

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

"FANTASTIC POMP OF STRUCTURE": A STUDY
OF THE EPIC, LITURGICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL
PATTERNS IN WORDSWORTH'S THE EXCURSION

by



ROYDON SALICK

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ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates that The Excursion is more carefully and elaborately structured than the critics would have us believe. Chapter One shows that criticism has either belaboured the poem's alleged lack of structural unity, or has treated the poem as a compendium of Wordsworth's philosophy. Not only have critics failed to understand the poem's "towering and intricate structure" (J. S. Lyon), but also most agree with Mary Moorman that "The Excursion fails as a poetic unity." Chapter Two demonstrates, in the teeth of the critical consensus, that The Excursion is a Romantic epic which possesses almost every major generic convention of "inner form" and "outer form," and fulfils Wordsworth's quite orthodox requirements for epic. Chapter Three investigates a hitherto unnoticed liturgical pattern, a series of rites, formulas, and gestures, derived from the liturgy of the Church of England, and so arranged as to give the reader the impression that he has experienced an Anglican Communion service in its essential entirety. Wordsworth's use of the liturgical pattern in The Excursion constitutes his answer to deism; reflects his reverence for the Church and her two sacred books, the

Bible and The Book of Common Prayer; and mirrors his own spiritual struggle after the chagrin of the French Revolution. Chapter Four analyzes the topographical pattern, the relationship between the minds of the wayfarers, especially the mind of the Solitary, and the poetic landscape. This pattern illustrates, through his responses to topography, how the Solitary's fractured rapport with Nature is partially healed.

The three patterns dovetail to form Wordsworth's boldest and most ambitious poetic structure. The Excursion is Wordsworth's attempt to present Romantic man as epic hero, Christian wayfarer, and nature-lover. The epic pattern establishes the genre in which the poet is working, giving form to and justifying his new heroic theme of the holy consummation between the mind of man and Nature. The liturgical and topographical patterns both confirm and enhance the moral and religious functions of the epic pattern. The former Christianizes the epic pattern; the latter expands it to include the quintessential reciprocity between "the individual Mind" and "the external World."

to my parents,
the first and wisest of my teachers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Abstract	i
Introduction	1
Chapter One: A History of the Criticism of <u>The Excursion</u>	6
Chapter Two: The Epic Pattern	74
Chapter Three: The Liturgical Pattern	159
Chapter Four: The Topographical Pattern	214
Conclusion	271
Bibliography	274

INTRODUCTION

In 1949, De Selincourt published the fifth volume of The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, an annotated and collated edition of The Excursion; and in 1950, Lyon wrote the only full-length study of the poem. The "sources and analogues" of The Excursion have been investigated by Robert Daniel;¹ and its style has been analyzed by Don Hensley.² Nevertheless, much critical work remains to be done on The Excursion.

The history of the criticism of The Excursion, reviewed in Chapter One, shows that too many critics have dismissed the poem as a second-rate product of Wordsworth's twilight years, and as not deserving of much critical attention. Critics, for the most part, have read the critiques of the poem more carefully than the poem itself. Consequently, many strictures, some of them wholly untenable, have been sanctified by repetition. Even the few who have read the poem carefully have been influenced by the widespread and recurrent censure that The Excursion is severely deficient in structural integrity. This study demonstrates that The Excursion is a uniquely and intricately structured poem, having as organizing principles three large patterns: epic, liturgical, and topographical.

Chapter Two argues that The Excursion is a Romantic epic, which evinces almost every major convention and device of traditional epic. Wordsworth modifies the elements of traditional epic to suit the exigencies of his adaptive epic. The catabasis, for instance, is no longer a physical descent into the underworld; it is now an imaginative response to the Pastor's "Authentic epiphanies." The Excursion illustrates also how much the nature of epic heroism has changed; here it comprises a desire to love God, to live in charity with one's fellowmen, and to commune meaningfully with Nature. While epic devices and conventions have changed, the function of epic remains unaltered. The Excursion discharges a moral function, creates a comprehensive picture of the time in which it was written, and seeks to depict man in his fullness.

Chapter Three analyzes the liturgical pattern, the ordonnance of certain rites, formulas and gestures derived from an Anglican Communion service. Not all the elements of such a service are present in the poem. Wordsworth employs certain ones and organizes them to give the reader the impression that he has experienced an Anglican Communion service in its essential entirety.

Within the framing elements of a confession and a benediction, there are prayers of thanksgiving, a homily, Comfortable Words, a Eucharist, an agape, and a recessional hymn. The liturgical pattern defines the spiritual progress of the Christian Solitary. The use of this pattern embodies Wordsworth's answer to deism, mirrors his personal spiritual struggle, and reflects his faith in and reverence for the Church of England and her two sacred books, the Bible and The Book of Common Prayer.

Chapter Four investigates the topographical pattern, the arrangement of the wayfarers' imaginative responses to the poetic landscape. In this pattern, Wordsworth uses aspects of the poetic landscape, especially topography, to mark the spiritual progress of the Solitary. His journey begins in a vale that has neither beauty nor prospect. His momentous decision to quit his "cell" for the first time is made on a "rocky knoll." His excursion ends on a "grassy slope" that commands a panoramic view of the Lake of Grasmere and the surrounding hills. The change in physical prospects suggests the enlarging of the sensibilities of the Solitary. The excursion across two valleys of the Lake Country is a spiritual journey

during which the Solitary can partially heal his fractured rapport with God, social man, and Nature.

This study demonstrates that The Excursion is much more intricately and meticulously structured than the critics would have us believe. The sophisticated structure reflects Wordsworth's ambitious poetic intention of depicting Romantic man as epic hero, Christian wayfarer, and nature-lover. The analysis of these three patterns gives The Excursion greater meaning and importance in the Wordsworth canon. The Excursion is Wordsworth's attempt to indite an epic, to present a theodicy of Christian values, and to dramatize his most persistent poetic theme--the essential reciprocity between the individual mind and the external world. The Excursion may possess a more sophisticated structure than any other poem of Wordsworth's. Consequently, it deserves more detailed critical analysis than it has received thus far. This study is the beginning of such a critical anatomy.

Notes

Introduction

¹ Robert W. Daniel, "The Reviews of Wordsworth's Excursion," Diss. Yale 1949.

² Don Hensley, "Wordsworth and a New Mythology: A Stylistic Analysis of The Excursion," Diss. Univ. of Wisconsin 1964.

CHAPTER ONE: A HISTORY OF THE CRITICISM OF THE EXCURSION

When Wordsworth published The Excursion on August 10, 1814,¹ he brought to a temporary end more than seventeen years of desultory composition. For the next thirty-one years he kept revising the text, accommodating the strictures and suggestions of reviewers and friends.² Some three months before he published The Excursion, Wordsworth wrote to his friend, the reverend Francis Wrangham:

A Portion of a long Poem from me will see the light ere long. I hope it will give you pleasure. It is serious, and has been written with great labour.³

It is hard to know exactly to what extent Wordsworth was satisfied with The Excursion in 1814. It appears that it pleased him more than did the first draft of The Prelude, of which he wrote to Beaumont on June 3, 1805:

I had looked forward to the day as a most happy one; and I was indeed grateful to God for giving me life to complete the work, such as it is; but it was not a happy day for me. I was dejected on many accounts; when I looked back upon the performance it seemed to have a dead weight about it, the reality so far short of the expectation; it was the first long labour that I had finished and the doubt whether I should live to write the Recluse and the sense which I had of this Poem being so far below what I seemed capable of executing, depressed me much.⁴

Wordsworth's relief and confidence on finishing The Excursion are expressed in a letter to Poole:

My poetical labours have often suffered long interruptions; but I have at last resolved to send to the Press a portion of a poem which, if I live to finish it, I hope future times will "not willingly let die." These you know are the words of my great predecessor, and the depth of my feelings upon some subjects seems to justify me in the act of applying them to myself, while speaking to a friend
 5

In the accompanying sonnet to the Earl of Lonsdale, Wordsworth, while admitting that The Excursion is "imperfect" though not "premature," confidently hopes that his poem may "prove a monument."

To some of his contemporaries, The Excursion was just that. Reading the manuscript before it was published, Lamb ecstatically wrote to Wordsworth: "[it] is the noblest conversational poem I have ever read-- a day in Heaven."⁶ To the anonymous reviewer for the liberal Monthly Magazine (Jan. 30, 1815), it was "one of the best poems of the age."⁷ James Montgomery, who preferred poems on a large scale, declared The Excursion to be "incomparably the greatest and the most beautiful work of the present age of poetry," and all else is "feeble in comparison."⁸ Southey, in a letter to

Townshend, paid tribute to Wordsworth's genius by stating that The Excursion is a major reason why "it is by the side of Milton that Wordsworth will have his station awarded him."⁹ Crabb Robinson was also extravagant in his praise: "I do not hesitate to place the poem among the noblest works of the human intellect, and to me one of the most delightful."¹⁰ Aubrey de Vere rated The Excursion as one of "the three great poems of the Age."¹¹ Keats on two separate occasions termed the poem "one of the three things to rejoice at in this Age."¹² Across the Atlantic, Emerson found the poem "dull," but was nevertheless overjoyed on reading it:

The Excursion awakened in every lover of Nature the right feeling, we saw stars shine, we felt the awe of the mountains, we heard the rustle of the wind in the grass, and knew again the ineffable secret of solitude. It was a great joy. It was nearer to Nature than anything we had before Here was no poem, but here was poetry, and a sure index of where the subtle muse was about to pitch her tent and find the argument of her song. It was the human soul in these ages striving for a just publication of itself.¹³

The Excursion also had its detractors. A month after the publication of The Excursion, The New Monthly Magazine, "founded as a conservative antagonist of the Monthly Magazine,"¹⁴ censured the poem. The lack of

dispassionate criticism on the part of the reviewer is evident from the opening sentence:

Mercy upon the reader, and still more upon the reviewer! for it seems this ponderous volume is only the prelude to two others of an equal size, and similar materials. The race of metaphysical poets was supposed to have been long extinct; but a wight, more formidable than Cowley, has risen in the person of Mr. Wordsworth; who now ascends into the airy region of metaphysical mysticism, and next plunges into the depths of cabalistic darkness, without relieving the reader by amusement or information.¹⁵

The metre of the poem is described as "a hobbling kind of measure," and the poem itself is dismissed with a one-sentence paraphrase. Not much is tenable in this review; but it is the forerunner of other damaging reviews.

Jeffrey's infamous review tells us more about the reviewer than it does about The Excursion. The opening sentence, "This will never do," is really a climax to the long feud between Jeffrey and the Lake Poets.¹⁶ In his remarks on Wordsworth's Prefaces, Jeffrey reveals his bias against the new poetry that was replacing that of Dryden and Pope:

His first essays we looked upon in a good degree as poetical paradoxes,--maintained experimentally in order to display talent, and court notoriety;--and so maintained, with no more serious belief in their truth, than is usually generated by an ingenious and animated defence of other paradoxes.¹⁷

Jeffrey cavils at Wordsworth's choice of lowly characters, and blames his long "habits of seclusion" for causing the poet to waste "so many precious gifts at the altar of those paltry idols which he has set up for himself among his lakes and mountains." He admits, grudgingly, that there "is a good deal of fine description in the course of" The Excursion, and that there is "a very great number of single lines and images, that sparkle like gems in the desert, and startle us with an intimation of the poetic powers that lie buried in the rubbish that has been heaped around them." Jeffrey, who in an earlier review had described the "Immortality Ode" as "beyond doubt, the most illegible and unintelligible part of the Poems of 1807," dismisses Wordsworth and The Excursion with characteristic disdain: "The case of Mr. Wordsworth, we perceive, is now manifestly hopeless; and we give him up as altogether incurable, and beyond the power of criticism."

Though Jeffrey's review adversely affected the widening reputation of the poet and the widespread acceptance of the poem,¹⁸ it did not destroy The Excursion's reputation. It would have taken much more to do that. Southey, writing to James Hogg in December 1814 concerning the putative censure of his poem, Roderick, chastises Jeffrey: "I despise his condemnation and I defy his malice. He crush the Excursion!!! Tell him he might as easily crush Skiddaw."¹⁹ Others, including Coleridge, were to join in the outcry against the "Aristarch."²⁰

To Jeffrey's vitriol, Byron added his dissatisfaction with The Excursion in poetry and prose. In the relatively unknown review of the Poems of 1807, he praises Wordsworth's "strong and sometimes irresistible appeals to the feelings," the natural and unaffected "native elegance" of many of the poems, but he "regrets that Wordsworth wasted his genius on so many trifling subjects."²¹ He is less appreciative of The Excursion. He celebrated his condemnation of the poem in his often-quoted couplet: "A drowsy, frowsy poem, call'd the 'Excursion,' / Writ in a manner which is my aversion" (Don Juan, III. xciv). In a reply to Blackwood's Magazine, he dilated on his couplet: "there is un-

doubtedly much natural talent spilt over The Excursion; but it is rain upon sands--where it falls without fertilizing. Who can understand him. Let those who do, make him intelligible."²²

In 1825, John Wilson as Christopher North in Blackwood's Magazine denounced The Excursion as "the worst poem, of any character, in the English Language."²³ Six years later he toned down his wilful denunciation. The Excursion, Wilson writes, affords "room for the display of Mr. Wordsworth's very original genius, which delights in description of all that is grand and beautiful . . . and is on all such occasions, truly creative." He wishes that "all those exquisite pictures had been by themselves, without the cumbrous machinery of the clumsy plan." He does not deem it a great poem because of its lack of significant structure:

Mr. Wordsworth cannot conceive a mighty plan. His image is of the first order; but his intellect does not seem to me to belong . . . to the old school, commanding and comprehensive. His mind has many noble visions, but they come and go, each in its own glory; a phantasmagorial procession, beautiful, splendid, sublime, but not anywhere forming a whole, on which the spectator can gaze, entranced by the power of unity.²⁴

John Stuart Mill, for whom the rediscovery of Wordsworth's poetry was a turning-point in his life, "found little" in The Excursion in his first reading of the poem, and did not read it a second time.²⁵ George Eliot found repayment "for going to the end" of The Excursion in "an occasional fine passage."²⁶ It does not seem that she was particularly impressed by the poem.

Contemporary Criticism

For greater critical insight into The Excursion we must leave behind the generalized and discursive opinions, the isolated and scattered comments of Emerson, Wilson, Montgomery, Jeffrey and others, and turn to the literary figures of Wordsworth's day.

The first of these to review The Excursion was Charles Lamb, to whom Wordsworth had sent a copy of the poem before its publication.²⁷ His review was, in his words, to Wordsworth, "the prettiest piece of prose I ever wrote." However, Gifford, the editor of The Quarterly Review, had revised and ruined the original, changing, according to Lamb, "every warm expression . . . to a nasty cold one." Lamb opens his critique by stating that The Excursion "is in itself, a complete

and legitimate production" rather than merely a "detached portion of an unfinished poem," as the prefatory letter says. Most critics have since viewed the poem as complete in itself. Lamb recognizes that the poem is of a "didactic nature, and not a fable or story." But he is quick to add that "it is not wanting in stories of the most interesting kind," such as "The Ruined Cottage" and the Solitary's own story. Lamb is the first to notice--what others have echoed--that "the prevailing charm of the poem" is that "the dialogue is carried on in the very heart of the most romantic scenery which the poet's native hills could supply." Lamb considers the fourth book "the most valuable portion of the poem, because of its moral grandeur," its wide "scope of thought and a long train of lofty imagery," its "personal appeals," and its versification. He is the first critic to correctly analyze the purpose of Book IV, which in his words, "is to abate the pride of the calculating understanding, and to reinstate the imagination and the affections in those seats which modern philosophy has laboured but too successfully to expel them."²⁸ Towards the end of his essay, Lamb anticipates and answers Jeffrey's objection to Wordsworth's choice of the Pedlar as his moral spokes-

man. Correctly, he argues that Wordsworth's plan required a character in humble life to be the chief organ of philosophy. He draws an apt analogy with Piers Plowman, and suggests to those who are offended by the poet's choice that they might "substitute silently the word Palmer, or Pilgrim, or any less offensive designation." Perhaps the most important contribution that Lamb makes to the criticism of The Excursion is his description of the basis of Wordsworth's system in the poem. Few, if any, have described it more simply and accurately:

To a mind constituted like that of Wordsworth, the stream, the torrent, and the stirring leaf --seem not merely to suggest associations of deity, but to be a kind of speaking communication with it In his poetry nothing in Nature is dead. Motion is synonymous with life . . . the visible and audible things of creation present, not dim symbols, or curious emblems, which they have done at all times to those who have been gifted with the poetical faculty; but revelations and quick insights into the life within us, the pledge of immortality (p. 827)

This faith in Nature Lamb terms "a sort of liberal Quakerism" or a "kind of Natural Methodism" (p. 828). Some sixty years later, Pater echoed Lamb's reading of Wordsworth's system.²⁹

On October 2, 1814, Hazlitt finished his three-part review of The Excursion.³⁰ His initial encomium indicates a favourable review: "In power of intellect, in lofty conception, in the depth of feeling, at once simple and sublime, which pervades every part of it, and which gives to every object an almost preternatural and preterhuman interest, this work has seldom been surpassed." But he regrets that "the subject of the Poem" is not "equal to the genius of the Poet," and that the skill with which the poet has chosen his materials does not accord with the power he exerts over them. His comparison between The Excursion and its setting is very suggestive:

The Poem of the Excursion resembles the country in which the scene is laid. It has the same vastness and magnificence, with the same nakedness and confusion. It has the same overwhelming, oppressive power We are surrounded by the constant sense and superstitious awe of the collective power of matter, of the gigantic and eternal forms of Nature, on which, from the beginning of time, the hand of man has made no impression All is left loose and irregular in the rude chaos of aboriginal nature. (pp. 111-12)

This alleged lack of structure in The Excursion has since been a constant in the criticism of the poem. Hazlitt continues by deifying Wordsworth's mind: "His

mind is, as it were, coeval with primary forms of things . . . and his imagination owes no allegiance but to the elements" (p. 112). He describes The Excursion as "less a poem on the country, than on the love of country," and as "not so much a description of natural objects, as of the feelings associated with them, not an account of the manners of rural life, but the result of the Poet's reflection on it." He moves on to discuss the poet's philosophy as evinced in The Excursion:

He only sympathizes with those simple forms of feeling, which mingle at once with his own identity, or the stream of general humanity. To him the great and the small are the same; the near and the remote; what appears, and what only is. The common and the permanent, like the Platonic ideas; are his only realities. (p. 113)

He continues by commenting on Wordsworth's "intense egotism," an influential notion he passed on to Leigh Hunt, Shelley, and Keats. This "intense egotism," as Hazlitt sees it, "swallows up everything" so that the Pastor, the Recluse and the Pedlar are three persons in one. It destroys the dramatic sense for it "resists all change of character, all variety of scenery, all the bustle, machinery and pantomime of stage, or of real life" (p. 113). So inimical is this "intense

egotism" that it causes the poet's mind to prey upon itself.

In the second part of the review, Hazlitt discusses the form of the poem. He regrets that Wordsworth had not given to his work "the form of a philosophical poem altogether, with occasional digressions or allusions to particular instances" (p. 113). Much of the narrative and description would have been "better in plain prose as notes in the end" (p. 113). He finds the treatment of the French Revolution one of the most interesting parts of the poem, but cannot share "the author's optimism about the triumph of virtue and liberty" (p. 119).

In the third part of his review of The Excursion, Hazlitt begins by postulating that there are two classes of poetry, "the poetry of imagination and the poetry of sentiment." According to Hazlitt, the former "consists in calling up images of the most pleasing or striking kind," while the latter "depends on the strength of the interest which it excites in given objects." Poetic excellence is achieved when these two are combined. Wordsworth's powers of feeling are of the highest order, argues Hazlitt, but he is deficient in "fanciful invention." There is the "inner power of poetry" but not its "outer form." What Hazlitt is speaking of here is

not the poet's lack of the constructive faculty but the absence of the "pomp and decoration and scenic effect of poetry." Instead, Hazlitt continues, Wordsworth takes the simplest objects and "adds to them a weight of interest from the resources of his own mind." The result is an "extreme simplicity" of style and subject characterized by "subtle and profound" sentiments.

Though Hazlitt can sympathize with the poet's "attachment to groves and fields," he cannot equally admire the inhabitants of the country. Against these he launches into a philippic that does his review disservice. His comments have no basis in fact and seem to be a venting of personal spleen:

All country people hate each other. They have so little comfort that they envy their neighbours the smallest pleasure or advantage and nearly grudge themselves the necessaries of life They had rather injure themselves than oblige anyone else Ignorance is always bad enough, but rustic ignorance is intolerable. (pp. 122-23)

His patrician contempt continues as he compares rural folk to "insects," and "flies," and labels them as "selfish." This "theory" of country life, Hazlitt avers, is based on "close observation," and confirmed by Wordsworth's poetic accounts. Such vitriolic charges were

answered in 1815 by William Allen in the Philanthropist.³¹

Allen seems to understand Wordsworth's poetic intentions better than Hazlitt. Allen writes:

With respect to the other alleged characteristic incongruities of mental endowment and low-born origin, these too may be easily reconciled, unless any should be found hardy enough to assert that genius and talents are the exclusive rights of education and rank; that the gems of wisdom are only to be found united with the baubles of art and circumstance; that physical and mental capacities are not one and the same qualities in prince and pedlar³²

Not surprisingly, Hazlitt finds the stories of the Whig and Jacobite, and of Sir Alfred Irthing most enjoyable.

