).
As he goes on to state, he "wish'd to be a lodger in that
house/Of Letters, and no more," to pursue his own "course
of independent study" rather than the university's prescribed
regimen (VI, 32-39). The image of the "lodger"—as opposed,
presumably, to a more intimate member of a group or family—
indicates a conscious desire to limit his personal involvement
in the life of the university community, since the principal
mode of participation was through exercises of "prowess and
reward." His desire to minimize his commitment of self by
being, as it were, at Cambridge without being of it was
frustrated, however, by his strong sense of guilt over those
who had sent him to school, a feeling

Which made the thought of planning for myself
A course of independent study seem
An act of disobedience towards them
Who lov'd me, proud rebellion and unkind.
(VI, 38-41)

Faced with two unpleasant alternatives—dispiriting and
demeaning competition, or guilty, rebellious "independent
study"—Wordsworth could act upon neither one; instead, his
divided state of mind "Gave treacherous sanction" to his
"overlove of freedom" and "indolence," and he turned from all
"regulations . . . As from restraints and bonds" (VI, 42-48).
Although the poet in retrospect strongly condemns his sensi-
tivity to the wishes of his loved ones ("This bastard virtue . . .
this cowardice"),³ his sense of obligation was clearly a powerful influence upon him, producing as it did a virtual paralysis of will. Moreover, that the simple recognition of the divergence of his own and others' intentions and concerns could produce such a response in him indicates considerable doubt about the validity of his own desires and about his capacity for purposeful self-direction and self-assertion.

Wordsworth notes two important sources of comfort and support during this period. The first was the exercise of his poetic powers:

The Poet's soul was with me at that time,  
Sweet meditations, the still overflow  
Of happiness and truth. (VI. 55-57)

It was a time of "A thousand hopes . . . a thousand tender dreams," a time when he experienced a "morning gladness" within him which has remained through the "Four years and thirty" of his life. This recognition of his poetic powers encouraged him "to trust/With firmness . . . that I might leave/Some monument behind which pure hearts/Should reverence," and thus helped to lessen the "dread awe" which he had felt for the "mighty names" of literary history (VI, 57-75). Now there is no question that Wordsworth's insight into his powers of mind and his sense of "fellowship/Of modest sympathy" (VI, 74-75) with the great artists of the past were strongly affirmative experiences, but his conception of art as a "monument," and his conception of the poet as the creator of an artifact "which pure hearts/Should reverence" seems
curiously narrow. Moreover, his description of the imagi-
native act itself is equally limited, for it seems to be
essentially a matter of self-indulgence and self-gratification:

I lov'd and I enjoy'd, that was my chief
And ruling business, happy in the strength
And loveliness of imagery and thought.
(VI, 77-79)

His picture of himself walking alone through the solitary
"groves/And tributary walks" of Cambridge, or experiencing
visionary moments while standing "Foot-bound" before a single
ash tree (VI, 80-109), recalls his withdrawal into the
seemingly self-sufficient world of consciousness at the
beginning of the Vagrant Soldier episode, but here nothing
in the external world worked as a corrective on this tendency.

Wordsworth's second source of comfort and support further
illustrates his preoccupation with the life of the mind at
this time, for in a lengthy passage he describes the "pleasure
gather'd from the elements/Of geometric science" (VI, 136-137).
Although he "had stepp'd/In these inquiries but a little,"
even this minimal knowledge of the subject was sufficient
"to exalt, to cheer [him] and compose," and to inspire
meditation on the relationship between the principles of
geometry and "the frame/And Laws of Nature" (VI, 137-146).
But beyond these "dark guesses" about the nature of the physical
world, his studies more often provided fundamental metaphysical
insights, for in the powers of mind engaged by this discipline
he perceived an image of a transcendent order:

Yet from this source more frequently I drew
A pleasure calm and deeper, a still sense
Of permanent and universal sway,
Of paramount endowment in the mind,
An image not unworthy of the one
Surpassing Life, which out of space and time,
Nor touched by welterings of passion, is
And hath the name of God. Transcendent peace
And silence did await upon these thoughts
That were a frequent comfort of my youth.
(VI, 150-159)

While his reference to the "one/Surpassing Life" recalls, at least initially, earlier phrases like, "for in all things/I saw one life and felt that it was joy" or "the one Presence, and the Life/Of the great whole" (II, 429-430; III, 130-131), the emphasis in this passage is completely different; where the One Life unites all of creation, man and the objects of the physical world, into one vital context of being, this "one/Surpassing Life" exists beyond the realm of "space and time," and is accessible to man only through an act of mind.

