WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S REVOLUTIONARY VIEW OF HISTORY: A STUDY OF THE NARRATIVES IN THE *LYRICAL BALLADS* (1798 & 1800)

by

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William Wordsworth's Revolutionary View of History: A Study of the Narratives in the Lyrical Ballads (1798 & 1800)

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ABSTRACT

William Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads is a collection of tales such as one might expect to hear told in the village square by the local bard. In common with other collectors of tales, such as the Grimm brothers, Wordsworth considered it necessary to preserve folk-lore. The difference between him and the Grimms is that while the latter merely put down the tales in writing, Wordsworth recreated the ethos of the oral age: he wrote of tales and tellers, both of which express an attitude toward history. My study of the Lyrical Ballads concerns itself with examining the concept of history advanced by the poems in the collection.

In Chapter I, I discuss narratives in which the speaker's utterance is disorganized to varying degrees while her ostensible purpose in uttering is to tell a tale. I also discuss Wordsworth as a teller of tales already told. A comparison of his version with the original of incidents he had heard of or read, been a witness to or participated in, reveals both what he considered suitable for poetic treatment and his concept of story.

Chapter II deals with narratives that are essentially dialogues with a bit of narration thrown in. These poems, while insisting on their status as narratives, just as insistently work against the teleological structure of narrative. They end, as do most of the narratives considered in this thesis,

inconclusively.

Chapter III is concerned mainly with narratives in which story-telling and the concept of story is the expressed concern. In these poems the narrators interrupt the tale they relate to address the reader or relate a tale in several different ways. Their method of story-telling makes the audience an integral part of the text.

In the Conclusion I discuss the oral tradition as a possible tradition in which the Wordsworthian concept of history is grounded and end by using "The White Doe of Rylstone" (1815), which can be regarded as the last lyrical ballad, as the testing-ground of the concept of history advanced by the first lyrical ballads.

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DEDICATION

To my parents

Mulk Raj and Shashi Kamra

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INTRODUCTION

Lyrical Ballads in History.

In the "Advertisement" to the 1798 Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth wrote in defense of his poetry: "The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments."[1] Since 1798 Wordsworthian scholars have discussed the Lyrical Ballads (1798 and 1800) in terms of innovation--of style, subject, poetic treatment, poetic language, characterization and so on. The nineteenth century literary world spoke of the nature of the experiment in terms that appear vague to the twentieth century critic. However, with a few exceptions, it appears to have considered the experiment a success. Hazlitt's remarks in The Spirit of the Age (1825) and Coleridge's analysis of the Lyrical Ballads in Biographia Literaria (1817) seem to be fairly representative in their judgement of the poems. The former writes that Wordsworth "has described all these objects in a way and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new view or aspect of nature. He is in this sense the most original poet now living."[2] In Chapter IV of the Biographia Literaria Coleridge makes his, by now, famous statement on the originality of the Lyrical Ballads apropos of a discussion of "Guilt and Sorrow" which he had heard Wordsworth recite:

> It was not ... the freedom from false taste, whether as to common defects or to those more properly his own, which made so unusual an impression on my feelings immediately, and subsequently on my judgement. It was the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the

> fine balance of truth in observing with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the *atmosphere* and with it the depth and height of the ideal world, around forms, incidents and situations of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew-drops.[3]

The Lyrical Ballads is probably best known for this famous dialogue that it set in motion between Wordsworth and Coleridge over the nature of poetry, out of which arose the "*Preface* to the Lyrical Ballads" (1800) and Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (1817). Wordsworth's initial attempt to justify the principles on which his "experimental" poems were based resulted in the full-blown theory of poetry to which Coleridge replied, thereby immortalizing the dialogic nature of their relationship. Wordsworth's theory emerges via a discussion of the Lyrical Ballads poems but the claims he makes in the Preface are universal. Hence, one of Wordsworth's most famous pronouncements, "for all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,"[4] is made in the middle of a discussion of the importance of "purpose" in good poetry. "Purpose," in turn, forms part of a discussion of the difference between his, Wordsworth's poetry, and the poetry of his contemporaries.[5] Coleridge's Biographia Literaria is, in his own words, an attempt to "effect, as far as possible, a settlement of the long-continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction."[6] In the same paragraph Coleridge also obliquely refers to the Lyrical Ballads as the source of the controversy.[7] This dialogue between Wordsworth and Coleridge over the principles of

poetry, with each using, primarily, the Lyrical Ballads narratives as proof of the validity of his argument, appears to have determined the language of critics ever since and their assessment of Wordsworth's place in literary history and in the history of ideas.

Starting with Wordsworth's contemporaries, Hazlitt and Coleridge for instance, it soon becomes apparent that the terms in which they assessed Wordsworth's poetic merits were reminiscent of Wordsworth's statements made in the Preface (1800). In his essay, "Mr. Wordsworth," Hazlitt writes of the former's "muse": "It takes the commonest events and objects, as a test to prove that nature is always interesting from its inherent truth and beauty, without any of the ornaments of dress or pomp of circumstances to set it off."[8] Wordsworth, in the Preface (1800), writes of his purpose in the Lyrical Ballads: "The principal object then which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature."[9] Hazlitt's assessment of Wordsworth's poetic style too seems to derive conceptually from the Preface. Thus he writes:

> His popular, inartificial style gets rid (at one blow) of all the trappings of verse, of all the high places of poetry: ... All the traditions of learning, all the superstitions of age, are obliterated and effaced. We begin *de novo*, on a *tabula rasa* of poetry.[10]

Continuing in this tradition of assessing Wordsworth in accordance with principles Wordsworth himself believed to be his

merits, Matthew Arnold writes of the "right sort of verse" in Wordsworth:

> There is nothing subtle in it, no heightening, no study of poetic style, strictly so called, at all; yet it is expression of the highest and most truly expressive kind.[11]

Early twentieth century criticism, in the representative person of A.C. Bradley, attempted to correct the Romantic and Victorian assessment of Wordsworth as the poet of the everyday and the common. In his essay on Wordsworth, Bradley spends a great deal of time arguing that an assessment of the poet on these grounds alone is less than comprehensive. At different points in his discussion he refers to Wordsworth's interest in the traditional subjects of poetry and to his "mystic" poetry--both examples of those aspects of Wordsworth ignored, according to Bradley, by Wordsworthian criticism up to the twentieth century. Thus he writes:

> There is no reason to suppose that Wordsworth undervalued or objected to the subjects of such poets as Homer and Virgil, Chaucer and Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. And when, after writing his part of the *Lyrical Ballads*, he returned from Germany and settled in the Lake Country, the subjects he himself revolved for a great poem were not concerned with rural life or humble persons.[12]

and:

> However much Wordsworth was the poet of small and humble things, and the poet who saw his ideal realized, not in Utopia, but here and now before his eyes, he was, quite as much, what some would call a mystic. He saw everything in the light of 'the visionary power'.... He apprehended all things, natural or human, as the expression of something which, while manifested in them, immeasurably transcends them.[13]

However, one of Bradley's major statements of the 'correct'

approach to Wordsworth suggests the extent to which Wordsworth's own statements continued to influence the discussion of his work and assessment of him as a poet. "Ignore the manner in which Wordsworth treated his subjects," writes Bradley, "and you will have to say that his world, so far as humanity is concerned, is a dark world,--at least as dark as that of Byron."[14] In other words, Wordsworth's treatment of subject is crucial to the proper understanding of his poetry--a statement Wordsworth himself made about the Lyrical Ballads.[15]

In the 1940s, however, there appears to have been a fundamental shift in emphasis, of which Basil Willie's discussion of Wordsworth in The Eighteenth Century Background (1940), seems to be representative. In this work Wordsworth is not assessed generally in terms of poetic principles such as diction and subject matter but in terms of his contribution to the history of ideas. The Preface, and Wordsworth's confessed principles of poetry, take a backseat as the poetry is analysed for its philosophical insights. Willie starts his chapter on Wordsworth with the following observation on the latter's status in the world of ideas:

> Wordsworth's importance in the history of the Idea of Nature is not likely to be underestimated, and it will not be expected that much can be added to what he himself and numerous critics and biographers have written on the subject. Nevertheless it is essential to the rounding-off of our story that Wordsworth's 'Nature' should be seen in its relation to the background we have been describing, and particularly in relation to the political thought of his age. The divinization of Nature which began in the modern world at the Renaissance, and proceeded during the eighteenth century in the way we have seen, culminates for English literature in

Wordsworth.[16]

From this point on, till very recently, the favoured method of criticism has been the locating and discussing of an idea central to Wordsworthian thought, hence M.H. Abrams' discussion of Wordsworth in Natural Supernaturalism (1971) in terms of "the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking."[17] Geoffrey Hartman, in Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814 (1964), discusses Wordsworth's work in terms of 'spots' of time which he suggests are "apocalyptic" where the term describes "the kind of imagination that is concerned with the supernatural and especially the Last Things," and also "a mind which actively desires the inauguration of a totally new epoch, whether preceding or following the end of days."[18] Jonathan Wordsworth, though writing much later, in William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision (1982), continues with this tradition, stating that "Wordsworth's borderers, border conditions, states of mind, implications, words, are so numerous and so ramified that they amount to a way of looking at his poetry as a whole."[19]

As this eclectic summary demonstrates, the Lyrical Ballads has not, since Coleridge, been paid much attention as a separate work. That is, not (as I discuss a little later) until the 1970s. When the selection was analysed in any great detail, by Wordsworth's contemporaries, it was done so, in particular by Coleridge, in terms of the Preface. In fact, Coleridge uses many of the Lyrical Ballads narratives to prove the discrepancy between Wordsworth's theory and practice. As far as he is

concerned, the poems are successful whereas the theory is not. In Chapter XVIII of the Biographia Literaria he writes: "I reflect with delight how little a mere theory, though of his own workmanship, interferes with the processes of genuine imagination in a man of true poetic genius."[20] His comments on the Lyrical Ballads poems are largely confined to proving that these poems, at least the "interesting" ones, for instance, do not have characters that are "taken from low or rustic life in the common acceptation of those words," and that "it is not less clear that the sentiments and language, as far as they can be conceived to have been really transferred from the minds and conversations of such persons, are attributable to causes and circumstances not necessarily connected with 'their occupations and abode.'"[21] Of the poems which Coleridge considered to be an instance of the use of characters and words "from low or rustic life" he writes that they demonstrate "a downright simpleness, under the affectation of simplicity, prosaic words in feeble metre, silly thoughts in childish phrases, and a preference of mean, degrading or at best trivial associations and characters."[22]

However, turning to the late twentieth century, there has been a resurgence of interest in the Lyrical Ballads poems as works worthy of independent discussion. It is evident from a reading of recent criticism on the Lyrical Ballads that this time around the work is to be judged in terms of its connectedness with the tradition of the ballad or magazine verse

and the socio-political climate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, that is, in terms less connected with the principles of poetry expressed in the Preface. The debate is still that over the innovativeness ("experiment") of the poems and has been dominated by Mary Jacobus, Stephen Parrish, Jonathan Wordsworth and Robert Mayo, who started it all with an article titled "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads" (1954). Together with more recent works such as Heather Glen's Vision and Disenchantment (1983) and Don Bialostosky's Making Tales (1984), Mary Jacobus in her Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads' (1976) and Stephen Parrish in his The Art of the 'Lyrical Ballads' (1973) argue for a tradition out of which the Lyrical Ballads arose and locate the innovativeness in Wordsworth's deviation from such tradition. In Jacobus, Parrish and Glen's studies the discussion takes the form of an extended comparison of Wordsworth's poems with eighteenth century ballads and / or eighteenth century magazine verse. These studies provide a much needed context in which to study the Lyrical Ballads, and in particular its self-proclaimed innovativeness. These critics do, of course, differ in the manner in which they account for this innovativeness. It is therefore these critics and their attempts at explaining the nature of the experiment that I will be discussing at some length.

In Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads' Mary Jacobus writes:

> The challenge of the 1798 volume lay in its refusal to fulfil audience expectations--in particular, expectations about the ballad. His readers were not only required to find 'A tale in every thing' ("Simon Lee", l. 76), but forced to look critically at the fashion for supernatural and pseudo-antiquarian balladry which had reached its peak during the mid-1790s.[23]

She further defines Wordsworth's ballad as "a new kind of ballad emphasizing the importance of the everyday, of feeling rather than situation."[24] The significance of Wordsworth's experiment is, according to her, the fact that it "offers the most illuminating example of Wordsworth's self-defining relation to his literary context."[25] Stephen Parrish's The Art of the 'Lyrical Ballads,' on the other hand, suggests Wordsworth's experiment with the ballad was largely a formal one. "At one level," he writes, "the experiments did involve poetic diction. But at a deeper level they were, I think, experiments in dramatic form, in characterization, and in narrative technique."[26] While Parrish confines his comparison largely to literary ballads--those of Scott, Burns and Percy--Jacobus considers the notion only to dismiss the possibility of a significant connection between the two. Thus she writes:

> Despite superficial resemblances, they have little but their themes in common with the poetry of the magazines, drawing instead on a more substantial tradition of humane and identified writing.[27]

Those of Wordsworth's poems she cites as examples of magazine verse are undoubtedly specimens of inferior poetry--"The Convict," "The Hour Bell Sounds" and "Address to the Ocean"--all of which did appear in magazines. Those of Wordsworth's poems Jacobus finds successful she traces back to the poetry of Cowper

and Burns and the ballad. In her words, "the closest analogues to 'The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman', 'The Last of the Flock', and 'The Mad Mother' are to be found respectively in the poetry of Cowper and Burns and in the traditional ballad."[28]

The Lyrical Ballads narratives are, however, significantly linked with magazine verse as well as with the literary ballad. The three are related in a manner of speaking since most magazine verse, in common with the ballad, has ordinary people and folk themes as its subject matter. Of the major Wordsworthian critics it is only Heather Glen who unequivocally places the Lyrical Ballads in the genre of magazine verse. The term "magazine verse," she admits, is damaging as it indicates the "ephemeral nature" of such verse but adds that it is:

> a useful generic label for the type of poetry which readers of *Lyrical Ballads* would have expected: poems on humanitarian subjects, such as bereaved mothers, female vagrants, madmen, convicts and the indigent poor; poems modelled on ballads; poems about nature; short meditative fragments; anecdotes; topographical pieces; reflective and occasional verses.[29]

Magazine verse, while in itself perhaps lacking the quality of more literary verse, is an important cultural index, as is most popular art. It is as a cultural index that she finds magazine verse significant to the purpose of the Lyrical Ballads. She writes:

> ... the poetry pages of the magazines--trivial as their contents mostly are--seem to be part of a larger cultural process: in this case, the process by which the polite culture justified itself to itself, coping with and translating into its own terms that which was potentially most challenging to its assumptions.[30]

Glen finds Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads offers a challenge to

this establishment. According to her, in the Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth refuses to "assume what eighteenth century readers would most fundamentally have expected--the central controlling viewpoint which would direct their responses and draw general conclusions,"[31] and her analysis of the Lyrical Ballads narratives is aimed at proving that:

> ... in a deliberately literal-minded way, Wordsworth records only what could actually be seen from a single limited point of view, and refuses (in what amounts to a parody of the reader's expectations) to speculate beyond it. Dramatically, he points toward the stubborn actuality of other, and quite unassimilable, points of view. In their disconcerting absence of mediating interpretation, these poems suggest the disquieting nature of a reality which is not filtered through familiar schemata, but which is momentarily confronted as quite unfathomable.[32]

Encapsulating her analysis of the Lyrical Ballads (1798) she writes of its originality in the following terms, suggesting that the poems challenge both literary and political establishments:

> In these poems of 1798 Wordsworth is clearly playing upon and drawing attention to his readers' simplifying schemata, refusing to present this expected subject-matter in easily digestible form, and demanding that they take a much more active attitude towards it.[33]

The important point Glen's analysis makes is that the Lyrical Ballads must be studied in terms of Wordsworth's political concerns in order to be correctly understood as innovative. This conclusion is built on the belief that there is a significant connection between magazine verse of the period and the Lyrical Ballads. Unlike Mary Jacobus, who dismisses the influence of magazine verse in the formation of the Lyrical

Ballads narratives, Glen's starting point for her discussion of the innovativeness of the book of poems is this vital connection.[34] The reason Glen's argument in favour of a serious connection between the two is more acceptable than is Jacobus's dismissal is that Wordsworth's statements on the issue of magazine verse and his political-literary concerns of the 1790s, as well as the works he wrote in this decade, affirm her conclusions. Briefly, during this period Wordsworth wrote much poetry that was overtly social in its concerns. A good example is a poem, "The Convict," that was first published in the Morning Post in 1797 and then in Lyrical Ballads (1798), after which it was never again published by Wordsworth.[35] The Godwinian overtones of this and other poems such as "The Old Cumberland Beggar" and Wordsworth's only drama, The Borderers, testify to the presence of a vital relationship between the poetry Wordsworth was writing and the socio-political scene of the 1790s.

The social purpose of poetry--to help in the realization of a better social system than the present one--is also behind Wordsworth's much publicized remark on magazine poetry. In a letter he wrote to Mathews dated June 1794 he refers to magazine verse as "trash which infests the magazines."[36] And of periodicals in general he writes, once again in a letter to Mathews, "All the periodical miscellanies that I am acquainted with, except one or two of the reviews, appear to be written to maintain the existence of prejudice and to disseminate error."[37]

Both these remarks are made apropos of Wordsworth's desire to publish a socially responsible periodical. Wordsworth's idealistic aim was to avoid doing what other periodicals were doing, at least according to him. He wanted his periodical to focus "upon life and Manners," and to be a "vehicle of sound and exalted Morality."[38] As far as doing what these others were--disseminating error and maintaining prejudice--he states in the same letter to Mathews, "I have already said I will not prostitute my pen."[39] Wordsworth even spells out the kind of readership he wants to cultivate, allowing us to conclude the reason for his keen interest in periodicals lay in their capacity to influence public thought. Thus he informs Mathews that they should be as concerned about the "class of readers" they "aim at procuring" as about what they should print.[40] Producing a morally and socially responsible periodical was so important to him that he thought fit to describe his own political stance, adding: "I have therefore thought it proper to say this much in order that if your sentiments or those of our coadjutor, are dissimilar to mine, we may drop the scheme at once."[41] And "Poetry" was to be a part of Wordsworth's ideal periodical.[42]

It is more than safe to see magazine verse as one of the genres against which Wordsworth defined his own experimental poetry. Why precisely did Wordsworth consider magazine verse to be trash? Glen's argument suggests it is because Wordsworth saw such verse as reinforcing a socio-political regime he

disapproved of by sentimentalizing those who were its victims. Wordsworth's own statement on periodicals in general would tend to validate Glen's judgement: such periodicals "maintain the existence of prejudice and ... disseminate error."[43] The immorality of the periodical industry appears to have been the main reason for Wordsworth's abhorrence of the magazines. Hence he defined his own periodical in terms that were precisely the reverse of the established periodicals. With the possibility of reaching the entire literate population, the periodical was at once potentially dangerous and beneficial. Thus Wordsworth's disgust arises from two conclusions he must have arrived at concerning the issue of periodicals: on the one hand the periodicals were irresponsible in their choice of material for publication and on the other, in reflecting their readers' tastes, they made a statement about the public's moral enlightenment, or lack thereof, that was frightening. According to his remarks, Wordsworth regarded magazine poetry as suffering from exactly the same problems: it reflected the lack of morality in the writers and the moral degeneration of the reading public. His challenge, in the Lyrical Ballads, is a challenge to both poets and the eighteenth century reader. What he is challenging is not simply the type of poetry the eighteenth century public enjoyed but its socio-economic-political-moral-cultural being.

Why did Wordsworth choose the genre of poetry to challenge the mythos of an age? Indeed, the question was asked by

Coleridge and is behind Charles James Fox's letter to Wordsworth as well, a letter he wrote in reply upon receiving the copy of the Lyrical Ballads (1800) that Wordsworth had sent him. Coleridge challenged Wordsworth's views on Poetry, which he--Coleridge--saw expressed in the Lyrical Ballads, in his Biographia Literaria through questioning Wordsworth's choice of subject: "I object," he writes referring to the Lyrical Ballads,

> for the following reasons: First, because the object in view, as an immediate object, belongs to the moral philosopher, and would be pursued not only more appropriately, but in my opinion with far greater probability of success, in sermons or moral essays than in an elevated poem. It seems, indeed, to destroy the main fundamental distinction, not only between a poem and prose, but even between philosophy and works of fiction, inasmuch as it proposes truth for its immediate object instead of pleasure.[44]

Fox's letter to Wordsworth is similar in tone. In a brief note he politely points out to Wordsworth that he is overstepping boundaries in considering poetry a venue appropriate for the discussion of political issues. Writing apropos of "The Brothers" and "Michael" he states:

> I read with particular attention the two you pointed out; but whether it be from early prepossessions, or whatever other cause, I am no great friend to blank verse for subjects which are to be treated of with simplicity.[45]

The disagreement between Coleridge and Fox on the one hand and Wordsworth on the other is the fundamental one of definition--of poetry. Coleridge, as his statement suggests, regards truth and pleasure as separate entities, as does Fox, pleasure being the end of poetry and truth that of sermons and moral essays. Wordsworth on the other hand seems to consider the defining

characteristic of poetry to be its capacity to record "the image of Man and nature." That is, the aim of poetry is, according to him, to relate the history of humankind. And since it must relate accurately, truth is its aim as much as it is the prose-historian's. In fact, in the letter he wrote Fox Wordsworth recommended the Lyrical Ballads in its capacity as a historical document. Talking about two poems in particular, he writes:

> In the two Poems, "The Brothers" and "Michael" I have attempted to draw a picture of the domestic affections as I know they exist amongst a class of men who are now almost confined to the North of England.... This class of men is rapidly disappearing.[46]

The 1800 Preface also reveals how much Wordsworth regarded his poetry as arising out of, as a record of and response to, the socio-political-cultural climate of the age. Informing his readers of his unwillingness to write a preface defending his poetry he offers the following as explanation: he declines

> ... because adequately to display my opinions and fully to enforce my arguments would require a space wholly disproportionate to the nature of a preface. For to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence, of which I believe it susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved: which again could not be determined, without pointing out, in what manner language and the human mind act and react on each other, and without retracing the revolutions not of literature alone but likewise of society itself.[47]

In Tropics of Discourse (1978) Hayden White recalls the late R.G. Collingwood, the historian, as insisting that "the historian was above all a story teller" and suggesting "that historical sensibility was manifested in the capacity to make a plausible story out of a congeries of 'facts' which, in their unprocessed form, made no sense at all."[48] Sonnets Wordsworth wrote on historians and statements he made on history suggest he would be in complete agreement with Collingwood about historiography. However, Wordsworth saw the nineteenth century historian as failing in his duty as a story-teller. His objections to the nineteenth century historian and historiography can best be understood as a reaction to the changes taking place in the discipline--changes that led to the separation, once and for all, of 'history' from 'story,' historian from story-teller. For observations on the nineteenth century attitude towards history I am indebted to Hayden White, who cogently summarizes the radical shift that took place in nineteenth century historiography as follows:

> In the early nineteenth century ... it became conventional, at least among historians, to identify truth with fact and to regard fiction as the opposite of truth, hence as a hindrance to the understanding of reality rather than as a way of apprehending it. History came to be set over against fiction, and especially the novel, as the representation of the "actual" to the representation of the "possible" or only "imaginable." And thus was born the dream of a historical discourse that would consist of nothing but factually accurate statements about a realm of events which were (or had been) observable in principle, the arrangement of which in the order of their original occurrence would permit them to figure forth their true meaning or significance.

> Typically, the nineteenth-century historian's aim was to expunge every hint of the fictive, or merely imaginable, from his discourse, to eschew the techniques of the poet and orator, and to forgo what were regarded as the intuitive procedures of the maker of fictions in his apprehension of reality.[49]

The belief that fact and fancy could be separated seems to have arisen as a consequence of the theory that the French Revolution, the single most significant historical event of the century, had failed because of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century tendency to see historical process in terms of myth. Once again quoting White,

> Both the political Right and the political Left blamed mythic thinking for the excesses and failures of the Revolution.... If social processes and structures seemed "demonic" in their capacity to resist direction, to take turns unforeseen, and to overturn the highest plans, frustrating the most heartfelt desires, then the study of history had to be demythified.[50]

However, the desire to avoid the mythification of the past--a desire Wordsworth sympathized with as his sonnet "Plea for the Historian" indicates--led to the unhealthy separation of the terms 'fact' and 'fancy' unaccompanied by the recognition that all fact is interpretation. As White writes, "no given set of casually recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story, the most it might offer to the historian are story *elements*."[51] Interestingly enough, this is exactly what William Labov, the sociologist, says about narrative. He first defines it as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of causes to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred."[52] Having discussed narrative in these terms, he adds,

> There is one important aspect of narrative which has not been discussed--perhaps the most important element in addition to the basic narrative clause. That is what we term the *evaluation* of the narrative: the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its *raison d'être*: why it was told, and what the narrator is getting at.[53]

White and Labov, although very differently concerned with the issue of story, both suggest that recording events does not in itself constitute a history but the act of interpreting them does. The similarity of method in history and story-telling is thus affirmed by the definitions of the terms 'history' and 'narrative' which these two scholars provide.[54]

Wordsworth too would have agreed with White and Labov. The attempt to remove the subjective self from a presentation of what Wordsworth called "the image of things," as well as the assumption that such supposed objectivity led to the truth met with his censure. In "At Rome--Regrets--In Allusion to Niehbuhr and Other Modern Historians" he specifically addresses the problems afflicting the nineteenth century historian.

> Those old credulities, to nature dear,
> Shall they no longer bloom upon the stock
> Of History; stript naked as a rock
> 'Mid a dry desert? What is it we hear?
> The glory of infant Rome must disappear.
> Her morning splendours vanish, and their place
> Know them no more. If Truth who veiled her face
> With those bright beams yet hid it not, must steer
> Henceforth a humbler course perplexed and slow;
> Our solace yet remains for us who came
> Into this world in days when story lacked
> Severe research, that in our hearts we know
> How, for exciting Youth's heroic flame,
> Assent is power, belief the soul of fact.[55]

The sonnet makes the nature of Wordsworth's problems with the nineteenth century historian quite clear. The belief that

history can be written without an audience in mind--after all facts are facts irrespective of the observer according to this view--is what appears to disturb him the most. Rather than placing the power of story in the written word Wordsworth places it in "assent," in audience, while he challenges outright the notion that "fact" can be divorced from interpretation: "belief," he states, "is the soul of fact."

Whether Wordsworth is aware of it or not, he is writing of concepts of history that clash because they belong to opposing systems of socio-political-cultural organization. The nineteenth century view on history can be seen as a culmination of the invention of the written language. It is a view typical of a literate society whose dependence on the written word as the medium of communication gave that medium the power until then given only to the story-teller. The identification of supreme truth with the written word leads to a belief in the sacredness of the printed page. As the mediator between humankind and its past, the written word also takes on the burden that was the story-teller's in the oral age--to tell the tale of the tribe responsibly. Making history as factual as possible, as unencumbered by imagination ("old credulities") as possible, is then to behave responsibly as a historian. Of course, the concept of history Wordsworth advocates in this sonnet is one that belongs primarily to an oral culture. History is "story" and incomplete without audience ("assent") and "belief" and is therefore a communal activity and must remain so. Rather than

recording "facts," its role is to remind the tribe of its place in space and time. A story-teller, historian, bard, whatever terms one employs, of an oral culture thus sings of "the glory" of the tribe, there being no incompatability between "truth" and "imagination."

As Wordsworth sees it, then, the role played by history and the story-teller in an oral society ensures the continuity of the tribe by ensuring the continuity of meaning. The last two lines of the sonnet in fact suggest he finds such communal meaning essential to the survival of the individual in his own movement through time, that is, essential to individual history. "For exciting Youth's heroic flame," he states, "Assent is power, belief the soul of fact." The nineteenth century literate historian thus stands accused of locating meaning in 'facts' (a dry desert, according to Wordsworth) and, more importantly, of ushering in the demise of the tribe by ushering in the demise of a shared past. Ironically, creating a shared past is precisely what the historian professes to be doing in writing a history.

The other major statement Wordsworth made on the subject is in the 1802 version of the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. Comparing poetry and history, poet and historian, he states:

> Poetry is the image of man and nature. The obstacles which stand in the way of the fidelity of the Biographer and Historian, and of their consequent utility, are incalculably greater than those which are to be encountered by the Poet who comprehends the dignity of his art. The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a Human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him ... as a Man. Except this one

> restriction, there is no object standing between the Poet and the image of things; between this and the Biographer and Historian, there are a thousand.[56]

The object of poetry and of history is thus the same--to present "the image of things."[57] Presumably, the major difference between the poet and historian, according to Wordsworth, is the historian's predilection for "severe research," which leads to a distorted presentation of "the image of Man and nature." Wordsworth's choice, to return to Coleridge's objection to Wordsworth's experiment in the Lyrical Ballads, of poetry over the sermon or the essay, is in itself a statement of his view of historiography: history is not a series of facts but a record of the spirit of man. And since poetry is such a record, it is, of history and poetry, the more accurate genre. Wordsworth's use of material firmly grounded in the 'real' world in the Lyrical Ballads is in itself a statement of belief in the identity of history and poetry, factual and poetic. As his discussion of poets and historians in the 1800 Preface to the Lyrical Ballads indicates, Wordsworth believed the primary task of poetry to be historical in nature, the poet's task being to consider "man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure."[58] This statement suggests Wordsworth believes history to be a record of this interaction, not of the entities per se, and hence to be a discipline largely concerned with relations. Wordsworth's letter to Fox, describing the people of the North of England, is entirely in keeping with this view. In this letter he relates the history of these people not in terms of

events but in terms of spirit. He finds the central, and distinguishing, feature of this area to be its bondedness to the land. And it is in terms of this bondedness that he writes of them to Fox:

> Their little tract of land serves as a kind of permanent rallying point for their domestic feelings, as a tablet upon which they are written which makes them objects of memory in a thousand instances when they would otherwise be forgotten.[59]

Along with magazine verse, then, eighteenth century historiography appears to have been the other object in Wordsworth's mind when he was defining his own theory of poetry. While historians mutilate, and at the very least misrepresent, the "image of things," writers of magazine verse sentimentalize the subject (which is pretty close to 'mythicizing the past,' as White speaks of it). Historiography and the historian are the subjects of the Lyrical Ballads narratives I will be looking at. These narratives are often histories / stories as well as discussions of historiography / story-telling. Thus they are simultaneously instances and discussions of Wordsworth's theory. Wordsworth accomplishes this dual purpose, making many of these narratives sophisticatedly self-reflexive, largely through his use of the structural leverage provided by the presence of a narrator. The reader's focus is divided between the story the narrator relates and the fact that he is narrating. The degree of mediation by the narrator differs with the narrative, but the curious fact is that in each instance the mediation, or lack thereof, is tailored to accomplish the purpose of the poem.

Unlike Heather Glen, who sees the narrator of the 1798 Lyrical Ballads narratives as awkward, and an indication of Wordsworth's immature art, I tend to see the narrator in his awkwardness, overt moralizing, and so on, as a part of the point being made in the narrative in question.[60]

Story and Teller

Wordsworth's choice of a narrative form--the ballad--as the form most suited to his poetic concerns in the Lyrical Ballads is in itself an indication of his interest in historiography in this book of poems. Narrative is of course the form most suited to the relating of a story. And the ballad, in particular, relates local history as well as that of the folk from the folk's point of view since it has its origins in folklore.[61] The association of folklore with a nation's history is the subject of some of Mikhail Bakhtin's observations on the different types of "chronotopes" in literature. Of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century's preoccupation with folkloric forms of writing such as ballads, folk songs, folk tales, he writes:

> The second half of the eighteenth century in England and Germany is characterized, as we know, by an increased interest in folklore. One can even speak with a certain amount of justification about the *discovery of folklore* for literature, which occurred in this epoch. This was primarily a matter of national and local (within the boundaries of the national) folklore. The folksong, the folktale, the heroic and historical legend, and the saga were above all a new and powerful means of humanizing and intensifying one's native space. With folklore there burst into literature a new, powerful, and extremely productive wave of *national-historical time* that exerted an immense influence on the development of the historical outlook in general.[62]

The other major characteristic of the ballad, that it is poetry set to music, is significant in considering Wordsworth's choice of the form. In his "Preface" to the Poems of 1815 Wordsworth classified the ballad as a sub-category of the lyrical, and not the narrative, as one would expect.[63] According to Wordsworth, "the Hymn, the Ode, the Elegy, the Song and the Ballad" are all categories of the lyrical, their distinctive feature being the music which accompanies the poetry.[64] Wordsworth's definition appears to be in keeping with the change in definition of the term "ballad" taking place in the eighteenth century. David C. Fowler in A Literary History of the Popular Ballad (1968) notes that by the eighteenth century "the traditional narrative emphasis of ballads gradually became subservient to the influence of melody, which began to play a much more important part in determining ballad structure."[65] The importance of the element of song for a study of the Lyrical Ballads is best outlined by Robert Langbaum in The Poetry of Experience (1957). In this work he states of the title, "Lyrical Ballads,"

> Wordsworth called attention to the double nature of his new kind of poetry by naming the volume of 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*.... He thought of himself, at least in Lyrical Ballads, as a teller of tales. The departure lay precisely in the word, *lyrical*, by which he could not have meant that the poems were to be sung but must have meant that they were lyrical in the sense of subjective, stressing feeling over action.[66]

Even in his definition of the narrative, Wordsworth focuses on the ability of narrative to use point of view in making its point. This definition, which appears in the "Preface" to the

Poems of 1815 is:

> 1st, the Narrative,--including the Epopoeia, the Historic Poem, the Tale, the Romance, the Mock-heroic, and ... the Metrical Novel. Of this Class, the distinguishing mark is, that the Narrator, however liberally his speaking agents be introduced, is himself primarily the source from which everything flows.[67]

Scholarly definitions of the ballad demonstrate just how radical is Wordsworth's use of the ballad and narrative. In the introduction to English and Scottish Popular Ballads (1904) Kittredge describes the ballad as an objectively narrated story. He writes:

> Not only is the author of a ballad invisible ... but the teller of the tale has no role in it. Unlike other songs, it does not purport to give utterance to the feelings or the mood of the singer. The first person does not occur at all, except in the speeches of the several characters. Finally, there are no comments or reflections by the narrator. He does not psychologize.... If it were possible to conceive a tale as telling itself, without the instrumentality of a conscious speaker, the ballad would be such a tale.[68]

In a similar vein, Gordon H. Gerould writes that the ballad:

> ... is a folk-song that tells a story with stress on the crucial situation, tells it by letting the action unfold itself in event and speech, and tells it objectively with little comment or intrusion of personal bias.[69]

Wordsworth's description of 'ballad' and 'narrative' would appear to challenge the central characteristic of the ballad--the absence of the subjective voice. If according to tradition the ballad story is purely concerned with theme, Wordsworth's lyrical ballads certainly do not qualify. Wordsworth's definition of narrative suggests he considers story to be a combination of theme and teller. And indeed in the

narratives of the Lyrical Ballads the narrator, whether absent or present, is structurally significant to the purpose of the poem.[70] He is important not only because he forces the reader to take point of view into consideration but because, more often than not, it is through him that the poem discusses the issue of history / story, teller / historian.[71]

The typical narrative in the Lyrical Ballads in fact poses a challenge to the traditional definition of ballad since it does not relate a story and has a rather obtrusive narrator. The typical narrative does, however, set the reader up for a story although it does not fulfil the expectation. Thus the typical Lyrical Ballads narrative raises the issue of story--what is a story--rather forcibly. The question then arises why create the expectation of a story, complete with the reasons for its utterance embedded in it, if one does not intend telling a story. That precisely is the point. Either, upon reading the Lyrical Ballads narratives, we must reassess what the terms 'story' and 'history' mean (and hence the purpose of story / history) or we must consider the narratives proof of Wordsworth's failure in his experiment with narrative. Since the structural feature common to many of the narratives appears to be the creating and subsequent disappointing of the audience's expectation of a story, I rather think it is a deliberate structural device than a sign of structural weakness. Since too this structural feature of the Lyrical Ballads is a premise for my analysis of the poems rather than the subject of the thesis,

I would like to do a close analysis of two poems--both originally part of one longer poem in manuscript--that appear in the 1798 and 1800 Lyrical Ballads. "Old Man Travelling," which appears in the 1798 edition and "The Old Cumberland Beggar," which appears in the 1800 one.[72] The purpose of the analysis is to demonstrate the manner in which the narrator sets the reader up to expect a story and follows it up with a refusal to fulfil this expectation.

Story vs Anti-Story; Wordsworth vs Tradition

Since "story" is a term that has been defined in many different ways, it is a concept I would like to define for the purposes of my discussion of the Lyrical Ballads narratives. Labov's definition is the most suitable: story is not simply a narrative of a sequence of events causally related but a form of utterance that makes its *raison d'être* apparent in the telling. In accordance with this definition, story is of necessity teleological: it must answer the crucial "so what" of the audience. Kittredge and Gerould's definition of ballad assumes the *raison d'être* of a ballad lies in the tale it relates, that is, the tale itself has to be momentous enough to warrant telling. Wordsworth's narratives, as we shall see in the discussion of "Old Man Travelling" and "The Old Cumberland Beggar," alter the centre of gravity as it were: the tale itself matters less than the telling. These narratives are anti-stories quite deliberately since more often than not their opening statements set the reader up to expect a story and then, just as

deliberately, fail to deliver.[73]

"Old Man Travelling" opens with a statement that leads us to expect a story. The narrator begins, as it were, *in medias res*, not identifying his subject except by a pronoun: "The little hedge-row birds, / That peck along the road, regard him not" (ll. 1-2).[74] But instead of telling a story the narrator sketches a portrait of an old man through an accretion of details that do not in and of themselves spell out a story. In the old man's "gait," "face," and "step" is "one expression" and

> ... every limb,
> His look and bending figure, all bespeak
> A man who does not move with pain, but moves
> With thought (ll. 4-7).

Lines 12-14 are almost a summation of the spirit the narrator sees manifest in the old man's physical state:

> .... He is by nature led
> To peace so perfect, that the young behold
> With envy, what the old man hardly feels (ll. 12-14).

The 1815 version of the poem, in which lines 15-20 were dropped, emphasizes the absence of story in the poem by ending with the last quoted lines. The identity of the "he" of line 3 thus remains obscure. The 1798 version of the poem has the added lines that detail a meeting that took place between the narrator and the old man, presumably the one out of which arose the observations the narrator presents in the first fourteen lines. However, the record of the meeting does not make a story out of the entire poem. In fact even in and of itself it does not tell a story and maintains a tenuous connection with the rest of the

poem--the connection indicated formally by a dash which connects the last five lines with the rest of the poem:

> --I asked him whither he was bound, and what
> The object of his journey; he replied
> 'Sir! I am going many miles to take
> 'A last leave of my son, a mariner,
> 'Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
> And there is dying in an hospital' (ll. 15-20).

The narrator does not link the incident with the statements he made earlier about the old man thereby leaving the "story" unuttered. The "story" is, in fact, not simply not articulated but deliberately disarticulated as there is no attempt made by the narrator to render the accretion of details and incident meaningful. What we are presented with is, in traditional terms, the materials that make up a story. We are given a character sketch and an incident and if we were to make a story out of the materials it would probably go something like this: an old man who appears to be so peaceful and beyond struggle, albeit a peace arrived at after immense struggle, is in actuality still involved in struggle, tragedy. Instead of statement what we are presented with is a sketch that paints a 'peaceful' and dramatic recreation of a past event that in itself demonstrates 'tragedy.' There seems, therefore, to be a deliberate evasion on the part of the narrator of making his narrative a meaningful unit--a story.

The structure of the poem then suggests that 'story' is not the issue at stake--it does not want to tell a story. There is no final statement by the narrator that would act as closure because the issue itself is not clearly defined. The story is

the blank space implied by the dash, and as such it exists only potentially. However, the narrative draws on our expectation of story in order to make its point. The fact that something is being related leads us to expect the teleological structure of story. But the story we are presented is the pre-story stage of raw materials. The narrative thus articulates disarticulation (of story). Hence too the narrative structure is centrifugal rather than--as in traditional narrative--centripetal; it throws itself out rather than drawing together to make one story. This is probably the reason it is difficult to arrive at the point of the tale--is the point being made that there is tragedy in the old man's life? or that his condition has social implications? or that despite all the trials and tribulations the old man is peaceful? The point is that there is no <u>one</u> point being made and to search for one is to be disappointed. The poem is, at the very least, a riddle.

It would probably not be incorrect to see the first part of the poem as a portrait. Käte Hamburger in <u>The Logic of Literature</u> introduces the "picture poem" as a category related to the ballad. Such a poem, she writes, "... having developed from the epigram of antiquity, describes a painting or a piece of sculpture."[75] Wordsworth's would be a naturalistic painting. By being given first, the portrait is set up as the point of reference by which the last few lines of the poem--that describe the incident--are to be understood. The portrait then is the "known" part of the poem. Structurally it occupies more space

than does the incident and it attempts to and succeeds in naming the essence of the man. The basic unit of organization in this section is that of image and thought. The incident which follows is the "unknown" part of the poem. It is semantically connected with the portrait and occupies far fewer lines than does the latter. These lines introduce the speaker in the first-person, thus opening the whole area of concern related to first-person narratives, which was not a part of the poem up to this point because the narrator was, till now, a third-person narrator. Secondly, they introduce an interchange between the character and a new presence, the first-person narrator, which incidentally, is not explored. Finally, these lines invest the figure of the old man, until now more spatially than temporally organized, with a plot-dimension. But since the incident is not semantically linked with the portrait none of these new issues raised is satisfactorily resolved.

The narrative thrives on a curious reversal; the observations, we presume, arise out of the incident of the narrator's encounter with the old man but the two--incident and observations--are presented in reverse order. This reversal of the nature of events in the "real" world of the poem drastically alters one's understanding of the narrative. If the incident had been presented first and the portrait later, the primary meaning of the poem would have been as follows: an old man with much suffering in his life is still so very peaceful that his condition is enviable. However, because the order of

presentation is the reverse the onus for explanation falls on the narrator who seems, in retrospect (after we read of the incident), to be forcing an interpretation on the old man. In its present form the 1798 version of the poem suggests the reality of the old man's situation is one of pain.