Writing some three years later, Hazlitt delivers a much less favourable review of The Excursion in his lecture, "On the Living Poets."³³ He denies Wordsworth "the constructive faculty," and states that he is "totally deficient in the machinery of poetry." The Excursion, he continues, stands "stock-still" like Robinson Crusoe's boat stuck fast in the sand. Seven years later, in The Spirit of the Age, his estimate of The Excursion is even lower:

The Excursion, we believe, fell still-born from the press. There was something abortive and clumsy, and ill-judged in the attempt. It was long and laboured. The personages for the most

part, were low, the fare rustic: the plan raised expectations that were not fulfilled, and the effect was like being ushered into a stately hall and invited to sit down to a splendid banquet in the company of clowns, and with nothing but successive courses of apple-dumplings served up. It was not even toujours perdrix (Works, XI, p. 91)

We should remember that even before 1825 personal animosity against Wordsworth had begun to impair Hazlitt's critical impartiality towards the poet.³⁴

Another contemporary who had much to say about The Excursion is Thomas De Quincey. Although he met Wordsworth for the first time in 1807, and had developed a strong interest in his poetry seven years before, his criticism comes in 1845.³⁵ Much of his first critical essay of a formal kind deals with The Excursion. De Quincey begins by commenting on Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction. This, he argues, was "the original obstacle to the favourable impression of Wordsworthian poetry" (p. 296). Publishing the Preface to the second edition of his Poems was, in De Quincey's view, an egregious blunder on the part of the poet: "Nothing more injudicious was ever done by man" (p. 296). He believes, with Coleridge, from whom he may have derived this idea, that Wordsworth should have explained himself more clearly in the Preface, because the phrase "the very

language of men" cannot be taken at face value. His practice in "Laodamia," in his "Sonnets," and in The Excursion falsifies the claim that the language of poetry should be "the very language of men," De Quincey asserts. He proceeds to defend Wordsworth's poems from Hazlitt's charge that they are wholly deficient in the passions associated with "marrying [or] giving in marriage." Wordsworth, De Quincey argues, stuck to what he knew best, and all poets have done this. He shows us that he understands something of Wordsworth's poetic practice when he says:

But whosoever looks searchingly into the characteristic genius of Wordsworth will see that he does not willingly deal with a passion in its direct aspect, or presenting an unmodified contour, but in forms more complex and oblique, and when passing under the shadow of the secondary passion. (p. 301)

Before addressing himself to The Excursion he defends Wordsworth's choice of subjects "and the mode of treating them."

De Quincey finds that as regards its opening The Excursion "seems to require a recast." The "inaugurating story of Margaret," he continues, "is in the wrong key, and rests upon a false basis" (p. 344). De Quincey's practical, almost forensic, cast of mind wonders why the

the Wanderer did not offer Margaret a guinea to allay her poverty. He demands factual data rather than poetic truth, it seems. De Quincey concludes his remarks on this tale by recommending that the poet, "if he retains energy for such recasts of a laborious work," excise it "from its connexion with The Excursion," for "nothing in the following book depends upon this narrative" (p. 308). This view Arnold some thirty-five years later re-echoed.

De Quincey finds the story of the Solitary "grand and impassioned,--not creeping by details and minute touches, but rolling through capital events, and uttering pathos through great representative abstractions" (p. 308). The narrative, however, collapses not because of its structure, but because of "the fate of this fine tragic movement." The Solitary's disappointment is unequal to what De Quincey calls "the grandeur of the first motives." He defends the French Revolution because after the Reign of Terror, "a mere fleeting and transitional phasis," "happier days have descended upon France" (p. 311).

To De Quincey there are two defects which interfere greatly with the "scheme" and "movement" of The Excursion. One is the "undulatory" course of the poem; it wanders "into topics yielding a very humble inspira-

tion and not always closely connected with the presiding theme" (p. 313). The other defect lies in the colloquial form which the poem sometimes assumes. "Philosophical discussions," De Quincey argues, "should not be conducted by talking"; if it is, then the result must be an indecorousness between the theme and its expression. De Quincey feels that future generations will read The Excursion in "parts and fragments" and never as a whole poem. Wordsworth's fame, he adds, will rest not on The Excursion, but on the shorter poems which scintillate "with gems of far profounder truth." He ends his review by praising Wordsworth's sympathy and by acknowledging his place as the greatest meditative poet, challenged only by Shakespeare.

One of the great disappointments in the history of the criticism of The Excursion is the paucity of comments on the poem from Coleridge. In a letter to Wordsworth, he promises to review the poem.³⁶ That review so eagerly awaited by his friend never saw the light of day. In this letter, nothing really specific or condemnatory is said concerning The Excursion. Coleridge admits that when he read the poem his "expectations were disappointed." These words recall Wordsworth's on the first draft of The Prelude. Coleridge thought that the "excellencies of the

poem [The Excursion] were so many and of so high a class," that it was impossible to say whether it was inferior to The Prelude. It was impossible also, in Coleridge's words, to assert "any flagging of the writer's own genius."

Coleridge's disappointment arose from his comparison of The Excursion and The Prelude (recited to him in January, 1807), and from a comparison of The Excursion and the plans he had co-authored for "The Recluse." He had looked forward to "The Recluse," as the first and only true Phil[osophical] Poem in existence" and "expected the Colors, Music, imaginative Life, and Passion of Poetry [with] the matter and arrangement of Philosophy . . ."³⁷ He also expected the poem to have a "grand didactic swell on the necessary identity of a true Philosophy with true Religion."³⁸ Instead, what he read was a poem which, in Wordsworth's words, attempted "to put the commonplace truths, of the human affections especially, in an interesting point of view; and rather to remind men of their knowledge, as it lurks inoperative and unvalued in their own minds, than to attempt to convey recondite or refined truths."³⁹

Later in the Biographia Literaria, he discusses Wordsworth's poetry with occasional references to The Excursion.⁴⁰ In this poem he finds examples of what

he considers "defects" of Wordsworth's poetry. There is, according to Coleridge, a sense of incongruity between passages. A "matter-of-factness" is another defect, and he quotes a specific passage of The Excursion to illustrate this defect (III. 50-73). Such minute painting seems laboured and painted by fancy rather than the imagination (p. 102). There is also an implied inappropriateness in the choice of subject in The Excursion: "For all the passages in this narrative the story of the Wanderer's boyhood might have been far more appropriately and with far greater verisimilitude told of a poet in the character of a poet" (pp. 108-9). There is as well a disproportion of feeling for and knowledge and value of the object described. Again this defect is found in The Excursion. The Excursion also exhibits an incongruity of style and "a species of ventriloquism" (p. 109);⁴¹ both defects arise from Wordsworth's undue predilection for the dramatic form" (p. 109).

Some seventeen years later in Table Talk, he repeats his estimate of The Excursion: "I cannot help regretting that Wordsworth did not first publish his thirteen books on the growth of an individual mind--superior as I think, upon the whole, to The Excursion."⁴² The critical consensus has consecrated this feeling. Cole-

ridge also reviews what the joint plans were for "The Recluse":

Then the plan laid out, and I believe, partly suggested by me, was that Wordsworth should assume the station of a man in mental repose, one whose principles were made up, and so prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy. He was to treat man as man,--a subject of eye, ear, touch, and taste, in contact with external nature; and informing the senses; then he was to describe the pastoral and other states of society, assuming something of the Juvenalian spirit as he approached the high civilization of cities and towns, and opening a melancholy picture of the present state of degeneracy and vice; thence he was to infer and reveal the proof of, and necessity for, the whole state of man and society being subject to, and illustrative of, a redemptive process in operation, showing how this idea reconciled all the anomalies, and promised future glory and restoration. (pp. 188-89)

This was too grandiose a poetic scheme to be realized even by the man who, in Coleridge's words, "possessed more of the genius of a great philosophic poet than any man I ever knew, or as I believe, has existed in England since Milton."⁴³ Like De Quincey, he believes that The Ruined Cottage should be published separately, but his estimation of that poem is far greater than De Quincey's: "It would have formed . . . one of the most beautiful poems in the language."⁴⁴

Sadly, this is all Coleridge has to say on The Excursion. Of all Wordsworth's contemporaries, he was most eminently qualified by his kindred genius, his critical acumen, and his intimate knowledge of the poet and his work, to write a profound, balanced analysis of The Excursion. As they stand, his scattered comments on the poem amount only to a very generalized criticism, far less specific than those of Lamb, De Quincey, and Hazlitt.

The Romantic literary figures, as far as they were free from personal rancour against Wordsworth, genuinely attempted to evaluate The Excursion by esthetic standards. Along with the poem's "system," they were concerned with its structure, its style, and its completeness and legitimacy as poetry. They also discussed the appropriateness of Wordsworth's alleged indecorousness of mixing grand thoughts with trivial objects, and questioned the efficacy of his dramatic technique or "ventriloquism" in The Excursion. Unfortunately, the criticism of none was sufficiently specific or sustained to provide a penetrating analysis of the artistic merits of The Excursion. The critical foci of Lamb, Hazlitt, and Coleridge and others, however, were to prove the basis of the most

balanced studies of the poem in the twentieth century.

Victorian Criticism

Victorian critics addressed themselves to a task that did not face their Romantic counterparts: that of establishing Wordsworth's place among English poets. When Arnold published his essay in 1879, Wordsworth had already been dead for twenty-nine years, and his reputation had peaked and ebbed. Most critics, "Wordsworthians" or not, attempted to give him his due as the greatest poet since Milton. Some, like Brooke and Stephen, emphasized solely the poet's philosophy; others, like Arnold and Morley, focused mainly on Wordsworth's poetry and discounted his philosophy.

Some three months after Wordsworth's death, David Masson, Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, attempted to analyze the poet's contribution to English intellectual life and to ascertain his place among the poets of England.⁴⁵ Masson finds three prominent characteristics of Wordsworth's poetry--an extreme sensibility to, and accurate acquaintance with, the changing phenomena of external nature, a general intellectual vigour, and "the exquisite

propriety and delicacy of style, his easy and perfect mastery over the element of language" (p. 59). Dilating on the last characteristic, Masson writes: "Very few poets have been more admirable masters of poetic metre: no versification is more clear, various and flexible, or more soothing to the ear, than that of Wordsworth" (p. 73). There are, however, defects such as a want of humour: according to Masson, there is "no real mirth, no rich sense of the comic" (p. 65). As well, Wordsworth lacks "energy, fire, impulse, intensity, and passion" (p. 68). Masson adds that for "all his [Wordsworth's] pathos, all his clearness of vision, there were sorrows of humanity, he never touched, recesses of dark moral experience he could not pierce or irradiate" (p. 68). While Masson praises the "very high" and "serene" intellect of the poet, he regrets that he lacks "a vast or prodigious" one like Coleridge's. Masson concludes his essay by stating that it is by the sonnets, "among the finest and most sonorous things in our language," "in conjunction with his Excursion (or, as we may now say, "The Recluse") that his great name will be most surely perpetuated" (p. 74). Great as his name is, though, Masson adds, he does not

stand atop Parnassus, but on the upper slope of the mountain.

In 1864, J. C. Shairp wrote a laudatory essay entitled "Wordsworth: The Man and the Poet."⁴⁶ According to Shairp, there was around the beginning of the nineteenth century a "new and changed spirit," two manifestations of which were the French Revolution and the poetry of Wordsworth. The Ruined Cottage, Shairp claims, is the finest example of Wordsworth's blank verse, and there is in it "depth, pathos pure and profound" (p. 69), and "the echo of a soul, the most capacious, tender, and profound, that has spoken through modern poetry" (p. 69). Shairp devotes a few pages to The Excursion, but regrets that he cannot discuss it "as its importance demands." He finds in The Excursion a theme "worthy of the great philosophic poem, which Wordsworth proposed to himself" (p. 66). To him the Solitary is an estimable character drawn from real life. Books VI and VII, he finds, "are beyond all others sustained in interest, and perfect in style," forming in themselves "a noble poem, full of deep insight into the heart, of attractive portraits of character, and of tender and elevating views of human destiny" (p. 68). Though the blank verse of The Excursion, and of The Prel-

ude is often "tediously prolix" (p. 69), and employs "too profuse a use of long-winded Latin words, to the neglect of the mother Saxon" (p. 70), Shairp sees it at its best in the Wanderer's account of his boyhood, the description of the Langdale Pikes, the Solitary's history of himself, Books VI and VIII, and the story of Margaret. He ends his discussion of the poem with an interesting comment of the change in literary tastes:

It seems strange to look back to the outcry that was long made against the employment of a pedlar as the chief figure of the poem. That this should now seem to most quite natural, or at least nowadays offensive, may serve to mark the change in literary feeling which Wordsworth himself did so much to introduce.
(p. 71)

For Shairp, Wordsworth will always be remembered as "a revealer of things hidden, the sanctifier of things common, the interpreter of new and unsuspected relations, the opener of another sense in men . . . the teacher of truths hitherto neglected or unobserved, [and] the awakener of men's hearts to the solemnities that encompass them" (p. 71).

In 1876, Leslie Stephen published his famous essay on Wordsworth's ethics.⁴⁷ Anticipating Beatty, Rader and Stallknecht, Stephen discusses Wordsworth's philo-

sophical system. He sees Wordsworth not primarily as a poet, but as a "prophet and a moralist" (p. 256). He is a "true philosopher" whose poetry, amongst all others, "retains its power" when "we are making our inevitable passages through the Valley of the Shadow of Death" (p. 256). Stephen states that the poet's philosophical theory "depends on the asserted identity between our childish instincts and our enlightened reason" (p. 263). Wordsworth's doctrine of nature, Stephen argues, "means a love of wilder and grander objects of natural scenery: a passion for the 'sounding cataract,' the rock, the mountain, and the forest, the preference, therefore, of the country to the town, and of the simpler to the more complex forms of social life" (p. 266). In his brief discussion of The Excursion, Stephen sees the Solitary as representing

the anti-social lessons to be derived from communion with nature Instead of learning the true lesson from nature by penetrating its deeper meanings, he manages to feed "Pity and scorn and melancholy pride" by accidental and fanciful analogies, and sees in rock pyramids or obelisks a rude mockery of human toils. (p. 266)

The purpose of The Excursion "and of Wordsworth's poetry in general is to show how the higher faculty reveals a

harmony which we overlook when, with the Solitary, we 'skim along the surfaces of things'" (p. 267). For Stephen, "the final answer to the Solitary is . . . embodied in a series of narratives, showing by example how our spiritual vision may be purified or obscured" (p. 267). Stephen ends his essay with a tribute to the poet:

It was his aim, he tells us, "to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous;" and high as was his aim, he did much towards its accomplishment. (p. 284)

Stephen's essay prompted perhaps the most famous of Victorian essays on Wordsworth--Matthew Arnold's preface to his edition of Wordsworth's poems in 1879.⁴⁸ Arnold's premise is that Wordsworth has not "obtained his deserts": he is "not fully recognized at home; he is not recognized at all abroad" (p. 40). As far as Arnold is concerned, "Wordsworth seems . . . to have a body of poetical work superior in power, in interest, in the qualities which give enduring freshness, to that which any of the others [poets since Milton] has left" (p. 41). Bearing Stephen's thesis in mind, Arnold counters: "The Wordsworthians are apt to praise him for the

wrong things, and to lay far too much stress upon what they call his philosophy" (p. 48). His remarks on The Excursion reflect Jeffrey's opinion: "The Excursion abounds with philosophy, and therefore The Excursion is to the Wordsworthian what it never can be to the disinterested lover of poetry--a satisfactory work" (p. 48). He singles out two passages from The Excursion as examples of the absence of poetic truth.

'Duty exists,' says Wordsworth, in The Excursion; and then he proceeds thus--

Immutably survive,
For our support, the measures and the forms,
Which an abstract Intelligence supplies,
Whose kingdom is, where time and space are
not.

And the Wordsworthian is delighted, and thinks that here is a sweet union of philosophy and poetry. But the disinterested lover of poetry will feel that the lines carry us really not a step farther than the proposition which they would interpret; that they are a tissue of elevated but abstract verbiage, alien to the very nature of poetry. (pp. 48-49)

The very things that Montgomery, Crabb Robinson and De Vere loved are what Arnold deprecates. In the Wanderer's utterance on "One adequate support/ For the calamities of mortal life exists," Arnold finds no poetic truth, "the kind of truth we require from a poet, and in what Words-

worth is really strong" (pp. 109-10). Premising that Wordsworth's poetry at its best is "as inevitable as Nature herself," Arnold sees The Excursion as Wordsworth's deliberate attempt to find style: "In the Excursion we have his style, as an artistic product of his own creation; and although Jeffrey completely failed to recognize real greatness, he was yet not wrong in saying of the Excursion, as a work of poetic style: 'This will never do'" (p. 52). In such poems as "Michael," "The Fountain," and "The Highland Reaper" Arnold finds a unique balance of "profound truth of subject with profound truth of execution." But The Excursion and The Prelude, Arnold adds, "his poems of greatest bulk, are by no means his best work" (p. 42). Arnold concludes his preface by rejecting the usual Victorian view of Wordsworth as a solitary bard uttering prophetic truths about man and nature. To Arnold, "Wordsworth is something more than the pure and sage master of a small band of devoted followers, and we ought not to rest satisfied until he is seen to be what he is--one of the chief glories of English Poetry" (p. 55).

Arnold's essay provoked a spirited reply from Swinburne in 1886.⁴⁹ Swinburne takes exception to Arnold's

claim that when "the year 1900 is turned," the first names in poetry will be Byron and Wordsworth. While Swinburne finds much to praise in Wordsworth, he finds little of esteem in Byron. Wordsworth is "the poet of suffering, and of sympathy with suffering" (p. 131). He considers both The Excursion and The Prelude failures, though the latter is superior to the former: "I would not dispute the verdict which should assert that a leaf of the Georgics would outpoise in value the whole of the Excursion, with nine-tenths of the Prelude thrown in as makeweight" (pp. 150-51). He disagrees with Lamb, Coleridge, Hazlitt, and most critics when he asserts that The Ruined Cottage is a failure: "Its idyllic effect is not heightened but impaired by the semi-dramatic form of narrative--a form so generally alien to Wordsworth's genius that its adoption throughout so great a part of the Excursion would of itself suffice at once to establish and to explain the inferiority of that poem to the Prelude" (p. 132). He reminds us that "a very considerable portion" of Wordsworth's poetry is "very bad," but adds that he was "the heroic poet of his age." He concludes his essay by placing Wordsworth a little lower than either Shelley or Coleridge on Parnassus.

In 1881 Frederic Myers wrote a short biography of Wordsworth.⁵⁰ It is in effect much more than that; it is a balanced introduction to the life and the work of the poet. His discussion of The Excursion, though not specific, is quite suggestive. Interestingly enough, he is the first critic to use the word 'epic' to describe the poem: "Judged by ordinary standards the Excursion appears an epic without action, and with two heroes, the Pastor and the Wanderer, whose characters are identical" (p. 89). Myers finds much that is excellent in The Excursion, but states that Wordsworth is far more successful in his shorter poems:

The long poem contains indeed, magnificent passages, but as a whole it is a diffused description of scenery which the poet has elsewhere caught in brighter glimpses; a diffused statement of hopes and beliefs that have crystallised more exquisitely elsewhere round moments of inspiring emotion. The Excursion in short has the drawbacks of a didactic poem compared with the lyrical poems; but judged as a didactic poem, it has the advantage of containing teaching of true and permanent value. (pp. 89-90)

Although The Excursion, according to Myers, is occupied with such "severe and prosaic themes" as child labour and national education, it contains "passages [that] rank among the poet's highest flights" (p. 94). Myers

closes his discussion of The Excursion by arguing that the judgement of reviewers at the time of publication influenced the lasting success of the poem.

In 1888, John Morley published an edition of Wordsworth's poems arranged in chronological order,⁵¹ thus fulfilling at least a part of Caird's recommendation made one year before.⁵² In his prefatory essay, Morley, like Arnold, discounts the poet's philosophy: "It is best to be entirely sceptical as to the existence of a system and ordered philosophy in Wordsworth" (p. lxv). Morley states that the special gift of the poet "lies in the extra-ordinary strenuousness, sincerity and insight with which he first idealises and glorifies the vast universe around us, and then makes of it, not a theatre on which men play their parts, but an animate presence, intermingling with our works, pouring its companionable spirit about us, and breathing grandeur upon the very humblest face of human life" (p. lxv). The Prelude he finds lacking in "the musical, harmonious, sympathetic quality which seizes us in Rousseau's Confessions," and he doubts whether it will ever be popular. On the other hand he considers The Excursion "the performance where we best see the whole poet, and where the

poet most absolutely identifies himself with his subject" (p. lxiii). He deems the Solitary's description of his search for this ancient friend and his visionary experience an example of Wordsworth's "peculiar power at its height" (p. lxiii). "These one hundred and seventy lines," he adds, "are like the landscape in which they are composed; you can no more appreciate the beauty of the one by a single or a second perusal, than you can scamper through the vale on the box of the coach" (p. lxiii). He considers Wordsworth's prolixity and didacticism "defects," and finds that the poet is deficient "in clear beauty of form" (p. lxvi). He ends by asserting that if the end of poetry be a search for "composure deep and pure, and of self-government in a far loftier sense than the merely prudential," then Wordsworth stands alone among the poets of his time.

