WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: A STUDY OF HIS USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOLITARY FIGURES

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PREFACE

William Wordsworth's predilection for and life-long use of the solitary figure in his poetry was initially revealed to this author while a member of a graduate class concerned with the Romantic Movement in English Literature. The class session terminated before I had achieved a concerted understanding of Wordsworth's solitary figure. However, continued reading in Wordsworth's canon directed my scattered thoughts. To objectify my own thinking on this subject, I went to secondary material. Critical recognition of the poet's interest in the solitary figure was plentiful, but his development and use of the solitary figure had not been traced. I thought that I recognized a pattern of development and use in his poetic creations, and I resolved to pursue Wordsworth's progressive treatment of the solitary figure with the hope of illuminating these facets of the poet's genius which had not been treated summarily.

The primary source for this study was Wordsworth's poetical canon. Special emphasis has been placed on The Prelude, his Gothic drama, The Borderers, and The Excursion. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, edited by Ernest de Selincourt, was vital to this study, as were the notes

included in each volume of his edition. In addition, his categorizing of Wordsworth's Works was a great aid in establishing the poet's development and use of the solitary figure. Moreover, Andrew C. Bradley's "Wordsworth" in Oxford Lectures on Poetry was of significant aid in providing the link between Wordsworth's solitary awareness and the power of the solitary figures that he found in Nature and in the universe.

Gratitude is expressed to Dr. Charles E. Walton who focused my wandering thoughts on the solitary figure and who provided needed assistance in positioning subject and verb. His selfless midnight efforts are appreciated. I am indebted, also, to Dr. William Cogswell whose commentary and encouragement as second reader were needed as this study was concluded.

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CHAPTER I

A PORTRAIT OF THE POET AS A SOLITARY BEING

Although national traits have lost their influence in determining character, Leslie Stephen's observations on the reclusive nature of the English race and his parallel discernment of a particular singularity in William Wordsworth remain valid. Stephen points out that, like all Englishmen, "Wordsworth was thoroughly insular or self-contained by temperment and circumstance."[1] Although Wordsworth recognized his own individuality, he did not specifically identify himself as "a solitary" until he had endured the misery of intellectual confusion, a turmoil that momentarily blinded his eyes and hardened his soul to the guidance of Nature (Prelude, VIII. 651-653).[2]

Nevertheless, the label "solitary" accurately describes him as the author of The Prelude. Furthermore, in

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[1]Leslie Stephen, Studies of a Biographer, I, 233.

[2]Thomas Hutchinson (ed.), Wordsworth: Poetical Works with Introduction and Notes, rev., Ernest de Selincourt, p. 555. All future references to The Prelude or the "Advertisement" for The Prelude, will be based on this edition. In addition, all references to The Prefaces or Essay Supplements to the Lyrical Ballads will be from this same text and noted within the body of the study.

light of Stephen's observations and the poet's own life work, one may apply the designation of solitary to Wordsworth at any point in his literary career. Indeed, in four phases of his life one may observe in his work a distinct use of solitary forms. His own solitary nature was a likely basis for his fascination with the solitary figures which appear in the poems of his early period. The era of the "meddling intellect" interrupted his innocent communion with the solitary, and he created solitary figures that were the human embodiments of his personal problems; he conceived these figures in an attempt to restore the balance of the intellect and emotion. Next, in his chronology, came a personal renaissance of spirit and creativity, and the poems of this period concentrate upon those solitary forms prominent in this personal renaissance. Next, in sequence, came a recognition of his need for a permanence in both the later days of his own life and in the existence that would begin after death. As evidence of this development, Wordsworth offered a major poetic and autobiographical work, which, although entitled The Prelude, carried also, the sub-title of Growth of a Poet's Mind (1805). His individuality was paramount, at least to him, and in this work he conceived of and carried out a poetic rendition of the growth of a single awareness to be submitted to the reading public for perusal and judgment. Although he wrote that The Prelude

was "not" a product of "self-conceit," he was certain of his ability to compose it, for he "had nothing to do but describe what he felt and thought."[3] His purpose statement can be taken as a recognition of the importance of his singular awareness.

His solitary nature dictated that he retire from humanity; in seclusion he could identify what he had felt and what he had conceived. The most potent feelings and the deepest thoughts came to him when he was alone, a solitary being. One of his earliest musings substantiates his singular self-concept:

> I used to brood over the stories of Enoch and Elijah, and almost to persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated, in something of the same way, to heaven.[4]

In early youth, he thought of himself as possessing the abilities of the biblical prophets. Humanity was put aside; the "I" was important. This state of mind had the power to reveal, and it provided insight into the realm of earthly existence:

> I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all

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[3]Ernest de Selincourt (ed.), The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805), p. 489.

[4]Ernest de Selincourt (ed.), Wordsworth's Poetical Works, IV, 463. All future references to poetic quotations and all further extracts from poems, except The Prelude, will be from the de Selincourt collection in five volumes. These notations, unless of a special nature, will hereafter be made within the body of the study.

> that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature.
> (Poetical Works, IV. 463)

This is Wordsworth's initial statement concerning the oneness of all things. Again, the vision or realization belongs completely to the solitary child. His childhood "immaterial nature" was later identified as a part of the "Soul of all the worlds" (Excursion, IX. 15). This identification is suggestive of a mystic origin of his individuality, an origin he could not define objectively:

> Who knows the individual hour in which
> His habits were first sown even as a seed?
> Who that shall point as with a wand and say
> "This portion of the river of my mind
> Came from yon fountain?"
> (Prelude, II. 206-210)

There were many fountains which fed his infantile existence and supplied his first thoughts and feelings.

One needs to recall that The Prelude was intended only to be a prelude, the initial segment of a great tripartite work to be entitled The Recluse. This trilogy was to have "for its principle subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement" (Excursion, "Preface"). It was only in seclusion that the solitary poet could "drink the visionary power" (Prelude, II. 311). Fortunately, he was allowed to drink freely through three stages of his life: "infant, boy, and adolescent." These were the sources of his poetic genius and the material for

the first segment of his portrait.[5] He was the progeny of himself; his solitary development provided the impetus for his later poetic creation.

His physical environment was significant in his development, and Nature's power aided in the substantiation of the poet as a solitary being. Nature, in his youth, was his absolute instructor, and he took his classes in solitude.[6] In The Prelude, he best explicates his debt to and admiration for Nature's guidance in the following address:

> Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
> And on the earth. Ye Visions of the hills!
> And Souls of lonely places! Can I think
> A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
> Such ministry, when ye through many a year
> Haunted me thus among my boyish sports,
> On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
> Impressed upon all forms the characters
> Of danger or desire; and thus did make
> The surface of the universal earth
> With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
> Work like a sea?
>
> (Prelude, I. 464-475)

Of particular interest is his identification of the "Souls of lonely places," because they or their auxiliaries "Impressed upon all forms the characters/ Of danger or desire." Since these forms are allocated to the "universal earth," it would not be illogical to label them as universal forms.

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[5]Jack Monroe Davis, "The Picture of the Mind: A Study of William Wordsworth's Art in Relation to His Thought," Diss. (Columbia, 1962), p. 47.

[6]Marian Mead, "Wordsworth's Eye," PMLA, XXXIV (June, 1919), 205.

All things spoke to the child, and he understood; he too, had an "immaterial nature," which was receptive to messages. For the youth, messages seemed most abundant when he sought natural scenes in natural settings. It was in these that his soul was most actively aware of being guided ("Lines Written in Early Spring," 5-6). In these places, he communed with both "God and Nature" (Prelude, II. 430).

This communion was comprised of beautiful and fearful visions. He sought Nature for these visions and also for the comfort of a sympathetic home. Legouis and Moorman document the traumatic experience Wordsworth suffered in the homes of relatives who did not care for him.[7] His lack of a loving family and his love for Nature have been seen as reason for his unconscious creation of a surrogate family comprised of mountains, rivers, clouds, and flowers.[8] This family, organic or inorganic, was beautiful.

Fear was a part of his family unit. The youth possessed "a native moral sensitiveness"; therefore, when he erred, the ministry of fear, which was as much a part of

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[7]For a detailed discussion of the problems aroused in the young William Wordsworth by the loss of his parents and the years of being kept by quasi-parents, one will find Emile Legouis' The Early Life of William Wordsworth 1770-1798 and Mary Moorman's William Wordsworth A Biography: The Early Years 1770-1803 both interesting and lucid.

[8]William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, p. 20.

nature as was beauty, would reprimand him.[9] In The Prelude, he records three major incidents of stealth in which he committed offenses that disturbed the peaceful solitude of his foster family (Prelude, I. 306-400). He was always alone when the ministry of fear pursued him. This fear was not a dark terror, however, but the sense of guilt that followed each error pursued him like "huge and mighty forms, that [did] not live / Like living men, but moved slowly through [his] mind / By day, and were a trouble to his dreams" (Prelude, I. 398-400). This passage indicates a formulation in his mind of the archetypal figure of Cain or the Wandering Jew pursued by past guilt.[10]

Historically, both the sinner and the faithful supplicant have sought their god in the heights. Wordsworth was both sinner and supplicant in finding his profoundest communion in the secluded heights. The ancients went into the mountains (from which their forefathers had descended) and, caught up in religious ecstasy, thought that the mist and thunder spoke to them. They reacted with fear and mystification and descended, certain that they had received ministration. The mountains of Wordsworth's childhood present situations parallel to those affecting earlier

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[9]Elias Hershey Sneath, Wordsworth: Poet of Nature and Poet of Man, p. 14.

[10]Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, p. 57.

supplicants. The lessons which the poet received added to his conception of his singular integrity.[11] He was always alone when moved in this fashion.

The spirit of the place awoke his first poetic inclinations and, together with solitude, fostered an early premonition of his future poetic vocation. The spirit worked on his feelings and:

> to him imparted power
> That through the growing faculties of sense
> [Did] like an agent of the one great Mind
> Create, creator and receiver both,
> Working but in alliance with the works
> Which is [beheld].--Such, verely, is the first
> Poetic spirit of our human life,
> By uniform control of after years,
> In most, abated or suppressed; in some
> Through every change of growth and of decay
> Pre-eminent till death.
> (Prelude, II. 256-264)

Following his communion with "The one great Mind," there stirred within him his first awareness of his "Poetic spirit." If he had been allowed a continued freedom to roam the heights and receive instruction, his innocence may never have failed. But his mother died; his father could not handle both vocation and domestic situation. The intimate fraternity of William, Dorothy, and John was dissolved, and William became an inmate at Hawkshead Grammar School.[12] His thoughts concerning his incarceration there parallel

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[11]John Jones, The Egotistical Sublime, p. 32.

[12]Emile Legouis, The Early Life of William Wordsworth 1770-1798, p. 27.

Chateaubriand's comments on his own early confinement in which the Frenchman reveals that "it took some time for an owl like [him] to get accustomed to the cage of a school, and to time his flight by the sound of a bell."[13] The years Wordsworth spent at Hawkshead have been recognized by Legouis as significant in providing a secure foundation for the poet's forge.[14] It was not the mental exercise but the rowdy boyish physical exertion that was young Wordsworth's delight, for "animal activities" produced in him a magnified sense of self-awareness (Prelude, VIII. 344). In his perception of individual integrity, he was constantly reminded that he was a part of a greater whole, and these sensings were reinforced by a recognition of a power without communing with a feeling within (Prelude, I. 33-35). Persistently, the message came to him most clearly when he was most alone.