The riddle is therefore not so much the figure of the old man but the poem itself. It does not "name" its *raison d'être*. The poem denies the mimetic function of poetry by forcing us to realize it is a linguistic act--this last by altering the cause and effect relationship between the events as they exist in the "real" world of the poem. The *raison d'être* of the poem lies not in a proper representation of reality, or in theme, as much as in the structure, in the contradiction central to the lyrical ballads--a primarily oral poetic form is being presented in the written form. Further, the poem's subject is dialogue--oral interchange--and the reflections it gave rise to, while the poem is itself a dialogue between the narrator and his audience / reader. Thus the subject of the poem is oral communication while the poem itself, a ballad, is oral communication translated into the written medium.[76]

The poem undeniably has a social purpose, expressed in the presence of point of view. However, it is useful to consider why Wordsworth did not overtly state the social implications (or make a story) as he does for instance in "The Convict" and "The Old Cumberland Beggar." The ambiguity of purpose and the fact that the poem is based on a supposed dialogue makes a

consideration of the oral tradition of some use (although Wordsworth did not concern himself with the philosophical ramifications to any great length). Story, in the oral tradition, is in many ways a flexible form rather than a rigid genre like the *bildungsroman*, for instance. Variation is more the rule than the exception. The improvisational nature of telling--and Wordsworth does not make a distinction between oral and written telling--is emphasized by him in his defense of the use of repetition in his poetry. In short, he suggests repetition is common because our awareness of the "inadequateness of our own powers, or the deficiencies of language" make us "cling to the same words."[77] And when the fact of telling is recorded, as in many of the lyrical ballads, it is important to Wordsworth to be faithful to the image he is recording. In "Old Man Travelling" the dash that separates and joins the portrait with the incident expresses a leap of logic in terms of linguistic expression. Hence, present in the written form, the utterance of the speaker poses a riddle as to the purpose of his utterance. Hence too, the poem remains open-ended.

The ambiguity of poetic purpose that is maintained in "Old Man Travelling" is discarded in a closely related poem Wordsworth published in the 1800 Lyrical Ballads, "The Old Cumberland Beggar." However, in every other way it is like the former. The opening lines once again set us up to expect a story as the narrator introduces us to his subject:

I saw an aged beggar in my walk,
And he was seated by the highway side
On a low structure of rude masonry (ll. 1-3).[78]

The atemporality that characterized the speaker's observations on his subject in "Old Man Travelling" characterizes the beggar; the promised story is never delivered and the character is divested of the dimensions of plot. He is described as involved in action so mundane that such action is spatialized and we absorb the action as part of a portrait rather than of a plot. His action, of eating his midday meal, has the value of providing detail necessary to the building-up of a picture. In fact the narrator rather skilfully creates the setting much in the manner of a story-teller, thus encouraging us to expect a story. The "aged Beggar" is seated on a "structure of rude masonry," which is at the "foot of a huge hill." His staff is laid "across the broad smooth stone" and he is involved in drawing out the "scraps and fragments" of food given by "village dames" and scanning them "... with a fixed and serious look / Of idle computation" (ll. 11-12). The organizational strategy of the poem continues to be imagistic as the narrator defeats the appearance of plot that his utterance assumes. We are presented with a series of actions--the "sauntering Horseman traveller" stopping to give the beggar alms, the woman at the toll-gate lifting the latch to let him pass, and so on. However, these are merely hypothetically actions--once again the narrator is drawing a picture of the old man instead of telling a story. The actions are, in fact, couched in the present perfect tense, suggesting they are representative rather than actual:

> ... for him
> The sauntering horseman-traveller does not throw
> With careless hand his alms upon the ground,
> But stops, that he may safely lodge the coin
> Within the old man's hat; nor quits him so,
> But still when he has given his horse the rein
> Towards the aged beggar turns a look,
> Sidelong and half-reverted (ll. 25-32).

Since the narrator at every step creates the expectation of story, and hence of plot, and just as consistently refuses to fulfil it, the purpose of his utterance is a riddle. However, unlike in "Old Man Travelling" in this poem the riddle is answered beginning at line 67, where Wordsworth, thinly disguised as the narrator, starts sermonizing. The long exhortation to the "statesman" has echoes of the angry prose of his Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff. As in "The Convict," the Godwinian tone of the poem is evident in its treatment of subject. In fact, Wordsworth appended a prefatory note to the poem in which he identifies the 'enemy' he is attacking in this poem very specifically:

> The political economists were about that time beginning their war upon mendicity in all its forms, and by implication, if not directly, on Alms-giving also. This heartless process has been carried as far as it can go by the AMENDED poor-law bill, though, the inhumanity that prevails in this measure is somewhat disguised by the profession that one of its objects is to throw the poor upon the voluntary donations of their neighbours; that is, if rightly interpreted, to force them into a condition between relief in the Union poorhouse, and Alms robbed of their Christian grace and spirit, as being forced rather from the benevolent than given by them; while the avaricious and selfish, and all in fact but the humane and charitable, are at liberty to keep all they possess from their distressed brethren.[79]

The important role played by the beggar in society is the point Wordsworth seems intent on establishing--hence the portrait of

the beggar in terms of his connectedness with society. The social purpose he serves is to remind society of "charity":

> .... While thus he creeps
> From door to door, the villagers in him
> Behold a record which together binds
> Past deeds and offices of charity
> Else unremembered (ll. 79-83).

His larger purpose is to suggest food and shelter are not enough, as the speaker in the poem puts it, to "satisfy the human soul." The narrator is at his most Wordsworthian when he addresses the statesmen with:

> --man is dear to man; the poorest poor
> Long for some moments in a weary life
> When they can know and feel that they have been
> Themselves the fathers and the dealers-out
> Of some small blessings, have been kind to such
> As needed kindness, for this single cause,
> That we have all of us one human heart (ll. 140-146).

What is implied by the dash in "Old Man Travelling"--the *raison d'être* of the utterance--is here made explicit. The point could have been made just as effectively if the "The Old Cumberland Beggar" had ended at at line 66. There is a structural and schematic separation between the portrait and the narrator's homily; while in the first part the point is made through and in images, in the second it is made through abstraction--the overburdened language of the moralist.

Conclusion

The thrust of the Lyrical Ballads is, I believe, one that challenges the reader's perception of history / story and one that is as necessary today as it was in Wordsworth's time for an audience grown fat on 'pulp' literature. To restrict the

innovativeness of the group of poems to form and / or content is to study the manifestation of the innovativeness of thought not the thought itself. Wordsworth himself attests to the extent and nature of the experiment in a postscript he wrote in a letter to his publishers in 1800. This postscript was "of great importance" and in it Wordsworth advocated sending copies of the Lyrical Ballads (1800) to eminent persons in an effort to boost sales, for, Wordsworth states, "the Lyrical Ballads are written upon a theory professedly new, and on principles which many persons will be unwilling to admit."[80]

It is traditional to consider the Preface (1800 and subsequent versions) as the Wordsworthian statement on poetry. It is equally traditional to study the Lyrical Ballads narratives in terms of the principles Wordsworth proclaims in the Preface. Although the Preface started out, in 1798, as an explanation of Wordsworth's purpose in the Lyrical Ballads, it very soon became an independent work with its own, and separate, concerns. One might say that the Lyrical Ballads (1798), because of the stir it created in the literary world, provided Wordsworth with an opportunity to spell out his thoughts on the history of poetry and only that. Perhaps the philosophical concerns of the Lyrical Ballads are not identical with those of the Preface, which was, after all, written later than most of the Lyrical Ballads narratives. Story and history are on the periphery of the argument in the Preface, certainly not its main concern. The one structural feature common to a number of the

Lyrical Ballads narratives--the deliberate attempt to draw the reader's attention away from event--makes me believe story / history are a part of the philosophical centre of the Lyrical Ballads. Perhaps the Lyrical Ballads is complementary to the Preface rather than an illustration of a theory put together in prose.

In the "Advertisement" to the 1798 Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth isolates what he considers to be the major stumbling block in the nineteenth century readers' reception of his poems. "They will," he states, "look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title."[81] What is worthy of telling is at stake in these poems. If one claiming to be a story-teller relates a tale but not one that appears to follow the easily recognizable pattern known as 'story,' what is being related and why? A crucial statement Wordsworth makes in the Preface (1800) suggests where the stories may lie in his narratives. Delineating the difference he believed existed between his poetry in the Lyrical Ballads and that of other writers of the "popular Poetry of the day," he states that in his poetry "the feeling ... developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling."[82] Hence in his narratives any and every event is a potential story, for event is not in itself significant or insignificant. It is the teller / perceiver who makes it so. It is no wonder that the Lyrical Ballads is brimming with socially

insignificant events--a man who loses his livelihood in "The Last of the Flock," an old man who cannot cut down a tree in "Simon Lee," a little girl who disappears in a snow-storm in "Lucy Gray" and so on. By claiming such a method of narrative, or anti-narrative, belongs in the world of poetry, Wordsworth is making just as radical a claim about poetry as he is about story. Nowhere is his democratic principle more patently obvious than in these narratives.

The magnitude of the task at hand did not escape Wordsworth. While it was easy enough for him to condemn his contemporaries for satisfying the public's "craving for extraordinary incident,"[83] it was difficult not to fall into the same trap, as his maudlin poem "The Convict" (1798) illustrates. In fact, in the Preface (1800) he writes, "when I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble effort with which I have endeavoured to counteract it."[84] The current literary scene he describes as one in which "the invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespear and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse."[85] What was of significance to Wordsworth in the 1790s is strongly present in the Lyrical Ballads narratives. Since he himself regarded them as heralding the new poetic climate and since the poems are confessedly experimental, they are not consistent--in their brilliance, effectiveness and even in the theory they

propose. The large number of characters, the varied social background, theme and form in the Lyrical Ballads make it impossible to give my argument unity of theme or form. Some narratives are dialogues, others are monologues while yet others are a mixture of narrative and dialogue. The *raison d'être* of each poem also varies enough from the next to render it impossible, as well as a violation of the text, to consider it in terms of another. In order to violate the variety of the Lyrical Ballads as little as possible I have chosen to group the narratives in terms of their structural similarities. The narratives have been selected for discussion because they are examples of a specific narratorial style. Chapter I deals with monologues such as "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" (1798), "The Mad Mother" (1798) and "The Female Vagrant" (1798) as well as "Lucy Gray" (1800) and "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" (1798), the last two being considered for the way in which Wordsworth adapts material from the 'real' world for poetic treatment. Chapter II deals with poems which essentially relate a dialogue. A discussion of the Matthew poems, "Expostulation and Reply" (1798), "The Tables Turned" (1798), "The Two April Mornings" (1800) and "The Fountain" (1800), is followed by a discussion of "We Are Seven" (1798) and "Anecdote for Fathers" (1798), also dialogues in the main. Chapter III discusses poems such as "The Idiot Boy" (1798) and "Simon Lee" (1798), where the main concern is story / history. The chapter ends with a discussion of poems also overtly concerned with history but in relation to geography. In "The Thorn" (1798), "Michael" (1800)

and "Hart-Leap Well" (1800) the narrator relates folklore, supposedly in an attempt to account for a physical object such as a thorn-bush, pile of stones or a disused and decaying fountain.

The author's use of the varying forms outlined above provides him with the opportunity to consider tale-telling in more ways than one. The diversity of forms present in the Lyrical Ballads narratives is not unique; it is in keeping with the ballad tradition, the ballad being a genre whose subjects and structures vary widely. The question why such varying forms are considered to be tales might very well be raised. The answer is simple: they all relate a story and in so doing reveal the fact that the basic desire behind all utterance, at least in the Lyrical Ballads, is the desire to tell. And although the Preface suggests that in order to arrive at the *raison d'être* of these poems it is necessary to consider the subjective viewer / narrator as much as the tale he has to relate, the Preface does not spell out the meaning adopting such an approach might unlock. This elusive meaning is what I am in search of, and if it is as varied as are the Lyrical Ballads narratives themselves, I will put off making generalizations until a concluding chapter where I will attempt to show the spirit animating the poems, the one in the many.

NOTES

1. Wordsworth & Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads 1798, 2nd. ed, (ed), W.J.B. Owen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 3.

2. William Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 135-136.

3. S.T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, (ed) George Watson (London: Dent, 1975), pp. 48-49. Coleridge heard the poem in its manuscript version--1792 or 1795. "The Female Vagrant" formed part of it, as Coleridge notes. Of the incident he writes:

> I was in my twenty-fourth year when I had the happiness of knowing Mr. Wordsworth personally; and, while memory lasts, I shall hardly forget the sudden effect produced on my mind by his recitation of a manuscript poem which still remains unpublished, but of which the stanza and tone of style were the same as those of 'The Female Vagrant' as originally printed in the first volume of the *Lyrical Ballads* (Biographia Literaria, p. 47).

4. "*Preface* to the Lyrical Ballads," The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, (eds) W.J.B. Owen & Jane W. Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), vol. I, p. 126.

5. Of his reaction to the poetry of the day, Wordsworth writes:

> I cannot be insensible of the present outcry against the triviality and meanness both of thought and language, which some of my contemporaries have occasionally introduced into their metrical compositions [Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 124]

Of the difference between his poems and the works of such

poets he writes: "From such verses the Poems in these volumes will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy *purpose*" (p. 124) and that if "in this opinion [he] is mistaken," he can "have little right to the name of a Poet" (p. 126). Here is where the definition of poetry occurs.

6. Watson (ed), Biographia Literaria, p. 1.

7. The statement he makes is: "... at the same time to define with the utmost impartiality the real poetic character of the poet by whose writings this controversy was first kindled and has been since fuelled and fanned" [Watson (ed), Biographia Literaria, p. 1].

8. Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age, p. 132.

9. Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 122.

10. Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age, pp. 132-133.

11. The remark is made about a line from "Michael" ("And never lifted up a single stone") which he describes as an instance of "his true and most characteristic form of expression" [Matthew Arnold, "Preface" to Poems of Wordsworth (London: Macmillan & Co., 1879), p. xxiii.

12. A.C. Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry (London: Macmillan & Co., 1965), p. 110.

13. Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry, pp. 126-127.

14. Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 124.

15. I am referring to Wordsworth's well known statement about the difference between his poetry and that of his contemporaries: "that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling" ["*Preface* to the Lyrical Ballads" (1800), Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 128].

16. Basil Willie, The Eighteenth Century Background (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1986; orig. pub. 1940), p. 253.

17. M.H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971), p. 12. The book looks at all of the major Romantic poets in the same terms.

18. Geoffrey Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. x.

19. Jonathan Wordsworth, William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 7.

20. Watson (ed), Biographia Literaria, ch. XVIII, p. 202.

21. Watson (ed), Biographia Literaria, ch. XVII, p. 190.

22. Watson (ed), Biographia Literaria, ch. IV, pp. 44-45.

23. Mary Jacobus, Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 209.

24. Jacobus, Tradition and Experiment, p. 209.

25. Jacobus, Tradition and Experiment, p. 209.

26. Stephen Parrish, The Art of the Lyrical Ballads (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 83.

27. Jacobus, Tradition and Experiment p. 196.

28. Jacobus, Tradition and Experiment, p. 196.

29. Heather Glen, Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 33.

30. Glen, Vision and Disenchantment, p. 37.

31. Glen, Vision and Disenchantment, p. 7.

32. Glen, Vision and Disenchantment, p. 76.

33. Glen, Vision and Disenchantment, p. 44.

34. Jacobus' statement on the issue has been quoted earlier. The difference she sees between magazine verse and Wordsworth's ballads suggest she is regarding them merely in terms of their literariness. As a result, magazine verse has no value to her and nothing in common with Wordsworth's verse except subject-matter. According to her, magazine verse rejects

"dramatic identification" of poet and subject, an identification central to Wordsworth's theory of poetry. It is "partly through its use of language" that magazine verse rejects such identification and "even at its most pitying, it sustains a literary idiom at odds with the distress it portrays" (Tradition and Experiment, pp. 184-185). Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads on the other hand, she writes, "attempts to bridge the gap between literature and life, asserting a community of feeling between sophisticated and simple, literate and illiterate" (Tradition and Experiment, p. 185).

35. The information on "The Convict" is from Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 149. "Date of composition unknown; 1793 is suggested by editors on the basis of the 'Godwinian humanitarianism' (de Selincourt) of the poem. First published in the *Morning Post*, 14 Dec 1797, with some variant readings and never reprinted by Wordsworth after L.B., 1798."

36. Letter to Mathews, 8 June 1794, The Letters of William & Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, (ed), Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd. ed., rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 126.

37. Letter to Mathews, May 23, 1794, de Selincourt (ed), Early Years, p. 119.

38. Letter to Mathews, May 23, 1794, de Selincourt, (ed), Early

Years, p. 119.

39. Letter to Mathews, May 23, 1794, de Selincourt (ed), Early Years, p. 119.

40. Letter to Mathews, May 23, 1794, de Selincourt (ed), Early Years, p. 119.

41. Letter to Mathews, May 23, 1794, de Selincourt (ed), Early Years, p. 119.

42. In the June 1794 letter Wordsworth states: "Some poetry we should have. For this part of our plan we ought to have no dependence on original communications, the trash which infests the magazines strongly impresses the justice of this remark" [de Selincourt (ed), Early Years, p. 126]. Wordsworth's views on magazine verse appear to have been commonly held. The Monthly Magazine, for instance, felt it incumbent upon itself to defend the genre while admitting the inferior quality of the average poem. In the "Preface" to the Feb. 1796 issue the editors issued the following statement:

> The term, Magazine-Poetry, has usually been considered synonymous with the most trivial and imperfect attempt at writing verse. It has been [the editors'] earnest wish to establish a very different character of the pages devoted to this pleasing object in the Monthly Magazine (Glen, Vision and Disenchantment, p. 36).

43. Letter to Mathews, May 23, 1794, de Selincourt (ed), Early Years, p. 119.

44. Watson (ed), Biographia Literaria, ch. XXII, p. 254.

45. Alexander B. Grosart, The Prose Works of William Wordsworth (New York: AMS Press, 1967), vol. II, p. 205. In his concluding remarks in the letter (Jan 14, 1801) that accompanied the volume of Lyrical Ballads (1800) Wordsworth sent Fox the former expresses his belief in the existence of a vital interrelationship between life and art: "I thought, at a time when these feelings ['of reverence for our species'] are sapped in so many ways that the two poems might co-operate, however feebly, with the illustrious efforts which you have made to stem this and other evils with which the country is labouring" [de Selincourt (ed), Early Years, p. 315.

46. de Selincourt (ed), Early Years, pp.314-315.

47. Owen, (ed), The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p.120.

48. Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978), p. 83. In The Idea of History (1956) R.G. Collingwood identifies history as a form that is closer to the novel than thought. The historian and story-teller, he writes, make it their business:

> ... to construct a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition analysis of characters. Each aims at making his picture a coherent whole.... The

> novel and the history must both of them make sense.... Both the novel and history are self-explanatory, self-justifying; the product of an autonomous or self-authorizing activity [The Idea of History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 245-246].

Of history's essentially fictional activity he writes: "freed from its dependence on fixed points supplied from without, the historian's picture of the past is thus in every detail an imaginary picture" (p. 245). However, he does insist that there is a difference between history and the novel. According to him, "as works of imagination, the historian's work and the novelist's do not differ. Where they do differ is that the historian's picture is meant to be true" (p. 246).

49. White, Tropics of Discourse, p. 123.

50. White, Tropics of Discourse, p. 124.

51. White, Tropics of Discourse, p. 84.

52. William Labov, Language in the Inner City (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1972), pp. 359-360.

53. Labov, Language in the Inner City, p. 366.

54. White states of history: "the events are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like--in short, all of the

techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play" (White, Tropics of Discourse, p. 84).

55. Ernest de Selincourt & Helen Darbishire (eds), The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), vol. III, p. 213.

56. The discussion first appeared in the 1802 version of the Preface. However, I have used the 1850 version in Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 139.

57. By 'Poetry' Wordsworth means 'literature.' In the Preface to the 1815 edition of his complete works Wordsworth includes narrative, drama, lyric, idyllium, didactic literature and satire under the title "materials of Poetry." ["Preface of 1815," Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol III, p. 27].

58. Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 140.

59. Jan 14, 1801, de Selincourt (ed), Early Years, pp. 261-262.

60. Heather Glen draws a distinction between the 1798 Lyrical Ballads and the ballads that were added in 1800. The distinction is one of poetic craft. Of the 1798 ballads she writes:

> The way in which these ballads draw attention to their own strategies betray a poetic unsureness. Many of these pointers are very clumsy--jerks and

> shows rather than subtle manipulations:... In many of these 1798 ballads the reader is shocked into an awareness of the distortions involved in the easy superficiality of the magazine verse, the inadequacy of the ways of thinking and feeling is expressed. But the narrator's obtrusive insistence that he should not fall into sentimental simplifications often dominates the poem, and the shock remains closer to a consciousness of violated decorum than to a new sense of what these familiar situations might mean. (Vision and Disenchantment, pp. 44-45).

And of the 1800 poems she writes:

> Here the difficulties which the magazine verse glossed over and the earlier collection exposed, are more fully explored--the disturbing sense of the disjunction between the human consciousness and the natural world which surrounds it...; the challenge which the reality of the sufferings of others offers to polite sentimentality. (Vision and Disenchantment, p. 45).

61. The connections between the ballad and the epic are undeniable. As oral forms both record history. The distinction may be between that of heroic societies and post-heroic ones. However, Walter Morris Hart in Ballad and Epic (New York: Russell & Russell, 1907) challenges the generally accepted belief that epic preceded the ballad. Thus he writes in defense of his theory that ballad preceded the epic:

> The popular ballad, now, like the popular tale, is a "survival in culture," and, as is the case with any such survival, the date of its discovery has nothing to do with its age. No one supposes that a custom found yesterday in Africa originated at that moment.... And so it is conceivable that the ballad, though taken down in modern times, represents a literary form older than the epic,--the form from which the epic was developed. Proof of its age is to be found partly in its widespread dissemination; for the ballad form, the striking peculiarities of the ballad art, are nearly as widespread as is the material of the folk-tale;... Further proof of its

age is to be found in the simple and primitive quality of this manner (p. 3).

62. Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of the Novel," Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, trans. Vern McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1986), p. 52.

63. See pp. 27-28 of "Preface of 1815," Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. III. Such an expectation may be part of a twentieth century definition of the terms for in 1800 the title "Lyrical Ballads" evoked from one review at least the charge of redundancy. The British Critic reviewer of the 1800 Lyrical Ballads thought fit to object to the title on the grounds that all ballads are lyrical: "The title of the Poems is in some degree, objectionable; for what Ballads are not *lyrical*?" [Quoted in John Jordan, Why The 'Lyrical Ballads'? (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 172].

64. Thus he writes of the lyrical categories: "in all which, for the production of their *full* effect, an accompaniment of music is indispensable," "Preface of 1815," Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. III, p. 27.

65. David C. Fowler, A Literary History of the Popular Ballad (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968), pp. 15-16.

66. Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (New York: Norton, 1957), p. 56.

67. "Preface of 1815," Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. III, p. 27.

68. Quoted in Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 56. Note 1.

69. Gordon H. Gerould, The Ballad of Tradition (Oxford: Gordian Press, 1932), p. 11.

70. F.K. Stanzel, in A Theory of Narrative, [trans. Charlotte Goedsche (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984)], describes a narrative which uses the first-person narrator, as do most Wordsworthian ballads, as one in which "the mediacy of narration belongs totally to the fictional realm of the characters of the novel: the mediator, that is, the first-person narrator, is a character of this world just as the other characters are. The world of the characters is completely identical to the world of the narrator" (p. 4). Discussing point of view in narrative, Stanzel locates the potential unreliability of the narrator in his structural role rather than in character:

> The unreliability of the first-person narrator is not ... based on his personal qualities as a fictional figure, e.g., character, sincerity, love of truth and so on, but on the ontological basis of the position of the first-person narrator in the world of the narrative. The presence of such a narrator in the world of fictional characters and his endowment with an individuality which is also physically determined leads to a limitation of his horizon of perception and knowledge. For this reason he can have only a subjective and hence only conditional view of the narrated events (p. 89)

71. Glen is the critic who comes closest to considering point of

view in the way I do. However, she sees Wordsworth's refusal to use controlling point of view as an indication of challenge to established modes of literary and political expression whereas I see the purpose differing with each poem. See pp. 10-11 of the text for a discussion of her statements on the Lyrical Ballads.

72. In his edition, Lyrical Ballads 1805 (London: Collins, 1968), Derek Roper notes that "most of lines 1-14 of 'Old Man Travelling' appears in early MSS of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar,'" (p. 305).

73. The terms "story" and "narrative" have assumed a complexity originally lacking ever since the novel developed into a formidably complex form. E.M. Forster's definition is probably the most cited in discussions of the terms. In Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1927), he defines "story" as "a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence" (p. 47). Wayne C. Booth's Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) builds on this fundamental feature of the narrative--that it tells a story. Although he does not define the term, "story," it is obvious that he considers "story" to be a sequence of events. In Understanding Fiction (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959), Cleanth Brooks talks primarily of "fiction." However, his initial statement suggests he too defines story as a sequence of events narrated by a teller. This statement also indicates the primacy of story-telling

in the human world:

> As soon as the cave man had leisure to sit around the fire while darkness covered the world beyond, fiction was born. In words, he relived, shivering with fear or gloating in victory, the events of the hunt; he recounted the past history of the tribe; he narrated the deeds of heroes and men of cunning; he told of marvels; he struggled in myths to explain the world and fate (p. 1).

Structuralism, in its interest in form and its approach to theme through form, sees a complexity in the concept of narrative that is missing in these earlier definitions. Perhaps Seymour Chatman can be regarded as expressing the classical structuralist attitude toward "story." In Story and Discourse (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978) he provides a definition of narrative which is, he suggests, representative of structuralism:

> Structuralist theory argues that each narrative has two parts: a story (*histoire*), the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting); and a discourse (*discours*), that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated. In simple terms, the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the *how* (p. 19).

In fact, his book is devoted to describing this distinction between "story" (the content element) and "discourse" (the formal element) of narrative. My use of the term "story" is analogous to Chatman's use of the term "narrative" (which I use interchangeably with "story").

74. All poems that appeared in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads I have taken from W.J.B. Owen's edition, Lyrical Ballads 1798.

75. Kate Hamburger, The Logic of Literature, 2nd. rev. ed.,

trans. Marilyn J. Rose (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 294.

76. The difference in the methods of communication in oral and written poetry was one Wordsworth was well aware of. In the Fenwick note on "The Thorn" he defends his use of repetition--a technique predominantly associated with oral poetry. The reason he offers is:

> ... the Reader cannot be too often reminded that Poetry is passion: it is the history or science of feelings: now every man must know that an attempt is rarely made to communicate impassioned feelings without something of an accompanying consciousness of the inadequateness of our own powers, or the deficiencies of language. During such efforts there will be a craving in the mind, and as long as it is unsatisfied the speaker will cling to the same words, or words of the same character [Owen, (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 140)].

He suggests there are other reasons "why repetition and apparent tautology" are "frequently beauties of the highest kind" (p. 140). The main reason is "the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as things, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion" (p. 140), an attendant reason being that "the mind luxuriates" from "a spirit of fondness, exultation, and gratitude ... in the repetition of words which appear successfully to communicate its feelings" (pp. 140-141).

While Wordsworth does not explicitly concern himself with the fact that repetition is a technique characteristic of oral discourse, he acknowledges it in the first reason he

offers by suggesting repetition predominates in dialogue.

77. Fenwick note on "The Thorn." Reproduced in Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 140.

78. All poems that appeared for the first time in Lyrical Ballads 1800 I have taken from Roper's edition, Lyrical Ballads 1805.

79. The prefatory note is reproduced in the note on "The Old Cumberland Beggar," in de Selincourt, Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), vol. IV, pp. 445-446.

80. Letter to Longman and Rees, Dec 18, 1800. de Selincourt (ed), Early Years, p. 310.

81. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 3.

82. Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 128.

83. "*Preface* to the Lyrical Ballads" (1800), Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 128.

84. Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, pp. 128-129.

85. "*Preface* to the Lyrical Ballads" (1800), Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 128.

CHAPTER I

DISORGANIZED UTTERANCE: TALES AND TELLERS

Utterance in the Wordsworthian Narrative: A Preview of Chapter I

Perhaps one of the most commonplace observations on Wordsworth's poetry is that it is full of people who talk. The Lyrical Ballads narratives almost always have a narrator who makes his presence felt, the Salisbury Plain poems, various versions of the same poem, all have at least one character who relates a tale. The Prelude is a narrative of the development of a poet's mind and The Ruined Cottage, in all its versions, is about tales told by Margaret and the Pedlar, and the list goes on. Why is utterance so important in the Wordsworthian scheme of things? Why particularly in his early years did he create so many characters who tell tales, sometimes about themselves and sometimes about others? Much of Wordsworth's later work, for instance the Ecclesiatical Sonnets (comp. 1821) and the River Duddon sonnets (comp. between 1806-1820), Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820 (comp. Jan-Nov 1821) and Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837 (comp. Dec 1840-Dec 1841), moves away from making utterance a significant part of the *raison d'être* of the work.

In this chapter I am concerned primarily with the structural significance of utterance in the Wordsworthian poem. I have chosen to discuss three poems, which, being soliloquies and monologues, formally indicate the poem's concern is indeed with utterance. "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman," "The

Female Vagrant" and "The Mad Mother" appeared in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads and concern themselves with the utterance of three women, all outcasts and all disoriented in their thinking and utterance. The subject of each of these utterances is a story, although that story is not always immediately apparent. The manner in which the story is related makes for an interesting concept of story, which the reader can extrapolate from the text but which is not expressed by the speaker. In other words, although the speakers are not interested in expressing a concept of story--they are interested in relating their histories--they express one anyway. The questions, what is this concept of story and why is uttering--in particular, relating a story--such a significant act in these poems, are what I had in mind when analysing these poems.

In the concluding section of the chapter I look at three poems, "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman" again, "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" (1798) and "Lucy Gray" (1800), to consider the issue of utterance from the authorial perspective. Since the thesis is concerned with the narratives and its narrators, I feel it is only fitting that I consider Wordsworth, the utterer, even if only briefly. As Wordsworth let it be known, through remarks made in the Advertisement (1798) and the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, a number of the narratives are based on actual incidents he had either experienced or heard about. The Fenwick notes (1843) document many of these sources. Two of the three poems I have chosen have their genesis in a

book and the third in an incident related by his sister, Dorothy. My main concern is to observe the manner in which Wordsworth altered his source material to suit his own concerns. These poems are his utterance, one might say, of an issue already given verbal form. He is therefore rewriting history in a way, even though it is a history of insignificant events and people.

I have used the term "utterance" advisedly. And in my discussion it has a very specific meaning. The term relates to the oral world. Mikhail Bakhtin, in "Problems of Speech Genres," describes it as "a unit of speech communication."[1] My use of the term is restricted to this basic definition. The utterance of the three women in "The Female Vagrant," "The Mad Mother" and "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman" assumes an audience--implicitly in the latter and explicitly in the first two. The characters, therefore, while being alone in their utterance--no one else speaks in the poem--are actually conducting a dialogue. The other participant in this dialogue is not the listener--a baby in "The Mad Mother" and the narrator in "The Female Vagrant"--but an absent party, that is, we find out, responsible for their condition as outcasts. Similarly, in adapting material from other sources for poetic treatment, Wordsworth conducts a dialogue with the past.

"Her Story": A Study of The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman, The Mad Mother, and *The Female Vagrant*

Wordsworth's choice of form and subject in "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman," "The Mad Mother" and "The Female Vagrant" is not unusual.[2] Soliloquies whose sole purpose was to reveal the condition of social outcasts such as mad mothers, the forsaken, vagrants, and so on were exceedingly common. To cite only a few examples, William Cowper's "The Castaway," which appeared in 1803, is a lament in monologue form by the survivor of a wreck at sea which Cowper based on an incident in Voyage Round the World (1748) by George Anson;[3] "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" is based on an incident Wordsworth read about in a travelogue. Lamentation is also the keynote of Blake's "Mad Song" (1783). Poems such as Thomas Holcroft's "The Dying Prostitute, an Elegy" (1785) and Anna Seward's "An Old Cat's Dying Soliloquy" (1792), both laments, appeared in the magazines of the day.[4] Wordsworth's choice of the soliloquy, in common with other writers of verse on social themes, was probably a result of his desire to foreground utterance. Much of the verse appearing in the magazines of the day allowed the characters to relate their own histories in an attempt to gain the sympathy of the reader for the outcast. It is not surprising that a number of these poems were monologues in which the speaker lamented his or her condition.

While Wordsworth's soliloquies share the characters, form and aim of demythifying the social outcast with those of writers

of magazine verse, there is a fundamental difference between his work and that of these others. Wordsworth uses the notion of utterance to collapse an essentially diachronic event--history--into the synchronic, utterance itself being a synchronic event. It is Wordsworth's concern with history that informs the soliloquies and turns cliche into the unique and the sentimental into a valuable record of the effects of industrialism. The theme of the speaker's utterance in each instance--her past--firmly indicates that these poems are concerned with history. Much of the verse written on outcasts in this time did not concern itself with locating the problem of the outcast, and the social system responsible for creating it, in history. Blake's "Mad Song," for instance, concentrates on revealing the disconnected nature of the mad woman's perception of reality. And although the utterance identifies grief as a possible source of the speaker's madness, the poem does not concern itself with the cause of the grief. The issue is thus dehistoricized, the "song" itself being primarily a dramatization of madness more closely related to the songs of the fool in King Lear than to Wordsworth's narratives.[5]

The ahistoricity of Blake's "Mad Song" is characteristic even of those poems where the subject of the speaker's utterance is specifically his or her life. For instance, Thomas Holcroft's "The Dying Prostitute, an Elegy" presents a speaker who laments and describes her destitution and alienation. Her utterance does not reveal her personal history. The explanation for her taking

up the profession of prostitution is vague, abstract and platitudinous. She appeals for pity in the opening lines of the poem, describing her condition in the following terms:

> Weep o'er the mis'ries of a wretched maid,
> Who sacrificed to man her health and fame;
> Whose love, and truth, and trust were all repaid
> By want and woe, disease and endless shame.[6]

The historical explanation of her condition is contained in these lines and these lines only in the poem. The explanation is inadequate to say the least, since it is so general. The speaker fails to be an adequate representation of the prostitute[7] because of the poet's own banal diction, which clutters his dramatization of prostitution, the social evil, and hence her language. Thus while attempting to demythify society's conception about its outcasts--by presenting an outcast describing life in her own language, thereby expressing her version of reality--the writer succeeds in creating another type of myth--one which draws on the Godwinian notion of the social basis of all evil.[8] The speaker's utterance is replete with terms that suggest she is mortified at her way of life. She refers to herself as "poor lost wretch" and as the most damned of the damned. "Sure she enough is cursed," she says, of the prostitute in general, "o'er whom his will, / Enflamed by brutal passion, boundless reigns."[9] The poet draws on images of misery, pain, alienation, economic hardship and emotional weariness to enlist the reader's sympathy for the speaker. Clearly, she is being used as a spokesperson for the outsider, condemned by society because she has transgressed its boundaries. The myth

Holcroft could be helping to perpetuate, from the Wordsworthian perspective, is the stereotype of the prostitute as one who does not deny her culpability (she refers to her "present guilt and shame" at one point in her utterance) and only asks for pardon and understanding, thus establishing her guilt. Her personal history is not of interest to the writer, nor of service to him. The suggestion that she was, as she states, "virtuous once, and beauteous too, / And free from envious tongues [her] spotless fame"[10] is barely sufficient in establishing the notion that she has somehow been forced into prostitution. Her life, particular conditions, circumstances and so on are by this one stroke reduced to the cliches that surrounds the profession of prostitution.

Mary Alcock's "The Chimney-Sweeper's Complaint" (1799), is similar to Holcroft's in its aims, execution and effect. While it aims at revealing the abuse prevalent in the chimney-sweeping industry, the poem succeeds in sentimentalizing the issue. The child's history, which serves to explain his present condition, is covered in two lines and draws on the stereotype of the orphan boy or boy of poor or abusive parents.[11] Of his personal history all the speaker says is: "Far from home, no parents I / Am ever doomed to see."[12] That is the extent of the historical background the poem provides. The rest of the boy's utterance is devoted to a description of the working conditions of the trade, which draws on all the images the nineteenth-century reader might have of the horrific world the chimney-sweepers inhabit.[13]

The speaker starts out by informing his audience that if they knew his "helpless state" they would "pity [his] wretched fate!"[14] Images of the abuse clutter the boy's utterance, suggesting the poet is making every attempt to create pity in the reader for the plight of the chimney-sweep. And, indeed, this speaker is in every way a representative figure. "Feeble limbs," "benumbed with cold," "legs ... burnt and bruised," "feet ... galled by stones," "flesh" that "for lack of food is gone" are some of the more explicit images that dominate the utterance.[15]

The poet's attempt to gain sympathy thus reduces the subject and speaker to the platitudinous. While the choice of a dramatic rather than a narrative form--speech, not story--suggests the individuality of the speaker is of interest, his utterance nullifies any such possibility. In Wordsworth's "Female Vagrant," "The Mad Mother" and "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman" the characters are undeniably stereotypical--abandoned women, women deprived of their homes and families, unwed mothers. The female vagrant, mad mother and forsaken Indian woman are, like the characters in the poems of Blake, Holcroft and Alcock, identified by their position in society. Thus far they are set up as representatives of the groups to which they belong. In fact, they remain unnamed although they are the subject of these poems. This anonymity reinforces their symbolic dimension--the one standing for the many. However, the look Wordsworth provides at the outcasts and

at the issue of the outcast is far from stereotypical. The utterance of all three characters indicates the poet's concern is with considering the issue in specifically historical terms. For instance, the psychological disintegration of the mad mother is contextualized by her own personal history, which is revealed in the course of her utterance and which focuses with intensity on unique and personal events. The similar disintegration of the forsaken Indian woman is contextualized by a story of abandonment, the most significant event in her history, which is revealed in her delirious utterance. Like these two characters, the female vagrant is mentally unstrung when we meet her. Her history, which she relates, is the context within which her present condition is placed. The reader is thus forced to consider the significance of individual history and its contribution to her present state of being.

In all three poems Wordsworth's concern appears to be historical in nature. The question that the poems raise is two-fold: how does the past account for the present, if indeed it does? The related question the poem raises is: is this past, as it is remembered in utterance, a releasing or entrapping agent? Returning to the initial question, the lives of the characters in "The Mad Mother," "The Female Vagrant" and "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman" appear to be typified by events that stereotype their condition, thus providing a logical connection between the past and present. However, their histories are not stereotypical and the reason lies in the

specifically, almost idiosyncratically, Wordsworthian manner in which the utterance of the characters is shaped. In the Preface (1800) Wordsworth identified one of the main differences between his poems (Lyrical Ballads) and "the popular Poetry of the day" as being a difference in emphasis. Referring to his own poetry, he states: "the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and not the action and situation to the feeling."[16] In the utterance of the characters each event is recalled in terms of its emotional impact then and now. In fact, events remembered are remembered for such impact and because they had an impact. History, the linguistic construct to which they give shape in their utterance, is thus a jumble of recollected images not necessarily connected sequentially by them (in at least two of the poems). The events of their past which the characters do not talk about are hence not part of their history. Further, in these poems the poet suggests that history is not a narrative of events but an utterance that gives shape to epiphanic moments--moments that capture the 'essence' of the subject.

The complex world of teller-tale-listener is central to Wordsworth's concept of history, where history lies in the telling--in the utterance--and not in event or the world of event. The fluidity of 'truth' and the elusiveness of the past are nowhere more evident than in the oral world of story-telling where the story changes, however subtly, with every telling. The fact that the three characters' histories emerge in an utterance is no accident. Talking about their lives is something these

characters appear to do obsessively. The narrator in "The Mad Mother" informs the reader that the woman whose utterance he is reproducing habitually talks and sings to herself: "She talked and sung the woods among; / And it was in the English tongue" (ll. 9-10), he says. Presumably the subject of her utterance is as constantly the same as is the fact of her utterance. Similarly, the forsaken Indian woman is obsessively concerned with some of the events in her life and in talking about them. The female vagrant too seems obsessed with talking about her life. Like the mariner in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" she departs after having related her tale, leaving the reader with the impression that there is only one tale she ever tells and that having told it she moves on to the next listener. In all three poems the utterance serves the function of pointing out the social basis of the psychological disintegration of the outcast, a disintegration that is more important than the physical hardships they have to endure. The more important purpose of the utterance, and one which is less immediately observable, is to underline the viciousness of history. These characters are caught in their own history, and although the events they talk of belong to the past, the constant statement and restatement of this past serves to make it omnipresent. Thus their present is overwhelmed by their past and their future determined by it. Since two out of three are presented talking more or less to themselves and the third, the female vagrant, speaks in monologue, it is safe to conclude that the utterance with which we are presented is that which is most

representative--the dialogue they conduct with an absent society when by themselves. The psychic disorientation of the one and disintegration of the others is a clear indication the poet regards such entrapment in history as tragic.

The very structure of these poems, then, advances the notion that history lies in utterance and not in event. The disorganized utterance of the mad mother and forsaken Indian woman is accounted for by the fact that they are psychologically vulnerable. Their utterance lacks purpose, aim, and the fact that they are talking to themselves reinforces the lack of social purpose in their activity. This is not to deny that their utterance contains factual information, but where it does, such details indicate that the characters do not organize this information into a meaningful entity--into a story. For instance, the mad mother's utterance, determined by her madness, is a haphazard recollection of a series of discrete images, the logic holding it together being that of emotion rather than that of cause and effect. She herself does not link her present condition--poverty, homelessness, loss of mind--with the events in her past. She implicitly acknowledges her insanity in statements such as "'Sweet babe! they say that I am mad'" (l. 11) and talks of the past in terms of significant events, as for instance in the following lines:

> A fire was once within my brain;
> And in my head a dull, dull pain;
> And fiendish faces one, two, three,
> Hung at my breasts, and pulled at me.
> But then there came a sight of joy;
> It came at once to do me good;

I waked, and saw my little boy,
My little boy of flesh and blood;
Oh joy for me that sight to see!
For he was here, and only he (ll. 21-30).

But she nowhere inserts the crucial "because." If her madness and vagrancy are seen as a consequence of past events--in themselves referred to only obliquely--it is due to the reader's impulse to make a story. The author, who does not use the narrator in "The Mad Mother" to organize her utterance into a story although he uses him to provide the reader with a physical description of the woman, appears to be deliberately challenging the concept of the linearity of history. In other words, he chooses to leave the woman's history a mystery. What is important in the poem is what the woman's history is according to the woman. And, as a reading of the poem indicates, to her it is a single event into which all other events are collapsible: the birth of her son. Indeed, all other events enter the poem *vis-a-vis* this event. From what little information the poem provides, all the other significant events in her life are related to this one--her lover, his betrayal, her pregnancy, her subsequent madness (according to the others), her regained sanity (according to her). However, her interpretation of this event, and of her life, differs radically from that of the reader, who arrives at a conclusion based on the information her utterance provides about her life. Since the birth of her child is a joyful event for the speaker[17] her history, from her point of view, is characterized by joy. As a matter of fact she regards her present existence--of an outcast--as a rather joyful

one. The source of her joy is her son. Addressing the infant she says:

> Oh! love me, love me, little boy!
> Thou art thy mother's only joy;
> And do not dread the waves below,
> When o'er the sea-rock's edge we go;
> The high crag cannot work me harm,
> Nor leaping torrents when they howl;
> The babe I carry on my arm,
> He saves for me my precious soul;
> Then happy lie, for blest am I;
> Without me my sweet babe would die (ll. 41-50).