Wordsworth's final comments on geometry are in the form of an elaborate and complex simile which again emphasizes the mind's participation in or creation of its own autonomous world. In the simile he compares the pleasing, comforting effect of geometry upon him to the relief it brought a man shipwrecked on a deserted island and "beyond common wretched-ness depress'd" (VI, 167). Even considering the poet's qualification ("if things/Producing like effect, from outward cause/So different, may rightly be compar'd"), it is a rather unusual analogy. The shipwrecked man, already separated from the larger context of human society, separated himself further (and now by choice) from his "fellow Sufferers" on the island to "beguile his sorrow" in isolation by drawing geometric
"diagrams" in the sand (VI, 160-174). Although Wordsworth's point seems to be that he achieved the same sort of restoration, we should note that he did so through a similar process of withdrawal and isolation. Like the shipwrecked man, the poet was also removed from the larger human community, maintaining not a physical but a psychological distance, and achieving his primary gratifications, as we have seen, in the world of consciousness. But for the poet this sort of internalized experience was not consistently satisfying, for his mind was often "beset/With images, and haunted by itself" (VI, 179-180), at which times he turned to geometry for relief. His recovery from this state of bewilderment was thus effected not by turning outward and engaging the external world, but by turning further inward: the mind "haunted by itself," by images of its own creation, found release in the "abstractions" of geometry, which the poet in his later years recognized as "an independent world/Created out of pure Intelligence" (VI, 186-187), an autonomous realm wholly separated from physical reality outside the self, and accessible only through the operations of consciousness. Later we shall see that the powers of mind which Wordsworth relied upon at Cambridge—both his poetic powers and the mind's communication with the transcendent—were crucial to his recovery from the spiritual crisis following his revolutionary experiences.

The major episode of Book VI, Wordsworth's walking tour of the Continent, was significant for several different reasons. First, it was quite explicitly an act of willful self-assertion,
one which the poet recognized at the time as irresponsible
and contrary both to his own best interests at Cambridge and
to the desires of family and guardians:

An open slight
Of College cares and study was the scheme,
Nor entertain'd without concern for those
To whom my worldly interests were dear.
(VI, 342-345)

But now no "bastard virtue" or "cowardise," no sense of obli-
gation or solicitude for the feelings of others, frustrated
his intentions. And notably, he credits Nature with sanc-
tioning what seems to be largely a matter of self-indulgence:

But Nature then was sovereign in my heart,
And might forms seizing a youthful Fancy
Had given charter to irregular hopes.
(VI, 346-348)

Second, on this excursion the poet experienced his first
immediate and personal contact with the transforming power
of the Revolution, a power which Wordsworth recognized as
effecting the regeneration of all mankind:

But 'twas a time when Europe was rejoiced,
France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again.
(VI, 352-354)

From Calais, through all of France and into Switzerland, he
encountered the same vital, all-inclusive energy,

benevolence and blessedness
Spread like a fragrance everywhere, like Spring
That leaves no corner of the land untouch'd . . .
(VI, 364-369)

But after his enthusiastic participation in the life of
revolutionary France, after his exhilarating view of "human
nature . . . born again," his experience of Nature in the Alps
varied radically from moments of rapture to disappointment,
bewilderment, and at one point, a "deep and genuine sadness" (VI, 492). His anticipation of the grandeur of Mont Blanc, for example, made the sight of the actual mountain itself a dispiriting anti-climax:

That day we first
Beheld the summit of Mont Blanc, and griev'd
To have a soulless image on the eye
Which had usurp'd upon a living thought
That never more could be. . . 

(VI, 452-456)

In this instance he recovered from his depression quite easily, for "on the following dawn" he and his companion viewed the Vale of Chamouny which

With its dumb cataracts and streams of ice
A motionless array of mighty waves,
Five rivers broad and vast, [did] make rich amends,
And reconcil'd us to realities. 