Victorian critics of Wordsworth were divided into separate camps: there were those who emphasized the poet's philosophy, and those who focused on the poetry. Neither camp seemed to appreciate that it is misguided to separate, in Wordsworth, the philosopher from the poet. Stephen could not see that, without his mastery of the poet's craft, Wordsworth would simply be a tenth-

rate philosopher. Arnold, too, did not understand as clearly as Bradley that:

His [Wordsworth's] poetry is immensely interesting as an imaginative expression of the same mind which, in his day, produced in Germany great philosophies. His poetic experience, his intuitions, his single thought, even his large views, correspond in a striking way, sometimes in a startling way, with ideas methodically developed by Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer.⁵³

Neither camp could see, as Coleridge did, that the relationship between poetry and philosophy is one of mutual enhancement: ". . . no man was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher."⁵⁴

In spite of the efforts of Arnold, Morley, and others,⁵⁵ the overwhelming impression is that Victorian critics saw Wordsworth as a bard, a seer, a philosopher, "a master and sage," rather than as a poet. His philosophy exerted on Victorian poets a far greater influence than his "exquisite propriety and delicacy of style, his easy and perfect mastery over the element of language."

Both camps did very little detailed artistic criticism; most critiques were generalized, and dealt with



the effect of Wordsworth's poetry on the reader. The Excursion, to them, was first and foremost a compendium of Wordsworth's philosophical "system." The poem's style and structure were largely ignored and their critical comments were less specific than those of the Romantic men of letters.

Twentieth-Century Criticism

Criticism of The Excursion in the twentieth century begins in 1916 with the publication of G. M. Harper's biography of Wordsworth.⁵⁶ Harper is quite sympathetic to The Excursion, though not blind to its faults. He begins his discussion by echoing Wilson's stricture concerning Wordsworth's inability to create a large unified poetic plan (p. 220). In The Excursion this weakness is evident, according to Harper: "The Excursion as a whole has not in itself that unity which doubtless the projected work would have had, and which The Prelude, taken by itself, actually has" (p. 221). As for characterization, Harper argues that Wordsworth is "unfair to the poor Solitary," and weakens the dramatic effect of his poem by making his recluse "a man of straw" (p. 228). This Harper considers the major defect of the poem.

There are as well "defects of style" (p. 229), and the poem is "badly named" (p. 230). But all other alleged defects have little weight, Harper asserts. The defects are "far outnumbered and outweighed by features of beauty and manifestations of wisely directed power" (p. 230). In this Harper shares Coleridge's estimate of The Excursion. For Harper, The Excursion is preeminently the poem of the Lake Country, for in "no other work of Wordsworth or anyone else has the life of a particular 'nook of English ground' been portrayed with more distinctness and poetic truth" (p. 230). Besides being singularly rich in variety, "The Excursion is no less than The Prelude a commentary on the Revolution." This, for Harper, is of great biographical moment. He ends his discussion of The Excursion by briefly reviewing its reception among Wordsworth's contemporaries.

Six years later, Arthur Beatty, analyzing Wordsworth's indebtedness to Hartleianism, writes quite sympathetically of The Excursion.⁵⁷ He deems The Excursion "a poem of reconstruction of the normal life of the world on the ruins of the Revolution" (p. 18).⁵⁸ In both The Excursion and The Prelude, according to Beatty, "Wordsworth looks forward into the future and envisages a new world of thought

and feeling . . . and a new poetic practice" (p. 18). He answers Harper's objection to Wordsworth's ending The Excursion where he does, by stating what others have missed: "It is no accident or oversight that the Solitary does not attain Hope within the limits of the poem. Wordsworth is not preaching a doctrine here so much as narrating the results of experience" (p. 234). Correctly arguing that the theme of The Excursion, like that of The Prelude, is the growth of the imagination, he sees the Solitary as lacking in the "higher faculty of imagination" and being forced to exercise the fancy (p. 243). The Solitary's weakness, according to Beatty, is that "he depends on the false conclusions of the reasoning power --conclusions which he himself has not tested, and which lead to false hopes, because they close passages through which the ear converses with the heart" (p. 250). He argues that the stories of The Excursion "are an integral part of the poem, giving rise to the philosophical discussion, or arising out of it, and illustrating it" (p. 255). His discussion of The Excursion is from a philosophical standpoint, but in closing he remarks, "we must keep in mind that he [Wordsworth] was a conscious artist, who quite deliberately chose how he

might write" (p. 276).

From two sympathetic critics of The Excursion who judge the poem on its own merits rather than comparing it invidiously with The Prelude, we come to the influential critique of Herbert Read (1930).⁵⁹ He opens his discussion of The Excursion by agreeing with Arnold's means of improving Wordsworth's reputation as a poet (p. 119). For Read, The Excursion "has no unity at all. It is a collection of moral anecdotes strung together by a literary device of almost childish naivety. What dramatic structure is in the poem is quite unconvincing" (p. 166). He argues, but fails to support, that "The Excursion was animated by the wrong kind of energy. Its sentiments were not poetic at all, but moral; it was grounded not in immediate sensation, but on ratiocination" (p. 155). After the great decade, Read continues, "Wordsworth had so frustrated his feelings that he was no longer capable of sustained poetic expression" (p. 156). As far as Read is concerned The Excursion "fails on two scores: it fails because it has no convincing structure, no visual or allegorical unity; and it fails because it has not sufficient verbal harmony or felicity to justify it in any less uni-

fied conception" (p. 156). The Excursion, Read adds, fails as great poetry because it lacks both "the dramatic or visual, and the verbal or aural" modes which "the highest poetry unites" (p. 156). It is unfortunate that Read does not attempt to show exactly how and why The Excursion fails as a poetic unity.

In 1933 Fausset, like Read, takes a somewhat psychoanalytical approach to Wordsworth's poetry, attempting to explain the poet's decline after about 1807.⁶⁰ Fausset sees Wordsworth as "a potential mystic who failed to complete himself at a crucial point, failed to pass from the state of childhood and boyhood when the spiritual is inevitably a condition of the natural to a creative maturity when the natural should be as inevitably a condition of the spiritual. Hence, when his natural forces began to decline, he not only ceased to grow imaginatively, but began to die" (p. 8). About The Excursion, Fausset is less condemnatory than Read. On the protagonists of the poem he writes, "The Solitary is the disillusioned and embittered man who retired at Racedown. The Wanderer is the poet of Grassmere who believed that he recovered his integrity. The Pastor is the later moralist and pietist into whom the

poet through his fatal compromise inevitably degenerated" (p. 307). Fausset sees both The Prelude and The Excursion as attempts by Wordsworth "to convince himself that the fissure in his being had been closed, and to show how it had been closed" (p. 314). The disease that caused the fissure in his being is, according to Fausset, personified in the Solitary. In the description of the domestic bliss of the Solitary and his wife, Fausset discerns some of the poet's ardour towards his approaching marriage. Suggestively, he intimates that the "blooming Lady" of the poem was Annette, not Mary Hutchinson (p. 315).

In 1950, Lyon published the first and only full-length study of The Excursion.⁶¹ Deploring the fact that such critics as Beatty and Harper "treated the poem incidentally," Lyon undertakes his study "with the intention of providing a general introduction for the serious reader who wishes to tackle The Excursion as a poem rather than a source for biographical data or for quotations used in some other connection" (p. viii). Lyon approaches the poem in the belief that

despite its many flaws, it is an important focal point in Wordsworth's poetical development, deserving much closer attention than it has had in the past; that it is the most complete and honest statement that has come down to us of the psychological problems posed for an Englishman by the failure of the French Revolution; and that a better grasp of the facts about the poem, a fuller understanding of its meaning, and a more thorough familiarity with the qualities of its poetic style than have hitherto been possible will make it easier to evaluate and more enjoyable to read. (p. viii)

Lyon begins his study by outlining the reputation of The Excursion. He draws attention to the main reviews, though he does not discuss them in any great detail. The chapter, however, provides the reader with a good idea of the fortunes of The Excursion. It should be supplemented by Smith's An Estimate of William Wordsworth⁶² and by Reiman's The Romantics Reviewed. Chapter Two, entitled "The History of The Excursion," is a useful and detailed essay on the composition of the poem, from its beginning in 1795 when lines 871-916 of Book I were written to its many revisions during the poet's lifetime. Helen Darbishire, in her review of Lyon's book, warns the reader of a few inaccuracies concerning the "ambiguity about titles" in Wordsworth's correspondence.⁶³

In Chapter Three Lyon endeavours to come to terms with the structure of The Excursion. He discusses the

four principal streams of eighteenth-century literature which meet in the poem, the long blank-verse didactic poem, the philosophical dialogue, the short verse narrative of humble life, and the funeral elegy (p. 31).⁶⁴ This is a well-documented chapter, and gives the reader a sound idea of the tradition in which Wordsworth was working. In this chapter, Lyon becomes the first critic to avoid merely suggestive remarks and to attempt to analyze the structure of The Excursion.

Chapter Four is the most useful section of Lyon's study. Here he analyzes the various strands of the poet's heterogeneous philosophy. He discounts attempts by critics like Beatty and Campbell⁶⁵ to impose metaphysical motivation on the "frank simplicity" of the stories of The Excursion (p. 83), and concludes that Wordsworth in these stories provided his own moral explanations.

His final chapter on the style of The Excursion is disappointing in that it really does not advance our understanding of the style of the poem beyond the somewhat obvious fact that there are "flowery circumlocutions" and a preponderance of latinate words. Lyon's cataloguing of words and phrases is tiresome, though he does pay some attention to sentence length, imagery and

similes.

Piper in The Active Universe (1962) devotes two chapters to the influence of The Excursion on Romantic writers such as Keats, Shelley, and to a lesser degree, Byron, and on such Victorian authors as Ruskin and Browning.⁶⁶ Piper sees The Excursion as having two separate parts, the first, written between 1797-99, "contain[ing] a religion of personal salvation through Nature," being the part that influenced Keats, Shelley, and Byron. The other part written between 1802-12 discusses "the application of that system to society and attempts to reconnect it with the established church" (p. 149). This latter part contained ideas of great importance to the Victorians. The facets of Wordsworth's philosophy, Piper argues, that had the greatest and most immediate effect on English poetry "were those which asserted that there was an active principle in each natural form and in the whole of nature, that through the power of the Imagination the poet in contemplating the forms communes with this spirit" (p. 159). Piper adds that though Wordsworth was not the originator of the belief in the inevitability of progress as presented in The Excursion, he "was for the younger writers

its chief preacher" (p. 183). Keats's conception of beauty, in Piper's view, was influenced by The Excursion, and Shelley's mature beliefs, though they owed much to Godwin and Plato, "rested ultimately on ideas which he adopted from The Excursion and in these ideas he had complete trust" (p. 196). Piper concludes his discussion by asserting that The Excursion is among the greatest Romantic achievements in large-scale poetry (p. 203).

In his prize-winning study of Wordsworth's poetry (1964),⁶⁷ Hartman attempts to treat The Excursion fairly, though his opening sentence recalls the sweeping censure of Jeffrey:⁶⁸ "One must admit that to read its nine books is a massively depressing experience, and it is hard to think of a correction for that despondency" (p. 292). Such a remark belongs more appropriately to a quick review than to a serious study. Attempting to understand the structure of The Excursion, Hartman sees the poem closely associated with the Georgics; both Wordsworth's and Vergil's poems are "devoid of action in the ordinary sense" (p. 298). More useful is Hartman's discovery of a literary resemblance between the despairing Solitary on one hand and the Red Cross Knight, Adam and the poet of The Prelude, on the other, all of

whom are victims of despondency (p. 360). Like Beatty and Harper, Hartman sees the Solitary's illness as an unhealthy imagination (p. 308).

Endeavouring to show that in Wordsworth's greatest poetry there is always a positive correlation between the visionary and the visual, Hartman argues that in The Excursion there is a separation of the visionary and the visual, and that in this work the poet is "fleeing from vision" (p. 294). Vision in The Excursion, Hartman continues, "is always with suffering, whether conceived in joy or in pain" (p. 294). But he does not take into account the mountain-top experience of "blended holiness" of Book IX. Hartman's most suggestive comment in his essay is that Books VI and VII form, to use his words, "an involuntary parody of the epic nekya or descent to the dead" (p. 296). Exactly why these books are an "involuntary parody" of an epic device is never taken up. Though Hartman's book has won much praise from the critics,⁶⁹ his chapter on The Excursion is quite disappointing.

Mary Moorman's broad sympathy is everywhere evident in the second volume of her definitive biography of Wordsworth (1965).⁷⁰ In The Excursion she finds

the descriptions of landscapes "inimitable and often strangely moving" (p. 181), an evaluation echoed by Noyes more recently (1973).⁷¹ For Moorman, The Excursion is a "novel without a hero" (p. 182), and in it Wordsworth lacked "the inspiration of a constant and rewarding theme, such as had been the 'growth of his own mind,' which gives fascination and unity to The Prelude" (p. 182). Moorman adds that The Excursion fails as a poetic unity, but remains "a monument to Wordsworth's unchanging concern with man as a 'moral being,' suffering and mourning indeed, but 'not without hope,' and with dignity bestowed upon him that was a perpetual reminder of 'that imperial palace whence he came'" (p. 182).

In his study of Wordsworth's poetry containing two chapters on The Excursion (1966),⁷² Bernard Groom begins by agreeing with Arnold that "The Ruined Cottage" should be discussed separately, and that it has no organic connection with the general plan of The Excursion. He finds portions of The Excursion loosely connected with the main purpose of the poem (p. 105), and it "is thus a series of poems, descriptions, and episodes, expressing the mind of Wordsworth in middle life, mainly through the medium of

the Wanderer and the Pastor" (p. 106). He agrees with most critics that Book IV is "the greatest piece of sustained writing in the entire work" (p. 105), and like Lamb and Beatty, he finds Books VI and VII of immense interest. To these he devotes his second chapter. Their variety precludes monotony (p. 122), and many of the stories therein exemplify Wordsworth's conception of what an epitaph should be, "'truth hallowed by love-- the joint offspring of the worth of the dead and the affection of the living'" (p. 125). Groom ends his analysis of The Excursion by stating that when the variety and harmony of these epitaphs are taken into account, "they will be recognized as an admirable achievement in the art of poetry" (p. 125).

Enid Welsford in her study of Wordsworth's Salisbury Plain Poems (1966), of which sixty-seven pages are devoted to The Excursion,⁷³ attempts to defend the poem against Read's influential allegation that The Excursion "has no unity at all." Though she finds the speeches too long, the plot trivial, and a certain indecorousness in a Miltonic style adapted to a luncheon party or picnic supper, Welsford nevertheless feels that Read "misunderstood the nature of the literary

device by which the moral anecdotes are strung together" (p. 80). The unity of the literary device, Welsford continues, "is not the unity of an eventful action, nor the unity of a closely knit argument, by the unity of a significant pattern which the verse preface . . . can help us interpret" (p. 80). She sees this pattern as "delineated by contrasts and correspondences, [and] by verbal and visual imagery related to the scenic background" (pp. 80-81). She discusses with greater insight than anyone else the significance of sunshine and shadow in The Excursion,⁷⁴ and attempts to discover a "significant pattern" behind the poet's emblemism:

" . . . if we focus the poem aright by attending not merely to the bare bones of the plot, but also to the carefully planned symbolic patterning of it; then we can see that The Excursion has structural unity and coherent thought as well as fine poetic passages; and is very much more than 'a collection of moral anecdotes strung together by a device of almost childish naivete'" (p. 132). Unfortunately Welsford does not really show how the emblemism informs a significant structural pattern in the poem; but her comments are perhaps the most suggestive ever made vis-à-vis the structure of The Excursion.

In 1978 The Wordsworth Circle devoted an entire issue to The Excursion.⁷⁵ Eight essays carry on the work of Lyon, Groom and Welsford, who have treated the poem as more than a mere repository of Wordsworth's philosophy. In the first article Kenneth Johnston discusses the evolution of the Solitary, and the difficulties the poet experienced as he attempted to portray the Solitary as a Job-like figure, whose problem is one of regaining rather than retaining faith.⁷⁶

Annabel Patterson's article convincingly shows that a georgic pattern does exist within The Excursion.⁷⁷ The poem, she argues, is "Wordsworth's attempt to re-write the Georgics for his own generation" (p. 145). The praise of the country life, the fervent patriotism, the over didacticism, and the 'happy man' formula are all "sign[s] of georgic intention" in The Excursion (p. 145).

In an excellent article Geoffrey Durrant analyzes the tree and plant imagery in Books VI, VII and VIII.⁷⁸ The trees are emblems of human life, and as the emblemism becomes stronger, they represent "the very structure of society--the family, the village, and even the Church" (p. 159). In an unconvincing essay David Smith discusses the Wanderer's silence during the last three hundred and

eighty-one lines of the poem.⁷⁹ Smith attempts to show "that here is an internal conflict of sorts in the Wanderer as the poem ends . . . that his final silence betokens observance of the fact, long known to him, that the power of the imagination to reach out beyond its possessor is crucially limited" (p. 163). This contradicts the meaning of the Wanderer's upbringing and the mountain-top experience the pilgrims share in Book IX.

Stuart Peterfreund, who collected these articles for this issue of The Wordsworth Circle, has written a very suggestive article on the Miltonic influence on The Excursion.⁸⁰ He finds that The Excursion "reverses the movement of the concluding lines of Paradise Lost in which Adam and Eve move eastward out of Eden" (P. 174). The westward movement of The Excursion is towards places of human ruin. Peterfreund sees the Wanderer as "Wordsworth's naturalized version of Milton's Archangel Michael," and the Pastor as Wordsworth's "naturalized version of Raphael" (p. 175). Such comments seem fanciful, for, though Wordsworth echoes Milton in many lines of The Excursion, he is not writing a personal version of Paradise Lost. However, Peterfreund's suggestions of epic intent on Wordsworth's part in The Excursion are stimu-

lating.

Barbara Gates discusses in her essay the function of providential history in The Excursion.⁸¹ The Wanderer's affirmation of providential history, according to Gates, "contrasts with the young poet's use of the past in The Prelude" (p. 178). Whereas the hero of The Prelude "ultimately opts to look beyond collective human events to nature and to love for personal salvation," the Wanderer "uses history to illuminate the present, and to teach others 'to draw the line of comfort that divides/ Calamity, the chastisement of Heaven/ From the injustice of our brother men'" (p. 178).

In "The Bitter Language of the Heart," Jim Borck discusses the main reasons why Wordsworth was forced to retreat from "epic structure and Christian philosophy" in The Excursion (p. 182).⁸² As Borck views the poem, there is an unresolved tension between the naturalistic language of eighteenth-century poetry and Wordsworth's attempt to describe the mind of man. What the poet does indeed describe is the "medial region" between the external world and the mind of man. Because the links between the external world and the mind of man are forever broken, Borck sees The Excursion as demonstrating

"how a nineteenth-century poet has great difficulty in writing Christian epics" (p. 187).

In the final essay of this collection, Peter McInerny discusses the "natural wisdom" of "The Ruined Cottage," and makes some valuable comments on the poet's use of landscape in both The Prelude and The Excursion.⁸³

Twentieth-century criticism has advanced our knowledge of The Excursion much more than that of the Romantic and Victorian Ages. Critics of this century have looked longer and harder at The Excursion than previous critics. They have gone beyond the broad, discursive comments of Romantic and Victorian critics, and have analyzed, in a specific and sustained manner, the structure and style, and to a much lesser extent, the imagery of the poem. We might say that whereas the criticism of the nineteenth century was largely descriptive, twentieth-century criticism of The Excursion has been, in the main, analytic.

One noticeable feature of much twentieth-century criticism of Wordsworth's poetry is the comparative neglect of The Excursion. Many important studies of Wordsworth's poetry either give token mention of The Excursion or completely pretermit it. David Ferry's The Limits of

Mortality,⁸⁴ subtitled "An Essay on Wordsworth's Major Poems," does not mention The Excursion even once; while David Perkins, in his two books on Wordsworth,⁸⁵ accords the poem merely incidental treatment. Harold Bloom, in The Visionary Company,⁸⁶ finds it more appropriate to take refuge in the strictures of Hazlitt than to say something original about The Excursion. Both Rader⁸⁷ and Stallknecht,⁸⁸ in their investigation of Wordsworth's philosophy, treat The Excursion only cursorily.