Her present, past and future are filtered, in her mind, through this one event and thus seem joyful. The poem ends with her talking about a future in glowing terms. Still addressing the unknowing infant she says:

> Oh! smile on me, my little lamb!
> For I thy own dear mother am.
> My love for thee has well been tried:
> I've sought thy father far and wide.
> I know the poisons of the shade,
> I know the earth-nuts fit for food;
> Then, pretty dear, be not afraid;
> We'll find thy father in the wood.
> Now laugh and be gay, to the woods away!
> And there, my babe; we'll live for aye (ll. 91-100).

The reader, connecting the different events to make a story, arrives at a conclusion radically different from that of the speaker about her life. Of course, it is easy to discount the validity of her interpretation since her madness is the given in the poem. If, however, her madness is regarded as a metaphor deliberately used by Wordsworth for a simultaneous mode of perception, then the poem can be viewed as an affirmation of the speaker's interpretation of her life. This does not mean the poet intends us to disregard the social criticism implicit in

the poem but it does mean that instead of emerging from the poem with a facile sympathy for the speaker we feel we have dealt with her on her own terms. That is, we emerge having dealt with her understanding of her own history and not simply with our understanding of it.

In a manner similar to the mad mother, the forsaken Indian woman speaks out of delirium and is thus absolved of the responsibility for the disconnected nature of her utterance. The event which preoccupies her to the exclusion of all else, and around which her utterance builds, is her abandonment by her tribe. The event with which this event is inextricably associated is the enforced separation between her and her son and it also figures prominently in her utterance. On the surface the abandonment hardly appears to be of symbolic proportions. Her utterance provides a very plausible explanation: sickness makes it impossible for her to keep up with the tribe, necessitating her abandonment.[18] The prose preface Wordsworth printed along with the poem in 1798 accounts for the abandonment on the same, literal level as does the speaker's utterance. In this preface he states: "when a Northern Indian, from sickness, is unable to continue his journey with his companions; he is left behind, covered over with Deer-skins, and is supplied with water, food, and fuel if the situation of the place will afford it."[19] The forsaken woman does not blame, although she reproaches, the tribe for its action. In effect, she does not question the validity of the custom that has condemned her to

death. If there is no disagreement over the action of abandonment why does the speaker's utterance revolve around it? The answer lies in the author's concern with dramatizing conflicting attitudes towards history. The poem presents the speaker's view of history and an alternative one that the reader is encouraged to arrive at and the two conflict. The speaker, as has been discussed earlier, accepts her society's action and identifies her sickness as the source of her abandonment by the tribe. Thus while she laments her isolation, loss of her child and her sickness, she continues to affirm the tribal customs and laws that together shape the tribe's history. Her utterance therefore suggests custom dictates morality and given the cause (sickness) the effect (abandonment) follows and is not immoral.

The poem, however, encourages the reader to arrive at a conclusion that challenges the official view of the woman's history. Wordsworth uses the given in the poem--the speaker's delirious state--to stage conflicting histories of the same events. Questioning custom as the valid explanation for the action is what the poem encourages the reader to do. More specifically, the poem encourages the reader to question whether a history that records events is a sufficient one. The moral issue of whether action such as abandonment is justifiable or not is central to the purpose of the poem. Wordsworth's refusal to justify the tribal custom, considering the fact that Hearne, his source, does so, is the strongest indicator of the moral concern inherent in the issue--or at least Wordsworth's version

of it. In fact the poem makes anguish an integral part of the woman's condition. Her entire utterance is a lament that stems from the anguish the tribe has caused her through taking away her son from her and abandoning her to her fate. Although the speaker herself does not blame the tribe for its actions, the reader, being privy to her anguish, does.

From the reader's point of view the speaker's utterance locates the cause of her anguish in the fact that she has been declared *persona non grata* by her tribe. She has quite effectively been stripped of her role as an individual in a community as well as of her role as mother. In fact, her utterance reveals she has been removed from the process of history (of the tribe). Ostracism, of which abandonment is the most severe form, has pronounced death on her and not her sickness. For instance, her desire to live is inextricably linked in her mind with being part of the community, as the following lines indicate:

> I'll follow you across the snow,
> You travel heavily and slow:
> In spite of all my weary pain,
> I'll look upon your tents again (ll. 51-54).

The parts of her utterance which express her resignation to her fate also do so in terms of the community, this time its ostracism which has in turn pronounced her dead. In the lines immediately following her expression of hope, she says:

> My fire is dead, and snowy white
> The water which beside it stood;
> The wolf has come to me to-night,
> And he has stolen away my food.
> For ever left alone am I,

Then wherefore should I fear to die? (ll. 55-60)

Talking about her life, which is inextricably linked with that of the tribe, is the only way in which the woman can affirm her humanity.[20] The poem thus serves the purpose of demonstrating the importance of belonging to the historical process. And although the fact that this woman, the mad mother and other Wordsworthian characters in the Lyrical Ballads remain unnamed suggests they are symbolic, the anonymity is indicative of Wordsworth's purpose. After all, such outcasts are invalid in society's eyes and lack the historical dimension that a home and personal history provide (in this instance the woman has been robbed of it). The true lament, the reader's lament, in this poem is not for the physical death to which the speaker has been condemned but the psychic disintegration that her society's custom has helped bring about. It is, after all, the speaker's psychic disintegration with which we are forced to be acquainted in the poem, and not her physical death.

Although less obviously so, the female vagrant's utterance is just as much determined by psychic disintegration, which prevails at the moment of her utterance. Unlike the other two poems, however, this poem is a dramatic monologue in which the speaker relates her history to a silent listener who introduces himself in the second line of the poem and then disappears to return only at the end of the poem. Since the speaker relates her history, whereas the other two characters' histories are revealed in their utterance rather than related, there are some

obvious differences between the structure of "The Female Vagrant" on the one hand and "The Mad Mother" and "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman" on the other. The most striking and pertinent of these is the structural cohesion of the female vagrant's utterance and the lack thereof in the utterance of the other two. While the latter appear to have lost all awareness of the presence of cause and effect in their lives or simply believe that it does not exist, the female vagrant presents the events in her life as a series of causes and effects. Unlike the other two, she does not concentrate on one single event in her life, that is, her utterance does not revolve around <u>an</u> event. However, the manner in which she organizes the events in her life to make up her history allows for the same conclusions to be drawn. For instance, the vagrant's utterance suggests there is one event which she regards as the central event in her life. And although it is the event which brings her history into being, as it were, it is glossed over. Most of her utterance is given over to a narration of events that occurred following <u>the</u> event. Her life preceding this major event is, interestingly enough, presented in the alinear, atemporal terms of image. Images of a harmonious universe are paralleled by images of emotional and psychological integration, micro and macrocosmic worlds reflecting the joy associated with the pre-lapsarian state. Her childhood she remembers in Edenic terms, as for instance in the following lines:

> Can I forget what charms did once adorn
> My garden, stored with pease, and mint, and thyme,
> And rose and lilly for the sabbath morn?

The sabbath bells, and their delightful chime;
The gambols and wild freaks at shearing time;
My hen's rich nest through long grass scarce espied;
The cowslip-gathering at May's dewy prime;
The swans, that, when I sought the water-side,
From far to meet me came, spreading their snowy pride
(ll. 19-27).

The images suggest typical rural activities and scenery are being presented in representative rather than unique terms. The atemporality and spatial non-specificity quickly dissolve into a narrative of events. What separates the two types of utterance is the speaker's recapitulation of the event, suggesting it forms the boundary (in her mind) between the prehistorical and the historical. The event she describes as follows:

There rose a mansion proud our woods among,
And cottage after cottage owned its sway,
No joy to see a neighbouring house, or stray
Through pastures not his own, the master took;
My Father dared his greedy wish to gainsay;
He loved his old hereditary nook,
And ill could I the thought of such sad parting brook.

But, when he had refused the proffered gold,
To cruel injuries he became a prey,
Sore-traversed in whate'er he bought and sold:
His troubles grew upon him day by day,
Till all his substance fell into decay;
His little range of water was denied;
All but the bed where his old body lay,
All, all was seized (ll. 39-53).

The rest of the female vagrant's utterance, the majority of the poem, attests to the significance of this event in her life. It is to this loss of her ancestral property that she traces the steady disintegration of her socio-economic-psychological-emotional context. Referring to the event she comments on its significance in the following terms:

Can I forget that miserable hour,
When from the last hill-top, my sire surveyed,
Peering above the trees, the steeple tower,
That on his marriage-day sweet music made?
Till then he hoped his bones might there be laid,
Close by my mother in their native bowers:
Bidding me trust in God, he stood and prayed,-
I could not pray:-through tears that fell in showers,
Glimmer'd our dear-loved home, alas! no longer ours!
(ll. 55-63).

"That miserable hour" metaphorically holds within it the whole complex of social, economic, political forces that form the backdrop to her story. The loss of property leads directly to the next major event in her life, or so she suggests: she marries a man she had loved "like a brother" because, in her words, "we had no other aid." The responsibilities of having a family in turn lead her husband to join the army, or, once again, so she suggests. "My husband's arms," she says,

... now only served to strain
Me and his children hungering in his view:
In such dismay my prayers and tears were vain:
To join those miserable men he flew (ll. 95-99).

Joining the army and going out to the Americas to fight the war in turn lead to the death of her husband and children. The orphaned state in which the untimely demise of all the members of her family leaves her deprives her of her will to live. In fact she offers her being orphaned as the cause of her present state of vagrancy. She rhetorically asks of the narrator, after having related most of her story, "What could I do, unaided and unblest?" (l. 244)[21] suggesting there is no place for her in society.

Thus while the female vagrant does not use the structure of cause and effect in recounting her childhood she does so in recounting her fall from grace. While the causal relationship she presents seems legitimate enough in accounting for her tragic past, her utterance suggests that it may in fact be merely an attempt to control a past that was beyond her control while she was experiencing it. When, for instance, the speaker reaches the point in her history where she relates the loss of her family, the linear movement of her narrative breaks down. On the one hand she indicates the death of her husband and children can be accounted for in physical terms ("by sword / And ravenous plague, all perished," ll. 132-133); on the other she hints at the possibility that the deaths are a result of divine retribution--divine justice exacting retribution for her and her family's participation in a social evil (participating in war for financial reasons). Interrupting her own largely descriptive narrative for the first time, the female vagrant gives voice to a generalization:

> Oh! dreadful price of being to resign
> All that is dear *in* being! better far
> In Want's most lonely cave till death to pine,
> Unseen, unheard, unwatched by any star;
> Or in the streets and walks where proud men are,
> Better our dying bodies to obtrude,
> Than dog-like, wading at the heels of war,
> Protract a curst existence, with the brood
> That lap (their very nourishment!) their brother's blood
> (ll. 115-126).

Lines that appear earlier in the poem indicate the speaker's belief in a divine justice that exacts retribution for immoral acts. While recounting her husband's decision to go to war she

reveals the uneasiness she had experienced then: "In such dismay," she says, referring to their extreme poverty, "my prayers and tears were vain: / To join those miserable men he flew" (ll. 97-98). Her belief that she is responsible for bringing about the events in her life is most explicitly revealed in the vagrant's account of her brief association with an agrarian community. Her descriptions of their life-style and communal relations suggest theirs is an idyllic life. In this community, "all belonged to all and each was chief" (l. 221), she says, while

> ... the yellow sheaf
> In every vale for their delight was stowed:
> For them, in nature's meads, the milky udder flowed (ll. 223-225).

Physical and emotional wholeness, both, are commented upon by her. And yet she does not join this community. She admits, however, that the choice was hers and indicates that her decision to move on was influenced by the fact that "on griefs so fresh my thoughts were brooding still" (l. 243).

In relating the episode in her life in which she loses her family, in some ways the most crucial after the loss of her home, the speaker reveals a confusion that is thus at the centre of her history. She seems to be divided between laying blame for this great tragedy in her life on the socio-political forces such as war, industrialism, capitalism, and laying it on herself. The question this confusion raises is whether she regards herself or society as responsible for her own history. More specifically, on the one hand her use of cause and effect

clearly identifies social forces as the root of her tragedy. The loss of ancestral property to an outsider, famine and war all seem to control and limit her life. On the other hand, she appears to blame herself, as the discussion of the observations she makes concerning the loss of her family and other significant events in her life indicates.

The poem thus raises the issue of locating responsibility in history, but it does not resolve the issue clearly. The speaker's confusion over her own history--over how to make her past coherent--is reflected in the changes in the methods she uses to structure her utterance. Beginning with an imagistic structure, in which cause and effect have no place, she moves to recollecting her past in terms of a strict cause and effect scheme and finally to talking in abstractions, using generalization to account for her present state (the abstraction varies from moral law to social force but it remains an abstraction nonetheless). It is not surprising that she ends her utterance, in itself an attempt to provide her past with a structure, on a note of confusion. The lack of purpose in her movements is underlined by her request to the narrator to provide her with direction. "And now," she says,

> ... across this moor my steps I bend-
> Oh! tell me whither--for no earthly friend
> Have I--(ll. 265-267)

The recreation of her past through utterance only serves to exacerbate the confusion in her life--of which her physical vagrancy is the perfect metaphor.

In the female vagrant's case, individual and social history seem inseparable, as her own confusion over responsibility indicates. At times she regards herself as a victim of social forces and at others as an individual infected with the canker that infests the age. As a victim she is automatically an outcast, a reluctant one, and as a Wandering Jew figure she is an outcast out of choice since she sees too clearly to belong to such a cankerous society. Since she does not resolve the issue, neither can the reader. Her attitude to her past, her understanding of the historical process, is as confused as is her understanding of the future.

The concern all three speakers express with their own history, almost compulsively, locates the absolute importance of history in each one's quest to locate herself in time and space. These three women have been denied presence in the official time (history) and space (village, town and so on) of their respective societies and are hence forced to create their own version in order to assert their humanity. In these poems, as in many of the other Lyrical Ballads poems, to utter is to be. And even when there is no listener, as in the mad mother's and forsaken Indian woman's case, to utter is essential to their survival: the mad mother talks constantly and one of the last things the forsaken Indian woman does is talk. Why talk about their lives? The question is a valid one. In all three instances talking about their lives involves talking about society, humanity, custom, tradition--in short the human family. In each

instance the character has been rejected by society. History is thus the last link these characters have with society. Perhaps in these poems it is not utterance so much as belonging to a community that matters. That is, to be a part of official history, or the officially acknowledged process of history, is to be. The aimlessness of the mad mother and female vagrant and the delirious (and near death) state of the forsaken Indian woman are a comment on a society that builds itself on exclusions, allowing only those who fit its prescribed customs and laws to be. Ultimately, then, history serves the purpose of reaffirming their connectedness with society, even if it is one that has labelled them non-human, unfit to participate in human history. Creating and recreating the event through language is the only way in which the speakers can maintain contact with, and their positions in, a society that has robbed them of their humanity by condemning them to an existence beyond its boundaries.

Fact and Invention: A Study of Wordsworth's Adaptation of Material in Goody Blake and Harry Gill, The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman and *Lucy Gray*

In the "Advertisement" to the 1798 Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth wrote:

> The tale of Goody Blake and Harry Gill is founded on a well-authenticated fact which happened in Warwickshire. Of the other poems in the collection, it may be proper to say that they are either absolute inventions of the author, or facts which took place within his personal observation or that of his friends.[22]

In the Fenwick notes Wordsworth insists upon making the sources of his poems available to the reader of his poems. Not only does such information force the reader to deal with the sociological basis of these poems, it also makes possible a study of Wordsworth's concept of story and history in a manner that would otherwise have been conjectural at best. Even a brief comparison of the source material and Wordsworth's poem reveals an implicit criticism of the manner in which the material was handled by the original writer. In the three poems I have chosen, "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman" and "Lucy Gray," the criticism appears to be of the fact that the original writers record or relate incident without considering its relation with a larger framework such as the rather abstract but pervasive universal morality or universal law.

"Goody Blake and Harry Gill," Wordsworth states in the Fenwick note, was "written at Alfoxden 1798. The incident from Dr. Darwin's Zoonomia."[23] The relevant section of Zoonomia (1796) is worth quoting in full since Wordsworth follows the incident as it is recorded by Erasmus Darwin closely although he differs widely in the use he makes of it:

> I received good information of the truth of the following case, which was published a few years ago in the newspapers. A young farmer in Warwickshire, finding his hedges broke, and the sticks carried away during a frosty season, determined to watch for the thief. He lay many cold hours under a hay-stack, and at length an old woman, like a witch in a play, approached, and began to pull up the hedge; he waited till she had tied up her bottle of sticks, and was carrying them off, that he might convict her of the theft, and then springing from

> his concealment, he seized his prey with violent threats. After some altercation, in which her load was left upon the ground, she kneeled upon her bottle of sticks, and raising her arms to Heaven beneath the bright moon then at the full, spoke to the farmer already shivering with cold, 'Heaven grant, that thou never mayest know again the blessing to be warm.' He complained of cold all the next day, and wore an uppercoat, and in a few days another, and in a fortnight took to his bed, always saying nothing made him warm, he covered himself with very many blankets, and had a sieve over his face, as he lay; and from this one insane idea he kept his bed above twenty years for fear of the cold air, till at length he died.[24]

In his note on "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" Owen adds that Darwin cites this incident as a case of "mania mutabilis. Mutable madness" in which "the patients are liable to mistake ideas of sensation for those of irritation, that is, imaginations for realities."[25] Thus Darwin's point was to prove the psychological basis of superstition, his interest in the case being a clinical one. The disparity between the obvious sociological implications of the incident and the limited psychological conclusion must have struck Wordsworth forcibly. I can only conjecture, using the poem's deviation from Darwin's text as evidence, since Wordsworth's only substantial comment on the poem suggests his concern is limited to proving that "the power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous."[26] Darwin's account has all the potential of being a story that could be used to comment upon the socio-economic climate of the late eighteenth century. "Young farmer" combined with "uppercoat" and "very many blankets" and the fact that he "kept his bed above twenty years" indicates the financial

well-being of the farmer. The woman on the other hand is "old" and "like a witch in a play" (haggard, decrepit, outcast and so on) and the fact that she steals sticks in the "frosty season" confirms her poverty. To ignore the morality of the issue and to use this real-life incident as an example of mutable madness must have rankled somewhat in Wordsworth's mind, for his poem invests the story with the sociological dimension by using the conflict between the poor, old woman and the young, rich farmer as the major vehicle for making its point.

The incident, which forms the substance of Darwin's text, occupies a relatively small space in Wordsworth's poem. The majority of the space in the latter is taken up with descriptions, primarily of the old lady but also of the young farmer. In one stanza, for instance, the two are implicitly compared, the young famer being described as a "lusty drover" whose "cheeks were red as ruddy clover (l. 19) and whose "voice was like the voice of three" (l. 20) and Goody Blake as "old and poor," "ill fed" and "thinly clad." Of Harry Gill we are also told that "of waistcoats" he:

> ... has no lack,
> Good duffle grey, and flannel fine;
> He has a blanket on his back,
> And coats enough to smother nine (ll. 5-8).

The image of the old woman is obviously meant as a contrast. The terms the narrator uses to point out her poverty are the same as the ones he uses to point out Harry Gill's economic well-being, those of physical comfort. While Harry Gill has several coats, Goody Blake, we are told, has

... never had ... well or sick,
As every man who knew her says,
A pile before-hand, wood or stick,
Enough to warm her for three days (ll. 53-56).

This detailed description of the poverty of the old woman and the relative comfort of the young farmer makes it impossible to consider the incident, which follows this description, as a psychologically intriguing one without considering it in terms of morality.

The incident and the consequences are the same as in Darwin: Harry Gill catches Goody Blake who curses him with: "'God! who art never out of hearing, / 'O may he never more be warm!'" (ll. 99-100) and Harry Gill is never warm again. This is one of the few ballads in the Lyrical Ballads in which the story is complete, complete with a statement which suggests the moral is explicit. In the last two lines of the poem the omniscient narrator addresses the audience directly, saying: "Now think ye, farmers all, I pray, / Of Goody Blake and Harry Gill" (ll. 127-128). However, the moral remains implicit rather than explicit, largely because the connection between the incident and Harry Gill's strange behaviour is never made plain by the narrator as it is, for instance, by Erasmus Darwin: can it be attributed to the fact that Goody Blake has powers beyond that of the rational or is his behaviour a psychological phenomenon? The narrative allows for both conclusions. On the one hand while describing the scene in which Goody reproves Harry Gill, the narrator says: "And kneeling on the sticks, she pray'd / To God that is the judge of all" (ll. 95-96). While the narrator may

simply be paraphrasing Goody Blake's speech, the phrasing and punctuation suggest he could very well be affirming God as the judge of all along with her. Is there a larger moral reality, to which Goody appeals, that avenges itself? On the other hand, the narrative ends with the suggestion that Harry Gill is mentally deranged. The narrator describes his behaviour subsequent to the incident as follows:

> No word to any man he utters,
> A-bed or up, to young or old;
> But ever to himself he mutters,
> 'Poor Harry Gill is very cold.'
> A-bed or up, by night or day;
> His teeth they chatter, chatter still (ll. 121-126).

This reported linguistic behaviour is not to be found in Darwin's narration of the incident.

If the poem advances a moral it exists in a form undifferentiated from the incident and characterization. In this fact lies the basic difference between Wordsworth's use of the incident and Darwin's. The latter makes explicit what was of significance to him in the incident whereas the poem refuses to make the significance explicit although it uses the literary formula which signals the presence of a moral ("Now think ye...."). Thus while the presence of this formula suggests a story has been presented, complete with its *raison d'être*, the lack of a visible moral suggests an incompleteness belied by the structure of the narrative. Since a moral is noticeably absent, the narrator's injunction "now think ye, farmers all" leaves the extraction of a moral from the story up to the individual reader. Whether one considers the *raison d'être* of the narrative

to be that of demonstrating the power of the imagination, or to be that of demonstrating the presence of a universal morality, the conclusion involves taking the social contrast between the two characters into account. Since the poem builds on the social contrast, the fact of Harry Gill's derangement only reinforces the notion that guilt, at his own inhumanity, is responsible for his condition. Looked at in a more pantheistic manner, the exacting of retribution by a pervasive moral structure suggests the extent to which human morality--the laws and customs of society which place a higher value on "property" than on "charity"--is divergent from this universal principle.

In the Fenwick note to "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" Wordsworth states: "written at Alfoxden, in 1798, when I read Hearne's Journey with deep interest. It was composed for the volume of Lyrical Ballads."[27] The preface Wordsworth appended to the poem in 1798 mentions his source and briefly refers to the particular custom which provides the dramatic context in this poem. Of interest is the fact that Wordsworth does not attempt to justify the custom, particularly since in his account Hearne appears to have felt the justification was necessary. After describing the manner in which a woman was abandoned by her tribe Hearne comments specifically on the action:

> Though this was the first instance of the kind I had seen, it is the common, and indeed the constant practice of those Indians; for when a grown person is so ill, especially in the Summer, as not to be able to walk, and too heavy to be carried, they say it is better to leave one who is past recovery, than for the whole family to

> sit down by them and starve to death; well knowing that they cannot be of any service to the afflicted,[28]

and then more generally on the custom:

> A custom apparently so unnatural is perhaps not to be found among any other of the human race: if properly considered, however, it may with justice be ascribed to necessity and self-preservation, rather than to the want of humanity and social feeling, which ought to be the characteristic of men as the noblest part of the creation. Necessity, added to natural custom, contributes principally to make scenes of this kind less shocking to those people, than they must appear to the more civilized part of mankind.[29]

Hearne tries to justify what he assumes would be regarded as an unnatural and inhuman custom by his readers by placing the action of desertion, which he has just described, in context. The context is, to underline the point, custom. In his adaptation of the material Wordsworth alters the manner in which the happening is conveyed, thereby complicating the issue of morality further. Whereas the incident in Hearne's A Journey is related by a person who is an acknowledged outsider, in "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman" the perspective supplied by an observer, a narrator, is unavailable, while the speaker in the poem is herself the victim of the custom. Thus while the incident is the same in Wordsworth's poem as it is in Hearne--a woman is abandoned by her tribe and left to die since she is too ill to keep up with them--it does not form the focus of attention in the poem. Instead, the poem requires attention to be focussed on the woman's utterance, which in turn reveals her emotional and mental state. The nature of the events leading to her abandonment emerges imagistically since the woman's utterance is fragmented. Presenting the happening from a purely

subjective viewpoint--placing the reader in the speaker's mind as it were--makes it very difficult for the reader to approach the level of objectivity present in Hearne's account of the event.

The very choice of a form that presents material in a subjective fashion is an implicit criticism of Hearne's account. Wordsworth supplies what the account ignores--attention to the the individual who is condemned to death for no fault of her own. After all, physical ailment is hardly within the woman's control. Yet, in this society sickness is the ultimate anathema. By dramatizing the incident instead of narrating it, Wordsworth invests the incident with the problematic issue of morality lacking in Hearne's account, where the behaviour is explained away as custom. The dramatic form foregrounds utterance and hence character (over action). Instead of focussing on the course of events we are made to focus on the character, her emotions, experience and understanding of it. Thus while Wordsworth's poem makes a drama out of the incident, Hearne's records the facts and circumstances surrounding the incident. The relevant paragraph, in which he describes the incident itself, is as follows:

> One of the Indian's wives, who for some time had been in a consumption, had for a few days past become so weak as to be incapable of travelling, which, among those people, is the most deplorable state to which a human being can possibly be brought. Whether she had been given over by the doctors, or that it was for want of friends among them, I cannot tell, but certain it is that no expedients were taken for her recovery; so that, without much ceremony, she was left unassisted, to perish above-ground.[30]

While Hearne's language betrays a certain amount of sympathy for the victim ("without much ceremony," "left unassisted to perish"), such sympathy is subordinated to a recording of the facts. By imagining the woman's reaction to the custom and her internal conflict--caused by her desire to live on the one hand and her loyalty to the tribe on the other--Wordsworth rectifies Hearne's account, where she is presented purely in terms of her social role. The given in the poem--the speaker's delirium--is used by him to make the utterance a contrapuntal one. On the one hand the speaker talks about her concerns, and expresses a resigned acceptance of the tribe's action and on the other she reveals her condition, which makes the reader cast a critical eye on her community. As for the latter, her absolute alienation from the human world, the pitiful condition in which she is left to die, deprived of warmth and food, suggest the tribe has violated a universal morality while trying to exercise its own. The outrage at such violation is present in the despair which the woman's speech expresses as well as in the images of the scene of parting. The opening lines of the poem are a poignant expression of the death of her social being:

> Before I see another day,
> Oh let my body die away!
> In sleep I heard the northern gleams;
> The stars they were among my dreams;
> In sleep did I behold the skies,
> I saw the crackling flashes drive;
> And yet they are upon my eyes,
> And yet I am alive.
> Before I see another day,
> Oh let my body die away! (ll. 1-10)

The strongest reproach she directs at the tribe is so mild that

by contrast it makes their action seem exceedingly cruel: "Too soon, my friends, you went away," she says, adding "for I had many things to say" (l. 30). Once again, the deprivation, as she herself suggests, is that of her right to belong to the tribe, utterance being an expression of such belonging.

Hence while the speaker, even in delirium, speaks as a member of the tribe, her situation speaks for her the individual. The issue of morality is therefore rendered complex. Is the social custom correct? Does the good of the tribe justify the sacrifice of the individual? The speaker's expression of the problem certainly seems to validate the tribal custom. On the other hand, her situation raises questions that run contrary to the tribal code--questions such as whether social custom has offended a universal morality and whether this morality will manifest itself in a vengeful act. Unlike "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," in this poem this universal morality does not manifest itself in any action that would vindicate the speaker and condemn her tribe. The harshness of her predicament remains unmitigated at the end of her utterance--also the end of the poem which therefore closes without resolving the problem raised by her utterance.[31]

"Lucy Gray" (1800) is a poem Wordsworth wrote while in Goslar, Germany in 1799. Wordsworth heard the story from his sister, Dorothy, who had heard about "a little girl who, not far from Halifax in Yorkshire, was bewildered in a snowstorm. Her footsteps were traced by her parents to the middle of the lock

of a canal, and no other vestige of her, backward or forward, could be traced. The body however was found in the canal."[32] The factual nature of the summary suggests Dorothy probably read the story in a newspaper. Wordsworth himself suggests to what extent he manipulated his source material in the same note on the poem:

> The way in which the incident was treated, and the spiritualizing of the character, might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative influences which I have endeavoured to throw over common life with Crabbe's matter-of-fact style of treating subjects of the same kind.[33]

"Spiritualizing of the character" led, as we shall see, to a story of socially incriminating as well as legendary proportions, both in the same poem and quite separate, structurally speaking, from one another.

The most intriguing feature of the poem is its structural organization. It can quite conveniently be divided into two 'poems,' with the first three and last two stanzas forming one poem and the stanzas in between the other. This curious division within the poem has been noticed by a number of critics. Derek Roper, for instance, while writing on the figure of Lucy Gray comments on the structure of the poem as well:

> For the first three stanzas she resembles the Lucy of *She dwelt among th' untrodden ways* in her remoteness from normal human contacts and her ambiguous nature (lines 7-8 suggest a plant rather than a girl). In the narrative which follows she acquires parents and behaves more 'matter-of-factly,' until the last two stanzas remove her again from the human level. The 'frame' stanzas are more interesting as poetry than the pedestrian narrative stanzas which recall the street-ballads Wordsworth admired.[34]

One way of making sense of the division is the way Roper

does--thematically. However, the sections appear to have more in common than he allows for--both tell a story that is mysterious and disturbing. In the first three and last two stanzas Lucy is spoken of in terms of a legend. And, as legends go, Lucy is beyond total comprehension. In the opening lines the narrator firmly places her in the world of legend by informing the reader "oft I had heard of Lucy Gray" (l. 1) and mentioning his encounter with her while crossing "the wild" at the "break of day." A few lines down he informs us that:

> You yet may spy the fawn at play,
> The hare upon the green;
> But the sweet face of Lucy Gray
> Will never more be seen (ll. 9-12).

Within a few lines of each other he has given us contradictory pieces of information--can she or can't she be seen? Clearly there is some mystery with which the narrator is surrounding her.

In the 'frame' stanzas the narrator clearly associates Lucy with the natural order. She does not appear to have much contact with the human world. We are told she had "no mate" or "comrade" and that she "dwelt on a wide moor." As if to reinforce the notion that her connection with the natural world is stronger than with the human world, the narrator describes her in organic terms, informing us that she was "the sweetest thing that ever grew / Beside a human door!" (ll. 6-7). The metaphor not only indicates she is, as Roper suggests, more plant-like than human but also that, being such, she has minimal contact with humanity--she grows "beside" a "human door" not within its

bounds. The natural world of the five stanzas is not, however, a purely benevolent one. Images of a harsh nature--"wide moor," "lonesome wild," a whistling wind--contrast starkly with images of a gentle nature--the "fawn at play" and the "hare upon the green," and Lucy is quite deliberately associated with nature in both its aspects. If the comparison between Lucy and the hare and fawn suggests the presence of an innocent, youthful, gentle nature to which Lucy belongs, then the images of the moor and wild in which Lucy "trips along" and "sings a solitary song / That whistles in the wind" (ll. 63-64) suggests the presence of a harsh nature to which she also belongs.

The image of Lucy as a more natural than human entity is the deliberate creation of a narrator who intrudes more in this poem than in any other analysed so far. The poem makes it incumbent upon the reader to take the narrator into account in locating the purpose of the poem. In these frame stanzas, for instance, he fluctuates between mediating to a very great extent and not at all. In the last two stanzas of the poem he suggests he is a mouthpiece for the folk, for whom Lucy Gray is a legend, by prefacing his observations with "yet some maintain." He thereby suggests there is little in the observations that follow that is his own. However, in the first three stanzas he suggests he is presenting his own impression of her. Of his chance encounter with Lucy he mentions very little, only that he "chanced to see at break of day / The solitary child" (ll. 3-4). The story implied by these two lines remains a mystery. Thus where the

narrator's mediation is at its maximum is also when the narrator is at his most cryptic, leaving unanswered the question raised by his fluctuating between treating Lucy as a legend and treating her as a person with whom he is familiar. The question is, of course, does he consider her to be dead or alive? Lucy's death, and we presume she does die, is never directly mentioned by the narrator. The first time it is referred to is in lines 11-12 where the narrator says: "But the sweet face of Lucy Gray / Will never more be seen." The next time the reference is present by virtue of being absent. Between the end of the story the narrator relates and the last two stanzas of the poem, which begin "yet some maintain that to this day / She is a living child" (ll. 57-58), there is a dash. Lucy's demise is implied by this hiatus in the utterance. But because of this careful evasion on the part of the narrator it is more like an absence in the one world which is a presence in another. Thus we are told Lucy's face "will never more be seen" in the world where the fawn and hare can be seen at play--that is, she will never be seen indulging in play like them--and in the last few lines of the poem we are told hearsay has it that she can be seen skipping and heard whistling on the "lonesome wild," a "living child." Absent in the one, she is present in the other world.

The narrator's story, which forms the bulk of the poem, presumably holds the explanation why Lucy's face will never more be seen. Dorothy's account of the incident does not provide the reason, or possible reasons, for the tragic occurrence. This

entire section of the poem, then, is as much a fabrication of the poet as are the 'frame' stanzas. The story itself is told partly through a dialogue between the characters of the story and partly through narration by a carefully factual narrator. The factual nature of the narration raises questions as the facts are far from self-explanatory and so much of the story is illogical that the story is reminiscent of the "frame" stanzas. The questions remain unanswered even though the narrator mediates constantly.

The story begins with a dialogue between Lucy and her father that is exceedingly disturbing. The father, while admitting "tonight will be a stormy night" (l. 13), asks his daughter to go into town to "light / [Her] mother through the snow" (ll. 15-16). The reversal of child / parent roles implied in the father's statement, as well as the action of sending out a child despite the threat of a storm, is very strange. Besides, the question as to why the father does not himself go is forcibly raised since the narrator, who enters the narrative to take over from the dialogue, informs us that the father continues working while Lucy leaves for town.[35] The unusual situation is not resolved by a narratorial comment or explanation. The inexplicable that surrounds the events of the story continues with the description of the girl's footprints (Lucy has in the meantime been lost in a snowstorm). We are told that Lucy's mother spies her daughter's footprints on a hill on which they are standing and that:

... downward from the steep hill's edge
They tracked the footmarks small;
And through the broken hawthorne-hedge,
And by the long stone-wall:

And then an open field they crossed:
The marks were still the same;
They tracked them on, nor ever lost;
And to the bridge they came (ll. 45-52).

The objects the narrator mentions seem to be familiar landmarks--they all have the article "the" and not "a" (except for "open field") preceding them. Yet Lucy is lost in this very territory--her footprints lead to the middle of the bridge which is a furlong from her home. Once again the narrator makes no attempt to render logical the illogical through an explanation. In Dorothy's account of the incident on the other hand the girl's body is discovered in the canal. The omission of an explanation, or an event that would serve as explanation, in Wordsworth's rendition of the incident is very telling. The narrator deliberately maintains the mystery and the illogicality of the incident. Besides witholding information that might resolve the mystery, the story also ends with the abrupt end of the search in the story with only a dash to serve as a bridge between the story and the legend, which the narrator proceeds to relate.

The story, then, which is supposed to explain Lucy's absence is just as confusing and mysterious as are the "frame" stanzas themselves. Further, the natural world of the story is just as harsh as that of the frame stanzas. Snow and storm, broken hawthorne-hedges, stone-walls, all keep the secret of the

disappearance of the little girl. In the same manner, the frame stanzas keep the secret of whether the girl is a "living child" or a spirit. The boundary between the mysterious and rational worlds is only an apparent one in the poem. The "human door" beside which Lucy "grew," the door separating the human from the non-human world, does not separate so much as connect the two. Similarly, the frame stanzas (which deal with the non-human world) and the intervening stanzas (set in the human world) are not as separate as they appear to be at first glance. Both sections of the poem raise the same issue: to which world does Lucy belong? In the frame stanzas the narrator informs us that she is a part of the wild and is lost to the human world. The story told in the intervening stanzas raises the same issue but somewhat differently. Lucy is presented in terms of the human world of relationships, work and community as well as in terms of the natural world--to which she responds joyfully. In fact, in this part of the narrative the only time the narrator abandons his factual mask is to inform us of her enjoyment of the natural world. We are told:

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

And it is into this world that she disappears.

The uncertainty the poem generates concerning Lucy's worlds arises partially through the fact that both sections assiduously avoid using the word "death" to describe her absence in the human and rational worlds. Accompanying this pointed absence of

the term, and hence of the notion of death, is the absence of sorrow that follows the loss of a loved one. On the contrary, Lucy's presence in the world of the frame stanzas is presented in joyful terms. Structurally the poem's sections work complementarily: Lucy's presence in the non-rational world is described in the frame stanzas, her absence from the human world being only tokenly acknowledged here. On the other hand, her presence in the human world is described in the story, her absence in the non-rational world being implied by her presence in the human one. The last few stanzas of the story--those dealing with her footprints--are interesting because they suggest her absence from the human world (only her footprints are left behind) without suggesting her presence in an alternative world. Lucy is truly absent from the poem for a while. Thus her disappearance is treated with the same element of mystery as is her appearance in the world of the frame stanzas.

Wordsworth's poem, then, provides the journalistic account of an untimely death with dramatic proportions. Through its central section it makes a moral issue out of an account that suggests the drowning was accidental. The dialogue between Lucy and her father at the very least suggests a lack of emotional bondedness between parents and child. By taking Lucy into itself is the natural world enacting revenge on the human world for its harshness and / or immorality? (After all, even the animals protect their young--a direct contrast to the father in the

poem). On the other hand the world into which Lucy disappears is equally harsh. The question remains unanswered by an otherwise highly intrusive narrator.

As an analysis of the three poems reveals, there is no uniform method in Wordsworth's adoption of factual material for poetic treatment. The one factor common to the poems is the attempt in each to defy closure. For instance, "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" ends without any change in the speaker's condition having taken place; "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" ends without spelling out the moral of the story while suggesting it has done so. Finally, "Lucy Gray" ends without having resolved the mystery surrounding Lucy herself and her disappearance. The open-ended nature of these narratives does not however mean that they lack a purpose beyond that of challenging the traditional narrative. Conflicting moralities--a universal, immanent one and an exclusively human one--are at the heart of these poems. Hence, neither one nor the other morality is used to conclude the issue raised in the poem. Instead of being a linear structure, story, it is suggested, is anti-linear, in which events are not causally related and in which there is no closure. And yet we are asked to accept them as stories.

NOTES

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problems of Speech Genres," Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, p. 73.

2. All three poems appear in Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads, 1798, 2nd ed., ed. W.J.B. Owen & Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). All of Wordsworth's narratives in the Lyrical Ballads that first appeared in 1798 are taken from this edition. I have chosen this edition because Owen reproduces the poems as they appeared in 1798.

3. The poem appears in The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). The information on the source of Cowper's poem can be found in the section titled "Notes and References," p. 851.

4. Holcroft's poem appears on p. 683 of Lonsdale (ed), The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse and Seward's on p. 755. The former first appeared in European Magazine, the April 1785 issue, while the latter appeared in Gentleman's Magazine, the April 1792 issue. The publication information is available in the notes on the poems, p. 853 & p. 854 respectively.

5. In the Norton Anthology of English Literature, vol. 2, in a footnote to the poem, "Mad Song," M.H. Abrams notes the

similarity between the poem and the fool's songs in Act III of Shakespeare's King Lear, The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2, eds. Abrams, Ford & Daiches (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 27, note 7.

6. Lonsdale (ed), The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse, p. 683, ll. 1-4.

7. The fact that she, as most of the characters in such poems, is identified only by her profession and not by a Christian name, suggests she is a symbolic figure.

8. In The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), E.P. Thompson writes about the facile, sentimental attitude prevalent in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century English society toward the labour-class. He writes:

> In the eyes of the rich between 1790 and 1830 factory children were "busy," "industrious," "useful"; they were kept out of their parks and orchards, and they were cheap. If qualms arose, they could generally be silenced by religious scruples: as one honourable Member remarked, of the climbing-boys in 1819, "the boys generally employed in this profession were not the children of poor persons, but the children of rich men, begotten in an improper manner." This showed a fine sense of moral propriety, as well as a complete absence of class bias (p. 342).

9. Lonsdale (ed), The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse, p. 683, ll. 7-8.

10. Lonsdale (ed), The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse, p. 683, ll. 17-18.

11. In The Making of English Working Class, Thompson describes the typical day of the child-labourer in terms that indicate abuse by parents was as common as abuse by the overseers. He writes:

> ... then commenced a day, for multitudes of children, which did not end until seven or eight o'clock; and in the last hours of which children were crying or falling asleep on their feet, their hands bleeding from the friction of the yarn in "piercing", even their parents cuffing them to keep them awake, while the overlookers patrolled with the strap (p. 338).

The period he is referring to is the mid-nineteenth century, but in discussing child-labour in the nineteenth century Thompson indicates the eighteenth century saw conditions worse than the nineteenth century for child-labour. Comparing the two centuries, he writes: "It is true that some of the worst atrocities were inflicted upon pauper apprentices at the end of the 18th century, and that the parish apprenticeship system gave way increasingly to 'free' labour in the nineteenth" (p. 336).

However, Thompson believes, and documents his belief, that, despite all the acts passed in the early to mid-nineteenth century, conditions did not alter significantly. Talking specifically about attempts to stop the abuse of chimney-sweeps, he says: "The campaign to protect the climbing-boys ... reached the statute book, against little opposition, in 1788. Every abuse returned during the [Napoleonic] Wars, attempts to secure new

legislative protection in their aftermath met direct opposition and were thrown out in the Lords--for, if boys had been dispensed with, their lordships might have had to make alterations to their chimneys" (p. 341).

12. Lonsdale (ed), The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse, p. 830, ll. 5-6.

13. The presence of poems such as Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper" in Songs of Innocence and Experience, and Mary Alcock's, suggests the conditions in which chimney-sweeps worked was well-known. The section on child labour in Thompson's Making of the English Working Class (pp. 331-349), notes the vigourousness of the debate over labour conditions between 1790 and 1830 or so. Thompson also documents the fact that those who fought for the rights of the labourers, particularly in the early years of the struggle, were punished. "Many of those who really exerted themselves on behalf of the factory children in the earlier years," he writes, met "with abuse, ostracism by their class, and sometimes personal loss" (p. 345)--an interesting insight into the writers of social verse.

14. Lonsdale (ed), The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse, p. 830, l. 2.

15. The prevalence of physical abuse, by owners as well as by factory implements and less than adequate working conditions, in places of child-labour is documented by

Thompson in The Making of the English Working Class. See, in particular, pp. 337-339.

16. Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, Vol. I, p. 128.

17. She recalls the event in ll. 21-30 of the poem, lines that have been quoted earlier in the chapter.

18. Thus, addressing the absent tribe, she says:

> Alas! you might have dragged me on
> Another day, a single one!
> Too soon despair o'er me prevailed;
> Too soon my heartless spirit failed;
> When you were gone my limbs were stronger,
> And oh how grievously I rue,
> That, afterwards, a little longer,
> My friends, I did not follow you!
> For strong and without pain I lay,
> My friends when you were gone away (ll. 21-30).

19. Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 106. Wordsworth thus cites the custom he had read of in his source, Samuel Hearne, as information. The preface is curious because although Wordsworth uses it to provide a context for the poem, he deliberately sidesteps the issue of morality which the incident itself raises. Hearne, on the other hand, raises the issue of morality and tackles the seeming immorality of the action of abandonment on the grounds of necessity (see p. 90 ff. above for Hearne's statement).

20. In the Preface (1800) Wordsworth states that his purpose in the Lyrical Ballads was to "follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections

of our nature" and that the method he chose in "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" was to "[accompany] the last struggles of a human being at the approach of death, cleaving in solitude to life and society." [Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol.I, p. 126].

21. She delineates her absolute alienation in the following terms:

> Poor Father! gone was every friend of thine:
> And kindred of dead husband are at best
> Small help, and, after marriage such as mine,
> With little kindness would to me incline.
> Ill was I then for toil or service fit:
> With tears whose course no effort could confine,
> By high-way side forgetful would I sit
> Whole hours, my idle arms in moping sorrow knit (ll. 245-252).

22. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 4.

23. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads, 1798, p. 131.

24. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads, 1798, p. 132.

25. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads, 1798, p. 132. The statement is by Darwin, not Owen.

26. "*Preface* to the Lyrical Ballads," Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 150.

27. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 147.

28. Quoted in Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 148.

29. Quoted in Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 148.

30. Quoted in Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 147.

31. Since the poem ends simultaneously with the speaker's utterance, we are left without an authorial comment, narratorial or otherwise, that could help create closure.

32. All of Wordsworth's poems that appeared for the first time in 1800 are taken from William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads 1805, (ed), Derek Roper (London: Collins, 1968). The Fenwick note appears on p. 371 of Roper's book.

33. Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 371.

34. Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 372.

35. This scene is rendered thus:

> At this the father raised his hook
> And snapped a faggot-band;
> He plied his work, and Lucy took
> The lantern in her hand (ll. 21-24).

CHAPTER II

DIALOGIC TALES: ORAL AND WRITTEN HISTORY

Remembrance of Things Past: The Dialogue and Time In The Brothers

The action of "The Brothers," a semi-dramatic poem, takes place in a churchyard where, as the village priest himself says, there is nothing of interest to a stranger; there is

> '... neither epitaph nor monument,
> Tombstone nor name--only the turf we tread,
> And a few natural graves' (ll. 13-15).

However, the setting is of tremendous significance to Leonard, one of the two main characters in the poem, and to the poem itself. In a poem concerned with history it is only fitting that the setting be a church-yard. For Leonard, in quest of his family history, this church-yard speaks eloquently of the community's disrespect for the historical process. "Your churchyard," he says, to the priest in his opening remarks:

> Seems, if such freedom may be used with you,
> To say that you are heedless of the past.
> An orphan could not find his mother's grave:
> Here's neither head, nor foot-stone, plate of brass,
> Cross-bones or skull, type of our earthly state
> Or emblem of our hopes: the dead man's home
> Is but a fellow to that pasture-field (ll. 165-171).

To this the priest replies:

> Why, there, sir, is a thought that's new to me.
> The stone-cutters, 'tis true, might beg their bread
> If every English churchyard were like ours:
> Yet your conclusion wanders from the truth.
> We have no need of names and epitaphs;
> We talk about the dead by our fire-sides,
> And then, for our immortal part--*we* want
> No symbols, sir, to tell us that plain tale:
> The thought of death sits easy on the man

Who has been born and dies among the mountains (ll. 172-181).

The very facts Leonard interprets as signalling a disregard for history the priest interprets as proof of the community's wholesome concern with history. "Names" and "epitaphs" in the one system are the means by which the past is recorded while in the other they are gratuitous symbols.

As we can see from this exchange, the two characters hold conflicting views on history, or the best way in which to record the past. The interchange makes clear the difference is a fundamental one. The priest regards history as a primarily oral activity whereas Leonard regards it as a primarily written one. For the latter, history is not history until the past is recorded in written form. The lack of the presence of the past in the form of a symbolic system such as language, as in this community, is synonymous with its non-existence. It is no wonder, then, that Leonard labels this particular church-yard, "the field" (l. 171).

The opposing attitudes towards a remembrance of things past dramatized in this dialogue inform the very structure of the poems considered in this chapter. The Matthew poems, "We Are Seven" and "Anecdote for Fathers" are dialogues in the main with some narratorial comment. Since the dialogue is far more significant--it occupies most of the lines in these poems--the poems appear to be advocating the superiority of oral history. Conversely, since the dialogues are captured in written

form--the poem--history that is primarily oral in nature is solidified. Wordsworth's use of dialogue is not in itself unusual. In Poetic Origins and the Ballad (1921), Louise Pound dates the appearance of dialogue in poetry to the Norman Conquest. "It is after the Norman Conquest," she writes, "that it began to enter, in lyric and narrative minstrelsy, until dialogue in one form or another, it is agreed by scholars, becomes part of the minstrel's stock in trade."[1] The question-answer format in dialogue is equally traditional.[2] Dialogue is known to have been a favourite type in the ballad and other forms of folk-poetry. What is unusual is Wordsworth's use of the dialogue in its folk and not its literary form.[3] Dialogue in an oral poem re-presents the past, making it simultaneous with the present in every utterance. In the Wordsworthian ballad, the use of dialogue to emphasize the presentness of the past is even more noticeable since it occurs in a written and not an oral form. However, while the dramatic portions of the poems stress the presentness of the past, suggesting the poem is advancing a view of history compatible with that of oral art, there are narrative portions that in turn stress the pastness of the past. Since "The Brothers" provides an interesting look at the clash between the two attitudes, a concern of the other poems considered in this chapter, I would like to discuss it briefly. In this poem the issue is expressed in the clashing attitudes toward history displayed by the priest and Leonard. Both characters are concerned with the history of the Ewbank family. But whereas Leonard wants the priest to

recount the events of the past, the priest recreates this past in imagistic terms. The differing expectations of story creates confusion and a certain amount of animosity which is expressed in Leonard's attempt to force the priest's utterance into a narrative of events and the priest's equally stubborn refusal to oblige. The tension pervades the conversation but nowhere so strikingly as when the priest starts discoursing about the childhood of the two brothers. Unprompted by Leonard, the priest recalls the time as an image of their grandfather "tripping down the path / With his two grandsons after him" (ll. 219-220). Leonard interjects with "but these two orphans" (l. 223) and the priest replies, presumably angrily:

> Orphans! such they were-
> Yet not while Walter lived: for though their parents
> Lay buried side by side as now they lie,
> The old man was a father to the boys (ll. 224-227).

The priest's preference for dealing with the past in imagistic rather than factual terms suggests he believes the 'truth' lies not in facts (such as the fact that they were orphans) but in the fabric of life, which can only be captured in image. Hence the image of the grandfather and the boys challenge language over the issue of 'truth.' This little exchange demonstrates the basic difference between the two; for the priest facts have little to do with the history of the Ewbank family whereas for Leonard the family history cannot be divorced from fact.

The poem thus pits differing concepts of story against one another. Consequently it dramatizes different ways of experiencing the past. Which way does the poem seem to prefer, if any? The actions in which the dialogue has its resolution reveal a contented priest and a severely discontented, self-involved Leonard. The priest extends his hospitality (he offers Leonard a meal) to someone he had originally resented as a "stranger," but Leonard, the narrator tells us,

> ... sitting down beneath the trees, reviewed
> All that the priest had said: his early years
> Were with him in his heart (ll. 416-418).

Of his emotional state we are told:

> ... cherished hopes
> And thoughts which had been his an hour before
> All pressed on him with such a weight, that now
> This vale, where he had been so happy, seemed
> A place in which he could not bear to live:
> So he relinquished all his purposes (ll. 418-422).

Can the priest's contentment be regarded as a claim, made by the poem, of the redemptive nature of oral history? And Leonard's morbid involvement in the past as a claim of the dangers that attend conceptualizing the past as a series of events? If memory is redemptive in the priest's case, it is a vicious, entrapping force in Leonard's. The narrative suggests the memory of his brother and the knowledge of his mysterious death prevent Leonard from fulfilling his desire of settling down in his ancestral village. The poem does not resolve the issue. Instead, it ends with the narrator relating the course Leonard's life takes in brief, factual terms.

History: The Source of Knowledge? A Discussion of the 1798 Matthew poems

When we consider the Matthew poems as a group, the issue of history takes on a very specific turn. Between 1798 and 1799 Wordsworth wrote a number of poems on Matthew. Of these, "Address to the Scholars of the Village School of ----" (written 1798) was published in 1842 and included in 1845 among "Epitaphs and Elegaic Pieces." Two elegies found in the Alfoxden notebook (1798) were not published in Wordsworth's lifetime.[4] Of the other Matthew poems, all of which were published between 1798 and 1800, only one is formally identified by the poet as an epitaph. The headnote to "If Nature, for a favourite child" states:

> In the school of __ is a tablet on which are inscribed, in gilt letters, the names of the several persons who have been school-masters there since the foundation of the school, with the time at which they entered upon and quitted their office. Opposite one of those names the author wrote the following lines.[5]

These poems deviate from the epitaph format rather dramatically. They are conversation pieces relating dialogues that occurred between the narrator and Matthew. Two of these poems, "Expostulation and Reply" and "The Tables Turned," appeared in 1798 while "The Fountain: A Conversation" and "The Two April Mornings" appeared in 1800. In the Fenwick note to "If Nature, for a favourite child" Wordsworth talks of the Matthew poems collectively, suggesting that they celebrate the notion of spiritual guide through celebrating the memory of Matthew, a figure symbolic of spiritual guidance. In this note he states:

> Such a tablet as is here spoken of continued to be preserved in Hawkshead School, though the inscriptions were not brought down to our time. This and other poems connected with Matthew would not gain by a literal detail of facts. Like the Wanderer in *The Excursion*, this schoolmaster was made up of several both of his class and men of other occupations. I do not ask pardon for what there is of untruth in such verses, considered strictly as matters of fact. It is enough if, being true and consistent in spirit, they move and teach in a manner not unworthy of a poet's calling.[6]

The intriguing fact about the Matthew poems published between 1798 and 1800 is that only one ("If Nature, for a favourite child"), as mentioned earlier, is a true epitaph. The other four celebrate the memory of the guide in utterance--his utterance--providing the reader with an unusual view of history; in these poems the past is preserved through a preservation of the speech of the individual remembered and not through an account of the events in his life, character and so on, as is typical of an epitaph. These poems are, however, Wordsworthian epitaphs since they are in the spirit of his own definition of the term. In "An Essay on Epitaphs," III, Wordsworth reproduces John Weever's definition of the epitaph[7] ("'An epitaph'" says Weever "'is a superscription [either in verse or prose] or an astrict pithie Diagram, writ, carved or engraven, upon the tomb, grave, or sepulchre of the defunct, briefly declaring [*and that with a kind of commiseration*] the name, the age, the deserts, the dignities, the state, *the praises both of body and minde*, the good and bad fortunes in the life and the manner and time of the death of the person therein interred'") and adds to it the following comment:

> This account of an Epitaph, which as far as it goes is just, was no doubt taken by Weever from the Monuments of our own Country, and it shews that in his conception an Epitaph was not to be an abstract character of the deceased but an epitomized biography blended with description by which an impression of the character was to be conveyed. Bring forward the one incidental expression, a kind of commiseration, unite with it a concern on the part of the dead for the well-being of the living made known by exhortation and admonition, and let this commiseration and concern pervade and brood over the whole so that what was peculiar to the individual shall still be subordinate to a sense of what he had in common with the species--our notion of a perfect Epitaph would then be realized.[8]

In "If Nature, for a favourite child" Wordsworth celebrates Matthew's memory in a manner typical of an epitaph--through an expression of grief at the passing away of a man who,

> ... when the secret cup
> Of still and serious thought went round,
> It seemed as if he drank it up-
> He felt with spirit so profound (ll. 25-28),

and who is the "soul of God's best earthly mould!" (l. 29). In the 1798 Matthew poems, however, Wordsworth's addition to Weever's definition, and not Weever's definition, seems to be the informing spirit.

In these poems, then, we are concerned specifically with the notion of the past in conjunction with the notion of death. They deny the linearity of thought that informs the typical epitaph. but more important, they reproduce dialogues that challenge Wordsworth's main objection to Weever's definition as well as challenging Weever's definition. The central statement in Wordsworth's addition to Weever's definition has to be his advice to "bring forward the one incidental expression, a kind of commiseration, unite with it a concern on the part of the

dead for the well-being of the living made known by exhortation and admonition, and let this commiseration and concern pervade and brood over the whole."[9] "Expostulation and Reply" and "The Tables Turned" do not present Matthew as a figure dispensing wisdom to the younger generation. On the contrary, his philosophy is well-challenged by the representative youth who makes us question the validity of Matthew's exhortation: what, then, is Matthew being celebrated, as he undeniably is, for? In allowing both points of view to exist side by side, these poems suggest history is a dialogue. Quite literally, the poem is a commemoration--a history--of Matthew. And it remembers him engaged in a dialogue and that is how it wants us, the audience, to remember him.[10]

In 1805 Wordsworth published the fourth and final edition of the Lyrical Ballads. He rearranged the order in which the poems appeared, placing "Expostulation and Reply" and "The Tables Turned" at the forefront of volume I.[11] Since Wordsworth did not discuss the reasons for the rearrangement any argument made for the radical change in the placement of these two poems (in the 1798 edition they are the eighteenth and nineteenth poems) is at best speculative. However, it is worth considering whether Wordsworth thought the poems central to the concerns raised in the Lyrical Ballads and hence a fitting introduction to the selection.[12] For, although the poems are just barely narratives (they relate a conversation) they debate issues that inform a number of the Lyrical Ballads narratives as well as other

Wordsworthian poems composed in the 1790s. The poems are complementary, "The Tables Turned" being, as the full title indicates, "on the same subject" as "Expostulation and Reply." The poems are concerned with history as the source of knowledge. They consider the separation of human from the non-human world and the accompanying belief that knowledge is an exclusively human domain from opposing points of view. Agreement with this view would lead to a belief that human history--the best of philosophical, cultural, social and political thought--is the true repository of knowledge and hence of enlightenment. Disagreement with this view on the other hand would lead to a refusal to accept history as the true repository of knowledge based on the belief that knowledge is not limited to the human world. In these two poems Matthew plays the role of the believer and Wordsworth that of the disbelieving challenger.

The thrust of Matthew's accusation is most clearly expressed in lines that occur early in the poem. The dialogue opens with him asking William:

> 'Where are your books? that light bequeath'd
> 'To beings else forlorn and blind!
> 'Up! Up! and drink the spirit breath'd
> 'From dead men to their kind (ll. 5-8).'

The question is deceptive in its simplicity. On the simplest level, while apparently questioning the poet about his apathy towards "books," the lines reproach him for a discernible lack of interest in the world of human knowledge, made available to mankind through the institution of history. The hallowed terms Matthew uses in describing the institution of human knowledge

suggest that on a more complex level he is reproaching the poet for ignoring history and in so doing perpetuating his own ignorance.

The severity of Matthew's accusation rests on an implicit equation of history, the collection of the best thought over the ages, with the sacred principle; "books" are, he says, "the light / Bequeath'd" (the Miltonic tone of the image is undeniable), and invest the human world with grace. The reverence he expresses for "the word" and the venerable institution of human knowledge has its ultimate sanction in the Bible.[13] The exclusive nature of knowledge, its restriction to the human world, makes history the secular institution closest to the sacred. History preserves wisdom, allowing man's condition to be informed with grace. Ultimately, then, Matthew's argument privileges the human world over the rest of nature, maintaining that a separation between the two is caused by the presence of knowledge in the one and lack thereof in the other.[14] Judging from the sub-text of Matthew's accusation, then, the poet's offence is ultimately that of heresy. By ignoring "books" Wordsworth is, in Matthew's terms, challenging the separation of the human from the non-human, the privileging of the human over the natural and the confining of knowledge to the human world. In conclusion, the William figure is accused of challenging the centrality of man in the cosmos and hence of human thought. Since a collection of such thought constitutes the formidable discipline of history--of philosophy, theology

and politics--he is also challenging the notion that knowledge resides in a careful study of such thought, that is, in a study of history. Matthew does not seem to have a specific tradition, theological, philosophical, political, or any other, in mind and the generality of his accusations is continued in his description of Wordsworth's activity. According to him, Wordsworth is idleness personified; he sits "'on that old grey stone, / '... for the length of half a day'" (ll. 1-2), and looks "'round on your mother earth, / 'As if she for no purpose bore you'" (ll. 9-10). Putting the sub-text of Matthew's accusations and this description together, Matthew's argument appears to arise from an inability to comprehend Wordsworth's philosophy, of which his attitude is a demonstration. Hence what Wordsworth regards as a reasonable activity Matthew regards as idleness.[15]

William's reply is a bold assertion of the necessity for overthrowing received doctrine, and hence of overthrowing history. His reason is very simple: his thinking does not fit into the language and thought of his philosophical ancestors (whom Matthew refers to as "dead men"). Knowledge lies so clearly in the interaction between human and non-human worlds, he would argue, that to insist otherwise--as Matthew does--is absurd. The poem's *raison d'être* has generally been identified with the theory William expresses.[16] In his edition Roper quotes J.W. Beach, indicating that he agrees with his conclusion that the poem expresses a Hartleian theory. Beach writes:

> What Wordsworth here asserts is simply that it is our senses which furnish us with the primary data out of which we build up our intellectual and moral life, and that from time to time it is well to return to the data of our senses for information and control upon our higher processes of thought.[17]

But as Bialostosky and Sheats point out, to see the poem as an authorial statement is to ignore its formal organization: it is, in Sheats' words, "to ignore the fact that the speaker ... is a dramatic character, and that his language is appropriate to the debate."[18] Although the poem undeniably presents conflicting theories, one which argues for the superiority of culture and another which argues for the superiority of nature, it does not privilege one over the other.[19] At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the importance of the debate in determining the poem's *raison d'être*. It is impossible too to deny that the debate is over nature and culture. The thrust of William's argument is expressed in the following lines:

> 'The eye it cannot chuse but see,
> 'We cannot bid the ear be still;
> 'Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
> 'Against, or with our will' (ll. 21-24).

In case he should be considered to be advancing a theory of knowledge that is based exclusively on sensory perceptions, William adds:

> 'Nor less I deem that there are powers,
> 'Which of themselves our minds impress,
> 'That we can feed this mind of ours,
> 'In a wise passiveness' (ll. 21-24).

By asserting that knowledge coexists with the body's sensory functions and a passive (receptive) mind the speaker asserts that knowledge is an inevitable consequence of being alive and

is not reserved for the few who actively seek it.[20]

The dialogue, however, also lends itself to a debate over the issue of history. Matthew's statements suggest that the crux of the issue is knowledge. He advocates the study of the past as the only available means of gaining knowledge. William on the other hand advances the theory that knowledge is best gained through an involvement--mental and physical--with the present: interaction with the universe is guaranteed to teach one all one needs to know, according to him. In the typical Wordsworthian poem, the present is indeed imbued with the past, as a look at "The Thorn," "Hart-Leap Well," and "Michael" reveals. The other point William makes is the necessity of involvement with the universe in its entirety, not just in its human aspect (of which books are an appropriate symbol).[21]

The philosophy expressed by William in "Expostulation and Reply," is similar to the philosophy expressed by Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" (1798). In the latter poem the poet affirms that he is still, even as an adult, "a lover" of:

> ... all the mighty world
> Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
> And what perceive (ll. 106-108).

That is, knowledge is a synthesis of complementary activities--receiving and expressing. The process of making meaning would be incomplete if either of the activities was to be denied.[22] Grounding knowledge in the sensory world and emphasizing the mind as a sensory rather than an intellectual organ makes the immediate present and the immediate world the

sources of knowledge. The co-existence of knowledge with the universe, of both with wisdom and the co-existence of all three with the sacred principle constitutes the philosophy William offers as a contrary to Matthew's assertion that knowledge is reserved for the human world and to be arrived at through a study of human wisdom down the ages.[23]

"Expostulation and Reply" ends without resolving the conflict. There is no summation or resolution provided by a narrator who nonetheless makes his presence felt in this poem. The poem ends with the dialogue, in which William has the last word. Having presented his own philosophy, which rejects history altogether in favour of a mode of simultaneous perception, William rounds off the argument by returning to Matthew's original objection:

> '--Then ask not wherefore, here, alone,
> 'Conversing as I may,
> 'I sit upon this old grey stone,
> 'And dream my time away' (ll. 29-32).

"The Tables Turned" is the only one of the four Matthew poems considered in this chapter that is a pure dialogue. The complex nature of the connection between this poem and "Expostulation and Reply" has been noted by Bialostosky in his discussion of the Lyrical Ballads poems. Discussing Sheats' valuable contribution to the discussion on the Lyrical Ballads, much of which he sees as correcting the errors of the predominantly thematic criticism of the day, Bialostosky writes:

> Sheats' insistence on "equilibrium" and his conflation of two poems into a single poem or a formally balanced

> pair follow from his attempts to correct the common attribution of the poems' most unqualified statements to Wordsworth himself, but they do not go so far as to take an interest in the difference between the narrative form of "Expostulation and Reply" and the dramatic form of "The Tables Turned" or to ponder the relation between these two formally dissimilar poems, always published together and in the same order, first the narrative anecdote, then the dramatic scene.[24]

Although there is no audience within the poem, the poem obviously has a specific audience in mind. The sub-title of the poem ("An Evening Scene on the Same Subject") and the fact that it always appears following "Expostulation and Reply" suggests the audience is the Matthew figure. The poem, in fact, continues with the argument made by William in "Expostulation and Reply." The dramatic form is interestingly paralleled by the argument, which is a more concrete expression of the abstract philosophy expressed by William in the previous poem. "Expostulation and Reply" ends with a rhetorical question posed by William. "Think you," he asks,

> ' ... mid all this mighty sum
> 'Of things for ever speaking,
> 'That nothing of itself will come,
> 'But we must still be seeking?' (ll. 25-28)

The utterance in "The Tables Turned" is really an attempt by the speaker to present "things for ever speaking." His argument is more imagistic, less abstract. He presents images of a natural world in very individual, concrete terms: "The sun above the mountain's head" (l. 5) who "through all the long green fields has spread, / His first sweet evening yellow" (ll. 7-8), the "woodland linnet" and "throstle" who sing and so on. The natural objects in the poem are described in terms of an activity

fundamental to their nature--the sun in terms of its light and the birds in terms of their song.

However, while the poem does spend time asserting the active nature of the universe through such description, it seems to be more concerned with establishing its intelligence. The speaker affirms the co-existence of activity with intelligence through explicitly equating the one with the other. The linnet's song, he says, has "more of wisdom in it" (l. 12) while the throstle is in his singing "no mean preacher" (l. 14). And so it is this active, intelligent universe that is the source of knowledge for the speaker: "Let Nature," he says a few lines later, "be your teacher" (l. 16). The poem thus celebrates nature as the perfect historian as well as the relationship between this teacher and the receptive student (presumably Wordsworth). Understanding history depends on the ability to interpret the great, natural system. The natural world is, we are told, "a world of ready wealth, / Our minds and hearts to bless--" (ll. 17-18) and that

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man;
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can (ll. 21-24).

Although the speaker insists on the wisdom inherent in nature and on nature as historian, he does not delineate the history itself. Neither does he address the issue of relationship--between man and nature (the teacher).[25] What the speaker does assert without qualification is approval of the man / nature relationship and disapproval of the man / history one. "Books" are accused of embroiling one in "dull and endless

strife" (l. 9) while the intellect is condemned as a "meddling" organ that "mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things" (l. 27). The poem, then, does not concern itself with more than making a statement of faith in an intelligent universe. It might almost be taken, together with "Expostulation and Reply," as a statement of Wordsworth's purpose in the Lyrical Ballads--to "come forth, and bring with [him] a heart / That watches and receives" (ll. 31-32). He is the historian and nature the teacher.

The 'nature' that the William figure in "Expostulation and Reply" and the speaker in "The Tables Turned" advocate as teacher is not, to use Coleridge's terms, "natura naturata," but "natura naturans." Whereas the former refers to a nature regarded solely as matter, the latter refers to a nature considered as a "dynamic system of ideas or laws."[26] The speaker in "The Tables Turned" thus affirms the presence of law in "Nature": "One impulse from a vernal wood" can "teach you more of man; / Of moral evil and of good" (ll. 22-23). Ultimately, natura naturans is the object of the poet's veneration because it justifies his faith that there are laws / ideas that govern the universe. In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth refers to this interaction between natura naturans and himself as an event in which:

> ... the breath of this corporeal frame,
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

We see into the life of things (ll. 44-50).

Natura naturans, then, is what both speakers refer to when they proclaim "nature" the "teacher." The omnipotence and omnipresence of this principle is affirmed in "Tintern Abbey." It is "a presence" whose:

> ... dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things (ll. 98-103).

It is important to remember that "Expostulation and Reply" and "The Tables Turned" do not describe this principle, as does "Tintern Abbey" for instance. Instead, the poems point to where this principle resides--in the linnet's music, the throstle's song, the vernal wood and in a day when "life was sweet." The presence of this principle in the mind of man, so boldly affirmed in "Tintern Abbey," is somewhat less clearly stated in "Expostulation and Reply." In his reply to Matthew, the William figure asserts:

> 'Nor less I deem that there are powers,
> 'Which of themselves our minds impress,
> 'That we can feed this mind of ours,
> 'In a wise passiveness' (ll. 21-24).

If the powers "impress" the human mind they must become an integral part of it. It is no wonder that Wordsworth, explaining his aim in writing the lyrical ballads in the Preface (1800), states his attempt was to "follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature."[27] The statement affirms the presence of "powers" in the human mind which align it with the rest of nature. So whether

the poetic subject is the natural world, or a specific natural object such as a thorn-bush, as in "The Thorn," or the human mind, as in "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman," it is the rhythm--the flux and reflux--of the universe that Wordsworth is interested in studying. In his scheme of things, then, nature is the source of knowledge and he, the poet, is the historian--the recorder of this knowledge.

"Expostulation and Reply" and "The Tables Turned" are concerned with proclaiming a philosophy which Wordsworth was in the process of developing--which is more fully expressed in in "Tintern Abbey" and in the Prelude. However, the manner in which the philosophy is expressed in the Matthew poems differs radically from its expression in "Tintern Abbey" and the Prelude. If we see "The Tables Turned" as a continuation of the conversation in "Expostulation and Reply," then together with the latter it is a dialogue, the philosophy being presented as a conversation that is in turn related as if it were a tale. The philosophical dialogue is soon interrupted by details more appropriate to a story. A narrator appears as early as line 13 and sets about placing the dialogue in a spatial and temporal context. "One morning thus, by Esthwaite lake" (l. 13) immediately contextualizes the dialogue and suggests it, the dialogue, is part of a story. However, the narrator does little else to make his presence a significant one except to describe the day the conversation occured as one "when life was sweet I knew not why" (l. 14). His significance is more structural than

thematic--his intrusion serves the purpose of turning what could have been an abstract dialogue, self-referential and self-contained--into story, grounded in the world of space and time. We are forcibly reminded that what we are being provided is a history of the event, not the event itself. Since "Tintern Abbey" and the Prelude are lyrical expressions of personal vision, the subject clearly being the poet himself, they allow for an extended meditation on philosophical issues, which is presented in the abstract language in which it was conceived. What is interesting of course is that the two-part Prelude (1799) is more of a narrative, less a lyric, that relates the history of the artist as a young man, the philosophy being inseparable from the story of the poet's growth.[28]

The Solipsistic Individual and History: The Two April Mornings and *The Fountain: A Conversation*

I would like now to turn to the two Matthew poems which appeared in Lyrical Ballads (1800)--"The Two April Mornings" and "The Fountain: A Conversation" in which one participant, the narrator, is largely silent. The other person's utterance (Matthew's) is the focus of attention in these poems. Both poems are concerned with a crisis, the only difference being that the crisis is not that of the "I" but that of his subject. In fact, in relating the conversation that occurred, the narrator underlines his own contentment at the time. In "Two April Mornings" he recalls the day in terms of its pleasantness and the mood as one of merriment, as

... through the grass
And by the steaming rills,
We travelled merrily, to pass
A day among the hills (ll. 9-12).

The narrator in "The Fountain" describes the remembered day in similarly idyllic terms. "We lay," he recalls,

... beneath a spreading oak,
Beside a mossy seat;
And from the turf a fountain broke,
And gurgled at our feet (ll. 5-8).

However, it is just as obvious that Matthew does not share the narrator's contentment. In "Two April Mornings" the narrator asks Matthew

'... what thought
Beneath so beautiful a sun,
So sad a sigh has brought?' (ll. 14-16)

and in "The Fountain: A Conversation" he requests Matthew to sing "of the church-clock and the chimes" but the latter responds with what the narrator later refers to as a complaint.

Matthew's discontent arises from his obsession with personal loss, whether it be his own animal spirits or his daughter. This utterance makes clear that this past, and his inability to let it be, has trapped him. His view of the present, he himself admits, is distorted by his living in memory. In "The Two April Mornings" he informs the narrator that he is unable to enjoy "a day among the hills" because:

'Yon cloud with that long purple cleft
Brings fresh into my mind
A day like this, which I have left
Full thirty years behind' (ll. 21-24).

He remembers, now, stopping by his daughter's grave, then, and encountering "'a blooming girl, whose hair was wet / With points

of morning dew'" (ll. 43-44). The imagistic association of the young girl who "'tripped with foot so free'" (l. 50) and his dead daughter who "'six feet in earth ... lay'" brought about a painful awareness of loss then, and remembering it re-creates the loss in the present. Of the crisis in the past he says,

> 'There came from me a sigh of pain
> Which I could ill confine;
> I looked at her and looked again:
> --And did not wish her mine' (ll. 53-56).

On that day, then, the memory of his daughter prevented him from enjoying the animation of the girl and that of nature; the girl is inextricably associated with the natural world, as is underlined by the manner in which Matthew describes her activity, comparing it with the activity of objects in the natural world. The comparison,

> 'No fountain from its rocky cave
> E'er tripped with foot so free;
> She seemed as happy as a wave
> That dances on the sea' (ll. 49-52),

suggests playing and dancing are the natural activities of the child just as much as they are of the wave. Thus memory prevents him from participating in the fulness of life, which surrounds him. His reaction suggests that he was unable to allow the girl and nature an autonomous existence then and is unable to do so now.

The poem does not, however, pessimistically assert the universality of entrapment in history. Matthew's entrapment in the past--all he can do is think and talk about the past--is attributed to a blind egotism. Crucial to the point the poem

makes is his description of his little girl. The joy he recollects having had in her appears to stem directly from the fact that she was his. Paternal pride is the focus of the lines in which he remembers her:

> 'Nine summers had she scarcely seen
> The pride of all the vale;
> And then she sung; she would have been
> A very nightingale' (ll. 33-36).

Egotism also controls his response to the girl whom he met thirty years ago. He now remembers thinking then that though she was a joy to behold--"'To see a child so very fair, / It was a pure delight!'" (ll. 47-48) he says--she is devoid of meaning to him; he did not wish her his. The question his response raises of course is why think in terms of possession in the first place? Are things meaningful only if they belong to him? His remarks certainly suggest so. His Emma, now dead, had more meaning than did this girl who was so vitally alive that day, thirty years ago. By inference, the past has more meaning to Matthew than does the present. Nostalgia permeates his entire utterance as he reveals how very much he is caught in the cycle of memory. Matthew's history is, then, an unredemptive force in his life which has ossified to the extent that it controls his perception of the present.

The poem counters the notion of history as an unredemptive force in the concluding stanza, the subject being the narrator's memory. The information the narrator provides in this stanza, that "Matthew is in his grave," makes the fact that the conversation took place in time past a significant part of the

poem's purpose since it makes the day and conversation a part of the narrator's memory. The last three lines of the poem suggest the narrator is indeed mourning too; he is mourning the loss of his friend. In these lines the narrator remembers Matthew standing "As at that moment, with his bough / Of wilding in his hand" (ll. 59-60). However, memory in the narrator's case is redemptive; Matthew's memory does not impose on the narrator's present. Instead of mourning by focussing on his own pain, the narrator mourns through reproducing a bit of the past which he and Matthew shared. More important, he remembers Matthew uttering and in reproducing the dialogue instead of relating it, the narrator recreates the past in the present. For the duration of the poem, Matthew is alive and talking.[29]

The importance of the concluding stanza cannot be overemphasized. It shifts the focus from the subject of the conversation related in the poem to the structure of the poem. By anouncing that the conversation is a part of the narrator's memory, the poem sets its structure up as analogous to its subject. Presumably something in the present reminds the narrator of Matthew and the day they had the conversation ("Methinks I see him stand," says the narrator in the last stanza). The conversation itself has its genesis in Matthew's reminiscences, aroused by the day on which the conversation takes place. Thus both the narrator and Matthew experience a crisis, in the poem, created by the loss of a loved one. The difference is that Matthew tries to resolve the crisis by trying

to surrender his will to that of God ("The will of God be done" is his very first statement in the poem), and the narrator resolves the crisis by expressing faith in memory that allows Matthew to live on. The poem, recording a dialogue between the narrator and Matthew, is itself a testimony to that faith.

The issue of crisis and loss is also the philosophical centre of "The Fountain: A Conversation," written at the same time as was "Two April Mornings."[30] As in the latter, the narrator's contentment is revealed in his description of the surroundings and his and Matthew's activity. "We lay," he says,

> ... beneath a spreading oak,
> Beside a mossy seat;
> And from the turf a fountain broke,
> And gurgled at our feet (ll. 5-8).

The contentment is, the narrator suggests, one that Matthew shares, referring, for instance, to the latter as "the grey-haired man of glee" (l. 20). However, the conversation itself suggests otherwise as Matthew voices strong discontent with the present. In this poem, unlike "Two April Mornings," the crisis is not a part of the narrator's experience, whose contentment only serves to underline the discontent of the other.

As in "Two April Mornings," in "The Fountain: A Conversation" memory is unredemptive for Matthew and prevents him from wholeheartedly engaging in the present. As the most tangible reminder of the passage of time, memory ruins the present for Matthew by imposing the past on the present. Hence

the day, which the narrator's statements suggest is altogether peaceful, is ruined for Matthew--a fact he himself recognizes. The dialogue opens with him saying:

> 'And here, on this delightful day,
> I cannot choose but think
> How oft, a vigorous man, I lay
> Beside the fountain's brink' (ll. 25-28).

His own history is once again a vicious cycle from which there is no escape. Memory is thus an entrapping rather than a redemptive faculty. In this poem, however, Matthew attempts to impose his conclusions--the product of an extreme solipsism--on humankind in general.

The argument Matthew makes, once again, is that the human condition is synonymous with loss. Only, this time it is explicitly stated rather than implied. For him, the passage of time is synonymous with the loss of vigour and the onset of decay. In fact, the dialogue ensues because of Matthew's brooding on this ontological fact: the day and fountain, ever-youthful, remind him of his own mortality--remind him, that is, that he has moved from being a "vigorous man" to a state of steady decay. It is not the passage of time itself that he blames for this loss, but memory. Memory is, in Matthew's terms, a faculty that confirms the unavailability of the past precisely because it makes it available in the form of mental images. His expression of this simultaneous availability and non-availability of the past is particularly keen in the following lines, as is the feeling of being helplessly trapped:

'My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirred,
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those days I heard' (ll. 29-32).

He does not identify loss with what "'age takes away'" but with what "'it leaves behind.'" He suggests, in fact, that it is "'the wiser mind'" that "'mourns less for what age takes away / Than what it leaves behind'" (ll. 35-36). What does age leave behind? And why is it a more tragic loss, requiring a philosophical mind to understand, than the loss of what age takes away? The answer to these questions also reveals Matthew's attitude towards the past. Matthew himself provides the answers in a seemingly unrelated discussion of the human and natural worlds. The argument he makes is:

'The blackbird in the summer trees,
The lark upon the hill,
Let loose their carols when they please,
Are quiet when they will.

'With nature never do *they* wage
A foolish strife; they see
A happy youth, and their old age
Is beautiful and free:

'But we are pressed by heavy laws;
And often glad no more,
We wear a face of joy, because
We have been glad of yore' (ll. 37-48).

Matthew's argument is the familiar one of the burden of consciousness. Age leaves freedom behind, freedom which children and animals unencumbered by consciousness enjoy. As these lines define it, freedom is not the superficial breaking out of restrictive laws but in fact an unquestioning and complete participation in universal law. Matthew therefore suggests the loss of oneness with the universe, the submission of the

individual to the laws to which the non-human world submits, is the more tragic loss of the inevitable growth into adulthood and that the awareness of separation from the non-human world creates the separation. Such a philosophy can arise only from a belief in time as a linear dimension. In fact, Matthew even refers to the natural world in terms of a linear progression from "youth" to "old age," sure proof that he is inclined to interpreting all of nature in human terms (after all, "youth" and "old age" are terms and constructs created to deal with the passage of time) rather than vice versa. His statement suggests nature too has an irretrievable past, only it is not aware of its own mortality whereas the human being is. In conclusion, as far as he is concerned, loss is a universal phenomenon and time a steadily forward-moving reality.

It may be tempting to believe the poem is a pessimistic statement on the viciousness of memory, which reminds us of a golden past without making it available in fact. It is important to remember that Matthew's philosophical observations originated in a personal expression of a personal loss. It is to this level he reverts, thereby suggesting his philosophical statements are heavily influenced by what is a rather severe solipsism, and hence suspect as far as the poem's final statement on the issue is concerned. The general discussion turns specific around line fifty-three, when Matthew gives the term "loss" a very personal meaning. Addressing the narrator specifically for the first time, he says:

'My days, my friend, are almost gone,
My life has been approved,
And many love me; but by none
Am I enough beloved' (ll. 53-56).

The present, which he insists is emotionally barren, is burdened with the past, which he insists was emotionally fulfilling. He is, in effect, talking of himself as the last man of the tribe. His reaction to this fact is to bury himself in this past. In fact, he almost makes a virtue out of mourning: "'if there is one who need bemoan / His kindred laid in earth'" (ll. 49-50), he says, "'it is the man of mirth.'" His possessiveness over the past--symbolized in his desire to mourn--extends to the present. He is unable to enjoy the present precisely because he cannot possess it or the people around him whereas he can and did possess the past and the people who are now part of it. (He refers to the dead as "'the household hearts that were [my] own'" [l. 51]). It is no wonder Matthew turns the narrator down when the latter offers to "be a son" to him since his children are dead. Describing Matthew's reaction, the narrator says, "he grasped his hands, and said / 'Alas! that cannot be'" (ll. 63-64). The refusal reveals the extent to which Matthew is trapped in and by his own history.

The poem challenges Matthew's philosophy by offering a view of memory, the past, and history as a redemptive activity in the person of the narrator, who, we remember, expressed joy in the day at the beginning of the poem. Now, the narrator confirms the belief that Matthew's view is not the poem's final statement on the issue. He takes exception to the severity and gratuitousness

of Matthew's complaint. Presumably addressing the reader, he says: "'Now both himself and me he wrongs, / The man who thus complains!'" (ll. 57-58), while in refutation of Matthew's complaint he offers the following: "'I live and sing my idle songs / Upon the happy plains'" (ll. 59-60). These two simple lines offer a point of view on the complex of memory / thought / language that is the contrary of Matthew's. On the literal level the lines do not in any way address Matthew's complaint that he is not "enough beloved": how does the fact that the narrator sings his "idle songs" prove that Matthew is "enough beloved"? The lack of logic suggests the narrator has indeed seen in Matthew's complaint a far more serious issue than is apparent and it is on this level that he chooses to respond. The two lines just quoted hold the key to the nature of his response. The two assertions he makes are that the plains are "happy" and that he, the narrator, lives and sings his "idle songs" on these plains. But whereas his earlier expression of contentment was addressed to a specific time and place--the day the conversation occurred and the place he and Matthew were visiting--it is nonspecific in these two lines. Contentment, with self and universe, is asserted as a principle against Matthew's discontent.

The narrator's contentment is as intricately linked with memory as is Matthew's discontent. The clue to the reason the narrator can argue for contentment as the universal principle, and not loss, lies in the phrase "idle songs." Elsewhere in the

poem "idle songs" are more specifically delineated as "old Border song," "catch," "that half mad thing of witty rhymes" (l. 15). All of these categories can be subsumed under the general heading "folklore" and are primarily forms of oral poetry. In common with other forms of oral poetry such as the epic these forms are dependent on memory, collective memory that is, for their survival. The narrator even locates the "witty rhymes" that are Matthew's invention in shared memory, shared by him and Matthew: they were composed, he informs us, "last April." Thus by asking Matthew at the beginning of the poem to,

> '... try to match
> This water's pleasant tune
> With some old Border song, or catch
> That suits a summer's noon' (ll. 9-12),

the narrator asks him to share in the collective memory available in folkloric forms of poetry. The reason is not difficult to locate. That the narrator considers such an exercise to be celebratory is evident in his deliberate paralleling of the human activity of poetry with the activity of nature, which, he suggests, is celebratory. The narrator's description of the natural world suggests it is permeated with rhythm. He uses this central principle of the natural world to indicate the identity of the human and non-human worlds. He refers to the sound of running water as "the water's pleasant tune" and the sound of human utterance as "old Border song," and "catch / That suits a summer's noon" (ll. 11-12). Tune, song and catch are all rhythmic forms of utterance / expression. The narrator's use of positive adjectives such as "pleasant" suggest

he regards the singing of the natural world a celebratory act. By extension, then, the human activity of song is celebratory too; both worlds are conceived of as uttering in rhythm with one another.[31] Rhythm is thus a means of aligning the human world with the universe, otherwise separated, as Matthew argues, by the complex of memory / thought / language.

In refutation of memory as the dis-aligning factor, the narrator thus appears to offer a view of memory as it is present in folklore--celebratory and redemptive. In fact, he offers such poetic forms as forms that align the human world with the rest of nature. After all, the reason he wants the two of them, Matthew and himself, to sing a Border song or a catch is that it might "match / This water's pleasant tune." The water's tune is the form which contains and relates nature's history and thus matching it with a song or catch, also reservoirs of collective memory, is to align the human with the natural. To return to Matthew's original assertion that age "leaves behind" the ability to participate in universal law, the narrator's argument challenges it. Growth into adulthood is not synonymous with the development of a limiting, and limited individual memory. Quite clearly, the poem advocates collective memory, and art forms that arise from it, as the phenomena which makes participation in the natura naturans possible. If the child participates because his / her individual memory is not separate from the collective memory assumed by the term natura naturans, the adult participates by virtue of his / her participation in collective

memory, in song, catch and witty rhymes. It is no wonder the narrator is contented and Matthew is not. The poem appears to support the narrator's stance rather than Matthew's for it ends with the narrator relating the manner in which the dialogue ended--with Matthew singing

> ... those witty rhymes
> About the crazy old church-clock
> And the bewildered chimes (ll. 70-72),

a song, and an image (the song is an image in the poem) that celebrates the breakdown of linear time.