(VI, 458-461)

But a more extreme response to the incapacity of Nature to fulfill the expectations of consciousness occurred later, at the crossing of the Alps. We never learn exactly what sort of experience Wordsworth had anticipated at this point in his journey, but it was apparently something which could satisfy his "stern mood," the "underthirst of vigour," which was "never utterly asleep" in him as he travelled. The actual event, however, was of so little consequence that he and his companion "cross'd the Alps" unknowingly, and the recognition of this fact plunged the poet into a moment of "dejection," a "deep and genuine sadness" (VI, 491-492). And as he recalls the experience while recreating it in the poem, he halts his narrative to describe the power of Imagination which, "in all the might of its endowments, came/Athwart me" in the act of composition:
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; . . . (VI, 525-532)

The rising of Imagination "like an unfather'd vapour" before
this experience of anti-climax revealed to the poet that
"Greatness resides not in this world but in "The invisible
world"; that

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.
(VI, 536-542)

Viewed from such a perspective, the incapacity of the world
to satisfy the self's demands upon it is of little signif-
icance, for the mind is an autonomous, wholly self-sufficient
entity, that needs neither support nor recognition from
beyond the self:

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, 543-548)

Thus barely halfway through the Thirteen-Book Prelude, fully
two books before Wordsworth even begins the account of his
subsequent despair, we have a clear anticipation of both
the nature of his crisis and its ultimate resolution. Indeed,
his spiritual collapse was precipitated by a much more intense
experience of the world's inability to satisfy his expecta-
tions, and the affirmation after his recovery is in large part
a recapitulation of this celebration of mind in Book VI.
The intervening books between VI and IX are not, of course, without consequence to the final design of the poem. The account of London in Book VII is especially significant, for it presents a striking contrast to his previous experiences in France. Although several months actually passed between Wordsworth's return from the continent and his subsequent residence in London, he mentions this period only in passing (VII, 57-60). The narrative effect which he thus achieves is the direct juxtaposition of his brief experience of "human nature . . . born again" in revolutionary France, and his extended encounter with human nature in its most unregenerate state in the chaotic abode of urban man. David Perkins comments that the city is for Wordsworth "the symbolic equation of the confusion and conflict of human impulses":

The city is wholly man-made; and in the city human nature is effectively walled within its own confines. It is not so much an example of man having gone off on the wrong track as it is the symbol of the track human nature inevitably makes for itself. 6

But to Perkins' assertion we must add that the promise of the Revolution, the initial effects of which Wordsworth had witnessed himself, was that this need not be "the track human nature inevitably makes for itself," that man can indeed be born anew.

Wordsworth begins his account of London by recalling that as a child he had considered the city not just a place of romantic and magical wonders but a place of radical transformation, for London inspired in him "Dreams hardly less intense than those which wrought/A change of Purpose in young
Whittington . . ." (VII, 108-117). But his conception of the city as the place where a "drooping Boy" can become "thrice Lord Mayor" very soon collapsed, for a childhood companion, "a cripple from his birth," journeyed to London and returned home unchanged, without even any "beams of glory brought away/From that new region" (VII, 97-104). As a sort of adult reminder of this childhood lesson, Wordsworth encountered "on the broadening Causeway" of the city "A travelling Cripple, by the trunk cut short,/And stumping with his arms" (VII, 215-220). The poet's apparently off-handed surmise, that "'Tis one perhaps, already met elsewhere" (VII, 218), was truer than he seemed to realize, for the grotesque figure was a stark embodiment of the city's incapacity to effect purposeful transformation, to impart "beams of glory" on resident or visitor.

Another of his childhood conceptions of urban life proved to be less illusory, for if London was to the child a place of magical, Dick Whittington-style conversions, it was at the same time a place of radical human isolation and unrelatedness:

Above all, one thought
Baffled my understanding, how men lived
Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still
Strangers, and knowing not each other's name.
(VII, 117-120)

The incident which most clearly illustrated the validity of this childhood sense of the city was the poet's encounter with the blind beggar, an event which the poet presents as only the most extreme of a typical urban experience: the recognition that "the face of every one/That passes by me is a mystery" (VII, 596-597). At one such moment, while feeling this sense
of absolute alienation, his mind became "oppress'd/By thoughts of what, and whither, when and how"; and as he lapsed into a trance-like state it seemed that everything which rendered life intelligible began to collapse:

And all the ballast of familiar life,
The present, and the past, hope, fear; all stays,
All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man
Went from me neither knowing me nor known . . .
(VII, 598-606)