British critics, by and large, have been more sympathetic to The Excursion and more willing to discuss its artistic merits than their American counterparts. Jones,⁸⁹ Welsford, Moorman, Piper, Hough, and Knight have avoided the melodramatic statements of Hamilton and Hartman, and have treated The Excursion fairly, though not adequately. It is hard to ascertain the reason for this difference between British and American critics, but one senses that it has something to do with the feeling of national pride that Arnold experienced in connection with Wordsworth's poetry.

Summary

The foregoing review of the history of the criticism of The Excursion reveals the changing nature of the critiques. For many years after its publication and as late as 1922, The Excursion was treated as merely an expression of Wordsworth's philosophy. For this critical trend there are at least two reasons. One is that after the two Prefaces and the poems of Lyrical Ballads readers, as Crabb Robinson reminds us, were eagerly awaiting a comprehensive statement of the poet's philosophy.⁹⁰ Secondly, in the prefatory letter to The Excursion, Wordsworth inadvertently sanctioned such an approach to his poem, when he wrote:

It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system; it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feeling, the Reader will have no difficulty in extricating the system for himself.

Readers, eager to discover the poet's philosophy and encouraged by Wordsworth's mention of his "system," ignored the fact that he found it "more animating to . . . proceed in a different course." That different course

was, it seems, the poet's attempt with the encouragement of Coleridge to combine poetry and philosophy. Too much of the early criticism of the poem neglects the poetry of The Excursion, while focusing almost exclusively on its philosophy. If the meaning of The Excursion is to be comprehended, criticism will have to take into account the significant relationship between the poem's form and its content.

There were, to be sure, critiques that touched upon the structure of the poem; but there were no sustained attempts to analyze its artistic merits. What we find instead are mainly generalized, sometimes quite suggestive, comments on such elements as style, unity and imagery. Lamb broaches the subject of the completeness of The Excursion, but does not investigate his allegation. Likewise Hazlitt's comments on the structuring of the poem are left undefined. De Quincey finds no connection between Book I and the rest of the poem, but does not demonstrate in any critical way the lack of unity. Both John Wilson and R. H. Hutton find that Wordsworth is deficient in the constructive faculty. Whereas Wilson finds this deficiency in the longer poems, especially in The Excursion, Hutton finds that the lack of structure

is evident throughout Wordsworth's works.⁹¹

Such scattered but evocative comments were to prove the basis of a new critical approach to The Excursion, an approach based on the premise that The Excursion is a work of art whose esthetic merits should be analyzed and appreciated. This did not happen in the Victorian Age, for then Wordsworth was considered a bard, a seer, and a prophet, and The Excursion his chief organ of philosophy.⁹²

Though Matthew Arnold dealt a severe blow to the general acceptance of The Excursion, he makes possible a just critical approach to the poem. He suggested that the poem be looked at as a poem. He found it woefully lacking in poetic merit and roundly censured it, but at the same time he alerted critics to the possibility of dealing with the massive poem differently.

In 1950 the most important critique of The Excursion appeared. Lyon's study is really a landmark and a turning-point in the history of the criticism of The Excursion. It is the first study to treat the poem as a work of art. The importance of Lyon's study is indicated by the heartening fact that most critiques since then have continued his approach and established it as fruitful and balanced. He has succeeded in getting

critics to view The Excursion as a major work of Wordsworth's that is still to be analyzed in depth and with understanding of the poet's intentions.

The criticism of The Excursion has come a long way. We are no longer inclined to praise it as extravagantly as Keats, Lamb and others did; nor are we apt to condemn it as outright as Jeffrey and Byron did. The Excursion is not only Wordsworth's longest poem, but also, as several critics have noted, his most ambitious.⁹³ The structural complexity of The Excursion comprises three large patterns: an epic pattern, a liturgical pattern, and a topographical pattern. An analysis of these patterns ought to put to rest the belief, widespread among Romantic and Victorian critics, and still found, that Wordsworth lacks the constructive faculty, especially in The Excursion. Though it may be an exaggeration to use the Solitary's words, "Fantastic pomp of structure,"⁹⁴ to describe The Excursion, the poem is more carefully and elaborately structured than critics would have us believe.

Notes

Chapter One

¹ This date is suggested by Judson Stanley Lyon in The Excursion: A Study (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1950), p. 22, and accepted by Helen Darbishire in her review of Lyon's study, RES, n.s. III (1952), 81-82.

² See the Preface to The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar, ed. James Butler (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), p. ix; and The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. De Selincourt and Darbishire (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), vol. V, p. 372.

³ The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. De Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), The Middle Years, 1812-20, rev. Moorman and Hill (1970), p. 144. Hereafter cited as Letters.

⁴ Letters, The Early Years, 1805-11, rev. C. L. Shaver (1967), p. 594.

⁵ Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20, p. 146.

⁶ The Letters of Charles Lamb, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (London: Bell & Sons, 1886), vol. I, p. 426.

⁷ The Romantics Reviewed, ed. Donald Reiman (New York: Garland, 1972), vol. II, p. 665.

⁸ Reiman, vol. I, p. 358.

⁹ The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey, ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey (London: Longmans, 1850), vol. IV, p. 195.

¹⁰ Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, ed. Edith Morley (London: Dent, 1938), vol. I, p. 159.

- 11 Wilfred Ward, Aubrey de Vere (London: Longmans, 1904), p. 34.
- 12 The Letters of John Keats, ed. H. E. Rollins (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), vol. I, p. 201, pp. 204-05.
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- 16 James Venable Logan, Wordsworthian Criticism (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1947), p. 10.
- 17 Reiman, vol. II, p. 440.
- 18 Katherine Mary Peek, Wordsworth in England (Pennsylvania: Bryn Mawr, 1943), p. 49.
- 19 New Letters of Robert Southey, ed. Kenneth Curry (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965), vol. II, p. 112.
- 20 Logan, p. 6.
- 21 Monthly Literary Recreations (July, 1807), quoted by Logan (p. 20).
- 22 The Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, ed. R. E. Prothero (London, 1898), vol. IV, p. 484.
- 23 The Works of Professor Wilson, ed. Professor Ferrier (London: Blackwood & Sons, 1855), vol. I. p. 35.

24 Blackwood's Magazine, XXIX (April, 1831),
reprinted in The Works of Professor Wilson, III, pp.
234-38.

25 Autobiography (London: Oxford Univ. Press,
1924), p. 124.

26 The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon Haight
(New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1954), vol. II, p. 430.

27 Reiman, vol. II, pp. 826-31.

28 Some three months later, Wordsworth echoes
Lamb's words: "One of the main objects of The Recluse
is to reduce the calculating understanding to its
proper level among human faculties" (Letters, The Middle
Years, 1812-20, p. 619).

29 Walter Pater, Appreciations (London: Macmillan,
1904), pp. 40 ff.

30 The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P.
P. Howe (London: Dent, 1938), vol. IV, pp. 111-25.

31 Reiman, vol. II, pp. 802-13.

32 Reiman, vol. II, p. 806.

33 The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, II,
86-95.

34 Logan, p. 24.

35 The Writings of De Quincey, ed. David Masson
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36 The Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed.
E. L. Griggs (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958), vol.
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- 37 The Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, IV,
p. 474.
- 38 The Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, IV.
p. 475.
- 39 Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20, pp. 669-70.
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oquists (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1963), pp.
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- 43 The Memoirs of William Wordsworth, ed.
Christopher Wordsworth (London, 1851), vol. I, p. 159.
- 44 Table Talk, p. 188.
- 45 Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Other Essays
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originally published in Cornhill Magazine, XXXIV (1876).

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- 49 "Wordsworth and Byron," Miscellanies (New York: Worthington, 1886), pp. 63-156.
- 50 Wordsworth (New York: Harper).
- 51 The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (London: Macmillan).
- 52 Edward Caird, Essays on Literature (London: Macmillan, 1909), originally published in Fraser's Magazine, CI (1880).
- 53 A. C. Bradley, "Wordsworth," Oxford Lectures on Poetry (1909; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 129-30.
- 54 Biographia Literaria, II, p. 19.
- 55 See also Walter Bagehot, "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; or Pure, Ornate and Grotesque Art in English Poetry," The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot, ed. Norman St. John-Stevas (London: Watson & Viney, 1965), vol. II, pp. 318-66, originally published in The National Review (Nov., 1864).
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- 58 Beatty's words recall A. E. Hancock's made some twenty-three years earlier: "It [The Excursion] does endeavour to reconstruct new life and hope out of the wreckage of the philosophical fiasco of the Revolution" (The French Revolution & The English Poets (1899; rpt. New York, 1967), p. 149.)

- 59 Wordsworth (London: Faber, 1930).
- 60 Hugh I'Anson Fausset, The Lost Leader: A Study of Wordsworth (New York: Russell, 1933).
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- 63 RES, n.s. III (1952), 81-82.
- 64 One possible source Lyon omits is Octavius, a dialogue by Mancius Felix, which Wordsworth knew through Coleridge. See Alan G. Hill, "New Light on The Excursion," Ariel, V, no. 2 (April, 1974), 37-47.
- 65 O. J. Campbell, Sentimental Morality in Wordsworth (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1920), pp. 21-57.
- 66 H. W. Piper, The Active Universe (London: Athlone Press, 1962).
- 67 Geoffrey Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, 1798-1814 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964).
- 68 See also Carson Hamilton who, in Wordsworth's Decline in Poetic Power (New York: Exposition Press, 1963), p. 373, summarizes his ill-founded remarks on The Excursion: "The Excursion is an unstable compound, an inconstant--impossible--mixture, a dish, unpalatable and indigestible, concocted out of the scraps of yesterday's transcendentalism and today's Anglicanism, served up with a garnish of social reform."
- 69 See Kenneth Johnston's review of Hartman's book, The Wordsworth Circle, vol. III, no. 2 (Spring, 1972), 149-59.

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- 72 Bernard Groom, The Unity of Wordsworth's Poetry (New York: St. Martin's, 1966).
- 73 Enid Welsford, Wordsworth's Salisbury Plain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), pp. 65-132.
- 74 For another reading of the solar imagery in The Excursion, see Abbie Findlay Potts, The Elegiac Mode (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 195-224.
- 75 The Wordsworth Circle, vol. IX, no. 2 (Spring, 1978).
- 76 "Wordsworth's Reckless Recluse: The Solitary," 131-44.
- 77 "Wordsworth's Georgic: Genre and Structure in The Excursion," 145-54.
- 78 "The Elegiac Poetry of The Excursion," 155-61.
- 79 "The Wanderer's Silence: A Strange Reticence in Book IX of The Excursion," 162-72.
- 80 "'In Free Homage and Generous Subjection': Miltonic Influence on The Excursion," 173-77.
- 81 "Providential History in The Excursion," 179-81.
- 82 Jim Springer Borck, "The Bitter Language of the Heart" in Wordsworth's The Excursion," 182-87.

- 83 "Natural Wisdom in Wordsworth's The Excursion," 188-99.
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- 90 Henry Crabb Robinson, Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence, ed. Thomas Sadler (London: Macmillan, 1869), vol. II, pp. 434-35.
- 91 R. H. Hutton, "The Genius of Wordsworth," Literary Essays (London: Macmillan, 1871), p. 113.
- 92 Logan, p. 47; Peek, pp. 49-261.

⁹³ G. Wilson Knight, The Starlit Dome (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 41; Margaret Drabble, Wordsworth (London: Evans, 1966), p. 131; J. M. Sutherland, William Wordsworth: The Story of His Life (London: Stock, 1892), p. 135; Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company, p. 194; Richard Brantley, Wordsworth's "Natural Methodism" (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1975), p. xii; and Solomon Gingerich, Essays in the Romantic Poets (1924; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p. 176.

⁹⁴ The Excursion, II. 859.

CHAPTER TWO: THE EPIC PATTERN

The Excursion is demonstrably epic: it is a Romantic epic that celebrates the exquisite reciprocity between the mind of man and external nature. Its matter and theme are quite new, though thematically it is a development of the Dantean and Miltonic epics. Although it adapts conventional devices to its specific purposes, as I shall show later, it shares a structural affinity with many epics. It possesses such prescriptive devices as an invocation to the Muse, an epic question, an in medias res beginning, a combined catabasis and nekya, an epic catalogue, and a journey of ordeal. It evinces as well a traditional encyclopedism, presents a pattern of human behaviour that is arguably heroic, and, like most epics since Vergil, discharges a moral function. Its matter, style, and purpose are serious and lofty.

All literary genres have changed over the centuries, but none more than the epic. By its very nature the epic is given to change. Inherent in the epic is a paradox--it seeks to perpetuate a venerable tradition, yet at the same time it seeks to challenge and change that very tradition. Furthermore, because it seeks,

among other things, to present a comprehensive picture of the age in which it is written, the epic has changed as much as the ages have. Its chameleonic character has frustrated precise definition, though there have been numerous attempts to define this most prestigious literary genre.¹

While most critics still continue to discuss epic in terms of "form" and "content," it seems more profitable to analyze the genre in terms of its "inner form" and its "outer form." According to Wellek and Warren, "Genre should be conceived, we think, as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both 'outer form' (specific meter or structure) and also upon 'inner form' (attitude, tone, purpose--more crudely, subject and audience)."² The "outer form" of epic, then, will comprise the traditional devices that have characterized the epic since Homer. These devices are the invocation to the Muse, the in medias res beginning, the flashback technique, the catabasis or descent into the underworld, the nekya or meeting with the dead, the epic catalogue, epic machinery, and the journey of the hero, who against great odds, wins the day. Most epics possess some of

these devices; perhaps only two, the Aeneid and Paradise Lost, possess all of them. The Iliad does not present a significant journey as, say, the Aeneid and the Odyssey do; neither does it exhibit a catabasis and a nekya, which first appear in the eleventh book of the Odyssey. While Paradise Lost bristles with epic machinery, The Divine Comedy and Jerusalem Delivered have none. The "outer form" of epic, then, may contain all the above-mentioned structural devices; usually, however, it contains only some. The conventions are arranged so as to give the work a discernible epic structure that resembles in actual form and in experiential reality the works that we have come to call epics. By "experiential reality," I mean the experience one has reading the epic. It is the sense that an action, vast, auspicious, and humanly significant, is unfolding before our eyes.

The "inner form" of epic comprises an attempt to see the world in a new way, a traditional encyclopedism, a prescriptive heroism, and a significant moral lesson. The epic poet is obliged by the exigencies of the genre to present in his poem a standard of human conduct that is heroic. 'Heroic' is a loaded term and can be misleading in this context, for in the minds of many it conjures up visions of the Red Cross Knight, of Odysseus, of

Achilles, and of other demigods battling with superhuman strength prodigious antagonists. But such a definition is obsolete, to say the least. Heroism should be defined as any behaviour that is admired and ought to be emulated, according to the standards of the age in which the epic is written. In Wordsworth's day, recovering one's equilibrium after the chagrin over the aftermath of the French Revolution, and attempting to regain confidence in oneself, in social man, in the benevolence of Nature, and in God's goodness in a troubled, tempestuous age constituted to many a form of heroic conduct. In this new age with its emphasis almost totally on the inner man, recovery from inimical despondency seems a viable heroic theme. The epic hero is an all-too-human hero trying to come to grips with "the weight of all this unintelligible world," and in so doing forging a new standard of heroism.

In his struggle the hero shows others how they may deal with their own problems. His conduct becomes a sort of moral norm for all, established to be emulated. In this respect the epic contains a significant moral lesson. Whereas Homer's epics seem amoral to our age, the epic since Vergil has been overtly tendentious.

Historically, this is the way critics have viewed the epic. According to H. T. Swedenberg Jr. (1944), nearly all English scholars of Wordsworth's time agreed that "the epic was a poem based on fable, designed to teach high moral lessons."³ Undoubtedly, Wordsworth subscribed to epic didacticism, for he considered all his poetry didactic. In a letter to Sir George Beaumont, he writes, "I wish to be considered as a Teacher, or as nothing."⁴

The epic springs from an auspicious conjuncture in the poet's life, a moment to which all his poetic endeavours, his political actions, and his social experiences have conduced. This moment, as Frye puts it, is "the crisis of his life."⁵ The epic poet realizes that he is working within a venerable tradition and that there are certain prescriptive demands of this self-imposed vocation. He knows that his creation calls upon him to task his talents to their limit and to present a personal yet comprehensive picture of the human situation. It is the crowning glory of his life, the achievement that sums up not merely his career but also the times in which he lived. For by its very nature the epic is encyclopedic, affording a graphic verbal picture of the milieu that

produced artist and artifact. Finally the epic poet hopes that the inditing of a successful epic will win him immortality and a place on Parnassus beside the laurelled Homer and Vergil.

To Wordsworth such success was important. Like many great poets, he considered the writing of an epic poem an important part of "the task of [his] life."⁶ In 1805 he wrote to Beaumont, expressing the hope that time would allow him "to bring [The Recluse] to a conclusion, and to write further a narrative Poem of the Epic Kind."⁷ Whatever the reasons, the "moral and Philosophical Poem"⁸ remained unfinished. Perhaps there was indeed a measurable decline in poetic power as Coleridge and others have argued.⁹ Perhaps the plan was too mighty for Wordsworth or any other poet to realize. Perhaps, as Batho suggests, his eye-trouble was too severe to allow him long periods of great concentration.¹⁰ Most reasonably, it was a combination of all these factors. Wordsworth, perhaps sensing that his goal of completing "The Recluse" first and then writing an epic poem would never be realized, concentrated his efforts on making The Excursion--the second part of "The Recluse"--the epic, the writing of which he deemed an essential portion of "the task of [his]

life." When he wrote to Wrangham in April 1814 that The Excursion "was serious . . . and written with great labour,"¹¹ he knew how carefully he had structured the poem.

Critics, however, have not been able to discern much structural unity in the poem. Furthermore, no one has been willing to grant epic stature to The Excursion. Lyon, for instance, argues that The Excursion partakes of the four principal streams of eighteenth-century poetry: "the long blank-verse didactic poem; the philosophical dialogue; the short verse narrative of humble life, separate or in framework; and the funeral elegy."¹² He does not consider it an epic, although he does mention that Wordsworth may have "been attempting to achieve some degree of epic unity" in The Excursion (p. 135). This epic tendency, Lyon adds, "would seem to be indirectly supported by the presence of Homeric similes and other classical and neoclassical stylistic traits, but there is no further evidence to support it and it must remain speculation" (p. 135).

Karl Kroeber, in an interesting discussion of Wordsworth's narrative art, argues for the epic quality of The Prelude, but is unwilling to grant that generic stature

to The Excursion.¹³ He does concede, however, that, "taken all in all, The Excursion is more like The Prelude than like The Seasons or The Task" (p. 104). He also admits that The Excursion "asserts the validity of the poetic vision as the profoundest of revelations, as the truth to which all else must appeal for confirmation" (p. 110). But "The Excursion pretends, as it were, to be literal epic, a realistic account of how man may fortify his mind" (p. 111); it fails to be genuine epic because "as a whole the poem is not animated by a narrative impulse" (p. 109). Since true narrative is Kroeber's first touchstone of epic, he excludes The Excursion from the company of epics.

Brian Wilkie, too, while granting the thematic similarity between The Prelude and The Excursion, does not consider the latter an epic.¹⁴ For Wilkie, where The Excursion fails in epic stature is in method rather than in theme. He continues: "the method of The Excursion is discursive rather than narrative and therefore could never be considered epic unless the term were unreasonably broadened, narrative method being one of the few things which epic theorists have agreed to demand of the epic" (p. 77).

Judged by the criteria of Kroeber and Wilkie, neither The Divine Comedy nor The Faerie Queene could be considered epics. For Abercrombie reminds us that in "all the poems which the world has agreed to call epics, there is a story told, and well told. But Dante's poem attempts no story at all, and Spenser's, though it attempts several, does not tell them very well . . ."

(p. 52).¹⁵ Foerster also reminds us that in the Romantic Age the distinct preference for the lyric and for the immediacy of drama resulted in a diminished importance of narrative.¹⁶ There was also a transfer from action and plot to the expression of emotion. Wordsworth's remarks on his general poetic purpose are germane here:

I have also informed my Reader what this purpose will be found principally to be: namely to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement. But speaking in less general language, it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature.¹⁷

He adds that what distinguishes his poems from the popular poetry of the day is "that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling."¹⁸

This transfer from action and plot to the expression of emotion meant that if epic were to survive, it had to be altered. In The Excursion, Wordsworth does not make plot bear the burden of meaning; he internalizes the plot and describes the nature, function and history of the mind of man.

Vogler is another critic who does not consider The Excursion an epic.¹⁹ For him, The Excursion does not possess the quality of the vision that The Prelude does, and so cannot be called epic: "Neither The Excursion nor Jerusalem is a direct fulfillment of the creative power of the imagination to remake the world; instead those poems return to survey the fallen and fragmented world that The Prelude and Milton had pushed to the brink of regeneration" (p. 17). Similarly, Carl Woodring,²⁰ while granting that "The Prelude, like Byron's Don Juan, seems to be of the epic genre," sees "The Excursion [as] turn[ing] its back on epic and epic form" (p. 194). Annabel Patterson sees The Excursion as falling within the Vergilian georgic tradition.²¹ For her, The Excursion is "Wordsworth's attempt to rewrite the Georgics for his own generation" (p. 145). But she agrees with Lyon, Kroeber, Wilkie, Vogler, and

Woodring when she categorically asserts, "Whatever The Recluse might have been, The Excursion (unlike The Prelude) is not a Romantic epic of the human mind, or even part of one" (p. 145). For Annabel Patterson, it seems, the terms 'epic' and 'georgic' are mutually exclusive; she does not consider that a georgic pattern could lie harmoniously within an all-encompassing epic structure.