The Wisdom of the Child's View of Time: We Are Seven and *Anecdote for Fathers*

The structural complexity of the Matthew poems is also to be found in "We Are Seven" and "Anecdote for Fathers." They too reproduce dialogues but the narratorial comment is far more insistent than it is in the Matthew poems. The dramatic rendering of the event of the narrative in dialogue creates the incident anew. This presentation of the past as present clashes with the fact that the poems are narratives. The intrusive narratorial comment in each instance serves to displace the presentness of the past, forcing the reader into realizing the event is completed. The comment is in both instances a moralistic one and is set up as a resolution to the event (the dialogue) which precedes it. The completedness of the whole process, that is, the notion of the poem as a narrative, is thrown into question in both poems by the dialogic portion of

the text since the substance of the dialogue challenges the narrator's moral conclusion, which is supposed to extract meaning from the event / dialogue. There is no such causal link between the dialogue and the narratorial comment as the comment pretends there is. Thus while the narrative framework suggests that story is complete, having its resolution in this instance in the comment, the dialogic centre advances the immediacy of story and its co-existence with the present--symbolized in its inconclusiveness. As in the Matthew poems, the dialogues in both poems present conflicting points of view. The subject of the dialogues too, interestingly enough, is history. More specifically, an adult and child express attitudes toward time past. The presentness of the past--the attitude expressed by the children of these poems--is something the adult narrator of both poems has great difficulty comprehending. While the children's participation in the dialogue suggests an attitude toward history similar to that of the priest in "The Brothers" the adult's participation suggests the reverse--an attitude that is closer to Leonard's.

As with the Matthew poems, then, in these poems the concern with history is expressed on both structural and thematic levels: the subject of the conversations reveals conflicting views on history as does the structure of the poems. In "We Are Seven" the adult narrator and little girl argue over whether she has four or six siblings, two being dead. She insists there are seven of them in the family and he insists there are five. That

is, he insists the dead are not--are past tense--and she insists the dead are--are present tense. In "Anecdote for Fathers" the argument is caused by the adult narrator's insistence the child compare two places, prefer one over the other, state his preference and offer a reason for his preference. The child replies only under pressure, the nature of his replies defeating the purpose of the narrator in asking the questions. Since one of these places belongs to the past and is only a remembered reality and the other belongs to the present, the debate is ultimately over time and history.

The Fenwick note on "Anecdote for Fathers" locates the origin of the poem in a conversation Wordsworth had with Basil Montague, whereas "We are Seven," the Fenwick note states, was "written at Alfoxden in the spring of 1798, under circumstances somewhat remarkable. The little Girl who is the heroine I met within the area of Goodrich Castle in the year 1793."[32] Statements Wordsworth made elsewhere on these poems shed light on his purpose in writing them. In a letter to an unknown correspondent Wordsworth wrote of "Anecdote for Fathers": "In reply to your letter ... I have to say that my intention was to point out the injurious effects of putting inconsiderate questions to children, and urging them to give answers upon matters either uninteresting to them or upon which they had no decided opinion."[33] And in the Preface (1800) he writes that "We Are Seven" deals with "the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter

inability to admit that notion."[34]

In both instances Wordsworth's desire to capture the real-life event in poetry appears to have been stimulated by the accompanying revelation of a kind of perception peculiar to childhood. The poetic consideration of the subject seems to have resulted in a salutary lesson which bypasses the narrator in the poem but not the poet. A curious feature of both poems is that the nature of this lesson is not revealed by the narrator, although in one poem he admits he has learnt a lesson and in the other that there is a lesson his partner in the conversation has to learn. The narrator in "Anecdote for Fathers" insists that he has learnt from the child in the concluding stanza of the poem, where he says,

> O dearest, dearest boy! my heart
> For better lore would seldom yearn,
> Could I but teach the hundredth part
> Of what from thee I learn (ll. 57-60).

The narrator in "We Are Seven" denies outright that there is a lesson to be learnt in the conversation he has had with the girl. On the contrary, he insists to the very end that she is wrong and he is right. His conclusion is that she cannot "know of death" because she is a child "that lightly draws its breath / And feels its life in every limb" (ll. 2-3). The narrator's myopia is an intended one. The poem makes obvious that the girl's part in the conversation is meant to indicate the superiority of the child's vision over that of the adult, at least this particular adult. In vindication of the narrator's judgement it might be pointed out that Wordsworth expressed a

similar attitude in his remarks on the poem in the Preface (1800). However, in statements he made elsewhere on the subject, Wordsworth suggests the child does indeed ponder the subject of mortality, albeit differently from the adult. In An Essay on Epitaphs (I), for instance, he writes:

> for, if we had no direct external testimony that the minds of very young children meditate feelingly upon death and immortality, these inquiries, which we all know they are perpetually making concerning the *whence*, do necessarily include correspondent habits of interrogation concerning the *whither*. Origin and tendency are notions inseparably co-relative. Never did a child stand by the side of a running stream, pondering within himself what power was the feeder of the perpetual current, from what never-wearied sources the body of water was supplied, but he must have been inevitably propelled to follow this question by another: "Towards what abyss is it in progress? what receptacle can contain the mighty influx?" And the spirit of the answer must have been, though the word might be sea or ocean, accompanied perhaps with an image gathered from a map, or from the real object in nature--these might have been the *letter*, but the *spirit* of the answer must have been *as* inevitably,--a receptacle without bounds or dimensions,--nothing less than infinity. We may, then, be justified in asserting, that the sense of immortality, if not a co-existent and twin birth with Reason, is among the earliest of her offspring.[35]

The centrality of childhood in Wordsworth's work is undeniable. The child is the subject of these two poems and some other of his major poems in the Lyrical Ballads. Childhood, Wordsworth's own, is the informing principle of the Prelude and forms the subject of philosophical contemplation in "Tintern Abbey" and "Intimations of Immortality." The significant difference between the poems in the Lyrical Ballads and these other works is that the child of the Lyrical Ballads poems is never Wordsworth himself.[36] These poems therefore afford us the

opportunity to study Wordsworth's views of childhood unhampered by the subjectivity which attends his presentation of his own childhood. Another significant difference is that in "Anecdote for Fathers" and "We Are Seven" we are concerned specifically with the child's utterance, not his / her actions. By reproducing the conversation verbatim, the narrator forces attention on the child's thought as it is contained in his / her linguistic apparatus; paraphrasing the thought in his own words would have altered the concern of the text considerably. In both poems he does, however, preface the dialogue with a description of the child which serves to underline the vast gap between the child and the adult, albeit only in physical terms. The child in both poems is described in terms of a perfect innocence and animatedness, unadulterated by the complex cerebration of the adult. The narrator in "Anecdote for Fathers" informs us:

> I have a boy of five years old,
> His face is fair and fresh to see;
> His limbs are cast in beauty's mould (ll. 1-3).

The narrator in "We Are Seven" describes the girl he encounters as "wildly clad," with eyes that are "fair and very fair," and hair that "was thick with many a curl / That cluster'd round her head" (ll. 7-8). The rusticity of both serves to align them more with the natural world than with the human one. The girl in "We Are Seven" has, we are told, a "rustic, woodland air" while the boy in "Anecdote for Fathers" is, says the narrator, "slim / And graceful in his rustic dress" (ll. 17-18).

In both poems the narrator's detailed description of the child appears to form part of a comparison between adult and child, although one of the quantities in the comparison, the adult, is suppressed and present largely by inference. Hence in "We Are Seven" it is only because of the first stanza,

> A simple child, dear brother Jim,
> That lightly draws its breath,
> And feels its life in every limb,
> What should it know of death? (ll. 1-4)

that we know the child is being compared with the adult. The lines suggest that the adult, who does not lightly draw his breath or feel life in every limb, knows of death and is oppressed by his mortality. The comparison is more apparent in "Anecdote for Fathers." After describing the boy as he was on the day the conversation took place, the narrator describes himself. Whereas the description he provides of the boy is predominantly physical, the one he provides of himself is exclusively mental, as for instance in the following lines:

> My thoughts on former pleasures ran;
> I thought of Kilve's delightful shore,
> My pleasant home, when spring began,
> A long, long year before (ll. 9-12).

The passage of time weighs heavily in these lines, and what is remembered--"Kilve's delightful shore" and "pleasant home"--is done so in terms used to describe the boy. But whereas joy defines the boy's present it is clearly a part of the unrecoverable past for the narrator. Like the narrator in "We Are Seven," this narrator is oppressed by his own cerebration. The concern both express is over the inexorable passage of time and the quick passing of life into history (something they are

reminded of when in contact with children).

Although the narrator's concern with the adult / child states of being is not overtly expressed in the poems, that it is present is evident in the basic distinction he draws between the two states. However, drawing the distinction as he does, in physical terms, he suggests that he believes the child's state differs from that of the adult primarily in the physical terms of vitality. The child's contribution to the dialogue challenges the narrator's rather simplistic comparison and conclusion. Whereas the mediatory remarks present the growth from childhood into adulthood as a "fall" best symbolized in the loss of animal spirits, the remarks the child makes in both poems suggest the "fall" is identifiable with the loss of a kind of perception that he / she, the child, possesses. The perception, of course, informs the child's remarks. The fact remains that the narrator's mediatory description of the child, in both poems, is crucial to the point the poem makes since it is through such description that he sets up a theory of time and history which the dialogue then destroys in favour of a theory implicit in the child's utterance.[37]

The dialogue in "Anecdote for Fathers" begins with the narrator questioning the boy, asking him whether he would rather be at "'Kilve's smooth shore by the green sea / Or here at Liswyn farm'" (ll. 31-32). The logical basis of the question, its either / or construction, assumes there is a logical explanation available for his preference. As the narrator says

in one of the many instances he repeats the question,

> 'There surely must some reason be
> 'Why you would change sweet Liswyn farm
> 'For Kilve by the green sea' (ll. 42-44).

The adult narrator in effect asks the boy to compare not just physical places but two periods of time, two experiences of life.

The boy's protracted silence in the face of the question is proof that it has made him uncomfortable. He lacks the comparative mentality of his questioner and is being forced into thinking in categories unfamiliar to him. The narrative subtly indicates that an element of force is required to get him to reply; the narrator takes the boy "by the arm" the first time he asks the question. The second time around, he "[holds] him by the arm" and we are told that it was "while still I held him by the arm" that he finally replies "'At Kilve I'd rather be / 'Than here at Liswyn farm'" (ll. 35-36). His "careless" reply is in direct contrast to the narrator's intensity, evident in the physical pressure he exerts on the boy's arm. The narrator's insistence upon a reply brings in yet another category of thinking unfamiliar to the child. The boy's statement of preference is followed by another series of questions based on the assumption that there is a reason for his preference, a cause for every effect.

The child's reply defies the assumption that his utterance, and hence thought, is a logical construct in which every effect can be traced back to a cause. At first he replies truthfully:

"'I cannot tell, I do not know'" (l. 39). Interestingly enough, the boy does not make the equation between language and knowledge that the narrator does; he does not link the fact that he "cannot tell" with the fact that he does not know. Without a "because" joining them, the statements remain independent of one another. Further, though the fact that he does not know does not appear in any way to inconvenience the boy, it disturbs the narrator greatly, who repeats his question until the boy responds with another answer. In the narrator's words, "Then did the boy his tongue unlock" but his reply is so illogical that it defeats the narrator's purpose in questioning. The boy's reply is: "'At Kilve there was no weather-cock, / 'And that's the reason why'" (ll. 55-56). The arbitrariness of the reply--evident in the triviality of the reason he offers for his preference of one place over another--renders the narrator and his logical apparatus ludicrous. The absurdity of the adult — dependence on logic for discovering "truth" is recognized even by the narrator who acknowledges that the child has been his teacher in this exchange and concludes with the following comment:

> O dearest, dearest boy! my heart
> Far better lore would seldom yearn
> Could I but teach the hundredth part
> Of what from thee I learn (ll. 57-60).

The poem, then, pits two ways of approaching history against one another. The narrator's questions have obviously been prompted by nostalgia for a place and time now in the past.[38] The boy's reply, in its carelessness, suggests he has a less

than nostalgic attitude towards a time and place past. The passage of time, and its record in memory, is not the great fear to him that it is to his adult companion. The child's freedom from the nostalgia that accompanies the adult's perception of the past is a closed door only serves to reinforce the adult's confinement in it. That such confinement is "a mind forg'd manacle" and not an inevitable consequence of the movement from childhood into adulthood is suggested by the fact that the narrator does not dismiss the boy's replies as inconsequential. Whether he has "learnt" the lesson he thinks he has is another matter altogether. The poem in fact suggests he has not. A brief look at the manner in which he relates the conversation proves he continues being dependent on logic, in particular cause and effect, in order to make meaning of the past, in this instance the conversation itself. Relating the sequence of events that led up to the boy's explanation of his preference, the narrator says:

> His head he raised--there was in sight,
> It caught his eye, he saw it plain-
> Upon the house-top, glittering bright,
> A broad and gilded vane (ll. 49-52).

His insistence on the fact that the boy saw the vane, hence his reply, only throws into doubt whether or not the boy actually did see it. From first merely suggesting that "it was in sight" and thus that there might be a connection between the boy's reply and the vane, he moves to asserting the connection ("it caught his eye") and finally to insisting on it ("he saw it plain"). More than verifying the connection, these phrases

reveal the narrator's determination to provide the boy's illogical statement with a logical basis.

Thus in relating the conversation the narrator deals with the boy's second and final reply in precisely the way he did with the first: he locates the reason. It was his attempt to locate the reason for the boy's preference that led to the second reply, which being just as "careless" as the first, is as illogical as the first. Hence the narrator's question remains unanswered and his attempt to confine the boy within the bounds of logic frustrated. And he does not appear to have learnt the lesson the incident had to teach him and appears to be just as trapped in a linear mode of perception. Meantime, the dialogue itself, since it is dramatically reproduced and not narrated, challenges the validity of his mode of perception and concept of time.

The narrator in "We Are Seven" is very similar to the one in "Anecdote." However, the issue of the child's perspective versus that of the adult is more clearly definable since history is more clearly the subject of the dialogue. The debate is over death, the term and the phenomenon. The silent question the poem raises is whether death signals the passing away of the individual from the "real" world to the world of symbols--whether it be language, music or painting. The narrator would argue it does. His entire argument is built on the belief that there is a very specific vocabulary for death and the dead. The girl's counter-arguments, on the other hand, suggest she

does not believe death makes the individual part of an irretrievable past. To look first at the narrator's argument, the question he repeatedly asks the little girl in this poem is how she can claim she has six siblings when, according to her, "'two at Conway dwell, / 'And two are gone to sea'" (ll. 25-26) and that leaves her and her mother who live at home. A look at the many variations of this question reveals the basis of the question as being the binary vision of the narrator. Some of the versions of the questions are as follows:

> 'You run about, my little maid,
> 'Your limbs they are alive;
> 'If two are in the church-yard laid,
> 'Then ye are only five' (ll. 32-35).
>
> 'How many are you then,' said I,
> 'If they two are in Heaven?' (ll. 61-62)
>
> 'But they are dead; those two are dead!
> 'Their spirits are in heaven!' (ll. 65-66)

The narrator uses the past perfect tense consistently when talking about the two dead siblings. When he does use the present perfect it is in conjunction with the term "heaven." Since they are, according to him, history, they cannot be counted among the living.[39] What the girl, in her innocence, has succeeded in doing is confuse the adult's well-defined, linear perception of time (this explains his exasperated tone): birth ends in death, death is the negation of life, the opposite of "to be" can only be "not to be," and hence to have a terminology that indicates the pastness of such an individual attached to one--which the girl refuses to do. It is over terminology, in fact, that the argument ensues: she says "we are seven," he says

"they are five." The definition of the verb "etre" is at stake. Caught in the trap of linear perception the adult narrator, as his prefatory remarks (ll. 1-4 of the poem) suggest, sees the adult condition as one in which death is the lens through which all perception, all thought, is filtered. Time is one long march, however reluctant, towards death.

The girl's replies only serve to underline the ludicrousness of the adult obsession with death, for to her death is not the negation of life / being. For instance, the second time the narrator reveals he is unable to make logic of the illogical, she replies yet again that

> 'Seven boys and girls are we;
> 'Two of us in the church-yard lie,
> 'Beneath the church-yard tree' (ll. 30-32),

using the narrator's terms to refer to events such as death but without investing them with the same conceptual paraphenalia. Thus while she initially refers to the dead siblings as the two who "in the church-yard lie," she later uses the word "died" to refer to the death of her sister. Yet "death," being in "heaven" and in "the church-yard laid" do not describe a condition of non-being: her two dead siblings "are" as she is. She even provides a definition of "being" in her description of the bond she shares with these absent siblings. In the most lengthy of her replies she describes the physical proximity of the graves to the house where she and her mother live. "'Their graves are green, they may be seen'" (l. 37), she says, "'Twelve steps or more from my mother's door'" (l. 39), before going on to refer

to their proximity to one another ("'And they are side by side,'" l. 40). The physical proximity is paralleled by an emotional one as the girl, by her own account, involves the two in her activity, be it a meal or a song. Thus she informs the narrator that:

> 'My stockings there I often knit,
> 'My 'kerchief there I hem;
> 'And there upon the ground I sit-
> 'I sit and sing to them.
>
> 'And often after sunset, Sir,
> 'When it is light and fair,
> 'I take my little porringer,
> 'And eat my supper there' (ll. 41-48).

The fact that these descriptive statements are made in reply to the narrator's question indicates that she is providing an explanation why she considers the total to be seven. The statements themselves suggest the reason is the fact that the dead siblings are still an integral part of the family, even if they are physically absent. Since they are significant, they are still alive. Her refusal to consider them a part of an irretrievable past the way the narrator does suggests that to her considering them part of an irretrievable past would indeed be to declare them dead. But as it stands, they are a part of an eternal present in her eyes (she even speaks of her own activities in the present perfect tense).

The dialogue ends, as expected, in an impasse, with the narrator insisting "'But they are dead; those two are dead!'" (l. 65) and the girl insisting "'Nay, we are seven!'" (l. 69) More clearly than in "Anecdote for Fathers" the narrator does

not appear to have learnt what the encounter had to teach him. He seems rather exasperated as he relates the girl's final statement, prefacing it with "for still / The little Maid would have her will" (ll. 67-68). Attempting to locate the reason for the girl's seemingly illogical statement, he refuses to accept her reason, for it defies logic. In fact, the opening statement in the poem, a generalization which has presumably arisen from this interchange, suggests how very unacceptable the girl's position is, even in retrospect. The poem begins,

> A simple child, dear brother Jim,
> That lightly draws its breath,
> And feels its life in every limb,
> What should it know of death? (ll. 1-4)

During the interchange the girl amply demonstrates she does know of death. For instance she describes the events leading up to her sister's death and the death itself as an occurrence arising out of sickness. She realizes there was pain involved ("'In bed she moaning lay'") and that death was release from such pain ("'Till God released her of her pain'"), but she is also aware that such relief is synonymous with a permanent separation ("'And then she went away'"). Similarly, she describes her brother's death as an untimely event; "'my brother John was forced to go'" (l. 59) she says. Yet the narrator prefaces the conversation with a statement that implies the child lacks comprehension of mortality. It is adult binary logic that she does not understand, not death. Thus while for the narrator death remains that which deprives man of significance, rendering him meaningless except in the past tense, for the girl death is

merely another event in a never-ending cycle of events. The continuation of the self and social significance (she involves her dead siblings in all her basic activities--eating, playing, working) is just as strongly affirmed by her as it is denied by the adult narrator. Interestingly enough, they both use the same language in presenting their points of view and she is, I think, the more successful user (and was meant to be).

NOTES

1. Louise Pound, Poetic Origins and the Ballad (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 141.

2. In a footnote Pound cites examples of question and answer ballads from the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. She suggests that "dialogue between mother and daughter, like other dialogue forms, seems to have been a popular troubadour mode" (Poetic Origins and the Ballad, p. 141, note 36). "Anecdote for Fathers" relates a dialogue between a father and son and "We Are Seven" is based on the same adult / child opposition. Pound also suggests that "dialogue ... songs appear in other lyric types beside ballads and game songs. Many carols both of the literary and of the more popular types take this form and many religious lyrics, and so do laments and dirges" (Poetic Origins and the Ballad, p. 145).

3. Dialogue in drama and the novel contextualizes utterance, by making it part of a plot, far more than does the dialogue in poetry, or at least the dialogue in these poems. Even the narratorial comment does little more than contextualize the utterance in space and time (dramatic setting). The philosophical context is not provided as it is in drama and the novel by the plot.

4. The elegies are reproduced in Ernest de Selincourt (ed),

Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), vol. IV, pp. 452-453. The variant readings of "Address to Scholars" are also to be found in this volume.

5. Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 200.

6. Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 379.

7. John Weever wrote Ancient Funerall Monuments within the United Monarchie of Great Britaine, Ireland, and the Islands adjacent ... Whereunto is prefixed a Discourse of Funerall Monuments ... Composed by the Studie and Trauels of John Weever ... London ... 1631, Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. II, p. 101. De Selincourt says that this work was a major source of Wordsworth's Essays Upon Epitaphs. The phrases in square brackets are in brackets in the original.

8. Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. II, pp. 88-89.

9. Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. II, p. 89.

10. In light of these Matthew poems, I think in his definition of the epitaph Wordsworth was acknowledging the traditional requirements of the epitaph while suggesting that it leaves out the most important element of recording the dead--"a sense of what he had in common with the species." The Matthew poems, 1798 and 1800, with the exception of one,

capture the essence--what Matthew had in common with the species. (In passing it is interesting to note that they were classified as "poems of sentiment and reflection" and not "epitaphs and elegaic pieces" in Wordsworth's scheme for the arrangement of his complete poetical works).

The formal complexity of these poems conducts the debate on history on the structural level. The dialogic form challenges the notion of the past as a completed process. The narrative framework, however, reinforces the notion since narrative is itself a linear form defined by the logic of cause and effect. Narrative is as artificial and deliberate a construct as dialogue is immediate and ad hoc. These poems are quite deliberately not just dialogues, not just narratives, but dialogues that are narrated. The typical epitaph, which is a narrative, formally asserts a view of history as a record of that which is completed, the predominant tense being the past perfect when the subject is the person's life and present perfect when it is his / her death. An epitaph by Chiabrera, which Wordsworth particularly liked, illustrates the second type. The epitaph is on Tasso:

> Torquato Tasso rests within this Tomb:
> This figure, weeping from her inmost heart,
> Is Poesy: from such impassioned grief
> Let every one conclude what this Man was. [Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. II, p. 91)].

These dialogic epitaphs are unusual in their formal assertion of the immediacy of the past: for the duration of

the poem, Matthew is alive and talking.

11. Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 14.

12. In Making Tales, Bialostosky writes: "this poem is traditionally taken, even by critics who elsewhere reveal formal interests, as one of the poems most pertinent to the question of what Hartman, summarizing a long-standing critical topos, calls 'the creed of Lyrical Ballads' (*Wordsworth's Poetry*, p. 155),'" (pp. 129-130). Bialostosky cautions against seeing this poem and "The Tables Turned" as permitting "extraction of authoritative statements of the poet's beliefs" (p. 130). Quoting Paul Sheats, he states that to see the two as "a sober summary of Wordsworth's doctrine of nature is to ignore the fact that the speaker ... is a dramatic character, and that his language is appropriate to the debate" [Paul Sheats, the Making of Wordsworth's Poetry (Cambridge.: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 208-209. Quoted in Making Tales (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), p. 130].

13. After all, John 1:1 states: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The association of "the Word," here not simply language but "logos," thought / concept / language, with the sacred makes "books" all the more significant since they are at the very least expressions of logos.

14. Matthew's statement that books are "the spirit breath'd /

From dead men to their kind" makes the association of knowledge with the sacred explicit. The analogy that immediately springs to mind is with the Trinity, the Holy Ghost in particular. According to the Gospel of St. John, Christ states that the Holy Ghost "shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you" (John 14:26).

15. Matthew's accusation and reproof in this poem has an interesting parallel in "The Aeolian Harp" (1795), one of Coleridge's "conversation" poems. In this poem the Sara figure reproves the poet for "these shapings of the unregenerate mind" (l. 55), which he himself refers to as "bubbles that glitter as they rise and break / On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring" [S.T. Coleridge, "The Aeolian Harp" (comp. 1795, pub. 1796), English Romantic Poets, (ed), David Perkins (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), ll. 56-57]. Like Wordsworth in "Expostulation and Reply," Coleridge stands accused of ignoring the philosophical tradition, the difference being that the tradition is specifically identified as that of Christian philosophy whereas in "Expostulation and Reply" William is vague about the tradition against which he is struggling. The Christian philosophy which Coleridge says he has ignored, worse challenged, in expressing his own philosophy he describes in the following lines:

> For never guiltless may I speak of him,
> The Incomprehensible! save when with awe

I praise him, and with Faith that inly *feels*;
Who with his saving mercies healed me,
A sinful and most miserable man,
Wilder'd and dark, and gave me to possess
Peace, and this Cot, and thee, heart-honour'd Maid!
(ll. 58-64)

The last verse paragraph of "Aeolian Harp" is imbued with the sense that he, Coleridge, has offended Christian doctrine through challenging the separation of God and nature, the sacred and the profane. Wordsworth's concern in "Expostulation and Reply" seems to be more the notion of tradition than a specific tradition whose tenets he is disputing.

16. see note 12 above.

17. J.W. Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 136. Beach's statement is quoted in Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 303.

18. Sheats, The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry 1785-1798, p. 208. Bialostosky quotes Sheats and expresses agreement with him in Making Tales, p. 130.

19. Bialostosky does not believe the argument ends in a stalemate. He writes: "on the supposition that the two poems constitute a formal debate, with William and Matthew representing the opposing sides of nature and culture, critics have been correct to feel the weight in favor of nature" (Making Tales, p. 131).

20. This philosophy is in keeping with Wordsworth's democratic views politically, socially and in terms of language. The illiterate individual is, according to this view, potentially as knowledgeable as is the literate.

21. To return to Coleridge, much of the "Aeolian Harp" is a demonstration of Wordsworth's statement "the eye it cannot choose but see." The first three verse paragraphs describe the synesthetic experience of the poet, suggesting Coleridge too believes knowledge is a synchronic activity requiring an interaction of self with universe. He describes himself, for instance, as subject to the "slow saddening round" (l. 7) of the day, the "scents / Snatch'd from yon bean-field" (ll. 9-10) and the sound of the lute "by the desultory breeze caress'd" (l. 15). Like Wordsworth in "Expostulation and Reply," the poet emphasizes the semi-active semi-passive state required in order for such an interpenetration of self and universe to take place. Addressing the Sara figure he describes his own physical and mental activity while involved in such an interaction with nature as follows:

> And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope
> Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
> Whilst through my half-clos'd eyes I behold
> The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
> And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;
> Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
> And many idle flitting phantasies,
> Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
> As wild and various as the random gales
> That swell and flutter on this subject Lute! (ll. 34-43).

The knowledge Coleridge gains from this experience is as

heretical as is the method he suggests for the attainment of knowledge. This knowledge, which he puts forward rather hesitantly, is that "all of animated nature" is:

> ... but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
> That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
> Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
> At once the soul of each, and God of all? (ll. 45-48)

Thus Coleridge, the speaker in "Aeolian Harp," moves a step beyond the William of "Expostulation and Reply" to suggest the nature of the knowledge that the latter only asserts can be gained from establishing a relationship with nature. In any event, both poems are painful expressions of the overthrow of the very tradition to which the poets owe their vocabulary.

22. Wordsworth was to express this idea in the "Prospectus" to the Recluse as the central tenet in his philosophy and poetry. In this prospectus he says that his epic is equal, if not superior, to the Greek and Christian ones because his subject is "the mind of Man." Wordsworth claims the status of a prophet in the "Prospectus" but not because he sings of the mind of man but because he sings of the availability of "paradise" in the present, and such availability has to do with receptivity and creativity. See Chapter Five for a discussion of the Prospectus.

23. Although the speaker in "Expostulation and Reply" does not explicitly state that the universe is intelligent he does make an oblique reference to it in his assertion that "there

are powers, / Which of themselves our minds impress" (ll. 21-22). His elaborate attempts to avoid using the term "God" in referring to this intelligent presence is nowhere more apparent in the Lyrical Ballads than here. The lines just quoted suggest his "Powers" are omnipotent and omnipresent--both qualities traditionally attributed to God. Like Coleridge in "Aeolian Harp," the speaker seems to be making an attempt to blur the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. The sacred is not identified with an anthropomorphic figure--God--but seen to reside in the secular "powers." Reason, wisdom and imagination, considered as belonging to the Godhead become, in this view, attributes of the secular. Hence he asserts that these "powers" can "our minds impress," can teach. The statement presumes intelligence, wisdom. It may seem as though the speaker is merely substituting the secular for the sacred, one term for another. But the Wordsworthian attempt is the more strenuous one of identifying the one with the all and the all with the one. Hence the abstract term "powers" quickly dissolves into the less abstract "mighty sum / Of things for ever speaking" (ll. 25-26).

24. Bialostosky, Making Tales, p. 130.

25. The Prelude addresses this issue, in particular in Book Five ("Books"). The question with which the book opens is remarkably similar in theme to "Expostulation and Reply." The question Wordsworth asks of a "studious friend" is:

.... Oh! why hath not the Mind
Some element to stamp her image on
In nature somewhat nearer to her own?
Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?
(1850: ll. 45-49)

And it is preceded by a lengthy statement on the permanence of the natural world and its history and the impermanence of man and his history:

Should the whole frame of earth by inward throes
Be wrenched, or fire come down from far to scorch
Her pleasant habitations, and dry up
Old Ocean, in his bed left singed and bare,
Yet would the living Presence still subsist
Victorious, and composure would ensue,
And kindlings like the morning--presage sure
Of day returning and of life revived.
But all the meditations of mankind,
Yea, all the adamantine holds of truth
By reason built, or passion, which itself
Is highest reason in a soul sublime;
The consecrated works of Bard and Sage,
Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,
Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes;
Where would they be? (1850: ll. 30-45) [Wordsworth, The Prelude, ed. J.C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972)].

The dream of the Arab, recounted in Book V, is significant because it reveals how out of harmony human history is with that of the rest of the universe. The Arab is trying to avoid the deluge in order to "bury" two books--Euclid's Elements and a book of poems--so that human history will be preserved. The anguish Wordsworth felt over the frailty of the human endeavour to record its presence is nowhere more evident than in this book of the Prelude. See Chapter Five for a further discussion of Book Five of The Prelude.

26. W.J. Bate (ed), Criticism: The Major Texts, p. 396n. In "On Poesy and Art" Coleridge mentions the terms in relation to the artist's imitation of nature. Differentiating between good and bad art he writes: "if the artist copies the mere nature, the natura naturata, what idle rivalry! If he proceeds only from a given form, which is supposed to answer to the notion of beauty, what an emptiness, what an unreality there always is in his productions.... Believe me, you must master the essence, the natura naturans, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man." [Perkins (ed), English Romantic Writers, p. 493].

27. Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 126.

28. A similar division can be made in "Tintern Abbey." The first verse paragraph of the poem describes the poet's observations upon revisiting the Wye. It simultaneously tells the history of the intervening years but this history--his doubts, alienation, questioning of poetic purpose--is inseparable from the description itself. The rest of the poem makes this history explicit. There is in the poem, then, a separation of thought and image, poetic and philosophical.

29. It is interesting to note that the narrator lets his audience know of Matthew's demise only at the end of the

poem.

30. Both were written in Goslar, Germany in 1799 [Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 379].

31. The association of language and music is at least as old as the first incantatory verses recited in praise of the godhead. The primal association of rhythmic language with the rhythm of the universe seems to underlie the use of incantation in sacred ritual.

32. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 135. The note to "Anecdote for Fathers" is as follows: "This was suggested in front of Alfoxden. The Boy was a son of my friend Basil Montagu, who had been two or three years under our care" [Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 134].

33. Letter of uncertain date, 1825-1841, Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, ed. Ernest de. Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 253.

34. Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. I, p. 126. In the Fenwick note on "Intimations on Immortality" Wordsworth writes: "Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being.... But it was not so much from [feelings] of animal vivacity that my difficulty came as from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me" [Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 137].

35. "Essay Upon Epitaphs," I, in Owen (ed), Prose Works of William Wordsworth, vol. II, p. 51.

36. This is true of all of the poems with the exception of "Tintern Abbey," where Wordsworth remembers his own childhood. But the child in "Tintern Abbey" is clearly discussed as a memory--Wordsworth the child is not present in the poem as he / she is in "We Are Seven" and "Anecdote for Fathers" for instance.

37. The view that growth is identifiable with loss is expressed by Wordsworth in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (1802-4) in the lines:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
> The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting,
> And cometh from afar (ll. 58-61).

This immortality, he goes on to affirm, is not entirely invisible; far from believing in the infant mind / soul as a *tabula rasa*, Wordsworth appears to believe that

> ... trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home:
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy! (ll. 64-66)

But approaching adulthood, "shades of the prison-house begin to close" and with the onset of adulthood "... the Man perceives it die away, / And fade into the light of common day," [Perkins (ed), English Romantic Poets, ll. 75-76].

38. In his analysis of the poem, Don Bialostosky in Making Tales notes both the father's assertion of power in his attempt to

get an answer out of the boy as well as his nostalgia for the past. He writes:

> ... the gesture and the questions both assert power over the child and respect neither his physical nor his mental separateness. Having himself become engaged in recalling the pleasures of their former home, the father leads the son to prefer those pleasures by subtly loading the questions in favor of Kilve, describing it as "a pleasant place," "Kilve's delightful shore" and "Kilve's smooth shore by the green sea," while Liswyn farm remains merely "Liswyn farm" (p. 110).

39. Bialostosky's remarks on this poem are once again accurate but the conclusions he arrives at seem exceedingly arbitrary (as happens so often in his analysis of the various poems). He notes the fact that the narrator "interprets the life of the child as something experienced in her limbs" (Making Tales, p. 116) and since "her dead siblings do not move their limbs ... the true count of her family must only be five" (Making Tales, p. 116). So far, Bialostosky's observations are acceptable, indeed perceptive. However, he goes on to conclude:

> ... on the speaker's premise, the only proper conclusion to be drawn from the difference between the child's animation and her siblings' lack of it is that those two are dead, not that the number of children is only five. The missing premise here is that the dead do not count for the living, that their loss of physical animation is at the same time the loss of their significance (Making Tales, p. 116).

However, I fail to see how the premise is missing. Just because it is not stated (and premises rarely are) does not mean it is not there. In fact my entire reading of the poem is based on the premise that he is quite aware that "to be"

is to be of significance and not to be is to lack significance and so is the girl. Hence she does not argue with him about the physical death of her siblings but she does argue about their significance.

CHAPTER III

STORY-TELLING AS THE SUBJECT OF THE BALLAD

Michael: A Poet's Covenant with his Literary Off-Spring

The responsibility which accompanies the privilege of being the bard is best illustrated in the Asterix comic series.[1] At the ritual feast with which each episode in the series ends, Cacophonix--the bard--is prevented from singing the adventures of the tribe by having his harp taken away from him. His name, of course, indicates why he is treated so unceremoniously. This image of Cacophonix, bound and gagged while the others are feasting, forces the reader's attention away from the adventures of the Gauls--the "story" the comic strip relates--to centre on the fact of hearing / reading the story of their actions. For, the image is a graphic statement on the sacredness of tribal history and the care with which it must be related: the Gauls would rather do without celebrating tribal history in song than have Cacophonix mutilate it in the telling. Perhaps the most paradigmatic instance of story-telling as well as of the necessity of telling story well is The Arabian Nights: if Scheherezade fails to keep the interest of the king alive in the stories she tells, she loses her life.[2]

In the pre-literate world of Asterix and the Arabian Nights the importance of the story-teller is never questioned and the consequences of telling a tale poorly are dire--as Cacophonix's condition and the Damocles' sword over Scheherezade's head

adequately state. It is no wonder there is a proliferation of tales in the literate world concerned with tellers, successful and unsuccessful. For, the figure of the story-teller is no longer a necessary one and thus becomes a possible theme. It is not surprising either that the figure of the narrator comes into its own with the development of the Novel, the genre most closely associated with "story," and is a significant part of the *raison d'être* of the work, as for instance in Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews. The presence of a narrator allows for the audience--teller--tale complex to become a theme and, as such, the object of poetic consideration. Thus from being a structural feature in an oral age, and taken for granted, the complex becomes a thematic and a problematic feature in the literate age. The narrators of the poems considered in this chapter differ from the narrators in the other Lyrical Ballads in this important respect: like their novelistic counterparts, these narrators openly concern themselves with the concept of story, while relating a story. The narrators in "Simon Lee" (1798) and "The Idiot Boy" (1798) interrupt the tale they are in the process of relating to discuss story-telling and their own perception of their bardic role with the reader. Thus, once again, a narrative is interrupted by dialogue and the teleological structure of story is disrupted by the ad hoc randomness of conversation. The narrators in "Hart-Leap Well" (1800) and "The Thorn" (1798) also express the concern with story through the manner in which they narrate. Unlike the other two, however, they do not step out of the story-world into that

of story-telling. Instead, they disrupt the narrative by presenting at least two versions of the same subject. Once again, dialogue is a significant part of the structure of the tale they tell. In "Hart-Leap Well" the entire second section is a dialogue between the narrator and a shepherd, which is related by the former, whereas in "The Thorn" the narrator engages in a dialogue with an invisible but very present "you" in the poem.

The story-teller's concern with his craft and with his own reasons for choosing to relate a particular tale is thus central to the *raison d'être* of the poems considered in this chapter. The poem "Michael" (1800), one of the two narratives Wordsworth identified as central to his purpose in the Lyrical Ballads (1800), is the most comprehensive in its treatment of the issue. It is one of the few narratives in which the narrator openly declares his purpose in relating the tale; his is a "history / Homely and rude" (ll. 34-35) and his purpose in relating it the desire to "delight ... a few natural hearts" (l. 36). However, he suggests there is a more significant purpose. The tale is related "with yet fonder feeling," he says,

> ... for the sake
> Of youthful poets who among these hills
> Will be my second self when I am gone (ll. 37-39).

The historical nature of the tale is matched by the impetus behind the tale-telling. This narrator, at least, regards his immortality as lying in his craft and not in himself, the teller. It is important to remember that the narrator is not talking about story-telling in general here but about a specific

tale. The reason he chooses to identify his value as a story-teller with this particular tale in his repertoire must lie in the tale itself. Since it is a history, as he himself informs us, we know that he values himself as an historian. What kind of historian is he? What is history according to him? Why is this history so significant that he chooses it as his "signature piece" as it were? All are questions this narratorial statement manipulates us into raising.[3]

Since "Michael" considers the issue of story, as do the others treated in this chapter, only more comprehensively, I turn to this poem and in particular the tale the narrator relates, before discussing them. As are these poems, "Michael" is part-narrative, part-dialogue. In fact, the central event in the poem--the covenant between father and son--is not narrated but presented dramatically. Once again, we have two ways of relating a tale, and two attitudes toward history, expressed in the very poetic structure.

The tale the narrator relates lends itself almost too easily to an allegorical reading. In The Visionary Company (1961) Harold Bloom describes "Michael" as "the most directly Biblical of Wordsworth's poems."[4] The Christian context of the poem is undeniable. The names of the central characters of the narrator's tale are Biblical ("Michael," "Luke") as is the title given to their house by the community ("The Evening Star"). However, as Bloom recognizes, it is the covenant between Michael and Luke that undeniably locates the poem's concern with

Christianity. In The Visionary Company he argues that the poem

> ... turns upon the symbol of a covenant between father and son, and its hero, though a poor shepherd, has a moral greatness that suggests the stories of the Patriarchs. Had Michael ever heard of his vanished son again, he might have said, with Jacob: 'It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.' But in Wordsworth's poem the covenant is forever broken, and the old shepherd dies without the solace of a prodigal's return.[5]

In an article written in 1981, John Bushnell disagrees with Bloom's analogy of the Michael-Luke relationship with the Jacob-Isaac one, although he agrees with him about the significance of the covenant in the poem. As an alternative, he offers the Abraham-Isaac story as the Biblical story closest to the Michael-Luke one. True, that is, not only to the relationship between father and son, but to the *raison d'être* of the poem. In refutation of Bloom he writes:

> The "Patriarch" of this poem, who places supreme importance on his inheritance of and dominion over the land, resembles Abraham much more strongly than he does Jacob. The Father of Israel knew nothing of his son's forced departure, believing him killed at the hands of thieves. Abraham, however, made his one true covenant with God and would himself have willingly sacrificed his only son as evidence of the strength of that covenant.[6]

His essay attempts to demonstrate that "Michael" is a socio-political treatise that parallels the Biblical one, a parallel which, according to Bushnell's argument, serves the purpose of creating a figure that is recognizable as "a type in Wordsworth's poetry."[7] The problem with his argument is that it does not go far enough. The potentially powerful demonstration of the connection between a Biblical covenant and a secular, nineteenth century poetic one is used only to conclude that

Michael is a Wordsworthian "type" and the subject of the poem. And although Bushnell remarks that the poem is about covenants,[8] he concludes the article by reducing the scope of the analogy itself, once again, to a single covenant in the Bible. "This poem," he writes,

> ... ultimately retells the Abraham-Isaac story.... The old man's covenant, made not with another human being, but nurtured and sustained within himself alone, cannot be passed on, because it exists only for Michael. It must necessarily die with him.[9]

The value of Bushnell's article lies in that one comment which seems unimportant in the context of his argument--that the poem is about covenants. The poem is, I argue later, not a poem about Michael or Luke per se but about the covenant enacted between them, an event which takes up about ninety-five lines of the four hundred and eighty-seven lines that make up the poem.[10]

Looked at as a historical document, the Bible can be regarded as a record of a series of divine dispensations,[11] covenants between God and man that are made and broken.[12] The Biblical account of human history, then, is an account of the continuous interaction between the divine and the human, the sacred and the profane. In the secular, nineteenth century world of "Michael," the covenant is a secular one that nonetheless reinstates the notion of history as a narrative of the interaction between the sacred and profane principles. The warring principles in "Michael" are, on the one hand, the economic forces of capitalism, and on the other, the sacred bonds symbolized by the family unit. And the tale is a tale of

the interaction between the two principles. The poem thus asserts that the principle of history, as it is expressed in the Bible through the Biblical covenants, is not an outmoded one. In the here and now history is a record of covenants made and broken (as in "Michael" according to the narrator). If the broken tablets signify the breaking of the covenant by the children of Israel, and hence the struggle between conflicting principles, the the incomplete sheep-fold--a heap of stones--signifies the very same in the modern world. And if the Bible recorded this continuous struggle in the ancient world, the poem records the very same in the modern one.

"Michael" provides ample evidence the history being related is that of the covenant and not of Michael and / or Luke *per se*. The poem opens, for instance, with the narrator talking about "a straggling heap of unhewn stones" (l. 17) to which, he says,

> ... a story appertains
> Which, though it be ungarnished with events,
> Is not unfit ... for the fireside,
> Or for the summer shade (ll. 18-21).