Wordsworth enjoyed more than etheral company while at Hawkshead. Human company, too, strengthened his innate feelings of being an entirely singular creation. Because he lacked parents, he had to be boarded. He was allocated to a willing Dame Ann Tyson, an unaffected gossip who informed her sensitive ward of the movement of village life and the personal history of most of its residents.[15] Not all the

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[13]Chateaubriand, Memoires d' Outre-Tombe, quoted in Legouis, op. cit., p. 28.

[14]Legouis, op. cit., p. 41.

[15]Ibid., p. 31.

people were permanent inhabitants; some were the harmless vagrants and pedlars who populated the English countryside.[16] Later in life, Wordsworth recalled in The Excursion a particular pedlar whose attention had heavily influenced his young mind:

> He loved me; from a swarm of rosy boys
> Singled out me, as he in sport would say,
> For my grave looks, too thoughtful for my years.
> As I grew up, it was my best delight
> To be his chosen comrade.
> (Excursion, I. 57-61)

He was special; he had been "singled out" for possessions that were his only. His face had betrayed the fact that he had thoughts which the other boys lacked. (The poet had an interest in physiognomy, and this is an example of its application in his poetry).

The Hawkshead period was a time in which the youthful awareness could explore the paths of nature and the society of man simultaneously. His mind open, Wordsworth could absorb the good of man and nature and yet disregard, almost casually, the bleak and dark with which he was confronted. The world of man cast an entangling net, but he was a solitary Nature's child, and her allurements were much more subtle. When the pressures of school and society grew too intense, he would always slip off to be with what Emerson

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[16] Ibid., p. 34.

recognized as his twin "master[s] . . . nature and solitude."[17] It was in these times of secluded reunion, accompanied by a more mature awareness, that Wordsworth became aware of:

> a dark
> Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
> Discordant elements [and] makes them cling together
> In one society . . . .
> (Prelude, I. 341-344)

This realization was further substantiation of his singularity. He had early been aware of the union of his life-force with a greater power. Now, this awareness was provided greater substance by the adolescent's recognition. At this time, he possessed an active mind that alone was seeing and understanding the life in things. He solely was aware of a song akin to the music of the spheres:

> The song would speak
> Of that intermingled building reared
> By observation of affinities
> In objects where no brotherhood exists
> To passive minds.
> (Prelude, II. 382-386)

This realization of "similitude in dissimilitude" (Preface, p. 740) was the apparent impetus for the development of his creative consciousness; he became aware that "An auxiliar light / Came from [his] mind, which on the setting sun / Bestowed new splendour" (Prelude, II. 368-370). This is a

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[17]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "English Traits," Works: Four Volumes in One, II, 181.

potent image, but at this point Wordsworth was so bound up with his unique relationship with powers which were only his that the reader is not really surprised by it. Nature knew the hour of his creative birth, and at that moment claimed him for her own spokesman (Prelude, IV. 334-337). Her claim possessed a similarity to the selection of Wordsworth as the pedlar's companion. He was chosen because he was unique; he had singular qualities. He stood out as a solitary individual.

Initially, the reason for Wordsworth's being in solitude was to escape human society, which interrupted Nature's ministration and which had caused pain. Keeping this pain in mind and recalling the fact that The Recluse was to be written by "a poet living in retirement" (Excursion, "Preface"), one understands McGhee's association of Wordsworth's personality with the definition of the solitarie found in the French L' Encyclopédia, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts Métiers, in which McGhee has noted that the solitarie, to qualify, must have suffered some pain at the hands of society, must think upon his position and the society that has caused him to withdraw, and, finally, must gain happiness in his contemplation.[18] The society of man had caused Wordsworth much pain; he had

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[18]Dorothy M. McGhee, "Conte Philosophique Evolves its Solitarie," PMLA, LXI (September, 1946), 756-757.

separated himself in beautiful, but yet fearful and awe-inspiring surroundings; and there because isolation brought the meditative mood he thought and, searching his memory for thoughts and feelings, found happiness in the discovery that many early experiences maintained their freshness.[19] Therefore, Wordsworth does fit the definition of the *solitarie* as drawn on the Continent.

The Prelude was the first major work written by the poet in retirement, a *solitarie*. It will be recalled that he proposed in *The Prelude* to "describe what [he] felt and thought." This statement of purpose might be amended to include also what he saw. For *The Prelude* is a great catalogue of the poet's reactions to things that he saw. His vision into things occurred when he was

> laid asleep
> In body, and became a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony and the deep power of joy
> [He saw] into the life of things.
> ("Tintern Abbey," 45-49)

His vision into things, the power behind life, is in essence the source of his "feelings and thoughts." Those things which agitated his vision to the greatest extent were things like himself, solitary things, which aroused his feelings and awoke his thoughts. Bradley has provided the connection between the power which was Wordsworth's solitary personality

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[19]Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

and his fascination with the solitary things he found in a natural setting. Bradley explains that "to call a thing lonely or solitary, is with [Wordsworth], to say that it opens a bright and solemn vista into infinity."[20] As "a solitary" (Prelude, VIII. 652) communing with the singular objects of Nature, the poet had the sight that Bradley defines. Wordsworth's poetic efforts, then, became tasks of bringing to the reader the vision into infinity which only he was capable of seeing. A possible prose substantiation of this ascertion is this:

> I do not know how to give my Reader a more exact notion of the style in which it was my wish an intention to write, than by informing him that I have at all times endeavored to look steadily at my subject.
> (Lyrical Ballads, "Preface," p. 736)

His subject was the singular; an observation of a swan, tree, rock, cloud, ruin, or man was the occasion for a profoundly complex trigger-action in the poet's awareness that has not and perhaps cannot be explained. Observation of the singular, if juxtaposed with insight into its inner life, produced a sense of recognition that appears to be at the base of Wordsworth's poetic definition of his imaginative process, i.e., what he experiences "when the light of sense / Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed the invisible

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[20] Andrew C. Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 142.

world" (Prelude, VI. 600-602). This "flash" was pecularily his, and he attempted to delineate it in The Prelude. The effort was not totally wasted, but his imagination was one of the tools which gave him his claim to genius, and he found it difficult to define objectively something as innately his own as the workings of his own mind. The imagination is the solitary creation of his singular mind. Hazlitt recognized Wordsworth's singular genius but could only generalize about its power and the realm in which it functioned: "The power of [Wordsworth's] mind preys upon itself. He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought."[21] Wordsworth called himself "a solitary." The pedlar of The Excursion chose him to be a comrade because of something about him that was different--he had a singular look. Nature had chosen him to be her priest because of his personal awareness of her twin powers of beauty and fear; few shared his insight or his sensitivity. As Hazlitt noticed, Wordsworth's work was inward. He did not need society; he required solitude. His work sprang from his own head and heart. His early poetic efforts were concerned with his fascination for solitary, natural objects. A brief survey of representative early

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[21]William Hazlitt, "On Mr. Wordsworth's Poem 'The Excursion'," Lectures on the English Poets from Chaucer to Byron, p. 347.

works indicates the allurement these singular objects possessed for this singular poet.

In Ernest de Selincourt's arrangement of the collected poetry, Wordsworth's first recorded fascination with a singular creation is to be found in "Dirge: Sung by a Minstrel." Although not specifically dated by either Wordsworth or De Selincourt, the latter has placed it between two other poems of "Juvenilia"--"A Ballad," written March 23 and 24 of 1787, and "Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep," written later in 1787.[22] The reference made in "Dirge" to a single flower catches the reader's eye, and the association the poet makes attracts the mind. Here, Wordsworth writes of the grave of a dead maiden:

> And if a scatter'd flower be there,
> Oft as they gather round thy sods
> That flower the wandering group shall spare
> And think it is a flower of God's.
> ("Dirge," 51-54)

His mother had provided him with the conventional biblical education, a fact which would explain his reference to God; but the image of the singular flower can have come only from his thought. The flower is not enveloped in a haze that is brushed aside when the imagination flashes, but it has suggestion of greater than ordinary power; it might be

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[22]Ernest de Selincourt, Poetical Works, I, 259; 267; 269.

God's. In the "Dirge," Wordsworth, perhaps unconsciously, adumbrates thoughts of pre-existence. For example, the poem states that at the grave of the maiden "Maids yet unborn in secret there / Of Death forewarn'd shall pour the tear" ("Dirge," 43-44). Moreover, the ministry of fear, expressed so manifestly in The Prelude, also sounds forth in the "Dirge":

> And should some boy wild in the race
> On thy green grave unweeting start,
> Strange fear shall flie across his face
> And home he goes with haunted heart.
> ("Dirge," 47-50)

In 1787, several years before The Prelude was begun, a voice--a spirit--had walked the earth and called to the sensitive and responsive soul, drifting into the active consciousness of the wild highland child. He knew that a power was about, for through the revelations of beauty and fear in the "Dirge" Wordsworth informed the reader that the single flower held innate power which in childish reverence the poet associated with God; the ministry of fear referred to in the "Dirge" received a more comprehensive treatment in The Prelude.

Wordsworth's first poem to be put in print was his "Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep."[23] The material in this poem, allocated by De Selincourt to the

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[23] Ibid., I, 367.

work of "Juvenilia," is prophetic of the poet's later thoughts--thoughts having lost the exuberance of youthful play. Heavy sentiment and emotional response within the poet are initiated by the sight of tears. The poet's life-force then escapes his body to become a wandering spirit, to become a mental awareness, rather than a physical form bound to the earth. The poem concludes with the poet's re-embodiment; the spiritual becomes concrete, and the wanderer is summarily identified as a human wretch groping toward "hospitable light" ("Sonnet: Miss Williams Weep," 14).[24] This solitary light is a guide. It does not offer succor; it is simply a salve for blunted emotions and not that which lifts the mind above the swelter of physical existence. It appears to signify rest for the wanderer, security in a habitation comprised of a human company.

The last poem to be examined in this initial chapter concerned with a portrait of the poet as a solitary being is "The Vale of Esthwaite." It is Wordsworth's first long autobiographical poem.[25] In the stanzas of this work, he reveals his fascination with the singular, both the isolated man and nature's singular creations. The ministry of fear is also much in evidence, as is the poet as a youth partici-

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[24] Ibid., I, 269.

[25] R. F. Storch, "Wordsworth's The Borderers: The Poet As Anthropologist," ELH, XXXVI (June, 1969), 352.

pating in an initation into the poet's craft: initation by a solemn specter.