H. T. Swedenberg Jr. has discussed the epic tradition Wordsworth inherited.²² He states that, while the French critics did not agree on the telos of the epic, nearly all English scholars concurred that the epic was designed to teach high moral lessons. While the epic poet was expected to entertain, he could not lose sight of his high moral purpose. Swedenberg further comments that all French and English critics were one with Aristotle in believing that the epic must possess artistic unity, unity of action, and unity between the episodes and the main action. John Dryden and many eighteenth-century critics argued forcibly that a modern epic "should be based on Christian matter and peopled by the machinery of Christian origin."²³ Coleridge, contemplating the epic poem that he never wrote, agreed with Dryden, but restricted the subject even further:

The description of Jerusalem is the only subject now remaining for an epic poem; a subject which, like Milton's Fall of Man, should interest all Christendom, as the Homeric War of Troy interested all Greece Here there would be the completion of prophecies--the termination of the first revealed national religion under the violent assault of Paganism, itself the immediate forerunner and condition of the spread of a revealed mundane religion; and then you would have the character of the Roman and the Jew, and the awfulness, the completeness, the justice. I schemed it at twenty-five; but alas! venturum expectat.²⁴

Disappointingly, Wordsworth has left very little comment on the epic. In the Preface to the Edition of 1815, he gives us one of his two comments on epic. Speaking of narrative poetry, the class to which epic belongs, he writes:

Of this Class, the distinguishing mark, is, that the Narrator, however liberally his speaking agents be introduced, is himself the source from which every thing primarily flows. Epic poets, in order that their mode of composition may accord with the elevation of their subject, represent themselves as singing from the inspiration of the Muse, Arma virum que cano; but this is a fiction, in modern times, of slight value: The Iliad or the Paradise Lost would gain little in our estimation by being chaunted.²⁵

Wordsworth here turns the narrative mode in a lyrical direction. Though Wordsworth himself assumes this fictional posture in the Prospectus to "The Recluse," it

seems a spontaneous gesture rather than the studied reaction to the stylistic exigencies of the epic.

In an undated letter to Robert Southey, author of dull tedious historical epics, Wordsworth again expresses his opinions on the epic, this time more clearly and more significantly:

My opinion in respect to epic poetry is much the same as that of the critic whom Lucien Bonaparte has quoted in his preface. Epic poetry, of the highest class, requires in the first place an action with a grand train of consequences; it next requires the intervention and guidance of a being superior to man, what the critics, I believe, call machinery; and lastly, I think with Dennis that no subject but a religious one can answer the demand of the soul in the highest class of this species of poetry. Now Tasso's is a religious subject, and in my opinion a most happy one; but I am confidently of the opinion that the movement of Tasso's poem rarely corresponds with the essential character of the subject; nor do I think it possible that, written in stanzas, it should. The celestial movement cannot, I think, be kept up, if the sense is to be broken in that despotic manner at the end of every eight lines. Spenser's stanza is infinitely finer than the ottava rima but even Spenser's will not allow the epic movement as exhibited by Homer, Vergil, and Milton. How noble is the first paragraph of the Aeneid in point of sound, compared with the first stanza of the Jerusalem Delivered! The one winds with the majesty of the Conscript Fathers entering the Senate House in solemn procession; and the other has the pace of a set of recruits shuffling on the drill-ground, and receiving from the adjutant or drill-serjeant the command to halt every ten of twenty steps.²⁶

Here Wordsworth lists four requirements of epic: an action with a grand train of consequences, the intervention and guidance of a being superior to man, a religious subject, and an appropriate style like that of Homer, Vergil and Milton. As will be shown in this chapter, The Excursion fulfils all of these requirements. The correction of despondency is part of the new heroism that The Excursion portrays. In the poem "the living God" directs the will of man: he does not appear as the gods do in Homer, but he does manifest himself in powerful ways. The subject of The Excursion, the correction of despondency, is part of a total imaginative response to God, man and Nature, which is for Wordsworth a religious subject. A further indication of Wordsworth's epic intention in The Excursion is his use of an elevated style patterned in part after the epics he knew and loved.

The Outer Form

In the Preface to The Excursion, Wordsworth includes the closing section of Home at Grasmere to serve "as a kind of Prospectus of the design and scope of "The Recluse." The inclusion of lines that are structurally and

thematically connected with The Excursion makes them, in effect, a part of the poem. They form the epic prologue, which includes the invocation to the Muse, the epic question, and the statement of the poem's argument. From the Muse the poet solicits and anticipates the vitally necessary inspiration. The singer becomes inspired, and as the Muse breathes knowledge into him, he becomes for his eager audience the purveyor of truth. Milton, by eschewing the classical Muses who inspired Homer and Vergil, and by invoking "the Heavenly Muse," who inspired Moses, becomes a transmitter of Christian truth. He is not just a poet here; rather, he is a divinely inspired narrator with an inspired story to tell. His poem is not mere fiction; it assumes an aura of biblical authenticity and prophetic truth. Wordsworth, then, following the practice of Homer, Vergil, and Milton, invokes his Muse:

Urania, I shall need
 Thy guidance, or a greater Muse, if such
 Descend to earth and dwell in highest heaven!

 Descend, prophetic Spirit! that inspir'st
 The human Soul of universal earth,
 Dreaming on things to come; and dost possess
 A metropolitan temple in the hearts
 Of mighty Poets: upon me bestow
 A gift of genuine insight
 (Prospectus, 25-27, 84-89)²⁷

Wordsworth is here assuming the traditional posture of the epic poet, sacerdos Musarum, as it were, the priest of the Muses, as he attempts to give his poem a ring of inviolable truth. Here he invokes Urania as Milton did (Paradise Lost, VII. 1), or "a greater Muse" and "prophetic Spirit" as Spenser and Milton did, to inspire him sufficiently to "sing" his "spousal verse."

His "spousal verse," of which The Excursion is the second part, pivots, as it were, on the epic question. It is a sort of justification for the poem's existence, in that the narrative is really an answer to the epic question:

Paradise and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields--like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main--why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
(Prospectus, 47-51)

At first glance this seems just a rhetorical question, whose explanation is offered in the following sentence. But placed between an invocation to the Muse and a statement of the poem's "high argument," it is much more. When in Book IX the pilgrims share a rare Pentecostal experience, we realize that the promise of the epic question is fulfilled, and that The Excursion has been moving

to the moment when

. . . a willing mind
Might almost think, at this affecting hour,
That paradise, the lost abode of man,
Was raised again: and to a happy few,
In its original beauty, here restored.
(IX. 716-19)

The sentence following the epic question offers merely an explanation; the poem answers the question. Whereas the sentence only states that when "the discerning intellect of Man" is "wedded to this goodly universe/ In love and holy passion," Paradise and the Elysian Fields shall be a "simple produce of the common day," the poem shows how and when this visionary experience can be attained. More than a rhetorical question, lines 47-51 are in effect the poem's epic question.

The "high argument" adumbrated by the epic question is stated explicitly in subsequent lines:

--I, long before this blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation:--and, by words
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
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;
 And the creation (by no lower name
 Can it be called) which they with blended might
 Accomplish:--this is our high argument.
 (Prospectus, 56-71)

We are not looking into mythology or history as Homer, Vergil, Southey, and Milton did; like Dante we are looking into the mind of man. The journey of The Divine Comedy and the journey of The Excursion are internal, psychological, spiritual ones. Homer sang of the military exploits and the amorous adventures of Achilles and Odysseus; Vergil sang plaintively of "arms and the man"; Spenser abandoned his "Oaten reeds," took up his "trumpet stearne," to sing "of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds"; Milton in the grandest poetic manner described the adventures of God, Angels, Satan, and Man, the dramatis personae of Christian history. In his treatment of fallen Man, and in his poem's movement from the virtues of active combat to those of fortitude and patience, Milton anticipates what Wordsworth is doing in The Prelude and in The Excursion. Wordsworth, shunning conventional epic themes, decides to sing with confidence of the exquisite harmony and interplay between the external world and the mind of man.

At the same time he is telling us that within quotidian sights and sounds inheres a higher level of experience.

Wordsworth's epic hero is neither the Homeric epitome of martial prowess, nor the Vergilian superhuman favourite with a divine mission, nor the Miltonic Christ, the very paradigm of Christian heroism. More like the penitent, suffering Adam, he is peculiarly Wordsworthian, a disillusioned Solitary who will gradually come to re-accept the benevolence of God and the essential goodness of social fellowship.

It may be necessary to defend my use of the term 'hero' in connection with the Solitary, since most critics of The Excursion hold an opposing view.²⁸ The Solitary is both the protagonist, the chief person in drama, plot or story, and the person who is struggling to attain the heroism exemplified by the Wanderer, his spiritual mentor. From his very first appearance in the narrative to his final farewell, the Solitary captures and retains the readers' interest. His gradual recovery is the principal action of The Excursion, and the raison d'etre of virtually all the action and utterance of the other characters. He is the only character in the poem who faces an antagonist, which is "ab-

solute despair." As a result, he is the only character who evinces any genuine inner conflict, any psychological and spiritual change. The Solitary, the poetic culmination of so many lonely figures that people the Wordsworthian landscape, is the hero of The Excursion in much the same way as Christian is the hero of Pilgrim's Progress, and as the poet-pilgrim is the hero of The Divine Comedy. All embark on a spiritual excursion that is the central, pivotal action of the works in question.

Like most major epics, The Excursion begins in medias res. Initially laid down by Horace,²⁹ this precept won the approval of all succeeding epic critics and theorists. It serves to arouse the interest of the reader and to place the beginning, middle, and end of the epic action in proper perspective. The Aeneid opens with the landing of Aeneas and his travel-weary Trojans on the Lavinian shore. This is the first event Vergil chooses to describe; why they land and who they are remain for some time unanswered questions. This narrative technique actually arouses mystery and suspense, and creates in the readers' minds a desire not to be kept in the dark. The epic poet thus has the undivided attention and the anxious anticipation of his

audience. In Book II, at the request of Queen Dido, Aeneas reluctantly relates the true beginning of the dolorous tale--the Trojan War, the victory of the Greeks, the burning of Troy, and the escape of the narrator and his followers. Milton, following the practice of Vergil, first describes Satan and his fallen angels rallying to revenge their defeat at the hands of the heavenly host. Much later, in Book VI, Milton eventually gives a full account of the war in heaven when one third of the angels led by Lucifer rebelled against God and, defeated, were hurled into Hell. In Peter Bell, Wordsworth's contribution to mock epic, the poet reminds us in an unusually comic way that he knows all too well how this prescriptive device works. Furthermore, he sees that it is artificial, and sets it aside, acceding in this instance to his audience.

In The Excursion there is a serious usage of this opening device. The poem begins in the middle of things, with the Poet toiling across a wide Common under the summer sun:

'Twas summer, and the sun had mounted high:
Southward the landscape indistinctly glared
Through a pale steam;
Across a bare wide Common I was toiling
With languid steps that by the slippery turf

Were baffled; nor could my weak arm disperse
 The host of insects gathering round my face,
 And ever with me as I paced along.

(I. 1-3, 21-25)

The Poet here is walking with a particular goal in mind, "a grove/ The wished-for port to which his course was bound" (I. 26-27). The repeated image of the journey in The Excursion serves, as in Peter Bell and in The Divine Comedy, to suggest the classical epic.

The opening movement is stressed and sustained with the words "toiling" and "wide." We do not know this anonymous pilgrim, where he comes from, how long he has been travelling, and where he is going. We do not know whether this is the beginning, the middle, or the end of some important journey. Some forty lines later, we find out that he is journeying to meet his venerable friend, the Wanderer:

For the night
 We parted, nothing willingly; and now
 He by appointment waited for me here,
 Under the covert of these clustering elms.
 (I. 48-51)

This opening piques the curiosity of the reader and arouses his interest in the significance of this planned meeting and in the narrative as a whole.

Like the in medias res beginning, the flashback has been a staple of epic since Homer. It occurs early in the narrative and takes the reader back in time, into the past events which have a definite bearing on the present, into the genealogy and life of the hero. Accordingly, during the first four books of the *Odyssey*, the hero is absent, but we hear of him from the epic poet and from other characters. We first see Odysseus in Book V, sitting forlorn on the shore of Calypso's island where he is held against his will. In Book IX, Homer has his hero relate his personal adventures to the Phaeacian nobles assembled in the hall of King Alcinous' palace. Similarly, in the *Iliad*, Achilles is kept in the background until Book IX. In Books I-VIII, the epic poet and other characters tell of Achilles' life and his adventures in the Trojan War. In the first book of the *Aeneid*, the epic poet remarks on the past exploits and on the present situation of Aeneas, the hero. In Book II, at the request of Queen Dido, Aeneas relates his activities in and his escape from Troy.

In The Excursion, Wordsworth allows the Wanderer, a friend of the Solitary, to tell the story of chagrin

before the hero makes his initial appearance. We first hear of the recluse in the second book when he is referred to as "One who lives secluded there/ Lonesome and lost" (II. 159-60). Three hundred and forty lines later, the Solitary makes his appearance. Soon after the Solitary exchanges greetings with the Wanderer, Wordsworth has him, after the fashion of Homer, Vergil, and Milton, relate his own quite moving story. He takes us back into the past and paints graphically the events that have moulded his present attitudes. Like the epic flashback, the Solitary's narrative reveals the hero's genealogy and life. It provides the reader with vital information he would not otherwise have. Because the Wanderer's "brief communication" leads to the Solitary's larger, more-detailed narrative, the double flashback adds a sense of expansiveness to the epic.

Expansiveness has characterized the epic since Homer, and derives from the magnitude of the temporal and spatial dimensions of the epic. The temporal dimension of epic can carry cosmic implications as in Paradise Lost and the Bible, which Frye considers an epic. In his secularizing of scripture, Frye sees the Bible as stretching from the very moment of creation

to the founding of the New Jerusalem; from the birth of the soul to its final haven in God from whence it came: "The Bible as a whole, therefore, presents a gigantic cycle from creation to apocalypse, within which is the heroic quest of the Messiah from incarnation to apotheosis."³⁰ It is quite possible that poets like Dante, Spenser, Milton Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley thought of the Bible in this way and were influenced by its structural and poetic significance. Paradise Lost, the most cosmic of literary epics, encompasses all time and all space. Its implied overall time scheme spans all history, from the fiat lux to the eschatological millennium which the archangel Michael reveals to Adam. Using the Bible as both historical guide and esthetic model, Milton needs to tell the story of all things, from beginning to end, to achieve his aim of

. . . assert[ing] Eternal Providence,
And justify[ing] the ways of God to men.³¹
(I. 25-26)

Wordsworth has no such theological aim. His is to show how the mind can create new worlds out of old. Creation and apocalypse in The Excursion are not historical events, but functions of a purged perspective.

They do not in Wordsworth's epic have the same integral relation to the plot as they do in Paradise Lost. The description of creation (IV. 631-62), for example, could be omitted without seriously derogating from the philosophical thrust of The Excursion. In Paradise Lost, however, creation, fall and apocalypse form a sine qua non of Milton's argument.

In this description of creation in Book IV of The Excursion, Wordsworth recapitulates in selective detail the Old and New Testaments, the beginning of time, the early bliss, the fall, the loss of "those pure heights," and the kind of life fallen man has had to eke out without "communications spiritually maintained":

Upon the breast of new-created earth
 Man walked; and when and whereso'er he moved,
 Alone or mated, solitude was not.
 He heard, borne on the wind, the articulate voice
 Of God; and Angels to his sight appeared
 Crowning the glorious hills of paradise;
 Or through the groves gliding like morning mist
 Enkindled by the sun. He sate--and talked
 With winged Messengers; who daily brought
 To his small islands in the ethereal deep
 Tidings of joy and love.--From those pure heights
 (Whether of actual vision, sensible
 To sight and feeling, or that in this sort
 Have condescendingly been shadowed forth
 Communications spiritually maintained,
 And intuitions moral and divine)
 Fell Human-Kind--to banishment condemned
 That flowing years repealed not: and distress
 And grief spread wide; but Man escaped the doom

Of destitution;--solitude was not.
 --Jehovah--shapeless Power above all Powers,
 Single and one, the omnipresent God,
 By vocal utterance, or blaze of light,
 Or cloud of darkness, localized in heaven.
 (IV. 631-54)

Apocalypse is described in a vision the Solitary has (II. 830-80). This private apocalyptic vision of a "mighty city" resembles, in a more than tenuous way, the prototypical vision in Revelation. The precious gems and the central throne, integral components of the "holy Jerusalem," are present here. Both visions are made from geographical heights: John's from "a great and high mountain,"³² and the Solitary's on a "lofty ridge." Like the "new Jerusalem," this visionary city is a complete world, "the revealed abode/ Of Spirits in beatitude" (II. 873-74).

This vision is a result of the Solitary's selfless action in searching for his "ancient friend," who had been lost in "persevering rain" and "impenetrable mist." Though the Solitary has taken up residence in his urn-shaped valley and has made despondency a way of life, he has not totally lost his humanity. He still knows genuine concern for another. The old man, the object of the Solitary's search, is found by "a heap of ruin,"

where "in ancient times the peasants of lonely valleys used/ To meet for worship" (II. 815-16). The Solitary is following the shepherds who are bearing his friend home, when suddenly he has the vision. This vision, it seems, is given or sent as a reward for a selfless act --a sort of reinforcement of Christ's statement, "If ye have done it to the least, ye have done it also to me." The Solitary's is truly a Christian act.

It may be argued that Wordsworth's final vision is secular rather than spiritual. He does present more forcibly and convincingly a secular apocalypse in The Excursion. He advocates and can anticipate a time when illiteracy will be non-existent and the barriers of ignorance forever levelled, a golden age when the state will be the spiritual stay and moral guide of its happy subjects:

Change wide, and deep, and silently performed,
 This land shall witness; as days roll on,
 Earth's universal frame shall feel the effect;
 Even till the smallest habitable rock,
 Beaten by lonely billows, hear the songs
 Of humanised society; and bloom
 With civil arts, that shall breathe forth their
 fragrance,

A grateful tribute to all-ruling Heaven.
 From culture, unexclusively bestowed
 On Albion's noble Race in freedom born,
 Expect these mighty issues: from the pains
 And faithful care of unambitious schools
 Instructing simple childhood's ready ear:
 Thence look for these magnificent results!

(IX. 384-97)

As Wordsworth addresses the "British Lawgivers," his poetry assumes an unprecedented patriotism. For a brief moment he sets aside the Solitary's despondency and addresses himself to his country and the gigantic moral responsibility that is hers. He loves his native land and believes she was created to be a leader among civilized nations. In this transport of intense patriotic feeling, his words, "Your country must complete/ Her glorious destiny / [and] Show to the wretched nations for what end/ The powers of civil polity were given" (IX. 407-15), owe something to those more famous Vergilian ones concerning the destiny of Rome:

"Come, I shall now explain to you your whole destiny But you, Roman, must remember that you have to guide the nations by your authority, for this is your skill, to graft tradition onto peace, to shew mercy to the conquered, and to wage war until the haughty are brought low."³³

Wordsworth's moral dilemma is not much different from Vergil's: both love their fatherland, both are piqued by the existing state of things, yet both feel compelled to sing of their beloved countries' supremacy over other nations. Wordsworth's words, here, like Vergil's in Book VI of the Aeneid, are not merely rhetorical; they

spring from an abiding, profound, and noble dream of a better quality of life for his countrymen and for all men.

So compelling was Wordsworth's dramatization of a secular apocalypse that The Excursion became, soon after its publication, as Mary Moorman notes, "the poetic charter of the poor, the ignorant, the underprivileged in a way that no English poem has been before or since."³⁴ The Excursion, Mrs. Moorman continues, "had become almost the Bible of the poetry-reading public, and Wordsworth's concern with the spiritual dignity of the poor earned him an honorary degree at Oxford" (p. 183). Wordsworth's gospel is a social one. The apocalypse is finally for him both a spiritual and a secular one; to him one perforce implies the other.

The temporal dimension of the epic is best understood metaphorically. Almost invariably, the epic journey is one of spiritual change and of rebirth. It is, too, a journey from homelessness to the discovery of a new or old home. After wandering for twenty-four years, Odysseus returns to his home a changed man; from the darkness of the lonely grotto on Calypso's island, he eventually travels into the sunlight of Ithaca, his

home. He has seen much, experienced much, and returns to his native land richer for his travels. Aeneas and his followers escape the doom of their home, Troy, and, guided by the gods, journey to find a new home in distant Rome. Like his followers, Aeneas is a spiritually changed man at the end of his odyssey; from despair and melancholy he eventually attains sufficient confidence in the help of the gods and in his friends to overcome these emotional obstacles and defeat the Italians and claim Latium as his new home. Paradise Lost describes the creation, the brief edenic bliss, the "disobedience" of Adam and Eve, and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. At the close of the poem, the "parents" of the human race, spiritually chastened children of God, pick up the burden of worldly existence. They have learned the value of obedience and penitence as they prepare for their pilgrimage through the world.