It was thus in this state of total bewilderment, "beyond/The reach of common indications, lost/Amid the moving pageant," that he came upon the blind beggar, standing against a wall with a paper on his chest "to explain/The story of the Man, and who he was" (VII, 607-614). At this sight the poet's mind "turned round/As with the might of waters," and he interpreted the scene as a kind of confirmation of his deepest feelings of isolation, of the incomprehensibility of the self and of the absolute barrier between self and other:

and it seem'd
To me that in this Label was a type,
Or emblem, of the utmost that we know
Both of ourselves and of the universe.
(VII, 615-619)

The incident resembles in one sense the situation in "Resolution and Independence," where a troubled speaker, perhaps "by peculiar grace,/A leading from above," 7 meets a physical embodiment of his own most disturbing thoughts. But where the encounter with the leech-gatherer served as a corrective to the speaker's state of mind, the poet's meeting with the blind beggar, this other moment of admonishment "from another world" (VII, 622), served to confirm, even to intensify, his anxiety over human unrelatedness, for it led him to imagine a world
wholly devoid of human interaction, where every man hangs his personal history around his neck like an epitaph for other blind men to read.

If Wordsworth considered this intense experience of isolation as belonging "To this great City, by exclusive right," the one scene which he describes as the "type not false/Of what the mighty City is itself" is the "blank confusion" of the St. Bartholemew's Day Fair. Where the poet had seen man in his most exalted state in the joyous revolutionary festivals in France, he now saw man in his most degraded state, "buffoons against buffoons/Grimacing, writhing, screaming,"

All out-o'-th'-way, far-fetch'd, perverted things, All freaks of Nature, all Promethean thoughts Of Man; his dullness, madness, and their feats, All jumbled up together to make up This Parliament of Monsters. (VII, 687-691)

In Wordsworth's final image, the Fair, and the city of which it is the "type not false," becomes one grotesque machine, which like Carlyle's "hugh, dead, immeasurable steam engine" engorges and regurgitates its human grist:

Tents and Booths Meanwhile, as if the whole were one vast Mill, Are vomiting, receiving, on all sides, Men, Women, three-years' children, Babes in arms. (VII, 691-694)

Thus London as an agent of transformation was a sort of antitype to the Revolution, for instead of uniting men in communal celebrations of joy it changed them into a monstrous, surging, inhuman "Swarm," which like the physical objects around them have been

... melted and reduced To one identity, by differences That have no law, no meaning, and no end ... (VII, 697, 702-704)
Despite his own description of the alienating and disorienting effect of the city upon him, Wordsworth claims that he was able to look with "steadiness" at it, for he saw "the parts . . . but with a feeling of the whole" (VII, 710-712). But however often he managed to impart "Composure and ennobling Harmony" through "the press/Of self-destroying, transitory things" (VII, 736-740), however successfully his powers of mind transformed London into something intelligible, the city itself as a chaotic, estranging reality remained wholly untransformed.

The poet, however, does not then juxtapose this experience of unregenerate man in London with his return to France; instead, he pauses for the long "Retrospect" of Book VIII. As Paul D. Sheats remarks, in this book Wordsworth "reviews the entire course of The Prelude, qualifying and correcting attitudes expressed earlier in the poem . . . ."9 Most notable among these corrections is his new treatment of London. Book VIII begins, in fact, with a long set-piece of description, the Helvellyn festival (VIII, 1-61), whose harmonious portrait of "a little family of Men" gathered within the bosom of Nature serves as both a structural and thematic counterpoint to the St. Bartholomew's Day Fair in VII. But far more significant than this sort of implicit corrective on the previous book are his explicit reinterpretations. He begins his discussion of London in Book VIII with the rather curious assertion that his previous account had been superficial and frivolous:

Preceptress stern, that did instruct me next, London! to thee I willingly return. Erewhile my Verse play'd only with the flowers Enwrought upon thy mantle; satisfied
With this amusement, and a simple look
Of child-like inquisition, now and then
Cast upwards on thine eye to puzzle out
Some inner meanings, which might harbour there.
(VIII, 678-685)

London in VIII becomes the place of history,

The Fountain of my Country's destiny
And of the destiny of Earth itself.
(VIII, 747-748)

Indeed, when he crossed the "threshold" of the city it seemed that

A weight of Ages did at once descend
Upon my heart; no thought embodied, no
Distinct remembrances; but weight and power,
Power growing with the weight: . . .
(VIII, 700-706)

To be sure the city was still a place of "guilt" and "vice,"
"Debasement of the body [and] mind"; but unlike his previous experience, "the misery forced upon [his] sight," though "often scann'd/Most feelingly," could not

overthrow my trust
In what we may become, induce belief
That I was ignorant, had been falsely taught,
A Solitary, who with vain conceits
Had been inspired, and walk'd about in dreams.
(VIII, 802-810)

Instead, his experience of urban society inspired "elevating thoughts" on mankind; the city served as a sort of foil against which "everything that was indeed divine" in human nature "seem'd brighter far/For this deep shade in counterview"
(VIII, 813-816).