A description of animal life superimposed upon a mountainous backdrop quickly establishes the poet's fascination with heightened conditions to be found in his boyhood haunts: "And on yon summit brown and bare, / That seems an island in the air, / The shepherd's dog I mark" ("Vale of Esthwaite," 13-15). The poet, then, introduces his reader to a wandering ministrel, also enhanced by atmospheric conditions, "Cold wandering thro' the swampy way" ("Vale of Esthwaite," 56). Once the reader has been introduced to the varied aspects of this gloomy vale, he is then introduced to the poet, who indicates his reclusive habit of "wandering ... oft by Esthwaite's [stream]" ("Vale of Esthwaite," 75). In the vale are the ruins of a castle, and the poet is lured to this Gothic setting because it was here that he once heard voices and allowed his boyish thoughts to create mysterious legends of horror and death. Alone, Wordsworth loved to be frightened--"I try'd the wide vaults dark and blind / While Terror lash'd me on behind" ("Vale of Esthwaite," 307-308). In these dark and peopled vaults, he found a specter that "on one branded arm ... bore / What seem'd the poet's harp of yore" ("Vale of Esthwaite," 334-335). Was this the start of Wordsworth's initiation into the world of poetry? The poet acknowledges

that "since that hour, the world unknown, / The world of shades is all my own" ("Vale of Esthwaite," 377-378). His insight appears to have been granted at this time, and knowledge and perceptive insight, too. What would appear to be primarily a dark world must be seen as the world unknown to common man but as the shadowing-forth of a higher reality to the poet.

The haunting nature of this poem, autobiographical in content, possibly assigns to the male specter not only the role of the ancient poet but also the masculine guidance missing from the poet's youth:

> Long, long, upon yon naked rock
> Alone, I bore the bitter shock;
> Long, long, my swimming eyes did roam
> For little Horses to bear me home,
> To bear me--what avails the tears?
> To sorrow o'er my Father's bier.
> ("Vale of Esthwaite," 422-427)

Empson has suggested that Wordsworth sought the mountains as a replacement for his own dead father; it is possible that he created this spectral image for the same purpose.[26] This suggestion might seem entirely without support if Wordsworth had not provided the following: "For I must never share / A tender parent's guardian care," or be secure "from the world's unkind alarm" ("Vale of Esthwaite," 514-516). Dorothy is apparently the youth's sole helpmate

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[26]Empson, op. cit., p. 20.

throughout these difficult times: "because ... I fondly view / All, all that Heav'n has claimed, in you" ("Vale of Esthwaite," 534-535).[27]

The first books of The Prelude, exerpts from the poems of "Juvenilia," and brief references in the later Excursion document Wordsworth's mind as one plagued by the absence of parents, the role of nature as a guiding force in his life, and the recognition by the youth of his personal singularity, his utterly unique quality of seeing, hearing, and feeling deeply things which went unnoticed by the unreceptive minds of the masses. His solitary awareness, sensitive to a moral order in the universe, sensitive to a beneficient guiding power in Nature, was his sole interest; he wanted to know where it had come from, its function, and to what ends it was directed. To study his awareness his intellect prescribed for him a solitary existence, and the insight that he received in solitude from powers unseen was proof that the perscription was correct. Wordsworth did not begin a new cult of the isolated man; solitary existence had been practiced centuries prior to his birth; but he did join this reclusive assemblage. A quotation from Coleridge

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[27]De Selincourt, op. cit., I, 282, 369. In the lines preceding the extract (528-531), Wordsworth directly refers to his "Sister," and in the note provided by de Selincourt, p. 369, is further substantiation that the pronominal reference was to Dorothy and not Mary Hutchinson Wordsworth.

and Southey's Table Talk and Omniana serves as a summary of this portrait: "'It [was] good for [Wordsworth] to be alone.'"[28]

[28]Samuel Taylor Coleridge quoted in Jones, op. cit., p. 29.

CHAPTER II

THE SOLITARY OF THE MEDDLING INTELLECT

The year was 1787, and William Wordsworth noted that his "seventeenth year was come" (Prelude, II. 386). Up to the time of this birthday, he had been a solitary child accepting Nature and her auxiliary powers as a part of himself. With a more mature awareness, he now realized that Nature was an external power. Although she still directed him, he was now aware of a real and powerful influence that worked upon him.[29] However, his recognition and enjoyment of "Nature and her overflowing soul" was to be shortlived (Prelude, II. 398), for he was soon to be involved with the "meddling intellect" ("Tables Turned," 26) which grew out of his Cambridge experience.

The time spent at Hawkshead had represented the last stage of his youth. Now, the natural setting and sense of security that these years had supplied were left behind as he abandoned his native dales for the university. Until now, he had pursued his singular lifestyle in Nature, so

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[29]Emile Legouis, op. cit., p. 50.

that the thought of being cast into a completely human society was frightening (Prelude, II. 34; 302-311). At the university, the young novice missed his home and the natural objects which had fascinated him; but on the campus, he found in Newton's statue a compensation. His interest in Newton was based upon the association of his own solitary nature with Newton's singularity. The pedlar of The Excursion had selected the poet because of his facial qualities that spoke of an inner singularity, and it was Newton's "silent face" which first captivated Wordsworth now, but it was Newton's intellect that secured his place in Wordsworth's mind. For the poet, Newton's face was indicative of a "mind for ever / Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone" (Prelude, III. 61-62). Although not a singular natural object, Newton's aspect possessed the same kind of latent power as that noted in the single flower from the "Dirge: Sung by a Minstrel."

At Cambridge, Wordsworth "was disturbed at times by prudent thoughts, / [And] a strangeness of mind, / A feeling that [he] was not for that hour, / Not for that place" (Prelude, III. 77; 80-82). His soul was dissatisfied with the lackluster visual effects of buildings, chapels, and gates. They did not speak to him as Nature had spoken. Consequently, he was forced to pursue a solitary path through the surrounding rural areas. In these settings, although

already spoiled by the presence of man, Wordsworth in memory recalled sensations and experiences in his days of youthful awareness (Prelude, III. 90-96). It was during these excursions that he

> . . . felt
> What independent solaces were his ,
> To mitigate the injurious sway of place
> Or circumstance, how far soever changed
> In youth, or to be changed in after years.
> As if awakened, summoned, roused, constrained,
> [He] looked for universal things.
> (Prelude, III. 100-106)

Even while suffering under the "injurious sway of place / Or circumstance," he was realizing the "independent solaces" that made him a solitary being (III. 185-186). Unfortunately, however, he was consciously looking for things which might inspire him; and his innocent awareness was faltering. Prior to his Cambridge days, he had never been compelled to search for things; images had come to him unsolicitedly. He now discovered himself searching with the "bodily eye" and exposing his new-found visions to the "strict analogies of thought" (Prelude, III. 115; 125). The eye, in attempting to be the primary organ of perception, constantly supplied new images to the mind which, in turn, experienced an instantaneous wealth of new material. The bodily eye and mind were a powerful twosome. The heart and soul which had once unconsciously spoken with the power of Nature were in abeyance (Prelude, III. 164-166). He had forgotten that

his greatest comfort from Nature had come when he was most unconscious of her aid.

Now conscious of her power, he was shaken also by the power of the meddling intellect:

> It hath been told, that when the first delight
> That flashed upon me from this novel show
> Had failed, the mind returned into herself;
> Yet true it is, that I had made a change
> In climate, and my nature's outward coat
> Changed also slowly and insensibly.
> Full oft the quiet and exalted thoughts
> Of loneliness gave way to empty noise
> And superficial pastimes; now and then
> Forced labour, and more frequently forced hopes;
> And, worst of all, a treasonable growth
> Of indecisive judgments, that impaired
> And shook the mind's simplicity.
> (Prelude, III. 201-213)

In The Prelude, the meddling intellect has been (conjecturally) labelled as "a treasonable growth / Of indecisive judgments, that impaired / And shook the mind's simplicity." Wordsworth now provides poetic substantiation for this authorial linking:

> . . . a swarm
> Of heady schemes jostling each other,
> . . . all conspired
> To lure my mind from habitual quest
> Of feeling pleasures, to depress the zeal
> And damp those yearnings which had once been mine--
> A wild, unworldy-minded youth, given up
> To his own eager thoughts.
> (Prelude, IV. 280-281; 286-291)

The dominance of the mind had stifled the "feeling pleasures," and he was aware of "an inner falling off" (Prelude, IV. 278). This first attack upon the innocent awareness of

the solitary child resulted in the death of such innocence. The pangs of death were drawn out, and the poet looked with difficulty back to this time. The scar was deep, and the mind cast a haze over the memory: "We see but darkly / Even when we look behind us" (Prelude, II. 479-480).

Aware that her ordained priest had forsaken her for newly-discovered mental distractions, Nature's beauty abandoned him. He knew that he was guilt-pursued when Nature altered her mood to fit his. He was now visited by "Moods melancholy, fits of spleen, that loved / A pensive sky, sad days, and piping winds . . ." (Prelude, VI. 173-174). Like Cain in his bitter confrontation with his deed, Wordsworth admits, "the fault . . . was mine; mine be the blame" (Prelude, VI. 189). His acknowledged nihilism and recognized intellectualism seared his self-concept. In deep despondency, he lamented: "Our meddling intellect / Misshapes the beateous forms of things:-- / We murder to dissect" ("Tables Turned," 26-28). His fall from innocence suggests an analogy between the solitary poet and archetypal Adam. His realization that his intellectualism had murdered, had destroyed, his innocent relationship with "God and Nature" is indicative of the archetypal guilt-pursued Cain.[30]

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[30]Bodkin, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

Having once fallen, he soon discovered that a second sin was not difficult. This error was not committed against Nature or the singular mind with which the poet had communed with Nature; but born out of the "meddling intellect" and its inroads into the innocent conscience, it was a sin against humanity. The occasion of the second sin occurred on the continent as it had for many young Englishmen in earlier times.[31] The political conditions on the continent and, in particular, in France, have been well-documented, and the turmoil in which Wordsworth involved himself at this time has also been dealt with summarily. Consequently, space need not be accorded to a reiteration of these matters except to clarify one significant point. The poet fathered a daughter in France and abandoned her to a life without parental image, a circumstance fully understood by Wordsworth.[32] His affair with Annette Vallon could have cured him of his dominant intellect and might have re-directed his solitary journey through life.[33] However,

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[31]The celebrated and lamented "Grand Tour," and its associated ills claimed many, James Boswell being a notable example. Frederick A. Pottle's James Boswell: The Earlier Years 1740-1769 documents in depth the ills Boswell fell into in Europe. The text itself is an illuminating work, but the scholarly edition has an exception Index and one would not have to read the entire work to varify these grosser facts.