The journey of the Solitary, like so many other epic journeys, is one of spiritual change and rebirth. During his night and day in the company of the Poet and the Wanderer and the meeting with the Pastor and his family, he does not encounter any physical obstacles comparable to those which confront the other epic heroes.

On this journey there is no cannibalistic Polyphemus, no piqued god or goddess, no Grendel, nor fire-breathing horses. But the Solitary does encounter despondency and "absolute despair," formidable barriers to the bravest of heroes, as Aeneas, Odysseus, the Red Cross Knight and Adam knew so well. The Solitary turns at the end of his excursion towards his sequestered cottage in the urn-shaped valley a spiritually different man. He is no longer the misanthrope awaiting death; but neither has he learned to live like the Wanderer "In solitude and solitary thought/ His mind in a just equipoise of love" (I. 354-55).

Nevertheless, he has regained some faith in God and in social man. His recovery is not complete because the poem is in a sense unfinished. But there is sufficient evidence to suggest a significant, if not great, change in him:

But he turned not without welcome promise made
That he would share the pleasures and pursuits
Of yet another summer's day, not loth
To wander with us through the fertile vales,
And o'er the mountain-wastes. "Another sun,"
Said he, "shall shine upon us, ere we part;
Another sun, and peradventure more;
If time, with free consent, be yours to give,
And season favours."

(IX. 775-83)

Without a change in attitude, heart, and mind, we cannot imagine the Solitary uttering such cordial sentiments.

In a subsequent work, the continuation of The Excursion, we are to be told to what extent the Solitary recovered from his despondency:

To enfeebled Power,
From this communion with uninjured Minds,
What renovation had been brought; and what
Degree of healing to a wounded spirit,
Dejected, and habitually disposed
To seek, in degradation of the Kind,
Excuse and solace for her own defects;
How far those erring notions were reformed;
And whether aught, of tendency as good
And pure, from further intercourse ensued;
This--if delightful hopes, as heretofore,
Inspire the serious song, and gentle Hearts
Cherish, and lofty Minds approve the past--
My future labours may not leave untold.
(IX. 783-96)

Like the Aeneid and The Faerie Queene, The Excursion is an incomplete epic.

Like the temporal scheme, the spatial dimension of the epic is invariably vast. The travels of Odysseus span the vast region from Ogygia to Scheria, to his homeland, Ithaca. The setting of the Aeneid is even larger, covering the entire ancient world known to Vergil. Even more extensive is the setting of Paradise

Lost, which occupies all conceivable space, heaven, hell, and intervening chaos.

The actual setting of The Excursion is, however, localized as we learn from the Fenwick Note:

The scene of the first book of the Poem is, I must own, laid in a tract of country not sufficiently near to that which soon comes into view in the second book, to agree with fact. All that relates to Margaret and the ruined cottage etc., was taken from observations made in the South West of England, and certainly it would require more than seven-league boots to stretch in one morning from a common in Somersetshire or Dorsetshire to the heights of Furness Fells and the deep valleys they embosom. For thus dealing with space I need make, I trust, no apology, but my friends may be amused by the truth.³⁵

There are other inconsistencies as Wordsworth has pointed out and others which Lyon has found. Lyon writes:

This localizing of the scene by Wordsworth is unfortunate, because not only are there inconsistencies which he points out himself in the Fenwick Note but there are other difficulties, such, for instance, as the facts that the Grasmere island is not fringed with birch trees, there are no lilies of the vale at Grasmere, there are no goats or waterfalls near Grasmere, and no spotted deer, all of which Wordsworth describes. There are details drawn from Rydal Water and Windermere included in the description of Grasmere, which in turn has been transplanted to Little Langdale. Graves are moved from all parts of the Lake Country into the Grasmere churchyard. Wordsworth really drew his scenery from wher-

ever he wished, and it is a hopeless and useless task to identify all the details or to try to bring them into consistency. (p. 43)

Wordsworth's attempt to create a unified poetic mise en scene is deliberate. He is always in command of his material in The Excursion, and his creation of scenic background is not mere caprice or an uncontrolled flight of fancy as Lyon suggests. Behind the deliberate localizing of the poetic landscape lies Wordsworth's desire to harmonize the setting with the requirements of his epic. In this adaptive epic, Wordsworth replaces the vastness of the traditional epic background with "an imaginative creation from the scenery of the Lake Country" (Lyon, p. 43). The arduous wanderings that characterize the classical and Miltonic epic are supplanted by a ramble of five days, two of which are spent amidst the grandeur and sublimity of the Lake Country. Since the poem's emphasis is on the mind of man and how it responds to external nature, the actual, physical journey yields primacy to an emotional, imaginative excursion through what, to Wordsworth, must have been the most sublime and beautiful terrain in the world: "I do not indeed know any tract of country, in which, within so narrow a compass, may be found an equal variety in

the influences of light and shadow upon the sublime or beautiful features of the landscape"36 The mountains of the Lake District, though "inferior in height and extent" to the Alps and the Apennines, are "unsurpassed by none" in "the combinations which they make, towering above each other, or lifting themselves in ridges like the waves of a tumultuous sea, and in the beauty and the variety of their surfaces and colours" (p. 239). In yet another respect this landscape out-vies any other: "A happy proportion of component parts is indeed noticeable in the landscapes of the North of England, and in their characteristic essential to a perfect picture, they surpass the scenes of Scotland, and, in a still greater degree, those of Switzerland" (p. 292). In its pictorial perfection and its sublime effects, the Lake Country is nonpareil. The "vastness and magnificence" that Hazlitt finds in The Excursion,³⁷ and the poem's "large landscape and cloud effects" that Renwick discusses,³⁸ apply not to the actual setting so much as to its effect upon the imagination. In no other setting, as displayed in Wordsworth's poetry, is the imagination so excellently fired and fed by the sublime. Among the beloved mountains, valleys, and lakes that

moulded his own imaginative response to external nature, Wordsworth found the ideal setting for his epic of the mind. In The Excursion, he replaces the traditional geographic vastness with a psychological vastness.

Like the spatial dimension, the catabasis, together with the nekya, of The Excursion is unorthodox. Combined, they are a crucial stage in the odyssey of the epic hero. Book XI of the Odyssey, appositely entitled, "The Land of the Dead," describes Odysseus' descent into the underworld where he meets his mother and the heroes and heroines of Greek mythology. In what is perhaps the most famous catabasis and nekya combined, Vergil has his hero, in the sixth book of the Aeneid, with the help of the Cumaean Sybil and the talismanic Golden Bough, descend into Hades to commune with the unburied dead. Dante has his Poet and Vergil journey into a Roman Catholic Hell to learn from the lost souls there. Milton, too, employs this epic device when he takes the reader to Hell where Satan and his fallen angels reside. In Books VI and VII of The Excursion, Wordsworth adapts the epic catabasis and nekya to suit the requirements of his poem.

Geoffrey Hartman considers Books VI and VII of

The Excursion "an involuntary parody of the epic nekya or descent to the dead,"³⁹ Hartman misunderstands Wordsworth's poetic technique here, and suggests that the poet is not in control of his material. But Wordsworth is too familiar with the nature of epic and too much of a craftsman to allow "an involuntary parody" of one of its devices in The Excursion. Since both the matter and theme of The Excursion are Christian, Wordsworth, in order to be artistically consistent, had to Christianize certain epic conventions. The combined catabasis and nekya are ones that required Christianization.

Since the Solitary's obstacle is spiritual, the physical descent is appropriately replaced by a spiritual and emotional descent. Unlike Dante and Milton, authors of Christian epics, Wordsworth does not allow his hero to descend physically into Hell. Rather he uses a village churchyard as the point of departure for an imaginative descent, and allows the Pastor, a spiritual guide, to conduct the Solitary through the lives of the deceased. The line, "Ere we descend into these silent vaults" (V. 668), strongly suggests the epic catabasis or descent into the underworld. The

catabasis invariably leads to the nekya or meeting with the dead. Like the Poet of The Divine Comedy, the Solitary descends "into these silent vaults" with a spiritual guide.

The Solitary meets the dead in a less tangible way than do the heroes of Homer, Vergil, and Dante. He has no verbal exchange with the dead as Odysseus and Aeneas do; neither does he have any visual contact with the dead as the Poet of The Divine Comedy has. Yet the Solitary is considerably moved as the Pastor pronounces his "Authentic epitaphs." So graphic and compelling is the Pastor's description that the deceased seem to live in song, and in the lives of the dead the Solitary sees much of his own suffering. So moving is the experience that his customary misanthropy begins to be tempered by pensiveness and genuine questioning.

As in the classical epics, the nekya in The Excursion is a turning point for the hero. During the nekya in the Odyssey, Odysseus is shown his future obstacles and is advised how to obviate or overcome them. In the Vergilian nekya, Anchises expounds to his son, the hero, the Pythagorean doctrine of the transmigration of souls

and shows him the future illustrious figures of Roman history. This interview with Anchises dispels Aeneas' diffidence and confirms his courage thus ensuring the successful outcome of the hero's epic journey. Likewise, to the Solitary, his nekya is by far the most rewarding experience of his entire excursion. Like the classical heroes, he is taken back into the past and is shown a way to future happiness. It is during his meeting with the dead that the Solitary shows signs of genuine change. Soon after his nekya, he is referred to as the "pensive Sceptic of the lonely vale" (VIII. 1). No longer is he "sick," or the "pale recluse." This is a turning point in the Solitary's journey of re-discovering his faith in God and in social man.

Like the catabasis and the nekya, the catalogue has been a distinguishing feature of epic since Homer. Traditionally, the epic catalogue enumerates characters, their temperaments and their special abilities, which are brought into focus as the narrative unfolds. In the Iliad, Homer presents two separate catalogues, one of the Greek ships (II. 484-785) which he no doubt considers characters, and the other of the Trojan forces (II. 786-877). In Book VII of the Aeneid, Vergil catalogues in formal detail the Italian tribes and their leaders who are joining forces to expel the Trojans (646-817). Mil-

ton describes in epic fashion the fallen angels in the first book of Paradise Lost. Wordsworth, like Homer, chooses a series of non-human objects as the subject of his epic catalogue. He chooses trees and endows them with human attributes and abilities as Homer did to his ships.

The epic catalogue occurs when the relating of the Pastor's "Authentic epitaphs" is interrupted by a "team of horses," driven by a Woodsman, a humanized figure of Death. In describing the work of Death, the Pastor lists the trees that have fallen prey to Death's "silent increase":

Full oft his [Death's] doings leave me to deplore
 Tall ash-tree, sown by winds, by vapours nursed,
 In the dry crannies of the pendent rocks;
 Light birch, aloft on the horizon's edge,
 A veil of glory for the ascending moon;
 And oak whose roots by noontide dew were damped,
 And on whose forehead inaccessible,
 The raven lodged in safety. --Many a ship
 Launched into Morecamb-bay, to him hath owed
 Her strong knee-timbers, and the mast that bears
 The loftiest of her pendants; He, from park
 Or forest, fetched the enormous axle-tree
 That whirls (how slow itself!) ten thousand spindles:
 And the vast engine labouring in the mine,
 Content with meaner prowess, must have lacked
 The trunk and body of its marvellous strength,
 If his undaunted enterprise had failed
 Among the mountain coves.

Yon household fir,
 A guardian planted to fence off the blast,

But towering high the roof above, as if
 Its humble destination were forgot--
 That sycamore, which annually holds
 Within its shade, as in a stately tent
 On all sides open to the fanning breeze,
 A grave assemblage, seated while they shear
 The fleece-encumbered flock--the JOYFUL ELM,
 Around whose trunk the maidens dance in May--
 And the LORD'S OAK--would plead their several rights
 In vain, if he were master of their fate;
 His sentence to the axe would doom them all.
 (VII. 595-624)

Catalogues of trees derive from Ovid (Metamorphoses, X), Chaucer (Parliament of Fowls, ll. 176-82), and Spenser (The Faerie Queene, I.i. 68-81), and it is safe to assume that Wordsworth, who certainly knew and admired the works of these poets, was influenced by their catalogues. But he goes beyond the mere listing and enumeration of names that Ovid, Chaucer and Spenser engage in. Trees, always dear to Wordsworth, become very important in The Excursion, as he indicates in the Fenwick Note: "To illustrate the relation which in my mind this Pastor bore to the Wanderer, and the resemblance between them, or rather the points of community in their nature, I likened one to an oak and the other to a sycamore" ⁴⁰ Trees thus symbolize the majesty against which human life can be measured. They are given a personality and a particular role in the drama. However, the ships, warriors, and angels have a more direct and immediate significance

for their respective epics. They actively participate in the unfolding drama, unlike the trees in The Excur-sion. Trees assume an emblematic significance. They represent the human lives cut down by inexorable Death, "this keen Destroyer" (VIII. 631).

In one way or another, all the major characters, some of the secondary ones, and many of the dead, are associated with trees. For example the Youth is like a mountain ash (VII. 714), the Dalesman is associated with a pine tree (VII. 395, 477), the miner is likened to an oak (VI. 144), Ellen is like an ash (VI. 863), and her baby a shrub (VI. 934), William Armathaite is compared to a hawthorn, and the Solitary and the Pastor resemble an oak and a sycamore respectively (V. 453ff.). Trees, according to Geoffrey Durrant, "are presented as the very structure of society--the family, the village, and even the Church itself."⁴¹ The JOYFUL ELM and the LORD'S OAK, Durrant continues, are "emblems of the invulnerability of the communal life and of the Church itself." While the individual trees, emblematic of individual man, are cut down by the Woodcutter, a subtly humanized figure of Death himself, the JOYFUL ELM and the LORD'S OAK "represent the continuity of life and faith" (p. 160).

This epic catalogue is also the consummation of the tree image that pervades almost the entire poem. It is as well a reminder of one of the chief themes of The Excursion--sic transit gloria mundi, most beautifully expressed in the following lines:

"So fails, so languishes, grows dim, and dies,"
 The grey-haired Wanderer pensively exclaimed,
 "All that this world is proud of. From their
spheres
 The stars of human glory are cast down;
 Perish the roses and flowers of kings,
 Princes, and emperors, and the crowns and palms
 Of all the might, withered and consumed!"
 (VII. 976-82)

One structural convention of the epic that The Excursion does not possess is the epic machinery, which, according to Pope, is "that part which the Deities, Angels, or Daemons are made to act in the poem." Wordsworth completely omits the epic machinery from his poem. Instead, he creates a spiritual atmosphere which shows an essential link between man and a more powerful order. The Excursion posits the existence of a beneficent God whom man must continually serve by daily Christian living and by a constant union of the imagination and external nature. The objects of nature, which excite a sense of the marvellous in the mind of man, replace the classical

pantheon and the heavenly host of Paradise Lost. In The Excursion, no intervening personages, save Nature herself, are needed in the communion between man and God.

One of the essential requirements of epic for Wordsworth is an appropriate style. In a letter to Southey (quoted on p. 86), he discusses epic style, drawing attention to the stylistic inadequacy of Jerusalem Delivered and The Faerie Queene. Both epics lack what he calls "the epic movement as exhibited by Homer, Vergil, and Milton." Such a quality Wordsworth imparted to the style of The Excursion. The care taken in the creation of an appropriate style for the poem is suggested by his somewhat vainglorious assertion to Mrs. Clarkson: ". . . the Excursion has one merit if it has no other, a versification to which variety of musical effect no poem in the language furnishes a parallel."⁴² To at least two critics there is truth in the poet's claim. Harper, in a generalized phrase, finds the poem's style "singularly rich in variety."⁴³ Woodring is more specific;⁴⁴ in the style of The Excursion, he notes a "daring simplicity," discursiveness and sobriety, "a degree of conversational realism," "rhetorical elevation [that] is imitatively Miltonic," and a "sometimes stately movement of the verse

paragraphs."

The style of The Excursion, like those of other epics, seeks to create a sense of magnitude and expansiveness. The opening sentence, seventeen lines long, perhaps patterned after the initial sixteen-line sentence of Paradise Lost, indicates Wordsworth's intention of creating a vast poetic canvas. There are many such long sentences: some are convoluted, rambling, and difficult to follow;⁴⁵ others,⁴⁶ like the following, are fluid and attain an elevated, grand style:

Ah! what avails imagination high
 Or question deep? What profits all that earth
 Or heaven's blue vault, is suffered to put forth
 Of impulse or allurements, for the Soul
 To quit the beaten track of life, and soar
 Far as she finds a yielding element
 In past or future; far as she can go
 Through time or space--if neither in the one,
 Nor in the other region, nor in aught
 That Fancy, dreaming o'er the map of things,
 Hath placed beyond these penetrable bounds,
 Words of assurance can be heard; if nowhere
 A habitation, for consummate good,
 Of for progressive virtue, by the search
 Can be attained,--a better sanctuary
 From doubt and sorrow, than the senseless grave?
 (III. 209-24)

Some of these long sentences are epic similes.⁴⁷

However, the shorter simile can on occasion evoke epic associations: "And like a weary voyager escaped/ From

risk and hardship . . ." (III. 558-9). The vast majority of similes, epic or not, involve a comparison between human life or an individual and features of landscape. They thus are integral to Wordsworth's poetic design of demonstrating the vital reciprocity between the mind and external nature. In the best of them there is, as in Vergil and Milton, pictorial embellishment, and an internal significance that radiates beyond the immediate context. In one of the most literary similes in The Excursion an individual is compared to a sailing ship:

Graceful was her port:
 A lofty stature undepressed by time,
 Whose visitation had not wholly spared
 The finer lineaments of form and face;
 To that complexion brought which prudence trusts in
 And wisdom loves.--But when a stately ship
 Sails in smooth weather by the placid coast
 On homeward voyage,--what if wind and wave,
 And hardship undergone in various climes,
 Have caused her to abate the virgin pride,
 And that full trim of inexperienced hope
 With which she left her haven--not for this,
 Should the sun strike her, and the impartial breeze
 Play on her streamers, fails she to assume
 Brightness and touching beauty of her own,
 That charm all eyes. So bright, so fair, appeared
 This goodly Matron, shining in the beams
 Of unexpected pleasure.

(VIII. 501-18)

The Poet simply means that the Pastor's wife seems happy and in excellent shape, though time has left its

mark on her. But the simile goes beyond this, adding images of light and movement to a large, sunshiny backdrop. The comparison assumes significance from such ambivalent phrases as "stately," "virgin pride," "full trim of unexperienced hope," and "Brightness and touching beauty of her own," which apply equally to the ship and the "goodly Matron." Furthermore "Graceful" and "homeward voyage" add a theological dimension to the significance of the comparison. The use of "ship" and "voyage" enhances the basic metaphor of the journey implied in the title of the poem, and also recalls the epics of Homer, Vergil, and Dante.

In addition to the presence of epic similes, there are specific echoes of the epics he knew well. The echoes of Paradise Lost are too numerous to mention, and have been enumerated and glossed by De Selincourt in his edition of The Excursion. There were other epics in Wordsworth's mind when he wrote The Excursion. For instance, the description of the Wanderer, "He wandered far; much did he see of men,/ Their manners, their enjoyments and pursuits,/ Their passions and their feelings" (I. 341-43), is an obvious adaptation of the famous opening lines of the Odyssey. Likewise, in the description

of the Prodigal, "the ghost of beauty and health" (VI. 330), and "Thrice he rose,/ Thrice sank as willingly" (VI. 334-35), there is an unmistakable echo of Aeneas' vain efforts to embrace his wife's "shade":

"Three times I tried to cast my arms about her neck
 . . . but three times the clasp was in vain."⁴⁸

Again, the Wanderer's impassioned words on the moral duty of England (IX. 295-28) are deliberate echoes of those of Anchises in the sixth book of the Aeneid.⁴⁹

Similarly, the Solitary's final words, "Another sun . . . shall shine upon us ere we part;/ Another sun, and peradventure more" (IX. 779-81) recall those of Ulysses to his comrades in the twenty-sixth canto of the Inferno.⁵⁰ Finally, the Poet's description of the proclamation of "the annual Wake" (II. 118-37) is a naturalized, humanized version of the famous description of the shield of Achilles.⁵¹

In addition to long sentences, epic similes and linguistic echoes of epics, there are other deliberate stylistic features. As Lyon notes (pp. 122-34), there are un-Wordsworthian flowery circumlocutions, common inversions of normal word order, and a predominance of latinate words over those of Old English derivation.

There are as well phrases and images from the Bible and Shakespeare,⁵² and several phrases, in Woodring's words, "of sacramental and noumenal vastness in compact space" (pp. 193-94), such as "the mighty stream of tendency" (IX, 87) and "the chalice of the big round year" (IX, 134).