As we find out later in the poem, the heap of stones is the symbolic extension of the covenant between father and son. Before the boy leaves for the city, Michael takes him to the unfinished sheep-fold, where the covenant is enacted. The sacredness of the covenant is captured in the statement with which Michael solemnizes the ritual:

> 'This was a work for us; and now, my son,
> It is a work for me. But, lay one stone-
> Here, lay it for me, Luke, with thine own hands' (ll. 391-393).

Michael's definition of this covenant, however, suggests this secular covenant is in the vein, specifically, of the last covenant, the New Covenant, which is characterized by love and mercy.[13] Michael ends the dialogue between him and Luke by asserting the principle of unconditional love, thereby suggesting the covenant is unconditional as far as he is concerned. "'Now, fare thee well--," he says, adding,

> 'When thou return'st, thou in this place will see
> A work which is not here; a covenant
> 'Twill be between us. But whatever fate
> Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last,
> And bear thy memory with me to the grave' (ll. 419-423).

And Michael does not renege on the promise he makes his son. News of Luke's dissolute ways does not make him give up working on the unfinished sheepfold--the symbol of their love.[14]

While Michael himself suggests the covenant cannot be broken, the narrator's arrangement of the tale suggests it certainly can and has been broken. The narrative itself can be divided into three sections: a history of the family before the covenant, the dramatic reproduction of the covenant, and a history of the family after the covenant. In the first section the narrator describes the life of the family in the Edenic terms of a microcosmic harmony that is a reflection of a macrocosmic one. Michael and his wife labour hard but also share a bond of affection, in which their son is included. "From the boy there came," we are told, "feelings and emanations, things which were / Light to the sun and music to the wind" (ll. 205-206), and that as a result "the old man's heart seemed born

again" (l. 207). The covenant appears to validate the bondedness between father and son. However, its necessity signals the confusion created by the clashing of opposing systems of belief. The realities of the increasingly capitalistic world impinge upon the world of familial bonds forcing Michael to choose between selling his "patrimonial fields," in order to bail out a financially insolvent relative, or sending his son to the city to work. Michael chooses the latter option and offers the following as reason:

> 'I have been toiling more than seventy years,
> And in the open sunshine of God's love
> Have we all lived; yet if these fields of ours
> Should pass into a stranger's hand, I think
> That I could not lie quiet in my grave (ll. 234-238).

Michael's choice raises the question whether he has not broken a covenant in creating one--that of the institution symbolized by the family unit. After all, his choice suggests the land is more important to him than is his son.

The final section of the narrative describes an Edenic world in ruins. Luke turns dissolute, Michael continues with his usual routine--although his spirit appears to have deserted him--until death, which is followed closely by the death of his wife. Luke's breaking of the covenant, his turning dissolute in "the dissolute city," suggests he is responsible for the ruin. Thus while Michael considers the covenant unbroken to the end, the narrator seems to think that the covenant was broken and the result disastrous. The narrative ends with the narrator bringing the history of the family to an end. "The cottage which was

named THE EVENING STAR," he informs us,

> Is gone--the ploughshare has been through the ground
> On which it stood; great changes have been wrought
> In all the neighbourhood: yet the oak is left
> That grew beside their door; and the remains
> Of the unfinished sheep-fold may be seen
> Beside the boisterous brook of Green-head Gill (ll. 482-487).

The disintegration of the Edenic world of section one could hardly be more complete.

Returning to the questions with which I began the discussion, it is evident that the poem, with its method of relating history, is the narrator's covenant with his literary progeny, the "youthful poets" who will be his second self when he is gone. While the poem is a covenant, the narrator's tale ("history") is about the notion of covenant. What has survived of the covenant between father and son is a heap of stones, an image with which the narrator begins and ends his tale. History is made contemporaneous with the present in the most obvious of ways: geography, very much a synchronic reality, is, the narrator's tale insists, imbued with history, not just with time. Perhaps, for the narrator all history has its basis in metaphor. In this instance the metaphor is that of covenant, of which the Bible is the prototypical instance. The other question with which I began the discussion was the narrator's choice of this specific tale as his signature piece. The tale itself suggests the narrator's concern is with redefining history as a tale of the relationship between the sacred and the profane, which it was in the days in which the Bible was put together.

The necessity of considering the past as a dialogue between these two principles is strongly affirmed by this tale. A theory of history, the poet as historian, an assertion of the necessity of preserving the dialogic nature of history--the record of the past--are all part of the reason the narrator chooses this tale as his signature piece.

The two poems considered in the next section, "Simon Lee" and "The Idiot Boy," raise some of the issues seen in "Michael." As has been mentioned earlier, in both narratives the narrator interrupts the tale he is relating to consider the issue of story-telling. What seems to be at stake in these poems is the best way in which history can be recorded, more specifically, whether a narrative that relates events reveals the truth of the past or whether a narrative that is imagistic does. Since the narrators use both methods--their tales are part narrative and part dialogue and description--it is difficult to settle on the narrator's preference. Ultimately, it appears the poems present the two methods without asserting the superiority of the one over the other. As with "Michael," the story is thus presented as a dialogue, rather than as a tale demonstrating the presence of cause and effect in story.

Image and Event: The Dialogue of Form in Simon Lee and *The Idiot Boy*

The Fenwick notes on "Simon Lee" and "The Idiot Boy" reveal Wordsworth's preference for image over event as the organizing

principle of narrative. Both poems are built on an image out of Wordsworth's experience. In the note on "Simon Lee" Wordsworth comments on the "image of the old man" which, he says, "is as fresh before my eyes as if I had seen him yesterday." The note establishes the importance of utterance in Wordsworth's memory and dramatization of this incident from his past. He quotes a phrase from the poem--"'I dearly love their voices'"--and adds "the expression ... was word for word from his own lips."[15] As even a cursory glance indicates, the poem is built on this auditory image of a huntsman. The Fenwick note on "The Idiot Boy" establishes the fact that the poem had its genesis in utterance--an idiot boy's utterance. In the note, Wordsworth states: "the last stanza, 'The cocks did crow, And the sun did shine so cold,' was the foundation of the whole. The words were reported to me by my dear friend, Thomas Poole."[16] And while the two poems use both image and event in relating the tales they do relate, the narrators seem to have a definite preference for image.

"Simon Lee" can in fact be divided into three sections: the first is imagistic, using image to create a picture of the old huntsman, the second is an address by the narrator to the reader and is seemingly unrelated to the first and last sections, the third section is the only section to be based on event--it relates an incident. However, the first section is as much a history of Simon Lee as is the last, and the narrator intends us to see it as such (as the discussion of the poem will show).

Both the essential difference between a history built on image and one built on event and the difficulty of combining the two are apparent even in the title of the poem. The title, "Simon Lee, the old Huntsman," focuses on the man's age and occupation, suggesting Simon Lee's history is largely an imagistic one. The sub-title on the other hand suggests the poem is concerned with an incident in his life ("with an incident in which he was concerned"). The similar division of the narrator's utterance into two styles of narration--one using image as unit and the other using event--creates a certain amount of confusion that is deliberate, as the middle section of the poem--where the narrator discusses story-telling--indicates. The narrator challenges the traditional dependence of story on event by first using the standard formulas of story-telling and then refusing to fulfil the audience's expectation of a story. For instance, in the opening lines he uses the "once upon a time" formula to locate his subject in time and space, thus setting up the reader for a story that is to follow. "In the sweet shire of Cardigan" (l. 1), he starts out,

> Not far from pleasant Ivor-hall,
> An old man dwells, a little man,
> I've heard he once was tall.
> Of years he has upon his back,
> No doubt, a burthen weighty;
> He says he is three score and ten,
> But others say he's eighty (ll. 2-8).

However, it soon becomes evident that the story the narrator intends relating is not an eventful one. Instead, it appears he is going to describe every aspect of his subject's life--the way he looks, dresses, what he does for a living, his domestic

situation, his house, his village and so on. Through the narrator's sketches several facts emerge--that Simon Lee is poor (his cottage is a "moss-grown hut of clay," l. 57), that he is quite sick ("His legs are thin and dry," l. 36), and that he is hard-working. While these images and statements create a mental image of Simon Lee they do not in and of themselves relate a story.

The notion the first section generates--that it is not relating a tale--is a misleading one. It does relate a tale, only it uses image to do so and not event. A study of the organizational unity of this section reveals a consistent juxtaposition of images of an old, decrepit Simon Lee against images of a younger, more energetic one. For instance, Simon Lee, we are told, "once was tall" and that "No man like him the horn could sound / And no man was so full of glee" (ll. 17-18). In this contrast lies the history of Simon Lee. And although the narrator does not spell it out, it is not difficult for the reader to do so; the facts are accessible. Briefly, a history of Simon Lee would be as follows: Simon Lee is presently old, sickly and incapable of taking care of himself, yet he must. He is an outcast in a world which is increasingly capitalistic. As the narrator says, "His master's dead, and no one now / Dwells in the hall of Ivor" (ll. 21-22). Simon Lee's alienation is stressed by the narrator in lines such as: "Men, dogs, and horses, all are dead; / He is the sole survivor" (ll. 23-24). The one issue that these images collectively raise is that of

meaning: Simon Lee's past was meaningful whereas his present is meaningless. The feudal structure, in which Simon Lee had a role as a huntsman is now obsolete. He is thus, in the "now" of the poem, in a world that is strange to him, its socio-economic structure being vastly different from that of the feudal world and hence meaningless to him. The only thing capable of making his life meaningful is the hunt and it is unavailable to him. In the narrator's words,

> ... there's something in the world
> At which his heart rejoices;
> For when the chiming hounds are out,
> He dearly loves their voices! (ll. 45-48)

The imagistic method seems to have served the narratorial purpose in relating Simon Lee's history. The truth about his life is in the meaninglessness of his present and the juxtaposition of images serves to explain this meaninglessness by imaging a meaningful past.

While we the audience can make a story out of the images the narrator presents, he himself refuses to do so. In other words, while this section of the tale allows for the conclusion that Simon Lee's present condition is a result of the breakdown of the feudal world, the narrator himself refuses to connect his presentation of Simon Lee's meaningful past and his meaningless present with the crucial "because." In fact, in the following section he pointedly refers to the fact that his utterance up to this point is not a story. This move from the world of Simon Lee to our own is so sudden that the two worlds appear to have been deliberately juxtaposed--fiction and reality colliding--by the

narrator. A stanza which starts off discussing Simon Lee ends with a discussion of tale-telling. It merits quoting in full:

> Few months of life has he in store,
> As he to you will tell,
> For still, the more he works, the more
> His poor old ancles swell.
> My gentle reader, I perceive
> How patiently you've waited,
> And I'm afraid that you expect
> Some tale will be related (ll. 65-72).

While the disruption forces the reader to realize the fictional nature of the world of the story, the subject of the narratorial intervention throws the nature of the narrative up to this point into question. The admission of failure extends to a silent admission of the failure to fulfill the requirements of a teller-audience relationship--after all, the narrator tells us, his audience, that we "expect" a "tale will be related."

The apology is, needless to say, a mock one, as the narrator's next statement, a definition of story indicates. Judged in accordance with this definition, the narrator's utterance so far is indeed a story, only its use of image as organizing principle makes it unrecognizable as one. In a direct address to the reader he says:

> O reader! had you in your mind
> Such stores as silent thought can bring,
> O gentle reader! you would find
> A tale in everything (ll. 73-76).

Story-telling, the subject of this narratorial intervention, is very specifically defined by the narrator, as is story. To deal with the latter first, by "tale" he does not mean simply the subject of narrative itself but the creation of meaning which

ultimately answers the unspoken question 'why tell the story?' The proof of this interpretation lies in the disclaimer with which he begins the final section of the poem: "it is," he states, "no tale," but "should you think, / Perhaps a tale you'll make it" (ll. 79-80). In this final section, ironically enough, the narrator does relate a tale (an incident). The presence of a plot, of specific event, makes his utterance recognizably a tale. Yet he insists that it, like the first section, is not a tale. What the narrator does not spell out is his purpose in narrating the incident. The narration ends in a generalization, which is connected with the incident only by a dash:

> The tears into his eyes were brought,
> And thanks and praises seemed to run
> So fast out of his heart, I thought
> They never would have done.
> --I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
> With coldness still returning.
> Alas! the gratitude of men
> Has oftner left me mourning (ll. 97-104).

Since the incident is spelled out, as it were, and the reason for the story is not, it is easy to conclude that by 'tale' the narrator intends a related incident that contains the reason for its utterance within itself.

A world in which a tale "is related" is thus a world in which the circle of meaning is complete. The narrator appears to be talking of a world in which meaning in a story is not predicated on the presence of an initial suspense which is alleviated by the resolution. In this world one can "find a tale in everything," a statement the narrator makes and which insists

on the inclusiveness of the genre. It follows then that tale-telling is not exclusive to the world of the unusual or restricted to events that fulfil the story-telling code. It also follows that the tale-teller is not restricted to relating tales that fulfil this code. The first section of the poem, then, is a story in the form of a history implicit in the images from Simon Lee's life.

The narrator does not appear to think we, his readers, belong to such a world. On the contrary, he appears to think we belong to a world in which the story-code is the yard-stick by which an utterance is judged a story or not; he believes that we "expect / Some tale will be related," that we do not consider his utterance so far a story. The concluding section which follows this intervention is based on the story-code. This section narrates an incident involving Simon Lee and the narrator. The initial situation reveals Simon Lee trying in vain to cut down "a stump of rotten wood" (l. 84). The narrator offers his help and accomplishes the task in one blow. This, of course, is the resolution of the initial situation. The accomplishment of the task is followed by a profuse outpouring of gratitude by Simon Lee. The narrative ends here. What follows is the narrator's generalization. Looking back at the statement which prefaced this part of the narrative, we remember that the narrator does not consider this to be a tale. And it isn't. For, although it has a plot which creates suspense (the problem), the narrative does not spell out its own significance. Figuring out

the *raison d'être* of the narrative is, as the narrator promised us earlier on, left up to the individual reader. The process of making meaning, integral to story-telling, is thus as incomplete as it was in section one.

Essentially, then, sections one and three of the poem dramatize the narrator's definition of tale and tale-telling, while the middle section defines the terms. History is for him open-ended, subjective, and requires audience participation in order to be complete (that is, to be meaningful). The historian without an audience to interact with cannot "relate" a tale--the circle of meaning must of necessity be incomplete. "The Brothers" is a good instance of the active participation required of historian and audience in order for a story to be created. Structurally, the priest's tale requires the participation of Leonard in order to be uttered. Similarly, in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" the mariner requires a listener, even an unwilling one, in order for his tale to be told. The participation of Leonard in "The Brothers" and the wedding guest in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" makes both poems successful instances of tale-telling, as the conclusions of both poems indicate. The priest moves from being initially irritated by the stranger's presence to welcoming it, just as the mariner departs from the wedding guest in a peaceful state of mind, even if such peace is temporary and lasts only until the fit to relate is upon the mariner again (the perfect metaphor of the story-teller's obsession with telling).

It is easy to extrapolate the presence of two worlds, the oral and literate, and two attitudes towards history from "Simon Lee." The oral world (with its appropriate kind of story-telling) is present in the poem only in the form of a past not available any more, just as Simon Lee's feudal world is present only as a system outmoded in the "now" of the poem. In this other world tales are "related," and the circle of meaning in story-telling complete. History is a communal activity and one verified by communal assent and not by recording facts. In the literate world (to which the narrator appears to believe he and his readers belong), on the other hand, history is an incomplete act because it is no longer a communal activity. In this world the story-teller is physically replaced by the written word as the mediator between humans and their past. The act of making history, that is of making the past meaningful, is an individual act. Hence the open-endedness of the concluding section of the poem, which is occasioned by the narrator's refusal to make the significance of the narrative explicit, and that of the initial section, occasioned by his refusal to structure the narrative on event.[17] Thus while the poem presents differing methods of making meaning, in this instance, in story, it does not definitively establish the "correct" one. While the narrator's address to us, his readers, establishes the dialogic mode as the favoured mode of story-telling, the final section counteracts it by being a narrative. At the same time, the narrator's refusal to complete the narrative section, by refusing to spell out his purpose in narrating the tale,

challenges the validity of the narrative mode. The formal dialogue ends without resolution.

The narrator in "The Idiot Boy" also flouts the literate world's dependence on event in the organization of story. Although suspense in this poem is generated by a carefully created dependence on event, it has its resolution in an image. Thus the narrator uses the structure of the traditional story only to overturn it through the resolution. However, in its treatment of the issue of story-telling this poem is as lighthearted as "Simon Lee" is sombre, a mood that echoes the author's self-confessed enjoyment of the process of composing the poem. In his note to the poem Wordsworth wrote: "in truth, I never wrote anything with so much glee."[18]

In the opening lines of the poem the narrator creates the expectation of an eventful tale by presenting an image of mysterious proportions. The suspense is intensified by the flat delivery. "'Tis eight o'clock," starts the narrator,

> ... --a clear March night,
> The moon is up--the sky is blue,
> The owlet in the moonlight air,
> He shouts from nobody knows where;
> He lengthens out his lonely shout,
> Halloo! halloo! a long halloo! (ll. 1-6).

Upon first glancing at the entire narrative, the reader might be convinced the narrator has delivered on his promise of an eventful tale. After all, the narrative involves the mysterious disappearance and eventual recovery of the idiot boy by his mother. However, upon closer examination the poem appears to be

more concerned with creating images than with relating incidents. The narrative itself is made up of a series of images, the focus in each image being different from that of others. For instance, the first twenty stanzas dramatize Johnny's departure. In terms of event that is all that happens: Johnny departs. On the other hand, these stanzas vividly sketch a departure scene--the distraught mother, the overjoyed boy, the horse, the mother's injunctions and directions, the sick Susan Gale, and the actual departure. The rest of the narrative can be divided into several such vignettes: the boy on his journey, the mother's reaction to the boy's prolonged absence (at this point the boy drops out of the narrative altogether), her search for her son (where the narrator focuses more on her verbal ramblings than on her actual physical movements), a narratorial interruption in which the reader is directly addressed, the rediscovery of the boy (at which point, obviously, he re-enters the narrative), the reunion between mother, son and Susan Gale, and finally, another narratorial address to the reader. The plot of the tale the narrator relates in brief is: an idiot boy is sent to the village for the doctor since there is no one else who can be sent. When he does not return, his mother sets out in search of him. She finds him in the forest, where Susan Gale finds both of them, having left her sick bed out of concern for both mother and son. Susan's concern cures her of her illness and all three return to the village. That is the end of the tale. As is evident much of the poem does not advance the plot, in particular the narratorial interventions and the scenes

focussing on the emotions and reactions of the characters. The narrative can, in fact, be regarded as relating several tales. It can be regarded as a tale about a mother, whose concern for her son is minutely sketched by the narrator and takes up a major portion of the narrative. It can be regarded as a tale about Johnny, the idiot boy, whose departure is the reason for all of the poem's actions and images in the first place. The narrative can also be regarded as relating a tale about Susan Gale, who goes from being at death's door to hale and hearty, the curative being a healthy dose of concern for someone other than herself. Or, the narrative could be about the narrator, who interrupts to state he is as much in the dark about the conclusion of the story as we are and to speculate on the ending. Or, and this is only slightly tongue-in-cheek, it could be about the owls with which the narrative begins (owls being a metaphor, one presumes, for the world of Gothic romance) for, after all, the narrator concludes his narrative with the statement:

> The owls have hardly sung their last,
> While our four travellers homeward wend;
> The owls have hooted all night long,
> And with the owls began my song,
> And with the owls must end (ll. 442-446).

The narrative thus develops several foci that help to decentralize and dissipate the plot in the story and to replace it with images, each of which is capable of generating a story. In like manner, each of the characters tells a story, but in each instance the story is about the same event--Johnny's

adventure while he is absent from the world of the tale as well as from the narrative itself. Thus we have several stories about the same event, several plots and several conclusions. The interesting fact is that what happens to Johnny while he is "lost" is never revealed, each of these stories built by the characters being openly hypothetical. Even Johnny's own story (which potentially could reveal what did happen) is, as we shall see, obscure enough to be finally beyond comprehension. To start with Betty Foy, while searching for her son she weaves a story around his absence to make it--his absence--less inexplicable than it is. That making meaning is at the heart of her verbal ramblings is evident in her choice of explanations. Her story places Johnny in the world of Gothic romances, fairy-tales, and of the mysterious in general. Since these genres deal with the inexplicable, by relegating Johnny's disappearance to them she satisfies her desire to make meaning of an event that defies meaning. Her story, however conjectural, is thus successful, at least as far as she is concerned. "Perhaps," she states,

> '... he's climbed into an oak,
> 'Where he will stay till he is dead;
> 'Or sadly he has been misled,
> 'And joined the wandering gypsey-folk.
>
> 'Or him that wicked pony's carried
> 'To the dark cave, the goblins' hall,
> 'Or in the castle he's pursuing,
> 'Among the ghosts, his own undoing;
> 'Or playing with the waterfall' (ll. 233-241).

The narrator enters the world of his narrative to speculate, like Betty Foy, on the boy's absence. His story explaining Johnny's absence is as imaginative as Betty Foy's is fanciful

and Gothic. However, he appears to be more aware than she is that his is pure conjecture, that he is interpreting that which is essentially unknown. The mystery of the boy's adventure remains unpenetrated as the narrator first addresses the reader by saying he wishes he could "tell / What Johnny and his horse are doing!" (ll. 322-323), and more important, "what they've been doing all this time" (l. 324). His hypothesis follows the disclaimer that he has as little an idea of the reality of the situation as we, his readers, do. He makes a series of conjectures, beginning with:

> Perhaps, and no unlikely thought!
> He with his pony now doth roam
> The cliffs and peaks so high that are,
> To lay his hands upon a star,
> And in his pocket bring it home (ll. 327-331),

continuing with:

> Perhaps he's turned himself about,
> His face unto his horse's tail,
> And still and mute, in wonder lost,
> All like a silent horseman-ghost,
> He travels on along the vale.
>
> And now, perhaps, he's hunting sheep,
> A fierce and dreadful hunter he!
> Yon valley, that's so trim and green,
> In five months' time, should he be seen,
> A desart wilderness will be (332-341),

and ending with:

> Perhaps, with head and heels on fire,
> And like the very soul of evil,
> He's galloping away, away,
> And so he'll gallop on for aye,
> The bane of all that dread the devil (ll. 342-346).

As with Betty Foy, the narrator's conjectures make meaning out of something that essentially defies meaning. There are

several ways in which he can account for Johnny's disappearance and he uses all of them. However, the severely hypothetical nature of the narrator's account indicates that the boy's adventure is deliberately left a mystery. In fact he ends his surmising with a mock-appeal to the muses to "reveal" the nature of the adventure. "O gentle muses," he says,

> ... let me tell
> But half of what to him befel,
> For sure he met with strange adventures (ll. 349-351).

The revelation which follows is of what "Johnny and his horse are doing" not of what "they've been doing all this time." So it still does not reveal the adventure Johnny had while absent, quite literally, from the fictional world of the poem. Even Susan Gale, in a manner of speaking, provides a story to explain the inexplicable. As she says, the thought that both boy and mother may be in trouble makes her venture out, or as the narrator puts it, "rise from her bed / As if by magic cured" (ll. 435-436). In other words, the story she builds in her mind around the absence is responsible for her presence in the woods (the details of her hypothesis being unrevealed to us).

The narrator who controls the entire narrative--as opposed to the narrator who enters the fictional world to speculate on Johnny's disappearance--clears up the mystery, or so he believes. After all, story-telling is what he has been indulging in for the last few pages and providing a resolution to Johnny's disappearance is necessary in order for him to resolve some of the plots in the narrative. Johnny's own statement on the issue

is simply: "'The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo, / 'And the sun did shine so cold'" (ll. 460-461). The lines immediately preceding, however, prove the narrator's explanation is just as speculative as that of the characters in his story: "No doubt," he adds, trying to interpret Johnny's cryptic statement, "he the moon had seen." Not only is the narrator's resolution as speculative as those of the characters, it mis-represents the nature of Johnny's adventure by freely translating Johnny's account of the latter. For the boy's "sun" he substitutes "moon," the logical alternative, and for his "cocks," "owls," also the logical alternative. But of course that is not what Johnny says. The narrator is, however, more like the idiot boy than his concluding remark suggests. Johnny's story is imagistic rather than eventful. That is to say, what he appears to have experienced is of imagistic and not eventful proportions. The narrator has shown a predilection for a similar way of experiencing reality and relating it in a story: the narrative is, I have argued, more a collage than a sequence of events linked together by a causal connection. The two are historians in the same mould.

The poem, then, in many different ways speaks of the primacy of man's desire to be a story-teller, story-telling being the primary way in which man creates meaning. It even dramatizes the joy the narrator experiences while relating a tale--the narrator's utterance (one of the few times in the Lyrical Ballads) is in the present tense, creating the sensation of a

story being lived and relived with every telling. The narrator, and Johnny, are content to leave their stories cryptically open-ended. To try to decipher Johnny's imagistic story, as the narrator pretends to do while letting us know that he has failed (which suggests the failure is intentional), would be to disregard the poem's insistent refusal to 'name' the most crucial episode in the poem (it is the disappearance of the boy that creates the suspense in this mock-gothic narrative). The narrative thus defeats all the expectations it sets up: the Gothic opening is dissipated since the boy is discovered in a naturalistic rather than in a gothic setting, the suspense generated by an event is resolved in an image, the expectation of a focus (generated by the centering of attention on Johnny in the departure scene) is dissipated since the narrative progresses in a staccato, imagistic manner rather than in a smoothly linear fashion typical of a narrative that moves from event to event. More clearly than in "Simon Lee," then, the narrator in "The Idiot Boy" reveals a preference for an imagistic method of story-telling. The dialogue between event and image is not, however, so easily resolved. The frame is still that of a story: the poem has a beginning, a middle and an end. Only, the beginning is misleading, the middle uneventful (it is a series of hypotheses) and the end inconclusive.

Legend (Time), Natural World (Space) and the Contemporizing of History in The Thorn and *Hart-Leap Well*

"The Thorn" and "Hart-Leap Well," like "Michael," firmly bring in the past through and in a concern with the present. The genesis of the stories the narrators relate in an image--a thorn and a fountain--suggests the emphasis on the present is a deliberate one. The fact that there is a history implicit in a physical object is not as startling as is the fact that the narrator in each of these poems talks of the object as though it were a historian (Keats was to make the equation explicit in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn"). The statement made by the priest in "The Brothers," "for historians, / Commend me to these valleys" (ll. 163-164), informs the structure of these poems. "The Thorn" makes the more direct statement of the two on the centrality of a natural object--the thorn--to its concerns. The narrative opens with the narrator introducing the thorn as his subject ("There is a thorn"). The use of the "once upon a time" formula leaves the reader in no doubt as to the subject of the story. The thorn in turn relates a tale silently (the story of human tragedy being inextricably linked with it). The narrator's fascination with the thorn as historian is a reflection of Wordsworth's. In the note Wordsworth dictated to Isabella Fenwick on the poem he says that the poem "arose out of my observing on the ridge of Quantock Hill, on a stormy day, a thorn which I had often passed in calm and bright weather

without noticing it. I said to myself 'cannot I by some invention do as much to make this thorn permanently an impressive object, as the storm has made it to my eyes at this moment?'"[19] Clearly, the method Wordsworth found of rendering the natural object "permanently an impressive object" was to make it an historian--to create a connection between it and the human world. The question the narrator's compulsive fascination with this natural object raises is why foreground a natural object if the sole purpose of the narrative is to relate a history, which the narrator does anyway. Once again, image and event clash in their separate renderings of the past. The thorn relates (silently) a tale and the narrator relates a tale and both tales deal with the same subject. "Hart-Leap Well" builds similarly around a natural object. The fountain and ruins of a pleasure-house (the human reclaimed by the natural), as the narrator's description of the scene suggests, silently relate a tale of desecration. This poem, however, chooses a strategy that is the reverse of "The Thorn." The poem begins with a straightforward narration of the history of Sir Walter and is followed by a second section, which is in the main a dialogue between the narrator and a shepherd and relates the same story but this time imagistically. Once again, event and image vie with one another as <u>the</u> unit of story.

The narrators' pointed concern with spatial objects suggests that the primary interest in both poems is not identical with the theme of the story the narrator relates. It is no wonder

that the subject of these two poems is not unusual. In his note on "Hart-Leap Well," Derek Roper notes both the similarity between Wordsworth's poem and Burger's ballad, "Der Wilde Jager," which Walter Scott translated in 1796, and the commonness of the theme of cruelty to animals in eighteenth century ballads.[20] In the note on "The Thorn," too, he (and Owen as well in his edition of the 1798 Lyrical Ballads) notes the similarity between the poem and other eighteenth century ballads on the theme of "a betrayed girl and her murdered child." As well, he notes the similarity of Wordsworth's poem to Burger's "Pfarrers Tochter von Taubenheim" which was translated by William Taylor in 1796 and appeared in the Monthly Magazine under the title "The Lass of Fair Wone."[21] Wordsworth's purpose in writing the poem was not to retell an already familiar tale but to study the art of story-telling and types of story-tellers. In the Fenwick note on "The Thorn" Wordsworth makes this aim very clear:

> The character which I have here introduced speaking is sufficiently common. The Reader will perhaps have a general notion of it, if he has ever known a man, a Captain of a small trading vessel for example, who, being past the middle age of life, had retired upon his annuity or small independent income to some village or country town of which he was not a native, or in which he had not been accustomed to live. Such men having little to do become credulous and talkative from indolence; and from the same cause, and other predisposing causes by which it is probable that such men may have been affected, they are prone to superstitition. On which account it appeared to me proper to select a character like this to exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind. Superstitious men are almost always men of slow faculties and deep feelings; their minds are not loose, but adhesive; they have a reasonable share of imagination, by which word I mean the faculty which

> produces impressive effects out of simple elements; but they are utterly destitute of fancy, the power by which pleasure and surprize are excited by sudden varieties of situation and an accumulated imagery.[22]

Here he comments not on the theme of the story the narrator relates but on the narrator himself.

The poem has had a history of unfavourable reactions, except very recently, from Coleridge to twentieth-century commentators like Roper. Their criticism suggests they regard the poem a failure because Wordsworth's narrator is not a success. Coleridge appears to think the narrator is not a fit subject for poetry for, according to him, he reduces the poem to dulness. In the Biographia Literaria Coleridge writes: "it is not possible to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser without repeating the effects of dulness and garrulity."[23] Roper comments similarly on the failure of the narrator, and hence of Wordsworth's purpose in writing the poem. In his note on "The Thorn" he writes: "Wordsworth's attempt to present The Thorn as a study in the psychology of superstition is not very convincing: the poem has to be read primarily as a tale of Martha Ray."[24] The narrator is, as far as he is concerned, a mere annoyance.[25]

Both Roper and Coleridge seem to have misunderstood the nature of Wordsworth's interest in the narrator. While the first part of the Fenwick note does describe the character of the narrator, it is only a preliminary statement to Wordsworth's statement of purpose. The latter focuses clearly on the

speech-act of such a person, suggesting the poem is not a character study but an attempt to allow a character with all his idiosyncracies to reveal his concept of story. Thus Wordsworth claims:

> It was my wish in this poem to shew the manner in which such men cleave to the same ideas; and to follow the turns of passion, always different, yet not palpably different, by which their conversation is swayed. I had two objects to attain; first, to represent a picture which should not be unimpressive yet consistent with the character that should describe it, secondly, while I adhered to the style in which such persons describe, to take care that words, which in their minds are impregnated with passion, should likewise convey passion to Readers who are not accustomed to sympathize with men feeling in that manner or using such language.[26]

The question, how would a man of this type deal with a story of dramatic proportions appears to have fascinated Wordsworth. Would he relate it as legend or as history? Would he invest it with mystery or with verisimilitude? Would he interject much in the telling? Would plot be important? And, as a study of the poem reveals, he does choose (presuming his autonomy from the author for the moment) a rather odd way of telling the story, focusing on a geographical location rather than on the events of the story. Coleridge's reaction to the poem is attestation enough to the novelty of the Wordsworthian experiment.

The narratorial method is as central to the concerns raised in "Hart-Leap Well" as it is in "The Thorn." This poem challenges the traditional story more explicitly than does "The Thorn." The narrator of the former first relates a tale, encouraging the belief that the story is <u>the</u> point the poem is endeavouring to make. Immediately following this straightforward

narrative, and at the very end of the first section, comes an address from the narrator to the reader: "But there is matter for a second rhyme, / And I to this would add another tale" (ll. 95-96). What follows is an alternative tale--same facts, different story, the first a legend that stems from the human world and the second a legend silently present in nature, the historian. Both poems raise the same issue, albeit differently. In both poems the narrator aligns himself with the natural historian, suggesting he is merely rendering verbal the silent history told by the latter. A study of how and why these narrators frustrate the reader's expectation of story, which they themselves encourage, reveals their definition of story and historian.

Turning first to "The Thorn," the narratorial feature that is most striking is the narrator's consistent setting up of the audience with false expectations. For instance, the poem opens with "there is a thorn" but what follows is not a series of events but a series of descriptions--of a thorn bush, a pond, a hill of moss and a woman. This descriptive introduction is followed by a series of rhetorical questions, which once again create the expectation of a story since they focus on event. Thus the narrator asks of the invisible listener:

> 'Now wherefore thus, by day and night,
> 'In rain, in tempest, and in snow,
> 'Thus to the dreary mountain-top
> 'Does this poor woman go?
> 'And why sits she beside the thorn
> 'When the blue day-light's in the sky,
> 'Or when the whirlwind's on the hill,
> 'Or frosty air is keen and still,

'And wherefore does she cry?-
'Oh wherefore? wherefore? tell me why
'Does she repeat that doleful cry?' (ll. 78-88).

The questions are followed by a repudiation of story--"I cannot tell," he says, "I wish I could; / For the true reason no one knows" (ll. 89-90). The curious fact is that in lieu of a reason he offers the listener three images he had introduced earlier as though, collectively, they hold the answers to the questions, and hence to the story he says he cannot tell:

But if you'd gladly view the spot,
The spot to which she goes;
The heap that's like an infant's grave,
The pond--and thorn, so old and grey,
Pass by her door--tis seldom shut-
And if you see her in the hut,
Then to the spot away!-- (ll. 91-97).

This juxtaposition of geography with the woman's unrevealed history is repeated yet again: the question,

'But wherefore to the mountain-top
'Can this unhappy woman go,
'Whatever star is in the skies,
'Whatever wind may blow?' (ll. 100-103)

is followed by the mention of the scene, only this time the narrator is more explicit about the connection between place and story, as well as about his being a story-teller twice removed. "I'll tell you everything I know" (l. 105), he says, adding that the true historian is the spot. "But to the thorn," he adds,

... and to the pond
Which is a little step beyond,
I wish that you would go:
Perhaps when you are at the place
You something of her tale may trace (ll. 105-110),

and a little later,

I'll give you all the help I can:
Before you up the mountain go,

Up to the dreary mountain-top,
I'll tell you all I know (ll. 111-114).

The narrator thus relates two tales: one which constitutes "everything" he knows and the other which is implicitly present in his description of the "spot" associated with the woman. While the former tale is a narrative of factual information, the latter is metaphoric, a description of objects. The narrator describes the main events in Martha Ray's life as follows: of the day she is betrayed he says:

... on that woful day
A cruel, cruel fire, they say,
Into her bones was sent:
It dried her body like a cinder,
And almost turn'd her brain to tinder, (ll. 128-132)

and of the period immediately following:

They say, full six months after this,
While yet the summer-leaves were green,
She to the mountain-top would go,
And there was often seen (ll. 133-136)

and finally of the conclusion of the sad love affair with the treacherous Stephen Hill:

'Tis said, a child was in her womb,
As now to any eye was plain;
She was with child, and she was mad,
Yet often she was sober sad
From her exceeding pain (ll. 137-141).

Before he ends this narrative of all he knows, the narrator insists again, "No more I know, I wish I did, / And I would tell it all to you" (ll. 155-156). This statement is followed immediately by his narration of the final episode in Martha Ray's life. "For what became of this poor child" (l. 157), he says,

There's none that ever knew:
And if a child was born or no,
There's no one that could ever tell;
And if 'twas born alive or dead,
There's no one knows, as I have said,
But some remember well,
That Martha Ray about this time
Would up the mountain often climb.

And all that winter, when at night
The wind blew from the mountain-peak,
'Twas worth your while, though in the dark,
The church-yard path to seek:
For many a time and oft were heard
Cries coming from the mountain-head,
Some plainly living voices were,
And others, I've heard many swear,
Were voices of the dead (ll. 158-174).

As these statements make abundantly clear, even this factual tale makes Martha Ray's history less accessible than it appears to do. Almost all the events mentioned are qualified by terms such as "they say," "'tis said," "some remember well," "oft were heard," "I've heard many swear," and so on. Thus the actual narration contradicts the narrator's statement that he knows at least a little. The truth of Martha Ray's life recedes with each event he narrates.

The other tale the narrator relates is of the spot, and perhaps nature--the historian's--silent tale is more revelatory than is the narrator's apparently factual but largely conjectural account. All the events in her life are presented as conjecture only Martha Ray's association with the spot is asserted as a fact:

But that she goes to this old thorn,
The thorn which I've described to you,
And there sits in a scarlet cloak,
I will be sworn is true (ll. 177-180).

Perhaps, in reality, as the narrator insists, "when you are at the place / You something of her tale may trace" (ll. 109-110). After all, that is what the narrator does in his imaginative description of the place; his description hides a tale. For instance, his initial, and concluding, description of the thorn is extremely suggestive of loneliness, alienation, premature aging, and suffocation by outside forces. It is, he says, "a wretched thing forlorn," "with lichens ... overgrown." The image of imprisonment in connection with the thorn is one the narrator repeats at least twice more, once to say,

> Like rock or stone, it is o'ergrown
> With lichens to the very top,
> And hung with heavy tufts of moss,
> A melancholy crop:
> Up from the earth these mosses creep,
> And this poor thorn they clasp it round
> So close, you'd say that they were bent
> With plain and manifest intent,
> To drag it to the ground;
> And all had joined in one endeavour
> To bury this poor thorn for ever (ll. 12-22),

and then at the end of the narrative, to suggest the strangeness of the image, he says:

> I cannot tell how this may be,
> But plain it is, the thorn is bound
> With heavy tufts of moss, that strive
> To drag it to the ground (ll. 243-246).

His description of the hill of moss, on the other hand, is as pleasant as that of the thorn is unpleasant. Beside the "aged thorn" is a "fresh and lovely sight," which we are told later is "like an infant's grave in size / As like as like can be" (ll. 52-53). The description itself is so colourful and celebratory and offers such a contrast to the description of the thorn that

it merits quoting in full:

> All lovely colours there you see,
> All colours that were ever seen,
> And mossy network too is there,
> As if by hand of lady fair
> The work had woven been,
> And cups, the darlings of the eye,
> So deep is their vermilion dye.
>
> Ah me! what lovely tints are there!
> Of olive-green and scarlet bright,
> In spikes, in branches, and in stars,
> Green, red, and pearly white.
> This heap of earth o'ergrown with moss,
> Which close beside the thorn you see,
> So fresh in all its beauteous dyes,
> Is like an infant's grave in size
> As like as like can be:
> But never, never anywhere,
> An infant's grave was half so fair (ll. 38-55).

The third image, that of the pond, is underemphasized, which is described only as a "little muddy pond" that is "three feet long, and two feet wide." The fourth, and final, image that makes up the "spot" is the woman herself, whom the narrator describes as follows:

> A woman in a scarlet cloak,
> And to herself she cries,
> 'Oh misery! oh misery!
> Oh woe is me! oh misery!' (ll. 60-66).

The image, as with the thorn, is repeated once again at the conclusion of the narrative:

> And this I know, full many a time,
> When she was on the mountain high,
> By day, and in the silent night,
> When all the stars shone clear and bright,
> That I have heard her cry,
> 'Oh misery! oh misery!
> O woe is me! oh misery!' (ll. 247-253).

The woman's cry is the verbal counterpart of the image of the thorn weighed down by moss; sitting beside the "grey" moss

in her "scarlet" cloak she is probably not higher than a "two-years' child," the height given of the thorn. If these images are part of the history the "spot" relates, so is the hill of moss. But the story it relates is quite different in tone. Although it is a grave, or so the narrator strongly hints, it is covered with a "mossy network" and is full of vibrant colours. The celebratory nature of the latter balances the gloomy, tragic nature of the former. This then is the history the "spot" silently relates, and except for his one attempt to allegorize--to connect the hill of moss with the grave of an infant--the narrator does not tamper with it.

This description of the "spot" underlines the amorality of nature in this poem. As an historian it is indifferent to the human tragedy enacted in its vicinity and the location does not bear the weight of the tragedy. In fact, the narrator at one point indicates "the others" he talks of so often read her tragedy into the spot in just such an allegorical manner. "But some will say," he says,

> She hanged her baby on the tree,
> Some say she drowned it in the pond,
> Which is a little step beyond,
> But all and each agree,
> The little babe was buried there,
> Beneath that hill of moss so fair (ll. 215-220).

Later in the poem he says, "some say"

> ... if to the pond you go,
> And fix on it a steady view,
> The shadow of a babe you trace,
> A baby and a baby's face,
> And that it looks at you;
> Whene'er you look on it, 'tis plain
> The baby looks at you again (ll. 225-231).

However, he makes a point of distinguishing between himself and these others. Not only does he not believe she killed the child, he does not believe such a connection can and should be made. "I've heard," he says,

> ... the scarlet moss is red
> With drops of that poor infant's blood;
> But kill a new-born infant thus!
> I do not think she could (ll. 221-224).

In fact, he insists on an attitude that is the exact reverse of these others. He denies he has knowledge of the nature of the connection between the natural objects that collectively make up the "spot." "But what's the thorn?" he asks of the invisible listener, as though anticipating the question,

> '... and what's the pond?
> 'And what's the hill of moss to her?
> 'And what's the creeping breeze that comes
> 'The little pond to stir?'
> I cannot tell (ll. 210-214).

Of course, the suggestive phrasing of the question indicates his belief that there is a connection.

Is the narrator suggesting that the spot does not hold the key to the mystery that is Martha Ray? That any connection there might be is symbolic, not allegorical? His concluding remarks suggest there is no allegorical connection between the two. In the last few lines of the poem he mentions the two "facts" he is sure of, but separately. In fact, it is an "and" that connects them. "But plain it is," he says,

> ... the thorn is bound
> With heavy tufts of moss, that strive
> To drag it to the ground.
> And this I know, full many a time,
> When she was on the mountain high,

By day, and in the silent night,
When all the stars shone clear and bright,
That I have heard her cry,
'Oh misery! oh misery!
'O woe is me! oh misery!' (ll. 244-253).