[32]Legouis, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

[33]Willard L. Sperry, Wordsworth's Anti-Climax, pp. 92-93.

although Annette was productive, she could not awaken the emotions necessary for alleviating the trouble caused by the meddling intellect. Her patient abandoned her early in December, 1792; and Ann-Caroline Wordsworth was born on December 15, 1792.[34] Wordsworth's reasons for leaving France are not clear; perhaps he thought that a passionate relationship would ultimately destroy his singularity and, subsequently, any hope of a reconciliation with the great natural powers that had spoken to him as an innocent, solitary child. Regardless of what he felt or thought at this time, he quit France and settled in London, hoping to cure himself of both the meddling intellect and the newly-acquired sense of guilt--the result of his abandonment of his child. In London, however, he found himself deeply troubled. His solitary nature found no rest in the urban noise and political excitement, and ironically, quiet made him more aware of his guilt. Later, he describes the deep nature of his wounds at this time:

> Most melancholy at that time, O Friend! (Coleridge)
> Were my day-thoughts,--my nights were miserable;
> Through months, through years, long after the last beat
> Of those atrocities, the hour of sleep
> To me came rarely changed with natural gifts.
> (Prelude, X. 397-401)

His attempts to purge himself of a melancholy mood and troubled sleep were an effort to alleviate the pain and

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[34]George McLean Harper, Wordsworth's French Daughter, pp. 29-30.

insecurity that were a part of the meddling intellect. The French Terror had shattered his faith in the ultimate goodness of man. With his faith gone, his love for man also disintegrated. With emotion absent in all human relationships, he withdrew from society. William Godwin became his guide during this period of spiritless intellectual withdrawal. Legouis has noted Godwin's impression upon the poet at this time. Moreover, Wordsworth's own remark, "One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed / Upon an independent intellect" (Prelude, XI. 243-244), is his poetic rendering of one of Godwin's major expressions.[35] Godwin and Godwinism had permeated the London intellectual and political scene; his Political Justice was the source of much intellectual excitement. A minister, Fawcett, had also been notable in the preparation of this important book, and Wordsworth was found regularly in attendance at Fawcett's public lectures.[36] Hence, the poet had an ample opportunity for positive reinforcement of his readings in Godwin's

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[35]Legouis, op. cit., p. 260. Legouis' note is significant to the argument being considered here. It follows: "These last words are an exact poetical version of a saying of Godwin: 'The true dignity of human reason is as much as we are able to go beyond them (i.e. general rules), to have our faculties in act upon every occasion that occurs, and to conduct ourselves accordingly.' Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, 2nd., i., p. 347." In this same note, Legouis states concerning these lines: "They furnish us with a key to Wordsworth's moral crisis."

[36]Legouis, op. cit., p. 264.

theory.[37] Strangely, Wordsworth was pursuing this intellectual course in an attempt to curb his own dominant intellect. It was a course, however, that led to further confusion, which he acknowledged as follows:

> So I fared
> Dragging all precepts, judgments, maxims, creeds,
> Like culprits to the bar; calling the mind,
> Suspiciously, to establish in plain day
> Her titles and her honours; now believing,
> Now disbelieving; endlessly perplexed
> With impulse, motive, right and wrong . . . .
> (Prelude, XI. 293-299)

Finally, he realized that the path which he had chosen and had energetically pursued was hopeless, because it would not relieve him of the agony of guilt nor the discomfort aroused by the meddling intellect. Consequently, he attempted the only thing (short of suicide) that he had not already tried:

> I lost
> All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
> Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
> Yielded up moral questions in despair.
> (Prelude, XI. 302-305)

The disease of the meddling intellect had been painful; the cure would most probably be fraught with additional pain. In an attempt to avoid further suffering, he developed a series of fictional character-embodiments which he carefully endowed with facets of his own shortcomings and guilt complexes. The cure, or the reinstatement with the emotions

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[37] Ray M. Adams, "Joseph Fawcett and Wordsworth's Solitary," PMLA, XLVIII (June, 1933), 508-528.

which the meddling intellect had pre-empted, could be administered to these fictional extensions, so that if and when they were restored, the poet similarly would be restored. That these character extensions of self should have direct connections with Godwin is not unusual, because Political Justice held all of the outward promises of relieving the problems caused by the dominating intellect and provided Wordsworth with hope for the future. However, as the poet discovered, Godwin's kind of hope and that of his own philosophy were incompatible. A cure without the feelings in conjunction with reason was impossible.[38] These extended figures, or "therapeutic vessels," were grounded in Godwinism.[39]

The poet called upon his first extended figure to aid him in restoring the powers that had been negated by the workings of the Solitary's meddling intellect, patterned upon

> A Scotchman . . . who had for many years been chaplain to a Highland regiment. He was in no respect . . . an interesting character, though in his appearance there was a good deal that attracted attention,

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[38]G. C. Moore, "Review of William Wordsworth, The Prelude, edited by Ernest de Selincourt (1926)," in MLR, XXI (October, 1926), 445.

[39]Edward Everett Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists, p. 68.

> as if he had been shattered in fortune, and not happy in mind.[40]

The correspondence, here, between the ex-priest and Wordsworth's broken vows to Nature's service (Prelude, IV. 334-338) is vitally significant to an understanding of Wordsworth's Solitary personality. The Scotchman, however, did not supply all of the characteristics of the Solitary figure, as Wordsworth has indicated, although the portrait was a composite of elements that were "[drawn] from several persons with whom [he] had been connected."[41] Of particular interest is the fact that, since all of the people who contributed facets of their personalities to the figure of the Solitary were from the city, they represented human society which Wordsworth, at this time, found distasteful.[42]

The poet may not have noticed the similarity between the composite portrait of the Solitary and his own personality when it was most belabored by the meddling intellect. Coleridge was the first to notice the connection between the two. He is accurate and illuminating when he states that he is displeased with that ". . . species of ventriloquism where two are represented as talking while in truth

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[40]William Wordsworth, quoted in Christopher Wordsworth, The Memoirs of William Wordsworth, II, 33.

[41]Loc. cit.

[42]Loc. cit.

one man only speaks."[43] Hazlitt also identifies this device, although his language is more severe:

> An intense intellectual egotism swallows up everything. Even the dialogues introduced in the present volume are soliloquies of the same character, taking different views of the subject. The recluse, the pastor, and the pedlar, are three persons in one poet . . . .[44]

He chose to call the Solitary figure a recluse, but his agreement with Coleridge is clear.

The Excursion was the poetic framework that Wordsworth appropriated in order to cure the Solitary. The restoration was not easily completed, for the long autobiographical work was begun in 1795 and completed and published in 1814.[45] Why Wordsworth selected the particular tag of the Solitary remains an open question, but one clue lies in his reference to the Solitary as the Sceptic (Excursion, IV. 767). Bush has noted that Voltaire had created a similar personality (i.e., a sceptic) who was experiencing a period of withdrawal after having similarly suffered from the workings of a meddling intellect. Voltaire had called this

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[43] J. Shawcross (ed.), Biographia Literaria by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, II, 109. Additionally, Bostetter, on one of the front pieces of his work, The Romantic Ventriloquists, notes Coleridge's poem "Soliloquy of the Full Moon; She Being in a Mad Passion," as a further invictive against ventriloquism.

[44] William Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 346.

[45] Christopher Wordsworth, op. cit., II, 31.

character a solitary.[46] In addition, the solitary figure was popular in English eighteenth-century literature, although labelled differently.[47] Certainly, Wordsworth had a stock of characters and characteristics from which to choose, but his own solitary nature may have been the deciding factor in his selection of a name for this type.

The person of the Solitary recalls the sum-total of Wordsworth's personal traits after the period of the meddling intellect, which probably caused his abandonment of his daughter. Similarly, the Solitary of The Excursion had committed crimes against humanity, and he wandered quilt-pursued (Excursion, II. 245-250). Like Wordsworth, the Solitary had "forfeited / All joy in human nature" (Excursion, II. 295-296), and he was "Steeped in a self-indulging spleen" (Excursion, II. 311). Paralleling the poet's nihilism, Nature had for forsaken the Solitary, as well (Excursion, II. 347-348). In addition, the Solitary had experienced Wordsworth's imaginative insight (Excursion, II. 829-835). But his revelation does not come until he has suffered from the dominance of the intellect; therefore, instead of being awed by an insight into things, he is

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[46]Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry, p. 60.

[47]Bostetter, op. cit., p. 435.

almost fatally despondent:

> That which I saw was the revealed abode
> Of Spirits in beatitude: my heart
> Swelled in my breast.-- 'I have been dead,'
> I cried,
> 'And now I live! Oh! wherefore do I live?'
> And with that pang I prayed to be no more!
> (Excursion, II. 873-877)

This death-wish has to be the poet's response to the devastating effects wrought upon him by the meddling intellect. Moreover, there is substantiation, herein, for Wordsworth's thoughts upon suicide. At the time in which he began to compose The Excursion (1795), he was reading Fleetwood's Sermons, several of which dealt with the Case of Self-Murther.[48] Potts has also observed that Wordsworth, in 1799-1800, wrote in his copy of Chetwind's Anthologia Historica: "'See Fleetwood of Self-Murder'."[49] Fleetwood's opposition to suicide may have been the determining factor that sprang from a mind troubled by a meddling intellect. Death having been avoided, Wordsworth may have continued to depend upon Fleetwood for a direction leading to a reinstatement of the natural powers that had been his prior to the separation of mind and heart. Fleetwood's statement is significant:

> The voice of nature is louder than that of reason and strict justice, and beats importunately at

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[48] Abbie Finlay Potts, "Wordsworth and William Fleetwood's Sermons," SP, XXVI (October, 1929), 444.

[49] Loc. cit.

> the heart, and there will be no lasting rest till all is over, and a through reconciliation bring back each party to their mutual affections, and place them in the state they were at first, and always should be.[50]

That Nature was more powerful than reason, Wordsworth knew; what he could not do entirely by himself, however, was to reach Fleetwood's state of reconciliation and place feeling and thinking in their proper perspectives. This is the essence, then, of the plight created in Wordsworth by the power of the meddling intellect. The Solitary figure clearly embodies this unnatural relationship of dominant logic and subservient emotion. Reconciliation was not yet possible. Reinstatement, however, was begun by the Solitary when he married and began to feel renewed emotions. These emotional surges, in turn, also allowed him to begin to reflect, in seclusion, upon intellectual dominance (Excursion, III. 553-561). Once he had withdrawn to the seclusion of the heights, once he had reacted to human fellowship and emotion, once he had begun to think about his past dilemma with renewed hope, the hold which the meddling intellect had fixed upon him was weakened.

The second solitary figure which Wordsworth utilized during this period was that of the Wanderer, also a character in The Excursion. This character is exactly the

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[50]Fleetwood, quoted in Potts, op. cit., p. 455.

opposite of the Solitary figure. Wordsworth describes the Wanderer as being "chiefly an idea of what [he] fancied his own character might have become in [the Wanderer's] circumstances."[51] Since this figure had not suffered from the derision of the meddling intellect, he was as a touchstone that could aid the Solitary as Wordsworth attempted to lead both himself and his fictional extension of self away from the influence of the meddling intellect. The Wanderer was a traditional figure in literature, to be sure, but Wordsworth had altered him to serve his own purpose.[52] That Wordsworth's figure was a divergence from the customary portrait is illuminated in Coleridge's observation that this Wanderer did not speak like the English conception of the image secure in the public mind.[53]

Wordsworth had little difficulty in identifying himself with his Wanderer. Indeed, the figure shares a certain affinity with the pedlar of The Prelude. The Wanderer also shares in certain aspects of Wordsworth's boyhood. As in Wordsworth's case, the Wanderer's

> foundations of mind were laid.
> In such communion, not from terror free,

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[51]William Wordsworth, quoted in Christopher Wordsworth, op. cit., II, 32.

[52]Bostetter, op. cit., p. 67. In addition, Enid Welsford, in Salisbury Plain, p. 74, identified the Wanderer-pedlar as "the ideal, archetypal Pedlar."

[53]Shawcross, op. cit., II, 107-108.