But while the poet stresses in Book VIII that human suffering and evil in London did not unnerve him, he asserts just the opposite in the review of his Cambridge period.

Although he states that he was often able to render such
sights "apt and pleasing to the view" by passing them "through the colouring of other times," he notes:

This notwithstanding, being brought more near
As I was now, to guilt and wretchedness,
I trembled, thought of human life at times
With an indefinite terror and dismay
Such as the storms and angry elements
Had bred in me, but gloomier far, a dim
Analogy to uproar and misrule,
Disquiet, danger, and obscurity. (VIII, 657-664)

Thus in modifying his account of London in Book VIII, Wordsworth transferred the sort of experience he had described in Book VII back to an earlier period in his life, when it could represent his first encounter with "temporal shapes/Of vice and folly" (VIII, 642-643), and not his response to man just prior to his journey to France, when, as he states at the conclusion of Book VIII, "the scale of love" for man was "filling fast" (VIII, 868-869).

Wordsworth's account of his commitment to the Revolution, his subsequent disillusionment, and his final crisis, is extremely complex, and while we cannot here follow the difficult turns and counterturns of his narrative, we can note the early conception of the Revolution and of his acceptance of its principles, and thus speculate on the personal significance to the poet of the collapse of the movement. First, the Revolution from the outset seemed to be sanctioned by Nature, the same benevolent, purposeful force that had shaped his own development:

And hence, O Friend!
If at the first great outbreak I rejoiced
Less than might well befit my youth, the cause
In part lay here, that unto me the events
Seemed nothing out of nature's certain course,
A gift that rather was come late than soon.

(IX, 245-253)
Second, while these events seemed to be a part of Nature's "certain course," his own allegiance to them seemed to be the logical extension of his own being; he describes himself up until the declaration of war between France and England as:

In brief, a child of nature, as at first,
Diffusing only those affections wider
That from the cradle had grown up with me,
And losing, in no other way than light
Is lost in light, the weak in the more strong . . .
(X, 753-757)

Finally, the Revolution seemed to be transforming the world according to the demands of consciousness; it was, as he states, "Bliss . . . to be alive" "in that dawn" both for the "inert," and for "lively natures" as well, those who found in the external world a new conformity with the desires of the self:

they too, who, of gentle mood,
Had watch'd all gentle motions, and to these
Had fitted their own thoughts, schemers more mild,
And in the region of their peaceful selves,
Did now find helpers to their hearts' desire,
And stuff at hand, plastic as they could wish
Were call'd upon to exercise their skill,
Not in Utopia, subterranean Fields,
Or some secreted Island, Heaven knows where,
But in the very world which is the world
Of all of us, the place in which, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all.
(X, 708-728)

Indeed, part of the efficacy of Beaupuy's mentorship was that under his influence the poet saw the ideal becoming the real. During their long conversations they discussed a variety of general topics, such as the "end" and "wisest forms" of government; the corruption of royal courts; man's God-given nobility and capacity to perceive "clear truth"; the creation of "mighty Nations" from "least beginnings"; and so on
(IX, 327-385). And while at first they could "appeal" only "To aspirations . . . of our own minds," they

finally beheld
A living confirmation of the whole
Before us in a People risen up
Fresh as the morning Star. (IX, 387-391)

Moreover, Beaupuy was himself the clearest example of thought and desire becoming reality; although the sort of "interchange of talk" which they shared is always "sweet," it is "far more sweet," the poet states,

If Nature then be standing on the brink
Of some great trial, and we hear the voice
Of One devoted, one whom circumstance
Hath call'd upon to embody his deep sense
In action, give it outwardly a shape
And that of benediction to the world. (IX, 404-409)

The failure of the Revolution to fulfill its initial promise of universal regeneration would thus have had a three-fold impact upon the poet, for it proved that his perception of Nature's "certain course" had been faulty; that his identity as a Patriot was not continuous with his earlier self; and that the world was inadequate to the demands of consciousness upon it. His recovery is perhaps best understood, then, in terms of his attempt to deal with these three realizations about his involvement in the Revolution.