In "English heroic verse without rhyme,"⁵³ embellished with stylistic artifices, and elevated and dignified with conscious borrowings from the Bible, Shakespeare, Homer, Vergil, Dante, and especially Milton, Wordsworth found an appropriately ponderable style that reflects the high seriousness of the philosophical subject-matter of The Excursion.

We may conclude, then, that The Excursion is a poem which exhibits all the major structural and stylistic devices of the classical and Miltonic epic. Some of these devices are used unconventionally as Wordsworth adapts them to suit the exigencies of his "subjective" epic.⁵⁴ The Excursion is epic in its "outer form," possessing the invocation to the Muse, the epic question, the statement of its "high argument," the in medias res beginning, the catabasis and nekya, the epic scope, the epic catalogue, the basic

journey of spiritual change, and an appropriate style.

The Inner Form

The "inner form" of The Excursion comprises a novel perspective on the world, a new heroism, a significant moral lesson, and an attempt to create a comprehensive picture of the Romantic age. Wordsworth has an unprecedented theme to "sing" of: the life-giving interplay between the mind of man and external nature. This is the impetus of heroic conduct that embodies a desire to love God, Nature and social man. This heroism is idealistically exemplified in the "reverend" Wanderer, and is the goal of the Solitary. Like other epic heroes, the Solitary at the beginning of The Excursion is not heroic, but does possess the potential for heroism. It is his journey that really defines his heroic conduct. In his spiritual struggle there is a moral lesson for others who are trying to find meaning in life. In the description of the Solitary's spiritual excursion, Wordsworth creates a comprehensive picture of Romantic man and his historical milieu.

To the choice of an appropriate heroic theme, Words-

worth devotes one hundred lines of the first book of The Prelude.⁵⁵ In his description of his mind's wavering, he outlines the evolution of epic themes, from Homer's to those of the poets of the Romantic Age. His mind thinks of a Homeric theme, "tales of warlike feats,/ Where spear encountered spear, sword with sword fought" (176-77); a Vergilian theme of patriotism, of "How Wallace fought for Scotland" (214). After Dante and Milton, the poet's mind contemplates a tale with "harmonious tribute paid/ To patient courage and unblemished truth,/ To firm devotion, zeal unquenchable,/ And Christian meekness hallowing faithful loves" (182-85). It wanders also to a theme like that of Spenser or Ariosto, within "the groves of Chivalry" with "Shepherd swains" and "reposing Knights" (171-72).

But these themes prove inappropriate, because they are obsolete and defunct. The poet's mind then moves to a theme very different from traditional themes, a "tale from [his] own heart, more akin/ To [his] own passions and habitual thought" (222-23). Having sensed the inappositeness of traditional themes, his mind now yearns "toward some philosophical song/ Of Truth that cherishes our daily lives" (229-30). But the poet's

mind wayers and "where'er she turns she finds/ Impediments from day to day renewed" (130-31). The poet abandons his search in the hope that "mellow years will bring a riper mind/ And clearer insight" (236-37). In the telling of the "tedious tale" of his childhood, the poet's mind is "revived," and he chooses to relate "the story of [his] life," "rather . . . than work/ Of ampler or more varied argument" (I, 643-64).

In Book III, however, the poet realizes that "the story of [his] life," or "what passed within [him]" (173), is worthy of heroic treatment. The powerful workings of an individual mind become a new epic theme:

Not of outward things
 Done visibly for other minds, words, signs,
 Symbols or actions, but of my own heart
 Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind.
 O Heavens! how awful is the might of souls,
 And what they do within themselves while yet
 The yoke of earth is new to them, the world
 Nothing but a wild field where they were sown.
 This is, in truth, heroic argument
 (176-81)

As Havens observes, The Prelude reveals how "a creative artist in surveying his past without any thesis to prove finds what is significant in it has been made so by the transforming power of the imagination."⁵⁶ In the Conclusion of the poem, Wordsworth tells us that The Prelude

has been a "meditative history," in which "the discipline/
 And consummation of a Poet's mind" have been faithfully
 pictured. He asserts to his friend Coleridge, to whom
 the poem is dedicated, that "the history of a Poet's mind/
 Is labour not unworthy of regard." It is significant be-
 cause it can teach many important and urgent lessons to
 those who without some guide will "fall back to old idola-
 try," and "return to servitude as fast/ As the tide ebbs."
 Poetry is instructive, and poets like his friend and him-
 self are teachers and "prophets of Nature," preaching
 what they have gleaned from the rich field of personal
 experience:

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
 A lasting inspiration, sanctified
 By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved,
 Others will love and we will teach them how;
 Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
 A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
 On which he dwells, above this frame of things
 (Which, 'mid all revolution in the hopes
 And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
 In beauty exalted, as it is itself
 Of quality and fabric more divine.

(XIV. 444-54)

The mind of man does not assume this surpassing
 beauty by itself; it depends on the fecund intercourse with
 external nature. For gazing on external nature is what

really awakens the dormant imagination. To others this theme may be unfamiliar, or in the poet's words, "little heard of among men"; yet to Wordsworth, it is a mighty theme, whose implications are vast, even unlimited. Comprehending this, Wordsworth makes it the "high argument" of both The Prelude and The Excursion.

The Prelude and The Excursion are closely related poems: they both derive from the poet's experience with the disillusioning French Revolution. Whereas The Prelude deals in part with the effects of the French Revolution on young Wordsworth, The Excursion "is the most complete and honest statement . . . of the psychological problems posed for an Englishman by the failure of the French Revolution."⁵⁷ This is how Wordsworth describes their mutual affinity:

Several years ago, when the Author retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them. That Work, addressed to a dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, and to whom the Author's Intellect is deeply indebted, has been long finished; and the result of the investigation which gave rise to it was a determination

to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society; and to be entitled, *The Recluse*; as having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement.--The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two Works have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church. 58

The Excursion and The Prelude are poems of hope and optimism after the headiness of the French Revolution had seduced the Reason and impaired the Imagination of the young Wordsworth. To him, as to Coleridge, Blake and Southey, the French Revolution was surely the most important contemporary historical event, for its significance went beyond the merely political, temporal, and social. So eagerly did they await the auspicious moment that their most cherished hopes and beliefs were brought into play. This revolution of justice was thought of in terms of Christian eschatology. These poets perceived the French Revolution as ushering in a new, long-awaited age of equality and joy for all mankind; it was the harbinger of the biblical millennium. For Wordsworth, the young radical and revolutionist sympathizer, it was a glorious time: "But Europe at that time was thrilled with joy,/"

France standing on the top of golden hours,/ And human nature seeming born again" (Prelude, VI. 339-41). In more often-quoted words, he describes his emotional euphoria: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,/ But to be young was very Heaven" (Prelude, IX. 108-09). For the zealous Solitary, young Wordsworth in disguise, it was also a time of intoxication: "I sang Saturnian rule/ Returned,--a progeny of golden years/ Permitted to descend, and bless mankind" (III. 756-58).

Belief in the millennial nature of the French Revolution was too strong to be completely destroyed after the most exalted hopes of the Romantic poets were dashed to the ground by the Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic Wars. They forgot their bitter chagrin and transferred their incorruptible millennial belief to the mind of man. They looked to the individual imagination as being capable of performing what the French Revolution was supposed to have done. A cosmogonic role was given to the Romantic imagination. For Blake, poetry was a new way of perceiving the world, and his work, he tells us, is "an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients called the Golden Age."⁵⁹ This desire on the part of writers to deliver a golden world, to restore Eden, became the foundation

and raison d'etre of much Romantic poetry. And to express this earth-creating function, they borrowed from the biblical Revelation the metaphor of marriage. Coleridge, in describing the inner power of Joy, the source of poetic inspiration, uses this evocative trope:

" . . . wedding Nature to us, gives in dower/ A new Earth and a new Heaven."⁶⁰ When nature and the mind of man work together in conjugal harmony the result is the creation of a new world. For Wordsworth, too, poetry is a true marriage of the mind and nature: "I, long before this blissful hour arrives,/ Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse/ Of this great consummation." "The Recluse" is to be an epithalamium, a wedding song to the marriage of the mind of man and the external world. The marriage metaphor indicates what he hopes to accomplish in his magnum opus:

Paradise and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields--like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main--why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.

(Prospectus, 47-55)

When the imagination and external nature are blissfully united, their generative reciprocity creates the fabulous and the mythological. When man loses this essential communion with nature, the fabulous places become a "history only of departed things, / Or a mere fiction of what never was." When there is that vital interplay between mind and nature, such legendary things become a "simple produce of the common day."

Wordsworth, it seems, is not talking about symbolism or emblemism here. He is discussing something far more encompassing and more essential, namely, a way of looking at the world. Symbolism may, willy-nilly, be part of the technique, but what is important is how the imagination creates out of the objects of external nature a higher order of experience. With "The Recluse" forever unfinished, much remains conjectural, and it is not really profitable to second-guess what poetic technique Wordsworth would have used therein to fulfil the promise of Home at Grasmere. What worked well earlier in The Prelude, also works well in The Excursion.

One instance of the blending of the imagination and the external world is a vision the Solitary has of a new and glorious world (II. 827-80). The content of the

vision, it seems, is not as important as its cause. The Solitary has once more, though only for the nonce, entered the fold of social fellowship as he, along with others, selflessly seeks a lost man. The waif is found by a "heap of ruin," a place formally used for ancient peasant worship. The resulting joy at finding the lost man, coupled with the thoughts the ruined ancient chapel arouses in the Solitary's imagination, makes this vision possible. In other words, and put simply, the Solitary's mind is momentarily united with nature and so produces a vision of a new world of "Glory beyond all glory ever seen/ By waking sense or by the dreaming soul!" (831-32). But this is merely an ephemeral incident, for the Solitary, unlike the Wanderer, does not live in "exalted habits of Imagination."⁶¹

The climactic instance of the marriage of mind and external nature occurs toward the end of the poem. As the pilgrims are gathered on an "elevated spot," admiring quietly the "general aspect of the scene" (IX. 583), they notice the sinking sun. Rays of vermilion light shoot upwards to the crown of the firmament, and the multitude of little floating clouds become "Vivid as fire" (IX. 600). There is a "blended holiness of earth and sky" (Home at

Grasmere, I. 144), a "unity sublime" between the minds of the awe-struck pilgrims and external nature, compelling the Pastor to rhapsodize:

"--How bright
 The appearance of things! From such, how changed
 The existing worship; and with those compared,
 The worshippers how innocent and blest!
 So wide the difference, a willing mind
 Might almost think, at this affecting hour,
 That paradise, the lost abode of man,
 Was raised again: and to a happy few,
 In its original beauty, here restored."
 (IX. 711-19)

Here, to alter slightly Blake's words, Eden is restored. The poetic promise of The Prospectus is fulfilled, confirmed and exemplified, as the imagination, made whole by its blissful marriage with external nature, recreates partially the golden age.

Such a marriage produces a new kind of poetry. As the French Revolution was supposed to bring a novel perspective to social and political man, so Wordsworth's "spousal verse" seeks to "arouse the sensual from their sleep/ Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain/ To noble raptures" (Prospectus, 60-62). According to Vogler, the modern epic endeavours to see the world in a new way,⁶² and we can see such an attempt in The Prelude and The Excursion. There Wordsworth forges a new poetics, a new way

of perceiving, assessing, and interpreting the world.

Like The Prelude, The Excursion evinces a pattern of human behaviour that can be called heroic. Simply put, heroic behaviour is conduct that is admirable and exemplary. It differs from age to age; furthermore, the heroic standard of the preceding age is usually obsolete in the succeeding. It can, however, be revived to show its inadequacy or obsolescence in the succeeding age as is the case in the Aeneid and Paradise Lost. A chronological study of epics reveals the various kinds of heroism they exemplify. To show how heroism has changed from age to age, a digressive look at McNamee's study of the shifting concept of "magnanimity" in epic poetry and in philosophy is warranted.⁶³ McNamee states that the heroic quality embodied by such epic heroes as Achilles, Aeneas, Beowulf, Arthur, and Christ, is "honor." This heroic quality he defines from the writings of Aristotle, St. Paul, St. Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. Achilles is proud and noble; Aeneas is dutiful and good; Arthur is magnificent; and Christ is the perfect embodiment of the magnanimous man.

Because in its portrayal of Aeneas it established once for all the manner in which epic heroism should pro-

ceed, the Aeneid holds a unique place in the history of epic. Whereas Achilles is the bravest, proudest, and most skillful warrior in the Iliad, he is not the most admirable. To the modern reader it is Hector who seems to be honourable and tragic rather than the sulking adolescent Achilles. With Aeneas, the prototype of the modern hero first appears. Epic theme and matter as critics discuss them are really Vergil's invention. The nationalistic, patriotic facet, absent from Homer, first emerges in the Aeneid and becomes a staple criterion of epic. But the real difference between Homer and Vergil is in the concept of the epic hero. C. S. Lewis, one of Vergil's most sympathetic critics, writes:

Vicit iter durum pietas; with this conception Vergil has added a new dimension to poetry. I have read that his Aeneas, so guided by dreams and omens, is hardly the shadow of a man beside Homer's Achilles. But a man, an adult, is precisely what he is: Achilles had been little more than a passionate boy. You may, of course, prefer the poetry of spontaneous passion to the poetry of passion at war with vocation and finally reconciled. Every man to his taste. But we must not blame the second for not being the first. With Vergil European poetry grows up. For there are moods in which all that had gone before seems, as it were, boys' poetry, depending both for its charm and for its limitations on a certain naivety, seen alike in its heady ecstasies and in its heady despairs, which we certainly cannot, perhaps should

not, recover. Mens immota manet, 'the mind remains unshaken while the vain tears fall.' This is the Vergilian note. But in Homer there was nothing to be unshaken about. You were unhappy, or you were happy, and that was all. Aeneas lives in a different world; he is compelled to see something more important than happiness.⁶⁴

Many critics have noticed how little actual fighting there is in the Aeneid, and how derivative Vergil's descriptions of battle are. Bowra writes, "he [Vergil] has little of Homer's understanding of the fury and frenzy of war. So far from feeling that war was exciting he felt it was odious and horrible . . . and over his battles there hangs a sense of effort, as if the poet's heart were not in them."⁶⁵ Vergil, like so many of his contemporaries, had lived through interminable years of bloody civil war, abhorred bloodshed, and yearned for peace. In Aeneas' recounting of the fall of Troy in Book II, Vergil questions the validity of the Homeric code of heroism. His final censure of that obsolete heroism comes when he describes Turnus, Aeneas' antagonist, as a second Achilles (*alius Latio iam partus Achilles, / natus et ipsa dea*, VI. 89-90). With Turnus' defeat, the old Achillean heroism is finally laid to rest with its Vergilian exemplar.

Vergil gave a new sort of heroism to Aeneas; a heroism which enshrines the value of being vir bonus, the good man, of being pius, dutiful to the gods, of being undeterred in one's quest. Outward show of military prowess on the battlefield is replaced for the most part by spiritual courage, fortitude, and faith in one's divine mission. Heroism ceases to be merely physical; it is stoic control and spiritual implacability. The solely militaristic Achilles is supplanted by the devout and good Aeneas. This change is a gigantic stride for epic and is too often overlooked. Once more Lewis' words are relevant:

In making his one legend symbolical of the destiny of Rome, he has, willy-nilly, symbolized the destiny of Man. His poem is great in the sense in which no poem of the same type as the Iliad can ever be great. The real question is whether any epic development beyond Vergil is possible. But one thing is certain. If we are to return to the merely heroic, any lay, however good, that tells merely of brave men fighting to save their lives or to get home to avenge their kinsmen, will now be an anachronism. You cannot be young twice. The explicitly religious subject for any future epic has been dictated by Vergil; it is the only further development left. (p. 39)

One future epic that recognized Vergil's paradigm and further developed Aeneas' heroism is The Divine Comedy.

Dante totally divests his hero of military skill and endows him with spiritual desire and faith. With God as his supreme guide, and Vergil as his earthly mentor, Dante, the pilgrim, embarks on his inner journey. There are two levels of interpretation of the poem's topography: on one level it is a spiritual odyssey, and on another level it is a journey over places no one has discovered, but which every one believed had a literal existence. We normally, however, think of The Divine Comedy as a highly imaginative and original description of the journey within, an excursion over psychical landscape. Of course, Spenser populates his epic with monsters, chivalrous knights, swooning ladies, but there is something deliberately anachronistic about The Faerie Queene. Despite the presence of so much physical heroic paraphernalia, Spenser's aim is admirable conduct--"to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." Though external chivalrous conduct is an important asset to "vertuous and gentle" behaviour, the poem's emphasis is, like Dante's and Vergil's, on the spiritual qualities of the hero. But it is Dante who made the Romantic epic possible. His hero is really himself, and the antagonists are, like Bunyan's, of the mind and spirit. The heroic action is irretrievably moved from the battlefields of the windy plains of Troy and put on the broken landscape of the human psyche.

The heroism of The Excursion is not really different from that of The Divine Comedy and Pilgrim's Progress, governed as all three are by an absolute belief in the goodness of God and in the value of social fellowship. We are presented in The Excursion with a disillusioned man who does not understand why life has been so bitterly unfair to him. He seems to love neither man nor nature. But though his misanthropy has taken root, it cannot kill the basic desire for positive change in the "sick" Solitary. He does not join the Wanderer and the Poet out of mere curiosity. Behind his reluctance to accept their invitation is too long a denial of social fellowship. His reluctance is realistic, for he has suffered his worst setbacks because of social relationships and expectations. Wordsworth chose to show the baneful effects of morbid seclusion, of loss of faith in God, nature, and man; but he also chose to show the intrinsic value in recovering one's faith in God and in the necessity of re-entering the fold of social fellowship.

The correction of despondency, according to Wilkie, has negative overtones, and thus cannot be the basis of narrative.⁶⁶ We should remember though that heroes, epic and other, Achilles, Aeneas, Sir Guyon, Christian, and

Adam, all knew the painful struggle to overcome despair. For these, recovery from despair is only one stage in their journeys, rather than the subject of entire poems. If, however, we view The Excursion as part of a longer work--and Wordsworth at the end of his poem, makes it explicit that this is what it is--then the correction of despondency is a preliminary stage in the Solitary's attainment of the heroism exemplified by the Wanderer. The correction of despair, as in Pilgrim's Progress, is a positive action, for by correcting his spleen, the Solitary no doubt is attempting to regain his former attitude of trust in social man and in God. Behind an adopted misanthropy lies a more meaningful life, clues to which are given in the Solitary's comforting of the little child and in his affection for the aged pensioner.⁶⁷ Like so many epic journeys, the Solitary's is one of self-discovery, of attempting to understand his mission and purpose in life. His journey is one of rebirth, and the number of books of The Excursion suggests a gestational period. His is an attempt to see the calamities and pleasures of life as part of God's inscrutable plan. The direction of the Solitary's spiritual excursion is towards a more positive, productive way of life.

The heroism of The Excursion is also akin to that of The Prelude--an inviolate belief in the power of the imagination and a belief that in one's personal experiences are to be found lessons for others. There is, however, one significant difference: in The Prelude the power of the imagination is sufficient unto itself; in The Excursion it is inadequate without the revelation of Christianity and without the institution of the Church. The correcting of despondency is really the restoration of an impaired imagination. Because of chagrin, the Solitary has denied his imagination its normal healthy growth. His vitiated imaginative response to nature is illustrated in the 'Cabinet for Sages' episode (Book III, 73-158). To the Wanderer this "hidden nook" is a "semblance strange of power intelligent" (l. 83), and he confesses, "shadowy intimations haunt me here" (l. 88). To his healthy imagination, it is a nook that is fitted for the contemplation of truth away from the "turbulence of murmuring cities vast" (l. 104). To the "sick" Solitary, however, it is a source of "depression," as evident in his words to the Wanderer:

Forgive me, if I say
 That an appearance which hath raised your minds
 To an exalted pitch (the self-same cause
 Different effect producing) is for me
 Fraught rather with depression than delight,
 Though shame it were, could I not look around,
 By the reflection of your pleasure, pleased.
 (152-58)

In his "self-indulging spleen," the Solitary lacks the imaginative integration that has characterized the Wanderer's life, from his earliest days among the Athol hills (I. 108-396), and throughout his entire life. In his "eloquent harangue" (IV. 1107-1275), the Wanderer asserts that the imagination must be "left free/ And puissant to range the solemn walks/ Of time and nature" (II. 823-25). For the individual who makes this a practice

lives and breathes
 For noble purposes of mind; his heart
 Beats to the heroic song of ancient days;
 His eye distinguishes, his soul creates.
 (II. 830-33)

The Wanderer's imaginative equipoise is in marked contrast to the Solitary's broken response to life. In the Wanderer's "legitimate union of the imagination, affection, understanding, and reason" (Argument, Book IV.), and in such episodes as the stay at the Pastor's and the events

following, especially the hill-top experience, we find exemplification of the poem's heroism. Like The Prelude The Excursion is concerned with the growth of the imagination and the reparation of an impaired response to man, nature, and God.