> While yet a child, and long before his time,
> Had he perceived the presense and the power
> Of greatness; and deep feelings had impressed
> So vividly great objects that they lay
> Upon his mind like substance, whose presence
> Perplexed the bodily sense.
> (Excursion, I. 132-139)

He had experienced Nature's twin ministries of beauty and fear; he was aware of the power behind things, and he was conscious of the fact that certain solitary objects possessed powers to speak to man. The church, too, had been significant in his youth much as it had been in the poet's childhood (Excursion, I. 398-399). In summary, then, the Wanderer was a solitary figure who had not strayed far from his earliest lessons learned from Nature. He had not yet been visited by the disturbing meddling intellect. He is identified, by Wordsworth, as a solitary figure:

> In solitude and solitary thought
> His mind in a just equipoise of love.
> Serene it was, unclouded by the cares
> Of ordinary life; unvexed, unwarped
> By partial bondage. In his steady course,
> No piteous revolutions had he felt,
> No wild varieties of joy and grief.
> Unoccupied by sorrow of its own,
> His heart lay open; and, by nature turned
> And constant disposition of his thoughts
> To sympathy with man. . . .
> (Excursion, I. 354-364)

As a singular being diametrically opposed to the Solitary who had suffered with the pain of the meddling intellect, the Wanderer is also a "guide" who will lead the Solitary figure to a reconciliation with Nature and man (Excursion,

II. 30). According to the Wanderer, the first requirement for the Solitary is simply that he must "Acknowledge that to Nature's humble power / His cherished sullenness is forced to bend" (Excursion, IV. 1190-1191). Once acknowledged, Nature would then respond with "universal forms" (Excursion, VIII. 14) that possess special curative and inspirational powers. The Solitary can, then,

> by contemplating these forms
> In the relations which they bear to man,
> . . . discern, how, through the various means
> Which silently they yield, are multiplied
> The spiritual presenses of absent things.
> [F]or the instructed . . . time will come
> When [he] . . . shall meet no object but may teach
> Some acceptable lesson to the [mind]
> Of human suffering, or of human joy.
> So shall [he] learn, while all things speak of man,
> [His] duties from all forms; and general laws,
> And local accidents, shall tend alike
> To rouse, to urge; and, with the will, confer
> The ability to spread the blessings wide
> Of true philanthropy.
>
> (Excursion, IV. 1230-1244)

Contemplation of these forms works on both the head and the heart, both on the reasoning and feeling in human beings. This contemplation awakens, as well, a renewed appreciation, a love, for man and Nature. Contemplation springs from the head; love from the heart. Consequently, contemplation of universal forms creates a balance between the powers of head and heart and creates what the Wanderer labels as the "intellectual soul" (Excursion, IV. 1275). With this intellectual soul, one may observe and learn uninterruptedly from the

spirit of Nature. The Wanderer, in summary, explains to the Solitary the nature of these powers behind the forms of Nature to which his attention has been directed. Hence, the Wanderer's explanation can presumably be taken to be Wordsworth's thoughts concerning the latent power of universal forms to aid in reclaiming the Solitary from the snares of the meddling intellect:

> To every Form of being is assigned,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> An <u>active</u> Principle:--howe'er removed
> From sense and observation, it subsists
> In all things, in all natures; in the stars
> Of azure heaven, the unending clouds,
> In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone
> That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
> The moving waters, and the invisible air.
> Whate'er exists hath properties that spread
> Beyond itself, communicating good,
> A simple blessing, or with evil mixed;
> Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
> No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
> It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.
> (<u>Excursion</u>, IX. 1, 3-15)

Wordsworth's predilection for solitary objects and his faith in the belief that <u>all</u> are parts of "the Soul of all the worlds" have been echoed, here, by the Wanderer. Moreover, the Solitary's observation of these solitary forms and his recognition of their unifying soul will finally defeat the power of the intellect and lead him to share in the Wanderer's balance between head and heart. At this point, Wordsworth does not reveal whether or not the Solitary has been completely restored. However, he indicates that both

the Solitary and he have been provided with a guide in the Wanderer; but beyond this comment, he is non-committal. His final observation is

> To enfeebled Power,
> From this communion with uninjured Minds,
> What renovation has been brought; and what
> Degree of healing to a wounded spirit,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> How far those erring notions were reformed;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> My future labours may not leave untold.
> (Excursion, IX. 783-786; 790; 796)

That the restoration has not been complete is the immediate concern of Wordsworth's future tragedy, The Borderers (1795). This play was a kindred attempt to reach the equipoise of the intellectual soul that would effect a cure for the meddling intellect. The critical difficulty concerning this work and its characters revolves around the problem of whether or not Godwin was still influencing Wordsworth's thinking at the time of composition. That there may have been a falling-out between poet and philosopher is indirectly suggested in a letter by the poet concerning The Borderers:

> I have been employed lately in writing a tragedy--the first draft of which is nearly finished. Let me hear from you very soon and I do promise--not a Godwynian, Montaguian, Lincolnian, promise--that I will become a prompt correspondent.[54]

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[54]Ernest de Selincourt (ed.), The Early Letters, pp. 161-162.

Thorslev suggests that critical evaluation of Godwinian elements in this drama are usually inaccurate because of innate prejudice, or bias, toward Godwin on the part of the critic.[55] MacGillivary indicates that Godwin's influence was minimal, that it had reached its pinnacle in 1795 and, by the time of the composition of this drama, had abated to the point of being completely rejected.[56] According to Campbell and Meuschke, Legouis' critical opinion is now the one most strongly supported--e.g., that The Borderers marks Wordsworth's first literary indication of a rejection of Godwin.[57] Potts agrees with De Selincourt that Wordsworth had rejected Godwin's philosophy as early as the summer of 1795.[58] But, according to Campbell and Meuschke, The Borderers became a proving ground: could the philosophy of Godwin ameloriate the bitter and lasting dark "vital experience" that had been the result of the abandonment of

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[55]Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., "Wordsworth's 'Borderers' and the Romantic Villian-Hero," Studies in Romanticism, V (Winter, 1966), 97-98.

[56]James R. MacGillivary, "The Date of Composition of The Borderers," MLN, XLIX (February, 1934), 106.

[57]O. J. Campbell and Paul Mueschke, "'Borderers' as a Document in the History of Wordsworth's Aesthetic Development," MP, XXIII (May, 1926), 470.

[58]Potts, op. cit., pp. 455-456.

Annette and Caroline?[59] Wordsworth had read Godwin, and he provides one with firsthand proof of his primary knowledge of the philosopher:

> I have received from Montague, Godwin's second edition. I expect to find the work much improved. I cannot say that I have been encouraged in this hope by the perusal of the second preface, which is all I have yet looked into. Such a piece of barbarous writing I have not often seen. It contains scarce one sentence decently written.[60]

He also had at least nine meetings with Godwin.[61] Godwin's influence had been initially broached with The Excursion. In The Borderers, its influence may be seen in three major figures in the dramatis personae, for there are three solitary figures in this play. Initially, there is Oswald, who is a product of the meddling intellect. Next, Marmaduke is a "nature's child," who is deceived by Oswald and who abandons his natural environment because of a crime that causes him to wander guilt-pursued as a creature whose innocence has been destroyed by the intellect. A third solitary figure is Herbert, who is physically blind. His lack of sight renders him totally dependent upon humanity and the benevolent spirits in Nature. He has never been disturbed by the meddling intellect. The setting into which

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[59]Campbell and Mueschke, op. cit., p. 477.

[60]De Selincourt, op. cit., p. 170.

[61]Mary Trevelyan Moorman, William Wordsworth, A Biography: The Early Years, pp. 262-263.

these three characters have been cast is also significant. Since The Borderers is a Gothic drama, the scene is gloomy, and the theme is that of remorse.[62] Because Wordsworth was already a guilt-pursued wanderer suffering from remorse, this work may be thought of, perhaps, as being therapeutic, and the reader may expect to encounter instances of that ventriloquism which had so disturbed Coleridge and Hazlitt when they read The Excursion. It is possible, then, that Wordsworth chose the framework of The Borderers to embody examples of his own turmoil emanating from the period of unrest which was the result of the meddling intellect.

Oswald is a Godwinian extension. His realm is that of the intellect, and his hope is based on reason:

> Let us be fellow-labourers, then, to enlarge
> Man's intellectual empire. We subsist
> In slavery; all is slavery; we receive
> Laws, but we ask not whence those laws have come,
> We need an inward sting to goad us on.
> (Borderers, IV. 1855-1859)

The inward sting is that of intellectualism. Feelings have no place in Oswald's world. His own commentary substantiates this view:

> A whipping to the Moralists who preach
> That misery is a sacred thing: for me,
> I know no cheaper engine to degrade a man,
> Nor any half so sure.
> (Borderers, III. 1159-1162)

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[62] Bertrand Evans, Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley, pp. 217-218.

Further evidence of the Gothic theme of remorse and of Oswald's being a product of the meddling intellect is provided in his own words: "Remorse-- / It cannot live with thought; think on, think on, / And it will die" (Borderers, III. 1560-1561). Oswald is a solitary, guilt-pursued wanderer who has found immense satisfaction in the powers of the intellect. These powers have dehumanized him, have made him more singular. He has been cured, nevertheless, of the remorse born out of guilt simply by his acceptance of the powers of the intellect.

On the other hand, Marmaduke is a solitary nature's child whose fall is instigated by Oswald's intellectual desires. Marmaduke's innocent existence recalls the life of the Wanderer in The Excursion. Marmaduke leads

> . . . no common life. Self-stationed here,
> Upon these savage confines, he . . .
> Stands like an isthmus 'twixt two stormy seas
> That oft have checked their fury at his bidding.
> 'Mid the deep holds of Solway's mossy waste,
> [His] single virtue has transformed a Band
> Of fierce barbarians into Ministers
> Of peace and order.
>
> (Borderers, II. 605-612)

He has chosen a solitary life in a natural setting because it fosters best his singularity and maintains his "single virtue." His feelings maintain his calm existence, and he is a practitioner of "natural justice . . . learned from the heart."[63] When Oswald successfully undermines the strength

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[63]Storch, op. cit., p. 345.

of Nature, Marmaduke begins to suffer from the inroads made by the meddling intellect (Borderers, V. 2008-2009). That Marmaduke is now a solitary individual suffering from guilt and remorse, a product of the meddling intellect, is revealed by the Forester (who shares Wordsworth's interest and understanding of physiognomy), as from Marmaduke's face the message springs:

> Some terrible phantom I believe is now
> Passing before him, such as God will not
> Permit to visit any but a man
> Who has been guilty of some horrid crime.
> (Borderers, V. 1996-1999)

Of course, Marmaduke is guilty of abandoning the third and final solitary figure in the play--Herbert. Since this character is blind, he holds special power for the poet:

> And know we not that from the blind have flowed
> The highest, holiest, raptures of the lyre;
> And wisdom married to immortal verse?
> (Excursion, VII. 534-536)

Although Herbert has lived in the city, he has wandered, since his blindness, in earth's natural settings, reliant upon man's kindness and God and Nature's benevolence. He is Job-like, even though sorely chastised:

> Merciful God! thou hast poured out the phials of thy wrath upon my head--but I will not murmur--blasted as I am thou hast left me both ears to hear the voice of my daughter, and arms to fold her to my heart. I will adore thee and tremble!
> (Borderers, Fragment B. II. 851-854)

God, once again, aids Herbert when Marmaduke, driven on by the workings of the intellect, endeavors to kill him.