In his first brief comments on the dynamics of his conversion, Wordsworth cites three important influences on him: Coleridge, his sister Dorothy, and Nature. Of the first he simply states that his "most precious Friend" "didiest lend a living help/To regulate my Soul" (X, 906-908). On Dorothy's role he is a bit more specific: by speaking "in a voice/Of
sudden admonition" and by her constant presence she "Maintained for me a saving intercourse/With my true self"; that is, she reaffirmed his identity as a poet, "Made me seek beneath that name/My office upon earth . . ." (X, 908-921). Moreover, under her influence he realized that his long period of despair and inner-division had only obscured and not diminished his being:

for, though impair'd and chang'd
Much as it seemed, I was no further chang'd
Than as a clouded, not a waning moon. (X, 916-918)

Now this image of the re-emergence of the "true self" after a period of absence, with its implication that another aspect of the self had engaged the world during his crisis, recalls several earlier moments in the poem when Wordsworth felt that his inner self was protected from involvement in the world by an "outward coat" or by the deep "caverns" in his being (III, 208, 246). Indeed, near the end of the poem Wordsworth offers a summary of the course of his narrative in which he uses much the same imagery to account for the re-appearance of his poetic self: he states that the theme of his work has been the growth of Imagination, and that in his poem he had

traced the stream
From darkness, and the very place of birth
In its blind cavern, whence is faintly heard
The sound of waters; follow'd it to light
And open day, accompanied its course
Among the ways of Nature, afterwards
Lost sight of it bewilder'd and engulf'd,
Then given it greeting, as it rose once more
With strength, reflecting in its solemn breast
The words of man and face of human life . . .
(XIII, 166-181)

Thus in terms of this metaphor, his "true self," his poetic self, was, like the stream of Imagination, submerged, "Lost
sight of" during his crisis, though it "rose once more/With strength" thereafter.

In his description of the role of Nature in his recovery we see that Nature's influence also brought about a reversion to a prior state of being, although this process sounds a good deal more like regression than the re-emergence of a "true self." Nature, he states, led him "through the weary labyrinth" of his despair "to open day" by reviving "the feelings of my earlier life," thereby providing "that strength and knowledge full of peace" which still sustains him (X, 922-930). In a later passage we learn that in addition to re-awakening the feelings of the past, Nature served to insulate the self, to protect it from anxiety-producing experiences: it is the "ministry" of Nature's "Groves"

To interpose the covert of their shades
Even as a sleep, betwixt the heart of man
And the uneasy world, 'twixt man himself,
Not seldom, and his own unquiet heart. (XI, 15-19)

We notice here that the source of anxiety is not just "the uneasy world," but the self's own response to that world, the "unquiet heart," which is put to sleep, as it were, by this type of "ministry." Nature's "counterpoise," which "Maintain'd . . . a secret happiness" for the poet "when the spirit of evil was at height" (XI, 32-34), thus provided the self with a refuge, a dark "covert," not just from the evil and disorder of the world but from the unsettling consciousness of it as well.

Having offered this all-to-brief account of the early stages of his recovery, Wordsworth turns in Book XI to a new
topic, to another lesser crisis which he suffered during the same period, the impairment of his capacity to experience Nature as he had before. In the troubled state of mind which finally led him to abandon "moral questions in despair" (X, 901), he also lost his earlier responsiveness to Nature; now not only did "the love/Of sitting thus in judgment interrupt[His] deeper feelings," but he suffered as well from a tyranny of the eye, that "state . . . In which the eye is master of the heart" (XI, 164-166, 171-172). The passage is, of course, the final version of the analytic/rationalist crisis, the drafts of which appear in MS. W. And here the implications of earlier manuscript are fully drawn out, for the incident is now an explicit celebration of mind. He "shook the habit off/Entirely and for ever" because he had felt

Too forcibly, too early in my life,
Visitings of imaginative power
For this to last . . .

(XI, 251-257)

Moreover, in the "spots of time," which he narrates next, he asserts that the power of these memories to restore the self derives from their testimony to the priority of consciousness over sense perception in our experience of the world:

This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had the deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will.
(XI, 269-273)

Moreover, the self's access to these restorative "spots" in times of deprivation indicates to the poet that he could look within himself, to his own inherent powers, for consolation and support in the future: "so feeling comes in aid/Of feeling,
and diversity of strength/Attends us, if but once we have been strong" (XI, 326-328).