Thus in this poem we have at the very least three tales and three sets of tellers, all relating the same history: the village folk, whom the narrator quotes often, the narrator himself and the "spot." However, none of these tellers appears to reveal the truth about Martha Ray. The narrator discounts the validity of the village folk's version by insisting it has its basis in a superstitious imagination. He casts doubt on his own version by insisting on the one hand that he does not know much (and by using "others say" too often to convince) and on the other that the "spot" holds the truth only to simultaneously assert he does not know what the connection is. The spot itself does not testify to the tragedy--it is beautiful and harsh at the same time.

"Hart-Leap Well" is in many ways the least sophisticated of the poems considered in this chapter. Precisely for this reason, however, it is a good poem for analysis. It is divided into sections--one that relates a story, observing all the traditions of story-telling, and another which challenges and dismisses the notions of history expressed in the first. The narrator himself distinguishes between the two narratives by referring to the second as "another tale" and its subject as "matter for a second rhyme." The division is therefore not an arbitrary one.

The first section is typically balladic: the narrator is almost omniscient in that he mediates very little except to describe, while his tale dramatizes an incident and suggests its significance and provides a resolution. The subject of the tale is a chase, and in particular the chief participant, Sir Walter. That the chase is a metaphor for man's desire to establish supremacy is evident in the description of the hunt: it is the third steed the knight is on, the dogs are tired, and most symbolic of all, the only two left in the chase are the knight and the hart. In an unusually dilatory stanza, the narrator rhetorically asks:

> Where is the throng, the tumult of the race?
> The bugles that so joyfully were blown?
> This chase it looks not like an earthly chase;
> Sir Walter and the hart are left alone (ll. 25-28).

Victory, gained of course at the expense of the hart, is celebrated by the knight who builds "a pleasure-house upon this spot" (l. 57) and makes "a small arbour" "for rural joy" (l. 58). He believes, says the narrator, that "'Twill be the traveller's shed, the pilgrim's cot, / A place of love for damsels that are coy" (ll. 59-60). The physical monument ensures the historicizing of the event, and the knight's subsequent victory, whereas the story-teller and story ensure the historicizing of both event and man.

The narrator's method of relating the story suggests he is endeavouring to make a moral tale out of the incident. He sets the reader up for a tale in which the "good" are rewarded and the "evil" punished. The detailed description of the chase

leaves no doubt as to the identity of the "evil" party. The exploitation of the natural world by the knight for personal aggrandizement, and the long-suffering nature of the silent, natural world are underlined by the narrator in his narration of the chase. For instance, we are told the knight is on his third steed, that though "Sir Walter like a falcon flies, / There is a doleful silence in the air" (ll. 11-12). His horse is "weak as a lamb the hour that it is weaned" (l. 39) and "foaming like a mountain cataract" (l. 40). Most touching of all is the image of the hunted hart at death:

> Upon his side the hart was lying stretched:
> His nose half-touched a spring beneath a hill,
> And with the last deep groan his breath had fetched
> The waters of the spring were trembling still (ll. 41-44).

The narrator's description of the knight's reaction to this pathetic scene of victory--to these images of desecration committed by him--brands him as the "evil" party in the tale. "And now," says the narrator, referring to the end of the chase,

> ... too happy for repose or rest
> (Was never man in such a joyful case!)
> Sir Walter walked all round, north, south, and west,
> And gazed and gazed upon that darling place (ll. 45-49).

Apparently the knight does not share our reactions to the images of suffering.

Although the narrator sets up a framework of nemesis, the story ends without the knight being punished. In fact, the narrator points out that the knight enjoyed many a summer in the pleasure-house built to commemorate the occasion and lived a pleasant life, died "in the course of time" and was buried in

"his paternal vale." Retribution does not seem to have been exacted. In this first section of the poem, then, the narrator presents two versions of the same event: the knight's and his own.[27] The knight's version, which emerges in the remarks he makes following his victory, suggests that the morality of his action is a non-issue--that nature is essentially amoral and indifferent. The narrator's version, on the other hand, suggests the issue of morality is central to the story. However, since nature does not exact retribution, this section of the poem seems to affirm the knight's version over the narrator's. What the narrator leads us, his readers, to expect is an allegory of the type the village folk of "The Thorn" create, an allegory which he then does not provide. The story, and the resolution of the chase, have their end in the anti-climactically pleasant life and natural death of the knight. The story has, it appears, gone down in history to celebrate the magnitude of the victory, just as the knight wished.

The narrator's moral concern does not remain unfulfilled, however, finding fuller expression in the second section of the poem. His dissatisfaction with the facts of Sir Walter's history, with which he has to work, is expressed in the final two lines of the first section of the poem. Having informed us of the anti-climactically natural end of the knight, he adds, "But there is matter for a second rhyme, / And I to this would add another tale" (ll. 95-96). This 'tale' however is not an eventful one. In fact the narrator refuses at the outset to tell

a tale of "moving accident[s]," which, he insists, is "not my trade." This tale is a combination of description--of the spot associated with the events mentioned in the first section--and a dialogue about this spot. It is nonetheless a tale, as the narrator's closing remarks in the first section insist. In this second section, the method used to establish the course of events is the direct reverse of the method used in the first. If, too, in the first the course of events is used to make the spot meaningful to the reader, in the second the spot is used to make the course of events meaningful. Thus while in the first section the knight's history explains the presence of the pleasure-house (after all it was created by him), in this section the ruins speak eloquently of the nature of the happening, and this time around, the story is a story of desecration.

The narrator's description, with which the second section begins, is not restricted to the ruined edifice but encompasses the entire scene. "The trees," he says,

> ... were grey, with neither arms nor head;
> Half-wasted the square mound of tawny green;
> So that you just might say, as then I said,
> 'Here in old time the hand of man has been' (ll. 109-112).

As if looking for the appropriate terms, he continues:

> I looked upon the hills both far and near,
> More doleful place did never eye survey;
> It seemed as if the spring-time came not here,
> And Nature here were willing to decay (ll. 113-116).

The dialogue, which follows, reconfirms the presence of morality in nature that this description implies and that the narrator

wanted to establish in the first section, only the facts of the story would not let him. The spot, the shepherd says to the narrator, "does its own condition tell." His description of the scene rivals the narrator's in its insistence on the unnaturalness of the decay. For instance, he describes the aspen trees as "lifeless stumps"; the fountain, he says, is a place where "neither dog nor heifer, horse nor sheep / Will wet his lips" (ll. 133-134); and the water, he adds, "doth send a dolorous groan" when "all are fast asleep." In sum, the place, as he says, "is cursed." However, like the narrator in "The Thorn," the shepherd refuses to make the connection between natural and human worlds an allegorical one. Like the former, he differentiates between himself and others who do so. "'Some say that here a murder has been done, / And blood cries out for blood'" (ll. 137-138), he says, adding,

> '... but for my part,
> I've guessed, when I've been sitting in the sun,
> That it was all for that unhappy hart' (ll. 138-140).

Following this statement, he narrates the episode of the chase but from the hart's point of view. His aim, in relating the tale, is not to suggest retribution has been exacted for the evil done in the past (as the others do) but simply to point out the gratuitousness and thoughtlessness of the act. In other words, he aims at establishing nature as a subject, a "Thou," and not the object--an "It"--that the knight perceived it to be.

The connection the shepherd sees between the spot and the story, between the human and natural worlds, is a symbolic and

not an allegorical one. Nature's sorrow over the desecration of her own is, according to the shepherd, not restricted to the hart. The spot itself, an idyllic place, was desecrated since it was used as the site of a pleasure-house built to commemorate the knight's victory, a victory gained at the expense of the hart's agony. Hence the dialogue ends with the shepherd talking about the spot in its present state of decay as a testament to the evil committed on it. "'But now," he comments,

> '... here's neither grass nor pleasant shade;
> The sun on drearier hollow never shone:
> So will it be, as I have often said,
> Till trees, and stones, and fountain all are gone' (ll. 157-160).

As interpreted by the shepherd, the tale the spot relates ends with a sense that justice has been done, a conclusion the tale of section one does not allow. Which version is the correct one? Since the narrator ends the second section with a homily that insists upon the correctness of the shepherd's interpretation of the happening, we are tempted into believing this is the correct version. However, the very presence of the factual version makes it valid too. Ultimately, then, the two sections are dialogically involved with one another, the one suggesting nature is indifferent and amoral and the other suggesting it is not. The tale related in the first section uses the fact that the knight does not suffer the consequences of his action as proof of the validity of its argument. The second uses the desecrated, ruined spot as proof of its argument that in the grand scheme of things retribution has been exacted--not allegorically (as the suffering of the knight would have made

it) but exacted nonetheless.

NOTES

1. The Asterix text is by Goscinny.

2. In The Poetics of Prose (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), Tzvetan Todorov suggests that The Arabian Nights best expresses the fact that "narrating equals living" (p. 72).

3. Wordsworth's letter to Fox, and in particular his statement on "The Brothers" and "Michael" suggesting the two are his signature pieces, answers all these questions on the authorial level. See section one of the Introduction for a discussion of the exchange between Fox and Wordsworth.

4. Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 182.

5. The Visionary Company, pp. 182-183.

6. John Bushnell, "'Where is the Lamb for a Burnt Offering?': Michael's Covenant and Sacrifice," The Wordsworthian Circle, vol. XII, #4 (Autumn 1981), p. 246.

7. This type is described by Bushnell in his account of Michael as one who "almost literally reads and interprets the book of nature, while listening ('when others heeded not') to a terrestrial version of the music of the spheres. He possesses a power greater than that of 'ordinary men,' and the light in his cottage (similar to the light in his soul?) shines as a 'public symbol' (l. 130) to all who see it"

("'Where is the Lamb for a Burnt Offering?': Michael's Covenant and Sacrifice," p. 249).

8. "*Michael* is ultimately *about* covenants (legal, fraternal, and spiritual), and we gradually recognize the one between Luke and his father as one of the least important" ("'Where is the Lamb for a Burnt Offering?': Michael's Covenant and Sacrifice," p. 247).

9. "'Where is the Lamb for a Burnt Offering?': Michael's Covenant and Sacrifice," p. 252.

10. I disagree with Bushnell about its insignificance, as my reading of the poem should indicate.

11. 'Dispensation' is defined by Rev. C.I. Scofield as "a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God" [(The Holy Bible), (ed), Rev. C.I. Scofield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 5].

12. In a note on the Edenic Covenant, Scofield writes: "The Edenic Covenant, the first of the eight great covenants of Scripture, which condition life and salvation, and around which all Scripture crystallizes, has seven main elements" (The Holy Bible, pp. 5-6).

13. The narrator's dramatic presentation of the ritual thus allows Michael's philosophical stance to emerge apparently uninterpreted by him.

14. The narrator informs us that:

> The length of full seven years from time to time
> He at the building of their sheep-fold wrought,
> And left the work unfinished when he died (ll. 475-477).

15. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 133.

16. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 143.

17. Leonard, of "The Brothers," is representative of the literate audience the narrator of "Simon Lee" appears to have in mind: he, Leonard, appears to believe that facts in themselves constitute history. After all, it is a fact--his brother's death--that sends him back to sea.

18. The Fenwick note to "The Idiot Boy," Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 143.

19. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, pp. 138-139.

20. Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 360.

21. Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 310.

22. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 139.

23. Watson (ed), Biographia Literaria, ch. XVII, p. 194.

24. Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805 , pp. 312-313.

25. "It is hard to feel that the narrator provides anything but a source of annoyance" [Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 313].

26. Owen (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1798 , pp. 139-140.

27. In fact, in the sections of the narrative where the knight's interpretation of the event--as a joyful occasion--is presented, the narrator switches to the dialogue form, allowing us to hear the knight's voice. Thus instead of phrasing the knight's interpretation in his own language (as he does with the chase, for instance), he allows the knight's version to emerge undistorted by his own.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Preservation of the Past in Dialogue

One of the best known incidents in the Prelude retells the Wordsworthian myth of the primacy of dialogue. In Book Five of the Prelude, one of the central stories told by the poet-narrator is an account of a dream in which the latter engages in a dialogue with an Arab.[1] The Arab, with a stone in one hand and a shell "of a surpassing brightness"[2] in the other, informs the poet that the stone "was 'Euclid's Elements'" (l. 88) and the other "'something of more worth'" (l. 89). The poet is given the shell, "with command / That I should hold it to my ear" (ll. 91-92). What the poet hears is, in my opinion, what Wordsworth ultimately believed to be the principle most basic to civilization--dialogue. He hears, he says,

> ... that instant in an unknown tongue,
> Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
> A loud prophetic blast of harmony;
> An Ode, in passion uttered, which foretold
> Destruction to the children of the earth
> By deluge, now at hand (ll. 93-98).

The utterance is not dramatically represented for us nor can it be, for it is remote in space and time--the utterance is in an "unknown tongue" and is contained by a shell (an object belonging to the sea, the primordial "other" to land). What the incident does dramatize is the dialogue between the poet and the entirety of space-time reality represented in the stone and shell. To return to the Arab, he is on a mission to preserve

both stone and shell, which are--the poet informs us--at the same time books, from destruction by a universal deluge. Since one of the objects (stone / book) is scientific and the other poetic (shell / book), the story asserts that the history of a civilization--in this instance about to be erased--is in the dialogue between the two. That the Arab is locating civilization in the dialogue and not in these disciplines per se is evident in the manner in which he describes these two books:

> The one that held acquaintance with the stars,
> And wedded soul to soul in purest bond
> Of reason, undisturbed by space or time;
> The other that was a god, yea many gods,
> Had voices more than all the winds, with power
> To exhilarate the spirit, and to soothe,
> Through every clime, the heart of human kind (ll. 103-109).

The two are described as contraries: the one is aspatial, atemporal and abstract while the other is located firmly in the concrete, both spatially and temporally speaking. Further, the Arab's terminology indicates both are sacred activities and both must be preserved.[3]

The Lyrical Ballads narratives are, when considered as a history of Wordsworth's age, in the true poetic mode of "many gods" with as "many voices." The history the narrator relates in the narratives is often as insignificant as a single event in the life of an unknown individual, as for instance in "Simon Lee" and "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman." Just as often it is a record of the life of a social outcast, as in "The Female Vagrant," "The Mad Mother" and "The Thorn." Capturing an event or a sequence of events in utterance is the purpose of the

narrator in the Lyrical Ballads narratives as much as capturing the ethos of an age in the written form is the poet's purpose in the collection. What distinguishes Wordsworth's telling of the tale of the tribe from that of others (particularly historians, according to him) is that at the centre of his method and his vision of history is the dialogue. Just as the dream of the Arab advocates the necessity of maintaining polarities, of creating a dialogue between science and poetry, and of preserving this dialogue for the use of a future civilization that seeks to reconstruct its past, these Lyrical Ballads narratives insist upon the dialogic mode as the mode in which such reconstruction should be carried out. Even in monologues such as the ones discussed in chapter I, the presence of an 'other' is implied by the utterance of the speakers. This 'other' is not other merely because it is at the receiving end of the communication implied in the act of utterance but also, and primarily, because it poses a point of view diametrically opposed to that of the speaker. For instance, in "The Mad Mother" and "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" society, the absent participant in the dialogue, holds views that have led to the homelessness and psychic disorientation of the two. These views, in "The Mad Mother," are countered by the speaker who believes the most joyful event in her life is the birth of her child. Society, on the other hand, has condemned her to the life of an outcast for the same event--the evidence of a supposedly promiscuous life in their eyes. Similarly, in "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman," the speaker's utterance builds around the contrary views

held by her and her society concerning her sickness. On the most literal level, the poem is about the speaker's desire to live and society's (contrary) desire that she die (an attitude that is clearly symbolized in the action of abandonment). The event or sequence of events reconstructed in the speaker's utterance is hence built up through a dialogue between individual and society. Neither stance is privileged since there is no narrator in "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" and the narrator in "The Mad Mother" does not provide a summary, choosing instead to end his utterance simultaneously with that of his character.

The typical story dependent on cause and effect and advocating the resolution of contrariety in a single event leads, ideologically speaking, to a privileging of unity, conformity and closure. This monological vision is directly in opposition to the dialogical spirit of the Wordsworthian narrative. Whereas the latter challenges the idea of eternal truth, the former asserts the presence of one. Hence Wordsworth's monologues, while presenting the outcast in his or her own terms--perfectly symbolized not only in the fact that they are allowed to utter but that their utterance locates their condition in their own individual history--allows the contrary point of view to surface. Thus neither society nor the outcast's stance is asserted as the "correct" one. Recording the past formally in a dialogue (as in the poems discussed in chapter II) or in the spirit of dialogue (as in all poems discussed) also challenges the availability of the truth and refuses to

privilege any one of the contrarieties over its other. The Matthew poems, for instance, present Matthew's views and a counter-view that challenges the first. Writing epitaphs--poems celebrating the memory of Matthew--the narrator records not event and not the sequence of events that would be seen as constituting a 'history' but a dialogue. Recreating the dialogue dramatically has the effect of creating the debate all over again. Further, these debates are not resolved by a narratorial statement. The two conflicting points of view are allowed to remain facing one another. The severity of vision that can accept, in fact thrive on, the disunified, and dis-equilibrium, is best expressed in "The Brothers." The clash between a pre-literate world, albeit in the middle of a literate one, and a literate one is left unresolved since the narrator closes the dialogue between the priest and Leonard with a summary of the events in Leonard's life.

This particular conception of history as a dialogic activity suggests a definition of dialogue Mikhail Bakhtin uses to talk of Dostoevsky's work in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1984). The paragraph in which Bakhtin most clearly defines what he understands by the term "dialogue" forms part of a discussion of the "polyphonic" Dostoevskian novel, which, Bakhtin states, is dialogic:

> It is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other; this interaction provides no support for the viewer who would

> objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monological category (thematically, lyrically or cognitively)--and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant.[4]

In their biography, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist describe the concept as it occurs in Bakhtin in more general terms:

> Dialogue is ... conceived as the extensive set of conditions that are immediately modelled in any actual exchange between two persons, but are not exhausted in such an exchange. Ultimately, dialogue means communication between simultaneous differences.[5]

It seems to me that ultimately the Wordsworthian narrative differs from the magazine verse of the day because of its presentation of the past--single event or sequence of events--as a "communication between simultaneous differences." And it is the communication that the narratives suggest is of interest, not the entities in themselves per se. Hence the omnipresence of dialogue in the Lyrical Ballads and in fact in the Wordsworthian canon. The principle of communication is too, I believe, what the poet's dream of the Arab asserts as the fundamental substance out of which history arises: presumably, and this is extra-textual, the civilization that flourishes after the deluge will write of its ancestor civilization as a communication between "stone" and "shell," scientific and poetic. To return to the Lyrical Ballads, the consistent use of the dialogic by the Wordsworthian narrator in relating, or recreating, the past suggests that the challenge Wordsworth is offering his literary contemporaries, in these early years of his poetic life, is to celebrate the forces of dis-unity, dis-ease and disequilibrium.

This propensity in the early Wordsworth toward the forces of disunification has been noted, in less explicit terms, by other readers. In Wordsworth: Play and Politics (1986), for instance, John Turner divides the socially concerned poets of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries into two categories--the radical and the paternalistic. Genuine radicalism, he suggests, is one in which "the poor may speak and act for themselves."[6] (Of course he considers Wordsworth to be a genuine radical). To define paternalism, Turner turns to E.P. Thompson, who argues that for the paternalistic "the interior life of the poor cannot be handled, unless with condescension or as picturesque."[7] This difference is discussed by Heather Glen as the difference between eighteenth-century magazine verse writers and Wordsworth. Of magazine verse in general she writes, as I have elsewhere quoted:

> The poetry pages of the magazines--trivial as their contents mostly are--seem to be part of a larger cultural process: in this case, the process by which the polite culture justified itself to itself, coping with and translating into its own terms that which was potentially most challenging to its assumptions.[8]

Thus she identifes the attitude of such writers as a centripetal one, pulling strangeness into the "normal" centre by assimilating the subject matter to the dominant ideology. And, my acquaintance with the magazine verse of the day leads me to concur.

Wordsworth's poetry on subjects typical of magazine-verse seems to drive the "normal," the everyday, out to a rapidly changing perimeter. It is a centrifugal force compared to the

centripetal pull of the typical magazine verse, not because he refuses to assimilate the "other" into the predominant culture, which he does,[9] but because he presents reality as an unfixed, unconcluded, controversial entity.[10] This last, the inherently controversial nature of history, is best expressed in those of the poems that deal explicitly with "story." In "The Idiot Boy," "The Thorn," "Hart-Leap Well" and "Michael," the same events are made into at least two different stories, each acting as the contrary to the other. "The Idiot Boy" is particularly interesting because of the multiple stories told in the poem. These various tales are told by the mother, the narrator, Susan Gale and Johnny himself and revolve around an absence in the poem--Johnny's adventure while he is lost to the world of the poem. The various tales remain equally valid or invalid since the central event remains unrevealed. The poem thus challenges the notion of an ultimate "truth" in narrative, structure or theme. What we have then is a series of tales built on an absence. Further, since none of these many stories claims the status of "truth," the order in which each is presented can be changed without causing a significant alteration in the poem's construction and / or meaning. "The Thorn" too is much like "The Idiot Boy" in its presentation of the history of Martha Ray as a controversial issue. The narrator's utterance incorporates the superstitious villagers' version of the events in the subject's life, one which the narrator insists is incorrect. The narrator's own story is heavily qualified and the story the spot relates, which he obviously also incorporates into his own

utterance, makes it impossible to make a strictly allegorical connection between Martha Ray's life and the spot. Hence the narrator's utterance plays off one version of the story against another, though because of the presence of more than two versions, the dialogic spirit of the poem is more complex than in "Michael," for instance, where there are only two versions of the story of the covenant--Michael's and the narrator's. Like "The Idiot Boy," neither "Michael" nor "The Thorn" resolves the issue by asserting the correctness of one version over the other, or another, as the case may be. "Michael" ends with a narrative of the events following upon Michael's and his wife's deaths while "The Thorn" ends with the narrator's assertion that in the conjectural mass he has offered as a story there are only two facts. These facts--that Martha Ray frequents the spot and that she wails--do not answer any of the questions about the "why" that the narrator himself raises in the opening section of the poem.

Each of the characters in the narrator's utterance in these poems, including the narrator, is to a certain extent retelling a tale that has already been told. But in these poems they are simultaneous retellings--all the characters telling a story at the same time, one which belongs to their collective past. Hence we have a vigorous dialogue being conducted between the various conflicting renditions, of the same subject, be it the history of Martha Ray or Johnny's disappearance. "Truth" absents itself in these poems that seem primarily concerned with re-creating

the past in dialogic terms.

Ritual and Play in Story-Telling

The presentation of reality as a dynamic interaction of differing principles is paralleled in the Lyrical Ballads narratives by the improvisational nature of many of the stories told. From the monologues--where the psychic disorientation of the speakers accounts for haphazard narration--and the tales of legendary proportions ("The Thorn" and "Hart-Leap Well") to the dialogues of the Matthew poems, the lack of a central 'truth' or organizing principle is more than evident. "The Thorn," for instance, suggests the next time the garrulous narrator tells the tale of Martha Ray it will be different precisely because in this telling he cannot settle on *a* version. The best example of the amorphous nature of story in the Lyrical Ballads is "The Brothers": The priest's story is moulded by Leonard's questions, changing direction with every interjection from the latter. There can be no clearer statement on the lack of an inherent truth in story that is merely waiting to be discovered.

This concept of story as a fluid form has often been identified with the pre-literate world, and in particular the poetic activity of this world. In The Singer of Tales (1964), Albert Lord writes that the bard who composed and sang songs on the stories of Odysseus, Achilles and the other Greek heroes,

> ... was author of each of his own singings. The songs were ever in flux and were crystallized by each singer only when he sat before an audience and told them the tale. It was an old tale that he had heard from others

> but that telling was his own. He did not claim it, yet all could see that it was his; for he was there before them.[11]

The disappearance of Wordsworth the author in the Lyrical Ballads and many of the other narratives he wrote during the 1790s[12] is a significant statement on his unstated belief in the anonymity of the poet, who as historian, merely retells stories already told. In the literate world and in Wordsworth's chosen medium--the written word--the author can reproduce the oral world poet's anonymity through the fictional mask of the narrator. And indeed the number of idiosyncratic narrators in the Lyrical Ballads is simply astounding, making identification between author and narrator impossible.

The pervasiveness of the ethos of the oral world in the Lyrical Ballads is as evident in the subject and characters of the tales as it is in the structure. The narratives are largely tales of local events and characters, as the Fenwick notes establish, and many of the narrators are--the poems make a point of informing us--local people. This localness is most commonly expressed as the familiarity of the narrator with the places and people of the stories he relates. For instance, the narrator in "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" is on a first-name basis with the two main characters, referring to them as "young Harry" and "Goody." And he ends by identifying his audience for us as "farmers." Localness is particularly important in the Matthew poems--it contributes significantly to the philosophical dialogue that occurs between Matthew and the narrator in these

poems. They are in country that is not only familiar to them, but beloved, as the descriptions the narrator provides indicate. This emphasis on the geographical and historical locatedness of the narratives serves the purpose of investing the subject of the narratives with the ritualistic element considered an integral part of story-telling in the oral world.

Turning once again to Asterix for illustration, the ritualistic nature of the occasion of story-telling is visually re-enforced by the closing scene of each individual comic: the Gauls gather round a fire at tables laden with food to celebrate their latest victory over the Romans. All that is missing is the bard and the song celebrating the victory. He is, as always, gagged and tied to a tree, deprived of his lyre and voice.[13] There is a vast body of literature on ritual in the oral world, and in particular on the ritualistic nature of story-telling in this world. However, all would probably agree that the association of ritual with story-telling in a pre-literate society is inextricably linked with the subject of the first tales ever to be told. To use Kipling's phrase, "the tale of the tribe" is the subject of the Iliad and Odyssey, the Epic of Gilgamesh, Beowulf as well as of the Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.[14] The tale of the tribe in the oral world was not, according to one school of thought, a cohesive entity. Albert Lord posits the view that the Homeric epics were not the first to sing of the Greek heroes. Stories about these larger than life figures were already in abundance by the seventh

century B.C. Even the Homeric epics as we know them, he suggests, are far from cohesive, dealing with several heroes simultaneously. Thus he talks of how the Odyssey is as concerned with Telemachus (hence the Telemachy) as it is with Odysseus. Even Norman Austin, while arguing for a formal unity in the Odyssey, in Archery at the Dark of the Moon (1975), feels he has to counter the arguments of those who find the Telemachy, in his words, "a later, unwarranted addition, and awkwardly attached to the preface to the original Odyssey.[15] His counter-argument is that the Telemachy is thematically integral to the poem. He writes:

> Much of the Analytical criticism is, at bottom, a desire to get on with the subplot of Odysseus' vengeance and an impatience with the slowly unfolding main plot, which is the awakening after twenty years of numbed isolation, of a husband, a wife, and a child. The Telemachy has much to say about the awakening of all three figures, though its primary emphasis is on Odysseus and Telemachos. The myths of Odysseus, as they are pieced together in the Telemachy, are the forms of incantation that will resurrect both voyagers, father and son. So misunderstood is the basic function of the Telemachy that even some of the correspondences between it and the rest of the poem are deposited as evidence of the Telemachy's inauthenticity, as if the whole poem were not one vast and joyful paean to correspondence.[16]

Whether the tale of the tribe is a cohesive entity, expressing a single truth, is hence debatable. The Odyssey is as beset with scholars arguing on the one hand that the epic is a series of distinct stories, built on folk-tales[17] and on the other that it is a structurally and thematically unified poem, as are the Lyrical Ballads narratives.[18] If the Lyrical Ballads narratives can collectively be regarded as telling the tale of the tribe, then the Lyrical Ballads is in itself a statement on the

disparate, dis-unified nature of the true history of the period. The selection is about cruelty, pain and sorrow, social outcasts, conflict within the self and between the self and society but it is also about joy ("The Idiot Boy" for instance) and communality ("The Brothers"). A history which tries to dissolve multiplicity into unity is, I think Wordsworth would say, not an accurate record. And that precisely, is what the nineteenth-century historian stands accused of: as counter-history, Wordsworth's history of the age is as much a collection of tales as is the Odyssey[19]

The tale of the tribe can be told as Wordsworth intended to tell it in The Recluse or as he tells it in the Lyrical Ballads. The project in the former was to relate a comprehensive history of the human condition. The title itself gives away the poem's concern with uniting the all--it is "The Recluse; Or, Views of Nature, Man, and Society." The unifying image and concept Wordsworth located as the symbolic centre of the universal principle (natura naturans), the Prospectus states, is "Mind." The locale of the epic, whose course Wordsworth traces in the Prospectus, has shifted from the vast suprahuman stage that it occupied in Milton to the mind of man, which Wordsworth says, is "my haunt, and the main region of my song" (l. 41). However, it is not the mind in isolation that this tale of the tribe concerns itself with. The Prospectus clearly states that the Recluse is to be about a dialogue between the essentially human (mind) with the essentially natural. Thus Wordsworth writes in

the former that his purpose is to proclaim:

> How exquisitely the individual Mind
> (And the progressive powers perhaps no less
> Of the whole species) to the external World
> Is fitted:-and how exquisitely, too--
> Theme this but little heard of among men--
> The external World is fitted to the Mind (ll. 63-68).

In fact, Wordsworth prophesies a "blissful hour" when such dialogue will be a commonplace, when "the discerning intellect of Man" will be "wedded to this goodly universe / In love and holy passion" (ll. 53-54). The fact that he regards such a dialogic relationship as identical with the reinstatement of a state of grace is evident in the language he uses to describe this relationship: it is a wedding in "love and holy passion" and a "great consummation." His epic, he says, is "the spousal verse" of this wedding. The sacredness of the act of writing the tale of the tribe could hardly be more emphatically stated. Into this one image, then, of dialogue disappear the great abstractions, "Nature," "Man," and "Society." The struggle Wordsworth must have had to find one image, one notion, one symbol that would speak for and of the all is evident in the opening verse paragraph of the Prospectus. Outlining the vast concerns of his poem, he writes:

> Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
> And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;
> Of blessed consolations in distress;
> Of moral strength, and intellectual Power;
> Of joy in widest commonalty spread;
> Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
> Inviolate retirement, subject there
> To conscience only, and the law supreme
> Of that Intelligence which governs all--
> I sing:--'fit audience let me find though few!' (ll. 14-23)

Wordsworth's struggle to create a poem which unified these

concerns to reveal the human condition in a unified fashion did not end with the statement of purpose in The Prospectus. The Excursion, all that was composed of The Recluse apart from The Prelude and Home at Grasmere, is a series of narratives told by very distinct narrators--Wordsworth, once again, adopted different poetic voices as the unity he sought eluded him yet again.

In the Lyrical Ballads, on the other hand, the poet makes no claims of unity in the telling of what is, after all, a history of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, the dissipation of a central authorial voice is the most striking feature of this volume of poems by a poet so often accused of being the supreme egotist. Whereas the onus was on the poet in his official epic to create a coherent work that would locate and reveal the order in the universe not revealed to all, in the Lyrical Ballads the poet was under no such restriction. The result is a celebratory history of the nineteenth century written in a dialogic spirit. Contradiction, unreconcilable views, dis-unity (which is really another term for "dialogue") are celebrated in the disparate nature of the poems in the volume and in the absence of a common theme and structure. This revelling in the centrifugal forces is evident within each narrative too. All of Wordsworth's narrators, even those who do not overtly acknowledge their concern with their craft, indulge in linguistic and semantic revelling that can only be termed play: having set up the expectation of a tale of syntactic proportions, that is orderly

and linear, they provide a paratactic one--without logic or causal connection. "The Thorn" best illustrates this method. The narrator teases his audience by juxtaposing the same images at different points in his narrative and by hinting that there is a logical connection between them and the woman, only to leave it on the margin between parataxis and syntagma. What makes this form of "play" so intriguing is that it is the result of "play" within the narrative itself--if dialogue can be defined as play.

The notion that the Lyrical Ballads narratives revel in the forces of disunity and are hence playful is not a new one. In "Dionysus in Lyrical Ballads" (1969), Donald Davie writes that these poems are "experiments in expressing glee and / or investigations of that state."[20] But whereas he sees 'play' as the unifying theme of the Lyrical Ballads, I see it as a formal and thematic device often used by the poet and individual narrators to assert the dialogic principle in relating the tale of the tribe. Even in a poem like "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree," where the issue is, as Jared Curtis' article suggests, an abstract one--the class of idlers--the discussion of the subject is dialogic. In this article Curtis argues that crucial to the poem's meaning is a tension generated by the presence, in the poem, of opposing attitudes towards the class of idlers. Discussing the middle verse paragraph in the poem, he writes:

> ... the portrait that emerges from these lines and in general from the entire middle verse paragraph is a sympathetic one of a man of talent and deep feeling rejected by an uncaring society. It is drawn from the

> point of view of the outsider, from his seat in the Yew-tree. The effect of this portion of the poem is to stand the convention on its head: far from correcting the "idler" for his moral and social unseasonableness Wordsworth's inscription praises his intellect, his promise and strength of feeling.[21]

The concluding verse paragraph, and the initial one, according to him, present a Stobaeian perspective. Thus he writes: "the concluding verse paragraph ... returns to the normative world of Stobaeus and his judgement against the man of talent for lapsing from decorum."[22] The poem, then, is dialogic--it presents opposing points of view. In this instance, while there is closure (the poem ends with an affirmation of the Stobaeian view), the spirit remains dialogic, for, the closure is as forced as is the closure in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."[23]

The celebration of the centrifugal forces so evident in the Lyrical Ballads does not, however, mean the history being related is an inconsequential one. Many of the narrators (for example, those in "Simon Lee" and "The Idiot Boy") in fact point out the seriousness of their challenge to the forces of unification, be they established forms of story-telling or social interaction. The subject of "Simon Lee," for instance, is, at its most reductive level, the stripping away of the last vestiges of the dignity of one person by another. The history of the movement of English society, and of society in general, from a feudal to a capitalist mode informs this single instance that is the history of Simon Lee. Knowledge of the casualties of the large, impersonal social movements, of which historians write,

could have hardly been more effectively transmitted from poet to audience. Similarly, the Matthew poems, where play is the given in the poem (they are dialogic in form as well as content), are concerned with the issue of the consonance, or lack thereof, of the human world with the rest of the universe. The attempt to discover a common vocabulary between the human and non-human worlds by the narrator in "The Fountain: A Conversation" suggests the seriousness of the issue at hand in these poems.

The history these poems collectively relate is of a fractured society. The difficulty of creating a story, teleologically organized and syntactically arranged, that could serve as the tale of the tribe is attested to by the selection. In fact, it would not be incorrect to talk of parataxis, not syntagma, as the structural technique most representative of the Lyrical Ballads. Just as the narratives, formally, are so disparate that the only thing holding them together is the physical confinement of the poems in a volume and an all-encompassing title, so the concerns they express on the nineteenth century reveal the lack of a logic, semantic or otherwise, in the material with which they deal.[24] The tale of the tribe, as told by the poets, ranges from this point on in time from being about politically significant actions (in Lyrical Ballads war, poor-law bills) to being about insignificant ones (in Lyrical Ballads the loss of a person's livelihood, inability of a person to cut down a tree); from relating socially vast concerns such as the movement from feudal

to capitalism to relating insignificant ones such as the enforced vagrancy of an unwed mother. The lack of a comprehensive moral, political, social and economic agenda is perfectly symbolized in vagrancy, and vagrancy is the most common condition of the characters in the Lyrical Ballads. To mention only a few--the female vagrant, the mad mother, the old Cumberland beggar and Martha Ray. There are also several narrators who make a point of informing us that they are on the road, in particular, the narrators in "The Last of the Flock," "We Are Seven" and "Michael."

Whether Wordsworth was celebrating the break-up of an established mode of existence or lamenting the fracturing of society by the forces of industrialism, and the concomitant fracturing of consciousness, is for the individual reader to decide. Whereas an argument like Jonathan Wordsworth's in William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision (1982) that the poems are about borderers--social and biological--lends itself to the conclusion that the Lyrical Ballads is a celebration as well as a documentation of pain.[25] Donald Davie's argument links the painful subject of many of the poems with the notion of 'glee' more explicitly. Thus he writes of "Wordsworth's emphasis on the poet's pleasure in perception as the central and distinguishing feature of poetry--a pleasure even in perception of what is painful, indeed especially in such perceptions."[26] John Turner, in Wordsworth: Play and Politics, finds the Lyrical Ballads celebratory too. He, however, disagrees with Davie about the

nature of the glee expressed and finds the joy "is compassionate and tender, in the spirit of a Herbert and Matilda rather than a Rivers."[27] Critics such as James Averill, on the other hand, consider the volume an expression of "the imaginative use of pathetic narrative."[28] In fact, Averill refers to the spring of 1798 as a period in Wordsworth's life which "saw the '*poesie l'armoiante*' of *Lyrical Ballads*, featuring Goody Blake, the forsaken Indian woman, Martha Ray, Simon Lee, and the drowned man of *Peter Bell*."[29]

Wordsworth wrote many more narratives after the Lyrical Ballads. Of his later works, The White Doe of Rylstone is of interest since it is an expression of faith in the principle of dialogue. It is, as Christine Dugas writes in her introduction to the Cornell edition of the poem, the last lyrical ballad.[30] Published in 1815, the poem was eight years in the making. A history of the Nortons, the poem is in itself the poet's dialogue with the writers of the ballad and histories in which he read the various stories of the family.[31] It differs significantly from the factual records, as Sir Walter Scott was quick to point out,[32] and from "The Rising of the North" as well--the image of the doe is not present in the ballad. Thus Wordsworth chose from both poetic and factual (scientific) sources, a fact that indicates the dialectical nature of the conception of the poem. In the published note on the poem Wordsworth referred to both types of sources:

> The Poem of the White Doe of Rylstone is founded on a local tradition, and on the Ballad in Percy's

> Collection, entitled "The Rising of the North." The tradition is as follows: "About this time," not long after the Dissolution," a white Doe, say the aged people of the neighbourhood, long continued to make a weekly pilgrimage from Rylstone over the fells of Bolton, and was constantly found in the Abbey Church-yard during divine service, after the close of which she returned home as regularly as the rest of the congregation."--DR. WHITAKER'S *History of the Deanery of Craven*.--Rylstone was the property and residence of the Nortons, distinguished in that ill-advised and unfortunate Insurrection, which led me to connect with this tradition the principal circumstances of their fate, as recorded in the Ballad.[33]

The poem was the subject of controversy between 1808 and 1815, that is, between its being written and its publication. The 1808 version, in fact, was the subject of much correspondence between Coleridge and Wordsworth during this period. Lack of unity was its main fault according to Coleridge. In a lengthy letter to Wordsworth, May 8, 1808, Coleridge voiced his many objections to the poem, chief among which was the fact that there was "a disproportion of the Accidents to the Spiritual Incidents."[34] Other objections of interest here were that Emily--the heroine of the poem--did not act or speak. Thus Coleridge wrote: "Emily is indeed talked of, and once appears; but neither speaks nor acts in all the first 3 fourths of the poem."[35] Wordsworth had heard the very same objections made by Lamb, whose response to the poem and his own defense Wordsworth spelled out in his letter to Coleridge dated April 19, 1808.[36] In this letter Wordsworth wrote:

> Let Lamb learn to be ashamed of himself in not taking some pleasure in the contemplation of this picture, which supposing it to be even but a sketch, is yet sufficiently made out for any man of true power to finish it for himself--As to the principal characters

> doing nothing it is false and too ridiculous to be dwelt on for a moment. When it is considered what has already been executed in Poetry, strange that a man cannot perceive, particularly when the present tendencies of society, good and bad, are observed, that this is the time when a man of genius may honourably take a station upon different ground. If he is to be a Dramatist, let him crowd his scene with gross and visible action; but if a narrative Poet, if the poet is to be predominant over the Dramatist,--then let him see if there are no victories in the world of spirit, no changes, no commotions, no revolutions there, no fluxes and refluxes of the thoughts which may be made interesting by modest combination with the stiller actions of the bodily frame, or with the gentler movements and milder appearances of society and social intercourse, or the still more mild and gentle solicitations of irrational and inanimate nature. But too much of this--of one thing be assured, that Lamb has not a reasoning mind, therefore cannot have a comprehensive mind, and, least of all, has he an imaginative one.[37]

Other than the observation Wordsworth makes on the inferiority of a poem that uses incident as its unit, his remarks on his poetic method are of significance. He insists that his poem, even if it were no more than a sketch, could be finished by an intelligent reader. Wordsworth's refusal to organize his narrative using the logic of causal relations between events makes the active participation of the reader a necessity if meaning is to be made.[38] The dialogic principle is therefore asserted even on the level of the poem as a literary object. A few years after the letter to Coleridge, in a letter to Francis Wrangham (January 1816) Wordsworth spelled out the dialogic nature of poetry, insisting that meaning lies somewhere between the reader and the poem. The subject is <u>The White Doe of Rylstone</u>:

> Throughout, objects (the Banner, for instance) derive their influence not from properties inherent in them, not from what they are actually in themselves, but from

> such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects. Thus the Poetry, if there be any in the work, proceeds whence it ought to do from the soul of Man, communicating its creative energies to the images of the external world.[39]

Many contemporary readers obviously did not engage in the dialogue in a manner which Wordsworth would have liked. Reviews that echoed Coleridge's objections of 1808 seem to have been common. The reviewer in The Eclectic, for instance, writing in January 1816, suggests that the poet sets the reader up for an adventure and then disappoints the expectation: by "some busy narrative of lofty adventure, such as Sir Walter Scott's Tales led us to associate with the metre," the reader is "forced to stand in Rylstone Churchyard and look all the while at a White Doe, and listen all the while to a rhapsody, the import of which he is not led to perceive, upon its whiteness, and brightness, and famousness, and holiness." Instead of "the mysterious interest which the mute heroine might have been made to awaken we follow her without curiosity, and resent her after-intrusion, as that of an impertinent spectre."[40] One remembers the words of an earlier Wordsworthian narrator who said: "It is no tale; but should you think, / Perhaps a tale you'll make it" ("Simon Lee," ll. 79-80). The poem, then, in 1815 continued to express a lack of unity that made its meaning inaccessible to many. Wordsworth was not being stubborn and proud in refusing to alter his poem towards a more dramatic telling. For, the point he was making about history, about relating the tale of the tribe, lies precisely in the dis-unity, the disequilibrium between the action-based history of the Nortons and image-based story of the

doe.