Here, Wordsworth's fascination for the singular stays Marmaduke's knife:

> 'Twas dark--dark as the grave; yet did I see,
> Saw him [Herbert]--his face turned toward me;
> and I tell thee [Oswald]
> Idonea's filial countenance was there
> To baffle me--it put me to my prayers.
> Upwards I cast my eyes, and, through a crevice,
> Beheld a star twinkling above my head,
> And, by the living God, I could not [kill him].
> (Borderers, II. 984-990)

Thus, although the single star has momentarily saved Herbert's life, his salvation is only momentary, because while Marmaduke is not directly able to kill him, he is able to abandon him upon the moor. The decision to leave Herbert upon the moor is instigated by the intellect, and one suspects that Wordsworth was qualified to draw such a picture because of his own abandonment of Annette and Caroline. A "solitary heart" (Borderers, III. 1260-1262) now possesses Marmaduke that has thoroughly negated his pangs of conscience. This solitary heart was also the product of the intellect. Thus, devoid of human feelings, he abandons Herbert to the will of Nature and God. In turn, since this combined power has also been usurped by the solitary heart, God and Nature also forsake Herbert, leaving him to death

> On a ridge of rocks
> A lonesome Chapel stands, deserted now:
> The bell is left, which no ones dares remove;
> And, when the stormy wind blows o'er the peak,
> It rings, as if a human hand [was] there
> To pull the cord. [He] . . . must have heard it;
> And it . . . led him toward the precipice . . . .
> (Borderers, V. 2023-2029)

The solitary old man is dead. The motivation for his death has been the meddling intellect, at work upon the natural goodness of the solitary Marmaduke. It has been introduced to this innocent leader of the borderlands by a guilt-pursued Oswald, who has found relief from remorse in the strength of his own intellect. However, the mind without the heart offers no aid to Marmaduke; he must now wander guilt-pursued in search of some means of restoring the powers that had once spoken to his innocence:

> A hermitage has furnished fit relief
> To some offenders; other penitents,
> Less patient in their wretchedness, have fallen,
> Like the old Roman, on their own swords point.
> They had their choice: a wanderer must I go,
> The Spectre of that innocent Man, my guide.
> (Borderers, V. 2308-2313)

The Borderers and The Excursion, therefore, represent the period occupied by the solitary of the meddling intellect. Yet this time span did not end with foreboding or promises of an even greater darkness. Marmaduke has been provided with an innocent guide who will apparently lead him to a communion, once again, with Nature's powers. Out of this period, then, emerges Wordsworth's statement of the power of catharsis:[64] "In terror, / Remembered terror, there is peace and rest" (Borderers, III. 1469). The meddling intellect has produced a solitary heart and a need for restora-

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[64]Campbell and Mueschke, op. cit., p. 481.

tion; and restoration takes on the form of Wordsworth's extended solitary figures, each embodying the poet's own weaknesses and strengths. The final solitary figure in this period of intellectual domination was a spectral guide who would lead the poet away from the hopelessness of the solitary heart. The period of the meddling intellect was at an end.

CHAPTER III

THE SOLITARY OF THE PERSONAL RENAISSANCE

William Wordsworth's innocent awareness had been demoralized by the predominance of the "meddling intellect." Reason had momentarily blinded his bodily eye to the beauty in Nature and man. Wordsworth's earlier solitary communion with the force behind physical appearances was also impaired. He was uneasy and distracted; no course of action had reinstated him with the guiding voices of his childhood. Realizing that he was too close to the usurping intellect, he created a set of fictional characters and commissioned them to work out the problem for him. In the position of observer, then, he could not be harmed; but he might be cured. Emerging from the shadow cast upon his perceptivity by the dominating intellect, he experienced a rebirth, a renaissance, of the powers which had once spoken to him during his childhood when he could behold the beauty in Nature and man and had drunk in the power of things.

His sister Dorothy and brother John came to aid him in his reinstatement with Nature. They formed a triangle sensitive to natural beauty. As one side of this geometric

design, Wordsworth both received and provided insight into the natural realm. Caught up in this giving-taking process, he found that Nature had begun again to gleam. She was beginning to re-establish the old lines of communication with which she had once spoken to him as a solitary youth. At this moment, he recognized that he had been reborn. He felt anew the intimacy of Nature and experienced a renewed love for man. Although his brother and sister had aided him in making this second reconciliation, to be re-established fully, he had to accept the premise that man was ultimately beautiful and good. His reacceptance of man, which amounts to a renaissance of feelings and love for man, was easier now than it had been during the time of his troubles with the meddling intellect. Now, he saw man as a part of Nature, and he realized that he, too, had to participate in the beauty and guiding forces of Nature, thus bringing to the surface feelings that had been long suppressed.

Next, Wordsworth's imagination was rejuvenated to provide him with a renewed vision into the life of natural things. With these visions, he could again create. He felt that this new insight was secure, because it had been bolstered by family associations and the love inherent in the family structure. Suddenly, his family circle was widened to admit the person of Samual Coleridge, who brought to the group intellectual curiosity and mental stimulation. Now,

no longer distrustful of the intellect, Wordsworth readily accepted Coleridge's philosophic and creative presence, thus fusing the faculties of reason and emotion to produce what the Wanderer called the "intellectual soul." This concept was an equipoise between logic and feeling that led to creativity. The creative products of Wordsworth's renaissance were his numerous portraits of solitary guides, in various literary forms. He watched them and listened to them, and they helped him maintain his "intellectual soul."

Wordsworth now selected forms with popular appeal, such as the ballad and pastoral, and experimented with tales of the mentally deficient, with fragments and complaints, and with a type of narrative which he labelled simply as a "description." Most of his poems which fall into these categories were collected and published in the Lyrical Ballads, his first major work in the decade described by Matthew Arnold as the "golden prime."[65] These poetic endeavors supplied Wordsworth with a suitable framework for the introduction of his solitary guides, the symbols of his poetic renaissance.

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[65]Matthew Arnold, "Wordsworth," Essays in Criticism, Susan S. Sheridan (ed.), p. 51. John Jones in The Egotistical Sublime, p. 54, has labelled the period from 1798-1808 as the "Great Decade." Arnold's and Jones' terminology will be employed throughout this study with no further reference to the source.

Although "Peter Bell" was not included in either edition of the Lyrical Ballads,[66] it was written at the same time as were many of the pieces in that collection. It is important and unique, here, because of its transitional qualities, because Bell as a character is drawn aloof from Nature and man, and because this figure resembles the poet during his own struggle with the meddling intellect. Bell is also provided with a guide to re-establish his love for man and Nature. Moreover, since this guide is an animal, Bell is actively transported rather than passively guided. His path lies through a natural setting which Wordsworth has hung with numerous theatrical trappings. Such stagings enable him to prepare Bell for the ultimate reconciliation of himself with man and Nature. Bell's progress is closely chartered, because the poet is striving, here, to secure his own newly acquired sense of the intellectual soul.

In the opening of the poem, Wordsworth depicts the poet as being secure from all worldly harm (he has a little ethereal boat which is not only an escape mechanism but a means or guide for a faltering, earth-bound man). Even in the protective solitude of this bark, the poet cannot forget the turmoil from which he is attempting to escape: "Ne'er

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[66] For a table of contents for both first and second editions of the Lyrical Ballads, see Christopher Wordsworth, op. cit., I, 123-124; 160-161.

in the breast of full-grown Poet / Fluttered so faint a heart before" ("Peter Bell," 81-82). That this poet is Wordsworth is revealed in the narrator's account of the strength to be found in high places (86-87). The narrator also identifies himself as nature's child: "Long have I loved what I behold, / . . . The common growth of mother-earth / Suffices me . . ." (131; 133-134). The reader next learns that this poet is a guilt-pursued wanderer on the road to redemption, overcoming obstacles by means of the cleansing power of catharsis:

> A potent wand doth Sorrow wield;
> What spell so strong as guilty Fear!
> Repentance is a tender Sprite;
> If aught on earth have heavenly might,
> 'Tis lodged within her silent tear.
> (146-150)

Until this time, the poet and his boat have been upon the heights where vision is clearer, but suddenly the narrator exclaims, ". . . let us now / Descend from this ethereal height [to] relate the Tale / Of Peter Bell the Potter" (151-170). It is obvious that the poet is still plagued by the meddling intellect, however, for he "spake with faltering voice, like one / Not wholly rescued from the pale / Of a wild dream or worse delusion" (186-188). Moreover, unlike Wordsworth, Bell, although brought up in the realm of Nature, has never really opened his eyes to her blisses: "Nature could not touch his heart" (286). In fact, he has avoided her to such an extent that his physiognomy has been affected

and one sees "In [Bell's] whole figure and his mien / A savage character" (293-294). As Bell makes his way through the dark, he takes a shortcut, but, by following it, finds himself confused and lost. Perhaps Wordsworth was recalling his own confusion which arose after he had abandoned the guide of his childhood, Nature. The meddling intellect which replaced Nature was not a shortcut for the poet. It appears, then, that Bell (and Wordsworth) ". . . left a trusty guide for one / That might [their] steps betray" (339-340). Wordsworth's guide had been his innocent communion with Nature; Bell's guide had been the path. For Wordsworth to help Bell back to the right path, Wordsworth had to provide another guide. As did the Wanderer and spectral guide appear at the end of Wordsworth's dim and perilous way, so does a lowly ass standing guard over its master's place of death suddenly materialize from out of the darkness and natural desolation. Since he has no love for Nature, Bell also lacks concern for beasts of burden and treats this one maliciously. His abusiveness, nevertheless, is short-lived when the moon suddenly reveals the corpse of the animal's dead master floating in a nearby stream, and Bell utters a "loud and frightful shriek" (529). The discovery of this macabre spectacle and Bell's growing awareness of the animal's affection for the corpse are the first in a series of events that lead eventually to Bell's reconcili-

ation of self with man and Nature, all freely associated with Wordsworth's own renaissance. The ass is the "trusty guide" (608) that now leads Bell onward with a newly conditioned heart and with senses now open to the processes that will teach anew. Thus, Nature provides for the rebirth of Bell (Wordsworth) who has been "long asleep" (1094) but who, "after ten months' melancholy, / Became a good and honest man" (1133-1135).

Of the poems specifically designated as pastoral in the Lyrical Ballads, "Michael" has always attracted considerable attention and is, here, a representative of the second kind of framework chosen by Wordsworth during this period of poetic renaissance.[67] In this poem, the central figure of Luke, the son, is the antithesis of the prodigal archetype ("Michael," 242-303; 442-447). Ironically, too, one recalls that Saint Luke was a physician who had the power of healing and, later, gained the power to heal for eternity. Like the biblical figure, Wordsworth's Luke, "When he had reached his eighteenth year, . . . / was his [father's] comfort and his daily hope" (205-206). Although Luke, unlike the prodigal, was sent to the city to help alleviate his parents' sudden financial plight, he

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[67]Christopher Wordsworth, op. cit., I, 123-124; 160-161. In the "Table of Contents" for both editions of the Lyrical Ballads on these pages, Wordsworth specifically designates some works as pastorals.