With this description of his recovery from his analytic/rationalist habits of mind, and his earlier description of the re-emergency of his poetic self, Wordsworth's account of his conversion was apparently complete, for at the outset of Book XII the poet presents himself as fully restored to spiritual integrity:

Long time in search of knowledge desperate  
I was benighted heart and mind; but now  
On all sides day began to reappear . . .  
(XII, 20-22)

His subsequent tribute to "right reason," however, suggests something very significant about the re-appearance of "day" "On all sides," for one of the primary values of this power is its ability to moderate and redirect the demands of the self. His recovery, he states,

proved indeed that not in vain  
I had been taught to reverence a Power  
That is the very quality and shape  
And image of right reason, that matures  
Her processes by steadfast laws, gives birth  
To no impatient or fallacious hopes,  
No heat of passion or excessive zeal,  
No vain conceits . . .  (XII, 23-30)

His rather stoic language suggests that in his despair over the collapse of the Revolution he came to recognize how unsettling the self's desire for gratification can be, and thus sought to diminish this tendency by allowing the self no unreasonable expectations, no demands which the other might prove inadequate to satisfy. And in addition to moderating the self's tendency to aspire, the operations of this "Power"
also redirect it toward a new source of satisfaction: when
the mind is "over-fondly set/On leaving her incumbrances behind"
this power "Disposes her"

To seek in Man, and in the frame of life,
Social and individual, what there is
Desirable, affecting, good or fair . . .
(XII, 33-41)

The energies which were formerly expended in the mind's act
of striving, in its effort to leave "her incumbrances behind,"
were thereby transferred into a new and pleasurable examination
of man:

Thus moderated, thus composed, I found
Once more in Man an object of delight
Of pure imagination, and of love . . .
(XII, 53-55)

Having achieved at once a restraint on the mind's future
aspirations and a new accommodation with man, he could then
renounce the hopes of the past and look with confidence to
those of the future:

The promise of the present time retired
Into its true proportion; sanguine schemes,
Ambitious virtues pleased me less, I sought
For good in the familiar face of life
And built thereon my hopes of good to come.
(XII, 64-68)

He pursued this new search "For good in the familiar
face of life" not among those who had so disillusioned him,
"the men/Who thrust themselves upon this passive world/As
Rulers . . ."(XII, 72-73), but primarily among the seemingly
humble and insignificant people he met along "the lonely
roads." By examining these people, by looking "into the
depth of human souls,/Souls that appear to have no depth
at all/To vulgar eyes" (XII, 166-168), he found
Hope to my hope, and to my pleasure peace,
And steadiness; and healing and repose
To every angry passion. There I heard,
From mouths of lowly men and of obscure
A tale of honour; sounds in unison
With loftiest promises of good and fair.

(XII, 179-184)

And in addition to this sort of soothing restoration, he found through such experience the subject for his poetry, and thus reaffirmed his identity as a poet, the "true self" which he had rediscovered at the initial stage of his recovery:

Of these, said I, shall be my Song . . .
. . . thus haply shall I teach,
Inspire, through unadulterated ears
Pour rapture, tenderness, and hope, my theme
No more than the very heart of man . . .

(XII, 231-240)

But as significant as his new accommodation with man and the discovery of his poetic subject was the poet's renewed relationship with Nature after his crisis, which led to another, very different affirmation of the poetic self, one which involved not the moderation but the celebration of the mind's capacity for expansion and striving. At the conclusion of Book XII Wordsworth states that soon after his recovery he "seem'd . . . to have sight"

Of a new world, a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted and made visible
To other eyes . . .

(XII, 370-373)

The characteristic quality of this "new world" was that in experiencing it he felt a vital and dynamic sense of reciprocity between self and other, "an ennobling interchange/Of action from within and from without" (XII, 376-377). The poet then opens Book XIII with the climactic episode of the
Thirteen-Book Prelude, his vision and meditation on Mt. Snowdon, the incident which, presumably, most vividly revealed this "new world" to him.11

The actual details of the incident are essentially the same as those which we examined in our discussion of the MS. W version of the ascent. After emerging from the fog the poet beheld an awesome natural spectacle, one displaying the kind of energy and animation which had been such an important part of his childhood experience of Nature. But if this vision did indeed reveal to the poet the workings of "an ennobling interchange" between subject and object, his immediate meditation focused not on the relationship itself, nor on the "new world" which he would transmit and make visible, but rather on the operations of the mind. We recall that in MS. W Wordsworth suspended his narrative after his description of the scene "to contemplate for a needful while" Nature's ability to operate as if with "imaginative power" (XIII, 66-89, crit. app.). In the longer version of the poem he also breaks off at this point, but remaining in the narrative past he states:

A meditation rose in me that night
Upon the lonely Mountain when the scene
Had pass'd away, and it appear'd to me
The perfect image of a mighty Mind,
Of one that feeds upon infinity,
That is exalted by an underpresence
The sense of God, or whatsoe'er is dim
Or vast in its own being . . . (XIII, 68-73)

In particular, the physical transformations in the scene were, for the poet, "the express/Resemblance" of the manner in which "higher minds" "deal/With all objects of the universe"
(XIII, 74-92). And this power of mind extends beyond the ability to manipulate the particulars of the visible world, to "send abroad/Like transformation," for it makes the self "more fit/To hold communion with the invisible world" (XIII, 93-94, 104-105). The supreme gift which such powers of mind provide, however, is a continual reaffirmation of one's status as a "higher mind":

    hence the highest bliss
    That can be known is theirs, the consciousness
    Of whom they are habitually interfused
    Through every image, and through every thought
    And all impressions . . . (XIII, 107-111)

The self thus experiences its "highest bliss," it has its most profound confirmation of its identity, not in a reciprocal interchange with the other, but in the act of transforming it, thereby demonstrating its powers of mind and at times establishing contact with the "invisible world." Moreover, the self does not moderate its desires or expectations, it does not accommodate itself to a world which cannot satisfy its demands; indeed, the mind experiences its greatest fulfillment when it is exercising its highest powers, when it is striving to communicate with the transcendent, the "invisible world." As the poet states in the "Imagination" passage which we noted earlier in this chapter,

    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. (VI, 539-543)

M. H. Abrams asserts that Wordsworth learned through his participation in the Revolution that "man is not born for
ultimate satisfactions," that "man's tragic dignity" lies in his power "to sustain an aspiration that is commensurate with desire." The closing lines of The Prelude, however, suggest that after his recovery, indeed, after surveying the "Vast prospect of the world which I had been/And was" (XIII, 379-380), he did not consider himself or other men barred from the final satisfaction of their desires. Instead, his final hope is that as one of the "Prophets of Nature" he could awaken all men to what he had discovered, that he could "speak/A lasting inspiration" and thereby

Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this Frame of things
(Which, 'mid all the revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine.
(XIII, 446-452)

Thus the final affirmation of the poem is that the "work . . . Of [man's] redemption" is to be directed not toward restoring man's relationship to "this Frame of things," to the realm of human action with its ineffectual "revolutions in the hopes/And fears of men," but rather toward cultivating each man's own internal world, which can become a thing of supreme beauty, "as it is itself/Of substance and fabric more divine."

Thus the poem which began in 1798 as a series of loosely related descriptions of Wordsworth's "boyish pleasures" reached its final form eight years later, by which time it had grown to thirteen books and nearly 9,000 lines. Nor was the version of The Prelude transcribed in MSS. A and B in fact the
"final form" of the poem, for Wordsworth reworked this text intermittently for the next thirty-odd years until it reached the state in which it was finally published after the poet's death. But the revisions which Wordsworth introduced into his poem during these later years were as often stylistic as conceptual. Indeed, nothing between MSS. A and E can even approximate the dramatic shift from the original celebration of Nature's "ministry" in the Two-Part Prelude to the celebration of mind at the climax of the thirteen-book poem. Although Wordsworth proclaims himself to be one of the "Prophets of Nature," his prophetic message is no longer the glory of Nature and man's vital connection to "this Frame of things," but rather man's capacity to transcend this "Frame," to participate in the realm of the infinite, which is "Our destiny, our nature, and our home" (VI, 539).
Notes


2. We recall that upon his first arrival at school he had "melancholy thoughts,/ From personal and family regards" (III, 75-76), which may have also concerned others' expectations of him.

3. _Prelude_, VI, 42-43.


6. Perkins, _The Quest For Permanence_, p. 22.


10. Hence Sheats' assertion that in Book VIII Cambridge "becomes a benignly mediating transition between youth and maturity" is patently false (loc. cit.).

11. The passage begins, "In one of these excursions . . ." which clearly relates it back to the phrase, "about this period" in the last lines of Book XII. See Havens, pp. 602-603.