The White Doe of Rylstone

The seriousness of the project in The White Doe of Rylstone is evident in the modified epic devices present in the opening canto. For instance, the narrator invokes the aid of the sacred in singing his song at the end of Canto I: the narrator's song, the "harp," is stirred into music by the action of a visiting wind:

> But, harp! thy murmurs may not cease,-
> Thou hast breeze-like visitings;
> For a Spirit with angel wings
> Hath touched thee, and a Spirit's hand:
> A voice is with us--a command
> To chaunt, in strains of heavenly glory,
> A tale of tears, a mortal story![41]

The first canto itself is a variation on the device of beginning *in medias res* typical of the Homeric and Miltonic epics. The poem begins with the doe and not the events concerning the Norton family (which start in Canto II). Most significantly, the vastness of the Miltonic and Homeric epics on historical and geographical scales, the juxtaposition of mortal and immortal worlds with their attendant concepts of space and time, is present in The White Doe of Rylstone in the dialogue between the sections on the doe and those on the Norton family history, the separation between which bothered Coleridge so very much. The statement of purpose is, in The White Doe of Rylstone, somewhat modified too. It is indicated more through the narratorial method than it is stated outright. The first canto does end with a narratorial statement that indicates the purpose of his

utterance is to chant "a tale of tears, a mortal story." The fact that this statement appears only at the very end of Canto I raises the question: what purpose does the rest of the Canto serve? Considering the fact that the narrative of the history of the Nortons is interrupted, at the very beginning, by a long narratorial address to the reader, it is not presumptuous to conclude that the narrator's preoccupation lies elsewhere than in the history of the Nortons. The canto is in fact built on an image--that of a doe. She is described, as are her actions in terms that suggest a mysterious participation in the sacred. The doe--image and action--are described, that is, as representative of an eternal being and activity. In the middle of relating the ritualistic activity of church goers in a rural community on a Sunday, the narrator stops short with:

> --When soft!--the dusky trees between,
> And down the path through the open green,
> Where is no living thing to be seen;
> And through yon gateway, where is found,
> Beneath the arch with ivy bound,
> Free entrance to the church-yard ground;
> And right across the verdant sod
> Towards the very house of God;
> --Comes gliding in with lovely gleam,
> Comes gliding in serene and slow,
> Soft and silent as a dream,
> A solitary Doe!
> White she is as lily of June,
> And beauteous as the silver moon
> When out of sight the clouds are driven,
> And she is left alone in heaven;
> Or like a ship from some gentle day
> In sunshine sailing far away,
> A glittering ship, that hath the plain
> Of ocean for her own domain (ll. 49-68).

But the canto is concerned not merely with suggesting the symbolic dimension of the doe through description. It is, in

fact, in the main a series of stories about the doe which the narrator relates in the voices of characters as far apart as a scholar from Oxford and a garrulous old man. The stories are as varied as are the voices themselves.

The series begins with the reaction of a child who, interestingly enough, is made to wonder without attempting to explain the inexplicable by spinning a tale. "The Boy had seen her," the narrator says,

> ... yea more bright-
> But is she truly what she seems?-
> He asks with insecure delight.
> Asks of himself--and doubts--and still
> The doubt returns against his will: (ll. 196-200)

The next character whose voice the narrator adopts is a "bearded, staff-supported Sire" (l. 220). His attempt, as the narrator puts it, to "expound / The spectacle" results in a fanciful tale of the "days of dim antiquity,"

> When Lady Aaliza mourned
> Her Son, and felt in her despair,
> The pang of unavailing prayer;
> Her Son in Wharf's abysses drowned,
> The noble boy of Egremound.
> From which affliction, when God's grace
> At length had in her heart found place,
> A pious structure, fair to see,
> Rose up--this stately Priory!
> The Lady's work,--but now laid low;
> To the grief of her soul that doth come and go,
> In the beautiful form of this innocent Doe;
> Which, though seemingly doomed in its breast to sustain
> A softened remembrance of sorrow and pain,
> Is spotless, and holy, and gentle, and bright,-
> And glides o'er the earth like an angel of light (ll. 226-244).

The next story, meant as an explanation of the doe's presence, by a "dame of haughty air," is openly fanciful--it does not at

first attempt to locate a connection between the events of the story and the doe other than the fact that the doe frequents the scene where the events of her story occurred. Adopting the voice of the dame, the narrator relates a tale of war, and death resulting from such a war. The story identifies the church-yard as the spot where violence was perpetrated, where, in the narrator's words, "John de Clapham" "dragged Earl Pembroke from Banbury church / And smote off his head on the stones of the porch!" (ll. 255-256) Since the doe "loiter[s] there," it cannot, according to the lady, be anything but an image of evil.[42] The gratuitous nature of the connection between the doe and the dame's ascription of the doe's intent is pointed out by the narrator.[43] Finally, the narrator relates a tale that might be told by a pedantic scholar, "that slender Youth, a scholar pale, / From Oxford" (ll. 267-268). This tale is the most allegorical of the lot. He believes the doe to be

> ... the gracious Fairy,
> Who loved the Shepherd Lord to meet
> In his wanderings solitary (ll. 270-272).

The story is of a time, now unavailable, in which the inexplicable and the human conduct a dialogue. The doe / fairy confers the gift of vision on the "shepherd Lord"; in the scholar's words, she "taught him signs, and shewed him sights" (l. 281). Bolton Priory is the site where Clifford (presumably the "shepherd Lord") conducts a life-long dialogue with the mysterious, first revealed to him by the fairy: it is where he "did pry / For other lore" (ll. 303-304). The scholar's story ends with the observation that such harmony is of the past and

now "all is ... disquieted-- / And peace is none, for living or dead!" (ll. 307-308)

This first canto, then, opening as it does with a series of quite extraordinarily unrelated tales about the same image--the doe--demonstrates the narrator's fascination with tale-tellers and tale-telling. Equally clear is the fact that tale-telling is being presented as the most basic form of meaning-making. Confronted with the illogical, the human mind--and the narrator provides examples of very different ones--records the unknown and incomprehensible in order to make it known and comprehensible. The factor common to the various stories is the manner in which the tellers attempt to make the mysterious doe a meaningful entity. The old man identifies the doe with the lady of his story, the haughty dame identifies her with a spot and the scholar with the supernatural. This allegorical bent serves the purpose of investing the image of the doe with a morality extraneous to it. The old man and scholar's stories make the doe a symbol of goodness and purity whereas the dame's makes her a symbol of evil. At the end of the canto, the narrator admits his purpose is no different from that of these other hypothetical tale-tellers. Thus he says, "nor to the Child's enquiring mind / Is such perplexity confined" (ll. 209-210), suggesting he too would like to fathom the mystery. On the other hand, he differentiates between himself and these others. Of the tales told by the others, he says:

> For, 'spite of sober truth, that sees
> A world of fixed remembrances

Which to this mystery belong,
If, undeceived, my skill can trace
The characters of every face,
There lack not strange delusion here,
Conjecture vague, and idle fear,
And superstitious fancies strong,
Which do the gentle Creature wrong (ll. 211-219).

The narrator's remark suggests the stories told by these others are not only false, but dangerously so; theirs, he says, reduce the image of the doe to "strange delusion," and express "idle fear" and "superstitious fancies strong" that "do the gentle Creature wrong."

Meaning-making thus appears inevitably to involve the creation of a causal relationship between the doe and the world of human event, even if it is as forced as metamorphosis (as in the old man's and scholar's stories) or moral osmosis (as in the dame's story). All three stories, then, make the inexplicable meaningful by making it a mere projection of human morality. In the light of these tales, the narrator's refusal to start his utterance with the history of the Nortons seems less inexplicable. His utterance, beginning as it does with the doe, is a demonstration of his refusal to make the mysterious meaningful by linking it causally with the world of human event--hence an entire canto that is devoted to this 'other' without the explanation that would make it meaningful.

In structural terms, then, the first canto sets the reader up for a dialogue--that between the narrator and these other tale-tellers. Their allegorical stories explaining the doe's presence are dismissed by him, so presumably his version will

follow and contain in itself the reasons for such a dismissal. The subtly expressed but dramatic set-up between the narrator and these other tellers mirrors in microcosm the dialogue between Wordsworth and Coleridge on the poem, at least if Dugas' reconstruction of the events leading to the publication of the poem is to be believed. These other tellers' primary method of making meaning is to link the image of the doe firmly with incident. Coleridge, and Lamb's, main objection was that the images of Emily and the doe were not linked clearly enough with the incidents in the poem (the insurrection). But it is in this disporportion that the point of the poem lies. Refusing to make the incomprehensible comprehensible by allegorically connecting it with the human world of event (as even Whitaker does in the paragraph quoted above), refusing, that is, to make the natural world an abstraction by presenting it as a representation (projection) of the human, is the poem's purpose.[44]

The narrator's tale accounting for the presence of the doe is the history of the Nortons, which he relates in the ensuing cantos. The first time the doe is mentioned is in Francis' parting speech to Emily. Observing the doe near them, he says, "'And even this creature'" (l. 560),

> "Even she will to her peaceful woods
> Return, and to her murmuring floods,
> And be in heart and soul the same
> She was before she hither came,-
> Ere she had learned to love us all,
> Herself beloved in Rylstone Hall" (ll. 564-569).

Francis uses the doe to contrast the condition of nature with humanity (in this instance, his sister). It is here, then, that

the connection between the doe and Emily is established. After this mention, the doe disappears from the narrative to return only in Canto 7, after the action of the story is complete. The doe, then, is not connected with the world of event but with Emily. Thus her significance in the narrative does not rise from a direct association with the world of human event.

The doe's association with Emily, however, is established in no uncertain terms by the narrator. The doe takes on human characteristics in the poem and Emily those of the natural world, each without giving up her own characteristics.[45] The doe is spoken of in terms of an intelligence and sensitivity normally considered human. In Canto 7 we are told that she:

> ... with a power like human Reason
> Discerns the favourable season,
> Skilled to approach or to retire,-
> From looks conceiving her desire,
> From look, deportment, voice or mien,
> That vary to the heart within.
> If she too passionately writhed
> Her arms, or over-deeply breathed,
> Walked quick or slowly, every mood
> In its degree was understood (ll. 1737-1746).

Emily, on the other hand, is described in terms of dumb passivity and a serenity that seems more a part of the natural than the human world (which is, in this poem, a severely aggressive one). For instance, she is, by being juxtaposed with the image of a blighted oak, deliberately set up as possessing an attitude expressed by the oak's tenacity:

> And so--beneath a mouldered tree,
> A self-surviving leafless Oak,
> By unregarded age from stroke
> Of ravage saved--sate Emily.
> There did she rest, with head reclined,

Herself most like a stately Flower,
(Such have I seen) whom chance of birth
Hath separated from its kind,
To live and die in a shady bower,
Single on the gladsome earth (ll. 1648-1657).[46]

While the similarity between the two is thus established by the text, the human nature of Emily and animal nature of the doe are insistently maintained by the narrative. For instance, the physical separation between the two--caused by Emily's death--is pointed out as is the mortality of the one and immortality of the other (in the sense that the doe belongs to an unreasoning nature). The lack of connection between the doe and the world of event and the connectedness between Emily and this world also underline the difference between them. Emily's alienation from society and her vagrancy are a direct result of the events in her past.

The doe is not significant, then, because it is a manifestation of Emily. The difference between the two is far too insistently maintained, structurally speaking, to allow for such an identification. How then is the doe significant to the narrator's tale of the Nortons? Perhaps the emphasis should be reversed--after all the narrator's tale is supposed to explain the presence of the doe and not vice versa. The answer lies in the relationship between the doe and Emily, as described by the narrator.

The action with which the poem opens speaks eloquently of the nature of the connection between Emily and the doe. The latter, says the narrator, passes by the church

... till at last
Beside the ridge of a grassy grave
In quietness she lays her down;
Gently as a weary wave
Sinks, when the summer breeze hath died,
Against an anchored vessel's side;
Even so, without distress, doth she
Lie down in peace, and lovingly (ll. 141-148).

The grave she is described as visiting is Francis', not Emily's. The fact that the doe visits Francis' grave and not Emily's is an interesting comment on the nature of her relationship with Emily. The narrator emphasizes this fact, as for instance in the following lines:

But chiefly by that single grave,
That one sequestered hillock green,
The pensive Visitant is seen.
There doth the gentle Creature lie (ll. 1917-1920).

The reason, he suggests, is that the spot, and the church-yard, were those "which her dear Mistress once held dear" (l. 1899). It is as though the doe performs the ritual Emily, now dead, can no longer perform. By loving "most what Emily loved most" the doe continues the dialogue the two shared when Emily was alive. She, the doe, in fact keeps the Norton history alive by this action of hers--after all, the history of the Nortons is related to explain the doe's presence by Francis' grave. The dialogic nature of their relationship is established beyond doubt in the description the narrator provides of the re-union of the doe and Emily in Canto 7. Emily, we are told,

... hath ventured now to read
Of time, and place, and thought, and deed,
Endless history that lies
In her silent Follower's eyes! (ll. 1733-1736)

The doe, on the other hand, has a perfect understanding of

Emily's mental anguish, or so the narrator suggests(ll. 1737-1746 quoted above). The result of such an intercourse, the narrator states, is the defeat of Francis' prophecy of Emily's alienation and misery. "Here hath," says the narrator, referring to Emily,

> ... a milder doom prevailed;
> That she, of him and all bereft,
> Hath yet a faithful Partner left,-
> This single Creature that disproves
> His words, remains for her, and loves.
> If tears are shed, they do not fall
> For loss of him, for one or all;
> Yet, sometimes, sometimes doth she weep
> Moved gently in her soul's soft sleep;
> A few tears down her cheek descend
> For this her last and living Friend (ll. 1805-1815).

The story of the Nortons, then, has explained the presence of the doe in a manner different from that of the other tellers of Canto 1. The doe is allowed autonomy of the world of event and that of human beings--she is not reduced to the level of abstraction (by being made a projection of a human being, a state, or emotion). Her significance arises solely from her dialogic relationship with Emily.

The narrator's intention within the poem in relating the history of the Nortons is far easier to fathom than is Wordsworth's, the author standing outside the poem. How is the history of the Nortons simultaneously that of the doe, as the title of the poem suggests it is? The introduction of the doe into a narrative of the history of the Nortons is not as perplexing as it appears to be. Dugas' discussion of Wordsworth's sources suggests he read of the doe and its

possible connection with the Nortons in Whitaker. She reproduces a paragraph from The History of the Deanery of Craven in the introduction to her edition of The White Doe of Rylstone where Whitaker mentions the doe and links it with the history of the Nortons. The tradition of this doe's journey, he writes:

> ... awakens the fancy. Shall we say that the soul of one of the Nortons had taken up its abode in that animal, and was condemned to do penance, for his transgressions against "the lords' deere" among their ashes? But for such a spirit the Wild Stag would have been a fitter vehicle. Was it not then some beautiful and injured female, whose name and history are forgotten?[47]

He also indicates that this mystery is fit subject for poetry. Referring to Sir Walter Scott, he concludes his conjectures with:

> Had the milk-white doe performed her mysterious pilgrimage from Ettrick Forest to the precincts of Dryburgh or Melrose, the elegant and ingenious editor of the Border Minstrelsy would have wrought it into a beautiful story.[48]

There is, then, a precedent for Wordsworth's linking of the image of the doe and the history of the Nortons. The doe, in Wordsworth's version of the history of the Nortons, differs in that it is not allegorical--as it is in Whitaker's. That is, it is not identified as a transfigured human being. What exactly the doe is in the scheme of his poem, Wordsworth identifies by way of a comment he makes in the Fenwick note about his intentions in writing the poem. "The anticipated beatification ... of her mind," he writes, referring to Emily, "and the apotheosis of the companion of her solitude, are the points at which the Poem aims."[49] The remark suggests the figure of the doe, and that of Emily, in Wordsworth's version of the history

of the Nortons, are instances of a paradigm as well as characters in a history. The doe is an instance of the natural world taking on the aspects of the sacred--hence the awe with which she and her regular appearance in the human world are regarded. At the same time, her connection with the world of human event--through her connection with Emily--is what makes her return to the graves of Emily and Francis. Thus she is an actor in an individual history in this poem at the same time as she is a deified figure.

Emily, similarly, is an instance of what is essentially the same paradigm: hers is a "beatification" and the doe's an "apotheosis," according to Wordsworth's statement. This essential identity of both as instances of the same paradigm makes Wordsworth's insistent separation of the two an intriguing feature of the poem. While Emily is an instance of the human turned sacred, she is, like the doe, also an actor in an individual history. Her connection with the world of human event is more forcibly maintained in the narrative than is the doe's.

In Wordsworth's version, then, the paradigmatic aspect of the history of the Nortons is central, unlike Whitaker's version, where the observation on the possible presence of the allegorical in the history seems to be more an incidental than a central statement. Because of the centrality of the paradigmatic in <u>The White Doe of Rylstone</u>, the narrative of the fall of the Nortons is a story of a unique and individual set of events and characters as well as an instance of a paradigm. Such an

interpretation makes Wordsworth's dedicatory poem less cryptic. This poem, an address by Wordsworth to his wife, Mary, locates other instances of the paradigm demonstrated by the history of the Nortons (Wordsworth's version). The subject of the address is Book I of Spenser's Faerie Queene, the story of which Wordsworth suggests is:

> How Una, sad of soul--in sad attire,
> The gentle Una, born of heavenly birth,
> To seek her Knight went wandering o'er the earth (ll. 6-8).

Una, in Wordsworth's terms, is an instance of the deification of which Emily is an instance in his version of the history of the Nortons. She is, according to him, a figure "who, pierced by sorrow's thrilling dart, / Did meekly bear the pang unmerited" (ll. 11-12). The prototypical instance of such active passivity, brought in by Wordsworth through his reference to Una's emblem ("the milk-white Lamb"), is Christ. Thus while the story of Una and the Red Cross Knight in the Faerie Queene is a unique story, it is also an expression of a paradigm--of the secular and human world (the Red Cross Knight) taking on the sacred.[50] The purely secular world of Wordsworth and his wife and the domesticity of the nineteenth century family unit which he invokes in the opening lines of the dedicatory poem ["In trellis'd shed with clustering roses gay, / And, MARY! oft beside our blazing fire, / When years of wedded life were as a day / Whose current answers to the heart's desire" (ll. 1-4)] is too an instance of this paradigm. Wordsworth speaks in this poem of a time past when "lamentable change ... taught / That 'bliss with mortal Man may not abide:'--" (ll. 22-23). The attitude he believes he and

Mary have in the present of the poem is an expression, in abstract terms, of the principle of which Una, Emily and the doe are imagistic instances. This paradigm is expressed in the dedicatory poem in terms of its expression in the history of the Nortons:

> ...; for it [the story] speaks
> Of female patience winning firm repose;
> And of the recompense which conscience seeks
> A bright, encouraging example shows;
> Needful when o'er wide realms the tempest breaks,
> Needful amid life's ordinary woes;--(ll. 49-54).

As these lines indicate, the imagistic instances express the paradigm better than does this abstract statement. Thus while Wordsworth's own history, in particular his loss (of his children) is a unique one, he himself suggests that it shares features with others. Similarly, he and Mary are instances of the paradigm of which the doe and Emily in the history of the Nortons, Una in the Faerie Queene and Christ in the Bible are also examples. The dedicatory poem, therefore, serves the purpose of creating links across space and time between histories of the fictional and non-fictional varieties. Interestingly enough, both fictional and non-fictional share, in Wordsworth's vision, the same paradigm.

History, then, as Wordsworth has related it--his own and that of the Nortons--is a dialogue between the past as a sequence of events, individual and unique, and the past as an imagistic variation of a pattern. These events, and their record in poetry, are therefore at once temporal, linear and teleological as well as atemporal, imagistic and simultaneous.

Thus although The White Doe of Rylstone, the last lyrical ballad, concludes on the one level--the Norton family's disintegration is complete with Emily's death as is their history--it does not on the other. And indeed it cannot, for it is, on this level, an atemporal instance of a paradigm.[51]

Postscript

Michael Bernstein in The Tale of the Tribe (1980) quotes a line from Pound's Cantos to prove Pound's vision of the re-unification of myth and history at some future time. He writes: "Myth and history could have been joined only in a socially just commonwealth whose 'temple is holy because it is not for sale' (XCVII), a new *polis* that incarnates an ideal order and yet remains a concrete, temporal creation."[52] He adds, "it was to this goal that *The Cantos* were dedicated for numerous years."[53] It seems to me that Wordsworth, in a nineteenth century poetic mode, accomplishes this very integral re-integration in The White Doe of Rylstone. History is re-invested with myth, and Wordsworth's reply to the nineteenth-century historian's pre-occupation with "fact" is complete.

NOTES

1. In the 1805 version of the Prelude, the dream is not the poet's but that of "a friend" (Bk. V, l. 50). In the 1850 version the dream is the poet's.

2. The reference is to the 1850 version, l. 80. All other references, unless otherwise noted, are to the 1850 version.

3. The irony of course is that utterance, which is the defining characteristic of the poetic ("voices more than all the winds"), can only be preserved in the manner appropriate to its "other"--in the written word.

4. See in particular Chapter One ("Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel and Its Treatment in Critical Literature"), in Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. & trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 18.

5. Katerina Clark & Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 9.

6. John Turner, Wordsworth: Play and Politics (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1986), p. 13.

7. E.P. Thompson, "Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon," in Power and Consciousness, ed. C.C. O'Brien & W.D. Vanech (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 152. Turner's reference to Thompson is on p. 13 of Wordsworth: Play and

Politics.

8. Vision and Disenchantment, p. 37.

9. Heather Glen writes, as I have quoted elsewhere,

> In a deliberately literal-minded way, Wordsworth records only what could actually be seen from a single, limited point of view, and refuses (in what amounts to a parody of the reader's expectations) to speculate beyond it. Dramatically, he points toward the stubborn actuality of other, and quite unassimilable, points of view. In their disconcerting absence of mediating interpretation, these poems suggest the disquiteting nature of a reality which is not filtered through familiar schemata but which is momentarily confronted as quite unfathomable (Vision and Disenchantment, p. 76).

10. That is, he espouses, at least in the Lyrical Ballads, the forces of disequilibrium, of which the centrifuge is an apt image.

11. Albert Lord, The Singer of Tales (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 151-152.

12. In the Lyrical Ballads there are a few exceptions, for instance, "Tintern Abbey," and "Lines Written at a small distance from my house." Extended narratives Wordsworth wrote in this decade are the 1793 and 1795 versions of the Salisbury Plain poem and The Ruined Cottage and the 1799 version of the Prelude.

13. The invocation with which the Homeric epics start is also testimony to the ritualistic nature of the undertaking.

14. In an address to the Royal Academy in May 1906 Kipling spoke

on literature. It is here that he used the phrase "the tale of the Tribe." The "record of the Tribe," he says, is "its enduring literature" [Rudyard Kipling, "Literature" in A Book of Words (London: Macmillan, 1928), p. 5.]

15. Austin, Archery at the Dark of the Moon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 273, note 1.

16. Austin, Archery at the Dark of the Moon, p. 273, note 1.

17. Austin discusses the link between folk-tale and the Odyssey in Chapter III ("Intimations of Order"). See, in particular, pp. 132, 147 and 148.

18. The tale of the tribe, as it is told in the Greek epics, is reduced by Austin to an abstract formula. He writes:

> ... order is of ubiquitous concern in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* certainly has much to say on the effects of disruption of social and cosmic order. But order is singled out as the main burden of the *Odyssey*. Restoration of order in Ithaka is the subject of the poem (Austin, Archery at the Dark of the Moon, p. 131).

19. The preservation of the history of the tribe--its cultural, political, economic, religious orientation--in utterance makes the poet's role a central but dangerous one in society, for he is the master-utterer. Albert Lord concludes his book on oral poetry by describing the oral poet in the following terms:

> The traditional oral epic singer is not an artist; he is a seer. The patterns of thought that he has inherited came into being to serve not *art* but religion in its most basic sense. His balances, his

> antitheses, his similes and metaphors, his repetitions, and his sometimes seemingly willful playing with words, with morphology, and with phonology were not intended to be devices and conventions of Parnassus, but were techniques for emphasis of the potent symbol (The Singer of Tales, p. 220).

Norman Austin in Archery at the Dark of the Moon concludes his discussion of the philosophical message of the Odyssey suggesting that this epic, above all, asserts the primacy, almost sacredness, of the bard:

> The singer is like the gods in speech, and there is no purpose of greater grace than when banqueters sit to listen to their singer--so Odysseus says to the Phaiakian artists. Of the gifts the gods give, the greatest in the Odyssey is song (Austin, Archery at the Dark of the Moon, p. 253).

His words inevitably bring the concluding lines of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" to mind:

> ... Beware! Beware!
> His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
> Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise ["Kubla Khan," Perkins (ed), The English Romantic Poets, p. 431].

It is in this context that Wordsworth's protestations about the validity of poetic vision--in particular his own vision--and his own poetry should be understood.

20. Donald Davie, "Dionysus in Lyrical Ballads," in A.W. Thomson (ed) Wordsworth's Mind and Art (Oliver & Boyd, 1969), p. 120.

21. Jared Curtis, "Wordsworth, Coleridge and *Lines, Left Upon a Seat in a Yew-tree*, Bulletin of Research in the Humanities

(forthcoming).

22. Curtis, "Wordsworth, Coleridge and *Lines*," p. 6.

23. The issue at stake in the article is whether Coleridge contributed to the poem or not. Interestingly enough, Curtis identifies the traditional sections of the poem as the sections most likely to have been influenced by Coleridge. "And the effect of the help," he writes, referring to Coleridge, "if he gave it, may have been to direct Wordsworth to return at the close of the poem to a conventional moral framework, to express a judgement of character which Coleridge readily and repeatedly made of his own character." As reason, Curtis offers the fact that "the theme of talent balked, of intellectual and spiritual idleness, taking shape in *Lines*, had long been Coleridge's theme as well" (Curtis, "Wordsworth, Coleridge and *Lines*," p. 7). And although the poem does end on a morally resolute note, as Curtis' statement on the concluding verse paragraph underlines, the lines indicate how forced the resolution is. In fact, the last verse paragraph is more than superficially similar to the conclusion of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner":

> If thou be one whose heart the holy forms
> Of young imagination have kept pure,
> Stranger! henceforth be warned; and know, that pride,
> Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,
> Is littleness; that he, who feels contempt
> For any living thing, hath faculties
> Which he has never used; that thought with him
> Is in its infancy. The man, whose eye

> Is ever on himself, doth look on one,
> The least of nature's works, one who might move
> The wise man to that scorn which wisdom holds
> Unlawful, ever. O, be wiser thou!
> Instructed that true knowledge leads to love,
> True dignity abides with him alone
> Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
> Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
> In lowliness of heart (ll. 44-60).

24. It is not surprising that Wordsworth, in 1815, classified these poems under thematic headings, disbanding once and for all the Lyrical Ballads.

25. In chapter 3 of his book, Jonathan Wordsworth writes that "like so much else in Wordsworth's poetry, the child-borderers have their beginnings at Alfoxden" (p. 67), and he identifies the child in Wordsworth with hope in Wordsworth. What he means by the term 'border' is explained in an earlier chapter in a discussion of "Upon Westminster Bridge" and "To a Butterfly." Thus he writes:

> The butterfly makes it especially clear that these figures (London is human in Wordsworth's metaphor--wears clothes, and has a heart) are enviable not just for their peacefulness, but because in their extreme passivity they approach, or seem to approach, a boundary that is the entrance to another world (p. 4).

While claiming that the concept of "border" runs through Wordsworth's work as a whole, Jonathan Wordsworth suggests there is an exception to the rule. In his words, while "Wordsworth's borderers, border conditions, states of mind, implications, words, are so numerous and so ramified that they amount to a way of looking at his poetry" (p. 7), "the poetry of suffering stands a little to one side" (p. 7).

Such poetry he identifes as The Ruined Cottage, "Michael," and "The Brothers." In these poems, "the poet suffers with, and within, his characters" (p. 7). The presence of both types of poems in the Lyrical Ballads thus makes the selection, according to Jonathan Wordsworth, an expression of both Wordsworthian attitudes.

26. Davie, "Dionysus in Lyrical Ballads," p. 134.

27. John Turner, Wordsworth: Play and Politics, p.117.

28. James A. Averill, Wordsworth and the Poetry of Suffering (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 118.

29. Averill, Wordsworth and the Poetry of Suffering, pp. 118-119.

30. William Wordsworth, The White Doe of Rylstone; or the Fate of the Nortons (ed), Christine Dugas (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. ix.

31. Wordsworth read of the history of the Nortons in Thomas Denham Whitaker's History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven (1805), other historians and in an anonymous ballad, "The Rising of the North." Of his response to the work, Dorothy wrote in a letter to Jane Marshall (18 Oct 1807):

> I cannot express how much pleasure my Brother has already received from Dr. Whitaker's Books [*The History of the Original Parish of Whalley, and Honour of Clitheroe* (1801)], and *The History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven* (1805)], though they have been only two days in his possession--Almost the whole time he has been

> greedily devouring the History of Craven, and, (what is of more importance) he has found all the information which he wanted for the prosecution of his plan [Ernest de Selincourt (ed), The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years 1806-1811, rev. Mary Moorman & Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 167-168; quoted in Dugas (ed), The White Doe, p. 3. All references to letters by Wordsworth and others that appear in Middle Years are taken from Dugas' introduction to The White Doe. However, I shall provide the original references in the rest of this chapter].

The subject--the Northern Insurrection of 1569 against Elizabeth I--had already been made popular by the ballad, which was reproduced by Bishop Thomas Percy in Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. Wordsworth reproduced much of Thomas Percy's note to "The Rising of the North" as well as the ballad. (The note and ballad is reproduced by Dugas on pp. 150-156 of her edition of the poem).

The relationship between Wordsworth's poem and his sources is well-detailed by Dugas in her introduction to the poem. She writes the following of the major change between Wordsworth and his factual sources (Stowe, Speed, Camden, Rapin and Carte--all mentioned by Percy); to the others, she writes,

> Wordsworth adds William Guthrie (*A General History of England*). But it is only in a collective portrait that the ballad and the histories provide us of Norton's sons, Christopher, Francis, and William, that we find the mold of Wordsworth's Francis. In the histories, it is Norton's son William who repudiates the rebels and refuses their armor, accompanying the band only for his father's sake, while Francis is drawn into battle unwillingly, joining up in response to his father's anger. (William is later accused of collaborating with the rebels, but is eventually acquitted of wrongdoing). It is only in the ballad that Francis pledges to

> follow his family "naked and unarmed," a pledge Wordsworth incorporated into his poem [Dugas (ed), The White Doe, p. 6].

Thus, as she concludes, the concern central to the poem, Francis' "pessimism, pacifism, dream vision and fated conscious flight with the standard" (p. 6), are Wordsworth's own "conceivings." She also suggests the central relationship in the poem, between Emily and Francis, has its genesis in the ballad as does Wordsworth's account of the uprising itself. Dugas writes of "The Rising of the North":

> the long opening exchange in 'The Rising of the North' between the insurrectionist Earl of Percy and his 'fair leddie' focuses on their love rather than the coming war. The Countess Percy counsels her lord and pledges to ride with him to the court to be 'his faith borrowe.' Their intimacy seems to have been the inspiration for the closeness between Francis and Emily" (p. 6).

About Wordsworth's reliance on the popular rather than official record of events she writes: "As for the uprising itself, Wordsworth follows the common account. Clearly, the heart of Wordsworth's poem was its origin not in fact but in legend, in what people commonly believed" (p. 7).

32. In mid-1808 Scott pointed out to Wordsworth that the Nortons had not been executed (as was indicated by the ballad, "The Rising of the North"). Wordsworth's response to this piece of information was as follows:

> Thank you for the interesting particulars about the Nortons; I shall like very much to see them for their own sakes; but so far from being serviceable to my Poem they would stand in the way of it; as I have followed (as I was in duty bound to do) the traditionary and common historic records--. Therefore I shall say in this case, a plague upon

your industrious Antiquarianism that has put my fine story to confusion. [de Selincourt (ed), Middle Years, vol I, p. 237].

33. Dugas (ed), The White Doe, p. 150.

34. Coleridge's entire statement was: "In my re-perusals of the Poem it seemed always to strike on my feeling as well as judgement, that if there were any serious defect, it consisted in a disproportion of the Accidents to the spiritual Incidents" [E.L. Griggs, (ed) Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (6 vols; Oxford, 1956-1971), vol. 3 pp. 107-108; once again, the letters are quoted in Dugas' edition of The White Doe but I shall refer only to the original (as STLC, followed by the volume and page number).

35. STCL, vol. 3, pp. 107-108.

36. The poem Lamb heard Wordsworth recite late March 1808 and Coleridge responded to in the letter of 8 May 1808 was substantially different from the version published in 1815. The details of the differences can be read in Dugas, pp. 31-56. The letter Coleridge wrote in May 1808 was in response to Wordsworth's letter about his meeting with Lamb, when he read the earlier version of The White Doe of Rylstone.

37. de Selincourt (ed), Middle Years, vol. I, pp. 222-223.

38. Although Dugas does a remarkable job of commenting on the long drawn-out literary quarrel over the poem between

Coleridge and Wordsworth, I think her identification of the issue of action as the contentious issue leads her to ignore some of the other statements Wordsworth made in defense of his poem. Certainly, Wordsworth was concerned with the criticism that the poem lacked action, as his remarks to Lamb indicate. However, I think he believed the matter resolved, for in the same letter he writes: "It suffices that everything tends to account for the weekly pilgrimage of the Doe, which is made interesting by its connection with a human being, a Woman" [de Selincourt (ed), Middle Years, vol. I, p. 222]. The related issue he has a harder time dismissing is the attack on his belief in the fundamentally dialogic nature of poetry--in simpler terms, his view that the reader and the poem engage in a dialogue. A narrative whose *raison d'être* is to relate a series of incidents (as Lamb and Coleridge's remarks seemed to Wordsworth to require) does not allow for such an interchange--the reader is unnecessary to the process of meaning making.

39. de Selincourt (ed), Middle Years, vol II, p. 276.

40. Quoted in Dugas (ed), The White Doe, p. 61.

41. Dugas (ed), The White Doe, ll. 331-337. All further references to the poem are to this edition.

42. Thus the narrator, in the voice of the lady, says:

> Oft does the White Doe loiter there,
> Prying into the darkness rent;
> Nor can it be with good intent:--(ll. 258-260)

43. The narrator suggests there is a personal bias that finds expression in the dame's tale. "For she," he says, "numbers among her ancestry / Earl Pembroke, slain so impiously!" (ll. 265-266)

44. It is interesting that in his comments on his purpose in the poem Wordsworth consistently mentions the doe and Emily separately. For instance, in the Fenwick note he writes:

> The heroine of the Poem knows that her duty is not to interfere with the current of events, either to forward or delay them.... She achieves this not without aid from the communication with the inferior Creature, which often leads her thoughts to revolve upon the past with a tender and humanizing influence that exalts rather than depresses her. [Dugas (ed), The White Doe, pp. 62-63].

And in the 1808 letter. many years before, Wordsworth had written to Coleridge (as has been noted before):

> It suffices that everything tends to account for the weekly pilgrimage of the Doe, which is made interesting by its connection with a human being, a Woman [de Selincourt (ed), Middle Years, vol. I, p. 222].

Wordsworth maintains the separation between the two even when talking of his aim in the poem. In the Fenwick note he writes:

> The anticipated beatification ... of her mind, and the apotheosis of the companion of her solitude, are the points at which the Poem aims, and constitute its legitimate catastrophe. [Dugas (ed), The White Doe, p. 63].

45. It is interesting to note that Coleridge's objections in 1808 included the fact that Emily did not speak much in the poem--speech being that which separates human from

non-human. In the letter to Wordsworth dated 21 May 1808 Coleridge wrote (as has been noted before): "Emily is indeed talked of, and once appears; but neither speaks nor acts in all the first 3 fourths of the Poem" [Griggs (ed), STLC, vol. III, pp. 107-108]. The dialogue between the old man and Emily, which takes place in Canto IV (added to the poem after 1808) was probably added in response to this criticsm by Coleridge.

In connection with the reciprocal relationship between Emily and the doe, one remembers the remark Wordsworth made about "The Leech-Gatherer" in the Preface of 1815. He prefaces the discussion of the poem with the statement that he is moving from talking about "the Imagination acting upon an individual image to a consideration of the same faculty employed upon images in a conjunction by which they modify each other" ("Preface of 1815," in Owen (ed), Prose Works, vol. III, p. 33). Referring to the images of stone and sea-beast in "The Leech-Gatherer," Wordsworth writes: "Take these images separately, and how unaffecting the picture compared with that produced by their being thus connected with, and opposed to, each other"; and more specifically:

> The stone is endowed with something of the power of life to approximate it to the sea-beast; and the sea-beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone; which intermediate image is thus treated for the purpose of bringing the original image, that of the stone, to a nearer resemblance to the figure and condition of the aged Man; who is divested of so much of the indications of life and motion as to bring him to the point where the two objects unite and coalesce in just

comparison ("Preface of 1815," in Owen (ed), Prose Works, vol. III, p. 33).

46. Of the unspoken understanding between the two, the narrator says of Emily:

> For she hath ventured now to read
> Of time, and place, and thought, and deed,
> Endless history that lies
> In her silent Follower's eyes! (ll. 1733-1736)

47. Dugas (ed), The White Doe, p. 5.

48. Dugas (ed), The White Doe, p. 5. She adds, "it seems to have been Whitaker, then, not Wordsworth or the legend, who explicitly related the Nortons to the doe; who suggested its feminine character and its relation to a single injured female; who contrasted her character with that of a wild stag; and who brought in Walter Scott, the editor of the *Border Minstrelsy*, as a model author" (p. 5).

49. Dugas (ed), The White Doe, p. 63.

50. In fact, the sacred partakes of the festivity that surrounds the betrothal of Una to the Red Cross Knight. Stanza 39 of Canto XII reads:

> During the which there was an heauenly noise
> Heard sound through all the Pallace pleasantly,
> Like as it had bene many an Angels voice,
> Singing before th' eternall maiesty,
> In their trinall triplicities on hye;
> Yet wist no creature, whence that heauenly sweet
> Proceeded, yet each one felt secretly
> Himselfe thereby reft of his senses meet,
> And rauished with rare impression in his sprite
> [Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, in Spenser: Poetical Works, (ed), J.C. Smith & Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912)].

51. The eternality of the doe and its activity is suggested by its being the given in the poem; that is, she is spoken of in the present perfect tense.

52. Michael Bernstein, The Tale of the Tribe (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 114.

53. Bernstein, The Tale of the Tribe, p. 114.

APPENDIX

Wordsworth's use of the soliloquy to relate stories was deliberate. A look at his only drama, The Borderers (1797-99), reveals a more traditional use of the soliloquy. The characters reveal themselves, debate human nature and themselves as specimens of homo sapiens in the manner of much Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. The soliloquy is thus used by Wordsworth to make the audience distance itself from the world of the play, an action that is synonymous with exercising one's judgement. A single instance--a speech by Rivers--made just before Mortimer is finally persuaded to take action will suffice to demonstrate the conventionality of the soliloquies in The Borderers. In this speech Rivers both reveals his own character and ruminates on human nature, of which a part is reproduced below:

> Carry him to the camp! Yes, to the camp.
> O Wisdom! a most wise resolve--and then
> That half a word should blow it to the winds!
> This last device must end my work--methinks
> It were a pleasant pastime to construct
> A scale and table of belief--as thus-
> Two columns, one for passion, one for proof,
> Each rising as the other falls: and, first,
> Passion a unit, and against us.--Proof!
> Nay, we must travel in another path
> Or we're stuck fast for ever--passion, then,
> Shall be a unit for us--Proof, oh no,
> We'll not insult her majesty by time
> And place--the where, the when, the how, and all
> The dull particulars whose intrusion mars
> The dignity of demonstration. Well,
> 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 (III. ii. 1142-1162).[1]

The structural purpose of the soliloquy in drama appears to be that of providing space and time when character can be foregrounded and action backgrounded. While Wordsworth's soliloquies in The Borderers lack the psychological brilliance of Shakespeare's, they do succeed in investing the characters with a structural complexity they would otherwise lack. The fact that there is an "explanation" available for Rivers' behaviour, and one which is social, is the substance of Act IV, ii, of The Borderers. Rivers recounts his history and we learn that he was seduced into guilt and evil the way he seduces Mortimer into guilt and evil. As explanation of his obssession with seducing others to evil (and one remembers the only ease Milton's Satan finds is in seeing others suffer the way he does) he offers the following rationale:

> Is not shame, I said,
> A mean acknowledgement of a tribunal
> Blind in its essence, a most base surrender
> Of our own knowledge to the world's ignorance?
> I had been nourished by the sickly food
> Of popular applause. I was perceived
> That we are praised by men because they see in us
> The image of themselves; that a great mind
> Outruns its age and is pursued in obliquy
> Because its movements are not understood.
> I felt that to be truly the world's friend,
> We must become the object of its hate (IV. ii. 1817-1828).

By making Mortimer the object of the world's hatred Rivers has moved one step closer, in his warped understanding, to redeeming the world. Thus he tells Mortimer:

> I've joined us by a chain of adamant;
> Henceforth we are fellow labourers--to enlarge
> The intellectual empire of mankind.
> 'Tis slavery--all is slavery, we receive
> Laws, and we ask not whence those laws have come.

> We need an inward string to goad us on.
> --Heavens--where's the harm of ridding an old wretch?
> (IV. ii. 1854-1860).

The most striking difference between the soliloquies that occur in Wordsworth's The Borderers and the soliloquies and dramatic monologue under consideration is that the latter are narrative rather than lyrical. That is, they do essentially what the plot of a drama does--relate a tale. All too often critics tend to ignore the fact that the soliloquies are narrative in form thus arriving at the conclusion that the *raison d'être* of these poems lies exclusively in the subject of the speaker's utterance--hence the apparent similarity between these poems and the magazine verse of the day. For instance, in his note on "The Female Vagrant" in Lyrical Ballads, 1805, Derek Roper writes:

> Apart from the rather obtrusive Spenserian stanzas, much of The Female Vagrant seems little different from other humanitarian propaganda in verse that was being written at this period. Nevertheless passages occur (e.g. lines 100-8) in which Wordsworth succeeds in making contact with genuine experience of his own, or in imaginatively apprehending that of the humble people and outcasts with whom he sought in those years to identify himself."[2]

Roper notes the similarity between Wordsworth's "The Mad Mother" and a ballad in Percy's Reliques ("Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament") in his note on the former. Robert Mayo, in his article "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads,"[3] notes the difference between Wordsworth's poems on the deserted mother theme and magazine verse on the same subject in the following terms: "in comparison with Wordsworth's, most magazine poems of this class seem hopelessly sentimental and derivative, but they are not so much different in kind as in degree. In both, for example, the

suffering is rendered in terms of a kind of generalized human nature." Such a view, however, ignores the structure as a significant factor of the poem's purpose. The history of the speaker's life is, in each case, subservient to the fact of utterance: it is not the history we are being presented but the relating of it. Proof lies in the way poems open: we stumble, as it were, upon a monologue already in progress. "The Female Vagrant" begins with the woman speaking ("By Derwent's side my Father's cottage stood," l. 1) as does "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman" ("Before I see another day, / Oh let my body die away!" ll. 1-2) while "The Mad Mother" presents a narrator who comes upon the subject speaking. Thus he informs us that "She talked and sung the woods among; / And it was in the English tongue," ll. 9-10).

NOTES

1. William Wordsworth, The Borderers, (ed), Robert Osborn (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982). The version I am referring to is the first one, which Wordsworth composed during the years 1797-99. All further references are to this edition of the play.

2. Roper (ed), Lyrical Ballads 1805, p. 318.

3. PMLA, LXIX (1954), p. 497.

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