> . . . began
> To slaken in his duty; and, at length,
> He in the dissolute city gave himself
> To evil courses; ignominy and shame
> Fell on him, so that he was driven at last
> To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas.
> ("Michael," 442-447)

Potentially the aid and comfort of his aged parents, Luke falls upon evil ways and flees, guilt-pursued, "beyond the seas." His flight enables Wordsworth to focus, then, upon the strength and perserverance in the other major character, Michael, who is still a nature-taught being, enduring in the lofty reaches of nature's solitudes:

> Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,
> Of blast of every tone.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> [And] he had been alone
> Amid the heart of many thousand mists
> That came to him, and left him, on the heights.
> ("Michael," 48-49; 58-60)

Nature, realizing Michael's adoration of her, has chosen and tutored him:

> Those fields, those hills--what could they less? had laid
> Strong hold of his affections, were to him
> A pleasureable feeling of blind love,
> The pleasure which there is in life itself.
> ("Michael," 74-77)

But earthly pleasures are shortlived, and Michael becomes an afflicted rustic when called upon to pay a debt which he had pledged to honor when the need arose. Prior to Luke's departure, Michael had asked the boy to aid him in laying some stones to form a sheep-fold as a monument to that love which Michael had for Luke: "But, lay one stone-- /

Here, lay it for me, Luke, with thine own hands" (386-387). The single stone and the solitary figure of Michael are to stand forever as emblems of the blessings of a humble rustic life, maintaining their sanctity and beauty through a perpetual association with natural beauty and deep, abiding human feelings. Following the shock upon learning of Luke's failure in the city, Michael withdraws to the heights, but does not reject the passions that have made him a symbol of contentment for Wordsworth:

> Among the rocks
> He went, still looked up to sun and cloud,
> And listened to the wind; and, as before,
> Performed all kinds of labour for his sheep,
> And for the land, his small inheritance.
> ("Michael," 455-459)

Not to be overlooked, here, is the curative power which Wordsworth ascribes to the forces of winds and water, as well as the importance he accords to personal property in this post-Godwinian era. As Garber has observed, this poem was an innovation for Wordsworth. He finally put aside his Borderers, Excursions, and "Peter Bells" in which the influence of Godwin played so great a part and became the simple, inspired poet.[68] As Luke had once been a source of renewed energy and joy for Michael, so too, was the figure of Michael a guide in Wordsworth's personal renaissance.

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[68]Frederick Garber, "Point of View and the Egotistical Sublime," ES, XLIX (October, 1968), 417.

When the literary theme of the mentally deficient became popular at the close of the eighteenth century, Wordsworth took advantage of its popularity and included, among others, the poem, "We Are Seven," in the Lyrical Ballads.[69] At the time of its composition, he was reading Darwin's Zoonomia, which provided him with early insights into the field of abnormal psychology.[70] His subsequent treatments of the idiot as a member of society demonstrate his intense feelings about these unfortunate individuals and reveal his disgust over society's general reaction to them:

> I can only say that the loathing and disgust which many people have at the sight of an idiot, is a feeling which, though having some foundation in human nature, is not necessarily attached to it in any virtuous degree, but is owing in a great measure to a false delicacy, and, if I may say it without rudeness, a certain want of comprehensiveness of thinking and feeling.[71]

In the last line of this passage, the phrase, "thinking and feeling," marks Wordsworth's arrival at the ultimate goal in his attempt to restore his consciousness to its former state of innocence prior to the time of the meddling intellect. Now, he feels secure in this mood, and in this new-

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[69]Robert Mayo, "Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads," PMLA, LXIX (June, 1954), 498-499.

[70]Lane Cooper, "A Glance at Wordsworth's Reading," MLN, XXII (1907), 87.

[71]William Wordsworth, quoted in Reverend Alexander B. Grosart (ed.), The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, II, 212.

found security, he lashes out against those who incarcerate their mental defectives to avoid social embarrassment. His praise is for those less well endowed who offer these solitary unfortunates tender and loving care.[72] His personal feelings for the mentally defective individual also recall his often quoted statement: "To every Form is assigned . . . / An active Principle." In this vein, he offers the following: "I have often applied to idiots, in my own mind, that sublime expression of Scripture that 'their life is hidden with God'."[73] Hence, this principle is analogous with or imbued with his concept of the "Soul of all the worlds" (Excursion, IX. 15), which, with its universal qualities, may be identified with God. Since for Wordsworth an idiot has his life hidden with God, he concludes that such a creature must have special powers with which to guide mankind. Consequently, Wordsworth's mentally defective figures are made to fit the guide-motif developed in this period of his personal renaissance.

The solitary figure of the idiot in "We Are Seven" is that of an eight-year-old girl who falls within the category of the beautiful defective:[74] "Her eyes were fair, and very fair; / Her beauty made [him] glad."

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[72] Loc. cit.

[73] Loc. cit.

[74] Ibid., II, 213.

(Wordsworth had met this little girl near Goodrich Castle in 1793.[75]) The story that this little girl relates is simple and unrehearsed, and she has a mature understanding that surpasses the innocent state of childhood. However, the oneness of all things has escaped even the consciousness of the intellectual soul of the adult figure in the poem, and the reader is left with the impression that this child, although mentally deficient, understands far more than the poet who has forgotten the simple nature of children as yet untouched by the corrupting influences of an adult society. Although in the following statement Wordsworth is concerned with "The Idiot Boy," his commentary is equally applicable to "We Are Seven":

> It is not enough for me as a Poet, to delineate merely such feelings as all men do sympathize with; but it is also highly desirable to add to these others, such as men may sympathize with, and such as there is reason to believe they would be better and more moral beings if they did sympathize with.[76]

That the defective had a moral purpose as a teacher who could excite unsympathetic men is significant, because it clearly indicates that all of Wordsworth's poems concerned with such unfortunates are associated with the poet's own

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[75]William Wordsworth, quoted in De Selincourt, Poetical Works, I, 360.

[76]William Wordsworth, quoted in Grosart, op. cit., II, 213.

personal renaissance. The child of "We Are Seven" is a guide for the poet--a simple, natural child, untaught and untroubled by the press of human society. She sees and understands the oneness which the poet could only write or, on occasions, merely glimpse "when the light of sense / Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed / The invisible world" (Prelude, VI. 600-602).

Wordsworth's use of the fragmentary sketch is well represented in "Old Man Traveling," later shortened and renamed "Animal Tranquillity and Decay, A Sketch."[77] Its fragmentary nature is substantiated by Wordsworth, who indicates that its lines were left over from the writing of "The Old Cumberland Beggar."[78] The unique quality of this poem is, as Jones has pointed out, the fact that the solitary figure in it is the first to break silence and speak to the poet.[79] The poem is contained in a selection

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[77]William Wordsworth, quoted in De Selincourt, op. cit., IV, 247

[78]Ibid., IV, 447-448.

[79]Jones, op. cit., p. 63. In the later edition of the poem entitled "Animal Tranquillity and Decay," the reply by the solitary figure was deleted. It has been deleted in the De Selincourt edition, but is included in a note following the poem in its present and final edition (See De Selincourt, op. cit., IV, 247fn). Jones notes that since Wordsworth realized that the conversation destroyed the mood of the poem, he omitted the last six lines in its final edition.

described as "Poems Referring to the Period of Old Age,"[80] and its Old Man is an "outward study of an inward state."[81] In fact, his outward state is almost nonexistent, and one may readily believe that this solitary figure has had no physical existence beyond that which the poet has provided. Even "the little hedgerow birds, / . . . regard him not" (1-2). He is a creature apparently removed from any real earthly presence, for he is "A man who does not move with pain, but moves / With thought . . ." (6-7). In the most regal solemnity of old age, he is relegated to a position of utmost serenity: "He is insensibly subdued / To settled quiet" (7-8). Yet, the last three lines disclose that this individual is a guide, thus associating him with the period of Wordsworth's renaissance:

> He is by nature led
> To peace so perfect that the young behold
> With envy, what the Old Man hardly feels.
> ("Old Man Traveling," 12-15)

Unperturbed and beyond the confines of an intellectual state, he is so receptive to Nature's voice that he is, in essence, a part of her. He is seen against the backdrop of a natural setting, but, as Wordsworth has stated, "In nature everything is distinct, yet nothing defined into absolute independent singleness" ("Essay Supplement to the Preface,

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[80] William Wordsworth, quoted in De Selincourt, op. cit., IV, 234.

[81] Ibid., IV, 448.

1849-1850," p. 748). This is the same concept of oneness which he broached in "We Are Seven." Moreover, Wordsworth

> . . . considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature . . . .
>
> ("Preface," p. 738)

The Old Man is essentially spiritual and, therefore, a "mirror of the fairest" in Nature ("Preface," p. 738). His duality, that of being a man and also a part of Nature, makes him the embodiment of Wordsworth's aim: "Poetry is the image of man and nature" ("Preface," p. 737). This duality of man and Nature is also a oneness, and the image of the Old Man is a guide to Wordsworth's renaissance, in which the poet is at peace with a newly constituted intellectual soul.

Of the previous guides, only Michael has suffered, although he has maintained a rustic Stoicism and has endured. In his "complaint" poems, Wordsworth deals with a variety of incidents, any one of which might be expected to bring suffering to its solitary human subject.[82] In composing the complaint, he had a specific purpose in mind--that of allowing the reader to be aware of his own feelings as he is confronted by a figure especially created to move him.[83]

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[82]Mayo, op. cit., p. 511.

[83]William Wordsworth, noted in De Selincourt, op. cit., II, 474.

The poem "The Last of the Flock" is a complaint that is noteworthy, here, because its solitary guide is given dialogue and converses with the narrator-poet. Moreover, the poet now feels security in his newly regained sense of equipoise and relaxes his authorial control. The solitary figure in this poem has lost his property, except for a single sheep. Furthermore, he fears that he is losing his affection for his family. In this financial and emotional dilemma, he commits acts that cause him to flee, guilt-pursued. This shepherd, with his last sheep, stands at the side of the road and weeps, thus creating a situation consciously designed to move a reader's emotions. In essence, this solitary figure is a guide for the poet who has also been emotionally moved.

The final form to be examined, here, is that of "The Old Cumberland Beggar, A Description," a work that contains another solitary guide. Wordsworth's note affixed to the poem indicates that he saw similarities in the purpose behind the complaint and the description. As in the case of the shepherd above, Wordsworth has seen the Beggar, and his emotions have been aroused. In turn, he endeavors to arouse the emotions of his reader.[84] The existence of this solitary old man is ambivalent. Unlike the gentle "Old Man

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[84] Ibid., IV, 445.

Traveling," the Cumberland Beggar frightens the birds (21), yet he moves so slowly that his feet just touch the surface of the ground (59-61). Indeed, his movement is so imperceptible that he appears to be a part of his natural surroundings. His outward being is a human message that acts upon the awareness of the reborn poet. Hence, this solitary old Beggar is a universal restorative. He is the transcient guide in Wordsworth's renaissance; yet he guides not the poet alone, but the entire world, awake to human suffering and the common feelings inherent in specially ordained guides. Although unable to converse, he communicates nevertheless, through his powerful physical presence and universality, and Wordsworth suggests that the Beggar's message has a greater than human significance. This figure is not only the trusty guide for the intellectual soul, but also the "silent monitor" (123).

The Old Cumberland Beggar followed a regular circuit around the countryside to collect his dole. Satisfying his simple needs generated a feeling of emotional satisfaction within his benefactors. These regular emotional responses mollified the power of the intellect in anyone suffering from an imbalance of thought over feeling. Each new visit initiated a new and intenser response in the benefactor. Wordsworth became aware of his altered feelings for the beggar and thus humanity in general, and by means of his

continuing responses to the solitary Old Beggar, he became the monitor of his own intellectual soul.

In summary, Wordsworth commissioned a variety of solitary figures to secure, maintain, and eventually bring him to the position that he could monitor his own intellectual soul. His success in achieving this goal is manifest in his renewed faith in the powers of emotion and thought. Realizing that these two forces could work together harmoniously lies at the very heart of his personal renaissance, a rebirth giving new insight into natural objects and highlighting an intensive period of poetic creativity.

CHAPTER IV

LATER SOLITARY FIGURES (BORN OUT OF LOSSES, GROPINGS, AND HOPES FOR IMMORTALITY)

William Wordsworth adopted the imagery of a cave and a stream in concluding The Prelude, a poem concerned with the solitary life of a single awareness. His concluding thoughts reveal that the last great solitary figure of his life was God. His developing awareness concluded with apprehensions of the need for "Eternity and God:"

> We [Wordsworth, Coleridge, the reader] have traced the stream
> From the blind cavern whence is faintly heard
> Its natal murmur; followed it to light
> And open day; accompanied its course
> Among the ways of Nature, for a time
> Lost sight of it bewildered and engulphed;
> Then giving it greeting as it rose once more
> In strength, reflecting from its placid breast
> The works of man and face of human life;
> And lastly, from its progress have we drawn
> Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought
> Of human Being, Eternity, and God.
> (Prelude, XIV. 194-205)

In reviewing his own life's progress, the poet reveals that finally he has been sustained by thoughts of humanity, Eternity, and God. That God was a solitary figure for the poet is illuminated in a passage from The Excursion:

> Jehovah--shapeless Power above all Powers,
> Single and one, the omnipresent God,
> By vocal utterance, or blaze of light,
> Or cloud of darkness, localized in heaven.
> (Excursion, IV. 651-654)

Wordsworth's need to cleave to an ethereal God, a solitary figure with eternal permanence, had its origin in his concern over the deterioration of things which he had considered permanent.[85] As Cerf has noted, a great psychological change began in Wordsworth in 1805, which marked the end of the stable situation, or mental set that had allowed him to produce his best work.[86] In this year, he was faced with a series of traumatic experiences: the death of John; Coleridge's failing health and therefore, the poetic impetus; and, from the Continent, Napoleon's self-crowning.[87] The loss of his brother, John, left Wordsworth groping for new security. He saw John's death as an expression of nihilism on Nature's part.[88] She had claimed John, and for

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[85]Elizabeth Green, "Concept of Grace in Wordsworth's Poetry," PMLA, LVIII (Summer, 1943), 700.

[86]Barry Cerf, "Wordsworth's Gospel of Nature," PMLA, XXXVII (9122), 625-626.

[87]Loc. cit.

[88]William Wordsworth, quoted in De Selincourt, op. cit., IV, 260-262. The poem "To the Daisy" (1805) deals in particular with John's death. It is poignant for that fact, but in it Wordsworth maintains the image of the single flower, which embodies both the idea of the singular which was so important to the workings of his imagination and recalls, too, the singular flower decorating the grave of

Wordsworth, the fear and awe which accompanied this act possessed nothing of the effect of the earlier ministry of fear. Rather, Nature claimed human life and did not offer the human soul any hope of eternity. He reasoned that, perhaps, the other power, the single and one God, would be more reliable, more substantial. Perhaps the universal solitary figure, "Jehovah," offered the ethereal dream of eternity.

The events of 1805 appear to be the dark culmination of Wordsworth's groping for permanency which actually had begun in 1804 with "Ode to Duty."[89] Having already lost his

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the maiden in "Dirge: Sung by a Minstrel"; the poet transposed this flower to his description of the death of John:

> Sweet Flower! belike one day to have
> A place upon thy Poet's grave,
> I welcome thee once more:
> But He, who was on land, at sea,
> My Brother, too, in loving thee,
> Although he loved more silently,
> Sleeps by his native shore ....
> ("To the Daisy," 1-7)

The single daisy, though not tragic in itself, maintains the power of catharsis for the soul having lost one-third of its being:

> From many a humble source, to pains
> Like these, there comes a mild release;
> Even here I feel it, even this Plant
> Is in its beauty ministrant
> To comfort and to peace.
> ("To the Daisy," 46-50)

[89]George McLean Harper, "Wordsworth-Coleridge Combination," Sewanee Review, XXXI (July, 1923), 273.

intimacy with Nature and the imaginative flash which this intimacy aided, Wordsworth was unnerved. In the tone of an invocation, the poet expresses his uneasy state of mind:

> Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!
> O Duty! If that name thou love
> Who art a light to guide, a rod
> To check the erring, and reprove.
> ("Ode to Duty," 1-4)

Wanting to be secure, needing reaffirmation of his place in the scheme of things and the happiness brought about by his renaissance of feelings toward Nature and man, he recalls the guide-monitor figure of "Old Man Traveling." Whereas the old Beggar was a solitary figure of Wordsworth's personal renaissance, "Duty," as the voice of God, now substantiates the claim that He is the poet's later solitary figure. One important difference, however, should be clarified. The solitary-monitor-guide of "The Old Cumberland Beggar" had just two offices: those of monitor and guide, whereas this later solitary image can "check and reprove." He, personally, could not overcome the loss of Nature and imagination; so, he pleads to the one thing which he thought could never deny him, the personage of God:

> I supplicate for thy control;
> . . . . . .
> I feel the weight of chance-desires:
> My hopes no more must change their name,
> I long for a repose that ever is the same.
> ("Ode to Duty," 35; 38-40)

His insufficiency creates an awareness of his own lack of power, and to God he totally submits his life:

> To humbler functions, awful Power!
> I call thee: 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!
> ("Ode to Duty," 57-64)

These same sentiments are presented in a more conventional form in a less well-known poem, "From the Italian of Michael Angelo," which De Selincourt has noted as a translation, occuring probably in 1805:[90]

> For all is vain that man desires below.
> And now remorseful thoughts the past upbraids,
> And fear of twofold death my soul alarms,
> That which must come, and that beyond the grave:
> Picture and Sculpture lose their feeble charms,
> And to that love Divine I turn for aid,
> Who from the Cross extends his arms to save.
> ("Italian of Michael Angelo," 8-14)

The poet's communion with this redeeming God was through the "philosophic mind" ("Ode: Intimations of Immortality," 187), and he identifies the messages he received from God after having attained the security of the philosophic mind:

> The soul when smitten thus
> By a sublime idea, whencesoe'er
> Vouchsafed for union or communion, feeds
> On the pure bliss, and takes her rest with God.
> (Prelude, VIII. 672-675)

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[90] De Selincourt, op. cit., III, 408; 573-574.

The philosophic mind of the solitary poet will, then, finally take its rest with God, the universal solitary. Through personal losses of family, friends, and poetic powers, Wordsworth's frantic gropings had led him to the eternal security provided by a universal God. Feeling secure in the futurity of his soul, he became concerned with the safety of his physical frame which housed his soul. God had provided for his ethereal nature; He also provided for Wordsworth's physical existence. Juxtaposed with God, Wordsworth now saw his Isle as a universal symbol of greatness, solidarity, possessing physical longevity. Britian became a solitary figure, because she was upheld by the universal solitary image, God. Wordsworth records this thought in the poem "Ode: The Morning of the Day Appointed for a General Thanksgiving. January 18, 1816".

> And one brief day is rightly set apart
> For Him who lifteth up and layeth low;
> For that Almighty God to whom we owe,
> Say not that we have vanquished--but that we survive.
> ("Ode: Thanksgiving," IV. 88-91)

This ethereal power divorced from Nature, this power that could create balance in human disruption, that could re-establish earthly order, and maintain reverential conscience, is the God of the later Wordsworth. He is the last solitary image that creates a hopeful eternity for the poet, grown tired of earth, still knowing that he, too, has been and always will be a solitary figure. Appearing in the De Selin-

court edition of Wordsworth's Poetical Works (although supposedly written by his friend, Cookson) is an apt description of Wordsworth, old but secure in the fact that he has maintained his singularity:[91]

> When vain desire
> Intrudes on peace, I pray the ethernal Sire
> To cast a soul-subduing shade on me,
> A grey-haired, pensive, thankful Refugee.
> ("At Bala-Sala, Isle of Man," 4-7)

Finally, and completely, the Refugee abandons all intellectual struggles and delvings into things. The solitary poet resigns the attempt to control his own destiny. Wordsworth is

> Leaving the final issue in His hands
> Whose goodness knows no change, whose love is sure,
> Who sees, forsees; who cannot judge amiss,
> And wafts at will the contrite soul to bliss.
> ("Ah, think how one compelled for life to abide," 11-14)

In bliss the solitary soul of the poet and the power of the single and one God will become consubstantial. Wordsworth's life of solitary existence concludes with the beginning of a more perfect solitary existence with the solitary being of God.

In conclusion, Wordsworth's life had as its focale point numerous solitary figures. In progression, he himself was first and foremost a solitary personality who, in

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[91] Ibid., IV, 34; 405.

innocent communion, was nurtured by the solitary figures found in his native dales. Next, his untried innocence was sullied by the influence of his own meddling intellect. His response was to create fictional characters who were embodiments of his intellectualism. He worked out his problem of mental dominance through a realization of something he labelled as an intellectual soul, i.e., emotional reasoning. Feeling secure in the power of thought and feeling was in essence a personal renaissance of his ability to create inspired poetry. To maintain the balance which was manifest in the intellectual soul, he created solitary figures that were guides. These figures helped him to secure and maintain the equipoise of the intellectual soul. One of the last figures to be produced during the period of the personal renaissance was a guide-monitor who directed the poet but also recorded his progress in the realm of the equipoise. The security of the renaissance period was shattered by thoughts and realizations of intellectual and physical mutability. His relationships with family and friends were deteriorating; he had lost the power to commune with Nature and, likewise, the illuminating power which was his imagination. To compensate for these losses, he seized upon the last solitary figure to fascinate his awareness, the image of God. God provided for his soul and for his physical security while he awaited liberation from his body. Although

his first lessons taught him of his own ability to escape, Enoch-like, a physical death, he had to die the inescapable physical death. Regardless of the fact that his animate form had to die, he went believing that God "wafts at will the contrite soul to bliss" ("Ah! think how one compelled ...," 14). Posterity observes, perhaps, the solitary poet's one abiding wish that came true, e.g., that his "verse may live and be / Even as a light hung in heaven to chear / Mankind in times to come" ("Recluse," MS. B., 837-839). He has left man with the last solitary figure of his own life's work, his poetry.

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