Since Vergil, the epic has discharged a moral function. Whereas Homer seemed interested in telling a story for its own sake, Vergil made the epic didactic. The moral lesson of the Aeneid is that dutifulness and obedience to the will of the gods are exemplary behaviour; and that peace is preferable to war. Dante's moral lesson might be summed up in the biblical warning, "the wages of sin is death." Milton's moral lesson in Paradise Lost is that disobedience of God's ordinance leads to certain perdition, but also that subsequent obedience makes the sinner open to God's mercy and to the possibility of overcoming perdition. The moral lesson of The Excursion is worked into the very nature of the poem's action. We must remember that The Excursion is a poetic exorcism of guilt and the foolish cries of youth. In the life of the Solitary, the mature Wordsworth is reliving the mental excesses of his younger days--giving in to the Godwinian doctrine of necessity and too strong a belief

in the pre-eminent authority of pure reason. It is a theodicy in which the Solitary and Wordsworth come to terms with an understanding of death, and with the inscrutable workings of Providence. It is also a validation of the poet's integrity, showing the rashness of younger days and the arduous task of redressing those excesses and aberrations. The action of the poem is positive, social, and influential. To Wordsworth, as Lyon reminds us, the statement of a moral was deliberate:

His lifelong habit of thoughtful introspection gave him a shrewd insight into the processes that had been working in his mind, and he felt that a poetical description of the complication, climax, and resolution which had been the dramatic story of his own mind in the past two decades would be of great value to others who were facing the same problems. He had achieved a sort of meditative calm which he realized was in some sense the goal toward which all men were striving. He felt that his success would be more complete if he could pass in review all the many steps by which he had ascended to the position in which he then found himself. And equally important, he felt that he might make the same ascent easier for others.

(p. 65)

The action of correcting despondency, the righting of an aberrant intellectual stance, is really part of a larger and more comprehensive theme in The Excursion, namely, the justification of traditional values and beliefs, though on

a new foundation. In this sense the poem is reactionary. Taking Coleridge's advice and recommendation seriously, but in part, Wordsworth inveighs against the pre-eminent authority of pure reason, against the scientific trends of the age, and against a mechanistic view of nature. For Coleridge wanted his friend to "write a poem in blank verse, addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary philosophes."⁶⁸ He also advised Wordsworth to substitute "life and intelligence . . . for the philosophy of mechanism, which, in everything that is most worthy of human intellect, strikes Death, and cheats itself by mistaking clear images for distinct conceptions where intuitions alone are possible or adequate to the majesty of Truth."⁶⁹ He was also to replace the prevalent empiricism with a vital Christianity.

It is quite evident that Wordsworth heeded Coleridge's advice in The Excursion. The raison d'etre of the poem's action--the curing of the epicurean Solitary--was encouraged, if not first suggested, by Coleridge. Also Words-

worth made The Excursion his most overtly Christian poem: the three main characters are all priests--the Pastor is an ordained minister of the Church of England, the Wanderer who grew up with the teachings of the Church of England is a sort of lay preacher, and the Solitary is a quondam chaplain. The Excursion advocates and justifies traditional Christian values while condemning un-Christian ones. The main action, the curing of an apostate recluse and bringing him back into the fold of Christian fellowship, is one of the great paradigmatic Christian actions. Epicureanism and despair are ~~neither admirable nor exemplary~~. They may be justified temporarily, but within the context of The Excursion are not tenable ethical positions.

The ethical, philosophical position towards which the Solitary is slowly moving is espoused by the Wanderer. This reverend man in his daily life endorses such traditional values as independence of spirit, humility, a life in harmony with nature and social man, a belief in King and country and in the inherent rightness of liturgical rituals, and an invincible faith in the benevolence of God. Because the Wanderer represents the terminus ad quem and the Solitary the terminus a quo in the poem, the reader's attention is focused on the Solitary who, unlike

the Wanderer, has not attained an unquestioning meditative serenity. The poet's focus is on the agon of the "sick" Solitary, on his struggle out of the Slough of Despond. In the Wanderer's life and in the Solitary's struggle, we find the poem's simplest and most telling justification of traditional values.

These traditional values are part of the encyclopedism of The Excursion. For, as traditional epics do, it expresses the views held by a certain portion of the population of Wordsworth's day. Even a summary look at the chapters of Harper, Beatty,⁷⁰ Moorman, and Lyon, reveals the extent to which the poem embodies the attitudes of Romantic man towards the preceding age, towards his own age, and towards the French Revolution. The central action of The Excursion is a reflection of how deeply and pervasively thinking men were affected by the stormy Revolution--what they thought about it, what they did during its course, and how they coped with its bitter aftermath. According to Harper, "The Excursion is intended to demonstrate the failure of Revolutionary hopes and the resulting prostration of those who held them. Let us admit our failure, the poet seems to say, and retrieve our error by building on a broader

basis."⁷¹

In its abjuration of enlightenment mechanistic philosophy and rationalism, its celebration of the marriage between the mind and the external world, its extolment of the cardinal Christian virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, its dramatic advocacy of universal education, and its impassioned plea for more humane treatment within the "temple" of industry, The Excursion is a comprehensive register of the pre-occupations of thinking men in the early nineteenth-century. In its treatment of these salient concerns, it delineates the intellectual temper of the times and gives us a feeling of what it was like to be alive in Wordsworth's day. The Excursion is, in effect, a summation of the values men clung to and the values they rejected. As Graham Hough states,

. . . it [The Excursion] is not negligible philosophy. One who is in sympathy with the Wordsworthian ethos can read The Excursion with edification and temperate pleasure: anyone who wishes to understand the nineteenth century must read it. It is one of the great reassertions of traditional values against the unhistorical rationalist optimism of the enlightenment.⁷²

The "inner form" of The Excursion, then, is arguably and demonstrably epic. In his Romantic epic, Wordsworth

attempts to see the world from a new perspective, a function of the exquisite interplay between the mind of man and the external world. This fecund reciprocity underlies a new heroism--a pattern of human behaviour that is significant and exemplary. This heroism forms part of the large moral lesson of The Excursion, and is an aspect of the encyclopedic register of the dominant ideas and strong passions of the Romantic Age.

In spite of his ample comments on the poem, it is difficult to say with certainty whether Wordsworth considered The Excursion an epic. We do know, however, that he considered the writing of an epic an important part of "the task of [his] life." He claimed also that The Excursion was "serious . . . and written with great labour,"⁷³ and hoped that it possessed "the spirit of truth, [and] 'The Vision and Faculty divine.'"⁷⁴ The presence of so many epic conventions of "inner form" and "outer form" in the poem seems to be the result of deliberation rather than the poet's unconscious drawing on his intimate familiarity with the classical epics, the romantic epics of the Renaissance, and the epics of Dante and Milton. In fulfilling all Wordsworth's quite orthodox require-

ments of epic, The Excursion is squarely and indubitably within the epic tradition.

Notes

Chapter Two

¹ I have found the following studies of epic most useful: Lascelles Abercrombie, The Epic: an Essay (London, 1914); E. W. M. Tillyard, The English Epic and its Background (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954); Karl Kroeber, Romantic Narrative Art (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1960); Brian Wilkie, Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1965); and Thomas Vogler, Preludes to Vision (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971).

² Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949).

³ The Theory of Epic in England, 1650-1800, Univ. of California Pub. in English, XV (Berkeley, 1944).

⁴ Letters, The Middle Years, 1806-11, p. 170.

⁵ Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 318.

⁶ Letters, The Early Years, 1787-1805, pp. 595-96.

⁷ Letters, The Early Years, 1787-1805, p. 595.

⁸ Letters, The Early Years, 1787-1805, p. 454.

⁹ For the soundest treatment of the alleged decline in Wordsworth's poetic powers, see Willard Sperry, Wordsworth's Anti-Climax (1935; rpt. New York: Russell, 1966).

¹⁰ Edith Batho, Wordsworth's Later Years (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1933), p. 319.

- 11 Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20, p. 144.
- 12 The Excursion: A Study, p. 31.
- 13 Romantic Narrative Art.
- 14 Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition.
- 15 The Epic: An Essay.
- 16 Donald Foerster, The Fortunes of Epic Poetry (Washington: Catholic Univ. Press, 1962), p. 36.
- 17 "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. Owen & Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), I, p. 126. Hereafter cited as Prose Works.
- 18 Prose Works, I, p. 128.
- 19 Thomas Vogler, Preludes to Vision.
- 20 Wordsworth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965).
- 21 "Wordsworth's Georgic Genre and Structure in The Excursion," The Wordsworth Circle, vol. IX, no. 2 (Spring, 1978), 145-54.
- 22 The Theory of Epic in England, 1650-1800.
- 23 The Theory of Epic in England, 1650-1800, p. 149.
- 24 Specimens of Table Talk (London, 1851), pp. 172-73.

- 25 Prose Works, III, p. 27.
- 26 Letters, The Later Years, 1821-50, II, p. 9.
- 27 All citations from The Excursion are to The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. De Selincourt and Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), vol. V.
- 28 Woodring, p. 183; Lyon, 43; Groom, p. 116; Beatty, p. 268; and Barbara Gates, "Providential History and The Excursion," TWC, vol. IX, no. 2 (Spring, 1978), p. 178.
- 29 "The Art of Poetry," The Complete Works of Horace, ed. C. J. Kraemer, Jr. (New York: Modern Library, 1963), p. 402.
- 30 Anatomy of Criticism, p. 316.
- 31 The Complete Poems and Major Prose of John Milton, ed. M. Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey, 1957), p.212.
- 32 Revelation xxi. 10.
- 33 The Aeneid, trans. W. F. Jackson Knight (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), pp. 170. 173.
- 34 Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth: A Biography (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), II, p. 182.
- 35 The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. Grosart (London: Moxon, 1876), III, pp. 198-99.
- 36 Prose Works, II, p. 174.
- 37 The Collected Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe (London, 1934), II, p. 103.
- 38 W. L. Renwick, English Literature, 1798-1815 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), p. 186.

- 39 Wordsworth's Poetry, 1798-1814, p. 205.
- 40 Poetical Works, V, p. 375.
- 41 Geoffrey Durrant, "The Elegiac Poetry of The Excursion," TWC, vol. IX, no. 2 (Spring, 1978), p. 159.
- 42 Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20, p. 187.
- 43 William Wordsworth, II, p. 524.
- 44 Wordsworth, pp. 193-94.
- 45 See also II. 65-80, III. 626-36, III. 173-89, IV. 663-93.
- 46 See also I. 197-219, VIII. 524-42, IX. 293-310, IX. 369-83, IX. 590-609, IX. 613-27.
- 47 See also III. 967-91, IV. 1062-70, IV. 1132-47, V. 531-57, VIII. 576-85, IX. 56-91, IX. 369-78.
- 48 The latin reads: "ter conatus ibi collo dare
bracchia circum;/ Ter frustra comprehensa manus effugit
imago . . ." (Aeneid, II. 792-93).
- 49 Anchises' words are: "tu regere imperio populos,
Romane, memento,/ Hae tibi erunt artes, pacique imponere
morem,/ Parcere subiectis et debellare superbos" (Aeneid,
VI, 851-53).
- 50 The Italian reads:
"O frati," dissi, "che per cento milia
perigli siete giunti a l'occidente
a questa tanto picciola vigilia
d'i nostri sensi ch'è del rimanente
non vogliate negar l'esperienza,
di retro al sol, del mondo senza gente."
(112-17)

51 The references to Dante and Homer are discussed in Chapter IV, and the Vergilian echo of the Wanderer's words is discussed earlier in this chapter (p. 102).

52 The references to Shakespeare are: I. 370-1, IV. 536-38, IV. 800-05, VI. 550-51, VI. 905. VII. 595-624, IX. 134; and the biblical allusions are: II. 381-82, IV. 293-94, IV. 975, VI. 11, VI. 945-51, VII. 814-15, VII. 848.

53 From Milton's gloss on the "measure" of Paradise Lost.

54 Lascelles Abercrombie writes: "That amazing image of the sublime mind of Lucretius is exactly the kind of lofty symbolism that the continuation of epic purpose now seems to require--a subjective symbolism. I believe Wordsworth felt this, when he planned his great symbolic poem, and partly executed it in The Prelude and The Excursion: for there, more profoundly than anywhere out of Milton himself, Milton's spiritual legacy is employed After Milton, it seems likely that there is nothing more to be done with objective epic" (p. 121).

55 All citations from The Prelude are to The Prelude (1850), ed. De Selincourt, rev. Darbishire, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950).

56 R. D. Havens, The Mind of a Poet (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1954), II, p. 112.

57 Lyon, p. viii.

58 "Preface to the Edition of 1814," Poetical Works, V, pp. 1-2.

59 A Vision of the Last Judgement from The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. Keynes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), p. 72.

- 60 "Dejection: an Ode," The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. H. Coleridge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), p. 366.
- 61 Letters, The Middle Years, 1806-11, p. 209.
- 62 Preludes to Vision, p. 16.
- 63 Maurice McNamee, The Epic Hero (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1950).
- 64 A Preface to Paradise Lost (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), pp. 37-38.
- 65 From Virgil to Milton (London: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 38-39.
- 66 Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition, p. 77.
- 67 See Edward Bostetter, "Wordsworth's Dim and Perilous Way," Wordsworth's Mind and Art, ed. A. W. Thomson (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1969), pp. 73-94, who writes: "He [the Solitary] is a true Wordsworthian, tender towards children, passionately aware of the still, sad music of humanity" (p. 78).
- 68 Christopher Wordsworth, ed. The Memoirs of William Wordsworth (London, 1851), vol. I, p. 159. Hereafter cited as Memoirs.
- 69 Memoirs, I, p. 159.
- 70 Arthur Beatty, William Wordsworth: His Doctrine and Art in their Historical Relations (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1922), pp. 241-84.
- 71 William Wordsworth, II, p. 525.

72 The Romantic Poets (1953; rpt. New York: Arrow Books, 1963), p. 90. Bostetter agrees with Hough: "It is probably impossible to say to what extent the poem is a major influence in moulding attitudes to Victorian poets and to what extent it merely anticipates them. But one can say with Graham Hough that "anyone who wishes to understand the nineteenth century must read it," for in it one can see clearly at work the forces which determine and limit the direction of nineteenth-century poetry" ("Wordsworth's Dim and Perilous Way," p. 94).

73 Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20, p. 144.

74 Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20. p. 180.

CHAPTER THREE: THE LITURGICAL PATTERN

While critics have agreed that The Excursion is overtly Christian, and though Lyon has thoroughly investigated the Christian content of the poem,¹ no one has noticed the liturgical pattern. By liturgical pattern I mean a structure comprising elements from the rites, formulas, and ceremonies of the Church of England. Such phrases as "confession," "sinner," and "vesper-service" indicate a liturgical context in The Excursion. In his poetry, as Crabb Robinson reminds us, Wordsworth, an intensely religious poet, adopts the vocabulary of the Christian religion to express an essentially sacramental relationship with Nature.² "Communion," "grace," "prayer," "holy," "sacrifice," and other related terms occur very frequently in his poetry, and most often in The Excursion.³ Here the use of many of these phrases hovers between the literal and the figurative, or more appropriately, between the secular and the theological. "Grace," for instance, and its derivatives, "graced," "graceful(ly)," and "gracious," which occur forty times in The Excursion, more often than not have their secular meaning. However, the constant repetition of these am-

bivalent terms creates a large theological frame of reference within which the liturgical pattern operates. They suggest the specifically Christian nature of the poem.

Though all the components of an Anglican Communion service are not present, and though the sequence is not very taut, there is a series of liturgical utterances, gestures, and acts so arranged as to give the reader the feeling that he has experienced such a service in its essential structure. In Book III of The Excursion, the apostate Solitary says his "confession" (473); forty-six lines from the end of the poem, the reverend Pastor concludes his "vesper-service" with a prayer of benediction. Along with these framing elements, there are a prayer of invocation, prayers of thanksgiving, Comfortable Words, a homily, a Eucharist, an agape or love feast, and an identifiable recessional hymn. Together these components form a discernible liturgical pattern in The Excursion.

Confession, all Christian Churches agree, is a necessary condition of spiritual renewal. With what is arguably a confession, the liturgical pattern in The Excursion commences. Though there is no explicit state-

ment of the Solitary's desire to change his peccant ways until somewhat later (IV. 1095-1100), there are clues by which we are meant to interpret the "sick" recluse's recounting of his life-story. Halfway through the Solitary's recalling of his past, Wordsworth has his Poet describe the spot where the hero reviews his life in very suggestive words:

Desirous to divert
Or stem the current of the speaker's thoughts,
We signified a wish to leave that place
Of stillness and close privacy, a nook
That seemed for self-examination made;
Or, for confession, in the sinner's need,
Hidden from all men's view. (III. 468-74)

This is one of the six instances of the phrase "confession" in Wordsworth's poetry. Along with another in "The Horn of Egremont's Castle" (l. 99), this instance has theological and liturgical significance. Such phrases as "self-examination," "confession," "sinner's need," and "Hidden from all men's view," used in association with the still, private nook, metonymically adumbrate the Solitary's spiritual condition. But they also recall the Kyrie Eleison of the Litany, "O God the Father, of heaven: have mercy upon us miserable sinners."⁴ The Solitary, the "sinner" referred to in this context, is in need of God's mercy and grace. He is a "sick Man" (II.

612), who has lost his confidence in social man and his belief in a benevolent God. Consequently, he "wastes the sad remainder of his hours,/ Steeped in a self-indulging spleen, that wants not/ Its own voluptuousness" (II. 310-12).

The Solitary's "self-examination" ends with words that betray a despondent heart:

Such a stream
Is human Life; and so the Spirit fares
In the best quiet to her course allowed;
And such is mine,--save only for a hope
That my particular current soon will reach
The unfathomable gulf, where all is still.
(III. 986-91)

These lines, taken together with the import of "senseless grave" (III. 224), indicate that the Solitary has lost his Christian faith. He no longer believes in the immortality of the human soul, one of the central tenets of Christianity. It is appropriate that the liturgical pattern should begin here, at the nadir of the Solitary's spiritual pilgrimage.

As the Solitary concludes his "mournful narrative," the Poet describes the apostate's emotional experience:

Here closed the Tenant of that lonely vale
His mournful narrative--commenced in pain,
In pain commenced, and ended without peace.
(IV. 1-3)

The Solitary's experience in this natural confessional is a cri de coeur from someone who is "inwardly opprest/
With malady" (II. 305-06). The Poet describes this experience as "yielding surely some relief to his [mind]" (IV. 6). The word "surely" seems to hint at the efficacy of the Solitary's painful utterance. Its effect on the individual is comparable to that of the liturgical confession. It is a purgatorial disburdening of a mind weighed down by despondency.

In response to the Solitary, the reverend Wanderer asserts that

"One adequate support
For the calamities of mortal life
Exists--one only; an assured belief
That the procession of our fate, howe'er
Sad or disturb'd, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power;
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good.
--The darts of anguish fix not where the seat
Of suffering hath been thoroughly fortified
By acquiescence in the Will supreme
For time and for eternity; by faith,
Faith absolute in God, including hope,
And the defence that lies in boundless love
Of his perfections; with habitual dread
Of aught unworthily conceived, endured
Impatiently, ill-done, or left undone,
To the dishonour of his holy name.
Soul of our souls, and safeguard of the world!
Sustain, thou only canst, the sick of heart;
Restore their languid spirits, and recall
Their lost affections unto thee and thine!"

(IV. 10-31)

Though there are differences between them, this opening remark thematically and tonally resembles the Lord's Prayer, an integral part of the liturgy. The remarkable simplicity of the "adoration" of the Lord's Prayer⁵ is rendered much less directly by lines 10-27. That God is a benevolent Father whose name is to be revered is the force of both "adorations." The central petition of the Lord's Prayer for the coming of his kingdom is poetized in lines 16-21. Here, as in the Lord's Prayer, the "Will" governing both the temporal and eternal kingdoms is the overriding concern. The petition of "Give us this day, our daily bread" is rendered simply by "Sustain, thou only canst, the sick of heart"

Here the plea for spiritual sustenance takes precedence over Christ's petition for "daily bread." The final petition for delivering us from evil becomes "Restore their languid spirits, and recall/ Their lost affections unto thee and thine!" Though the Wanderer's utterance omits the petition for forgiveness of sins, it does take sinfulness into account in lines 24-27.

Unlike the Lord's Prayer, the most comprehensive of prayers,⁶ the Wanderer's assertion has a very personal application. A major difference between the Lord's

Prayer and the Wanderer's lines is that one is a prayer from man to God and the other from a pious man to a sinner, a kind of argument, which in the last four lines, assumes the form of a prayer. But both prayers assert an absolute belief in God's goodness and in his "holy name," in his ability to bring all mortal chances to divine fruition, in sustaining man, whether physically or spiritually, and in the final promise of ultimate union between man and God (ll. 30-31). The first twenty-two lines of the Wanderer's "ejaculation" (Argument, Bk. IV) are a poetic reworking of Christianity's most important prayer.

Having asserted his absolute belief in God's benevolence and divine plan, and having prayed for his "sick" friend, the Wanderer utters a prayer of praise and supplication:

"How beautiful this dome of sky;
 And the vast hills, in the fluctuation fixed
 At thy command, how awful! Shall the Soul,
 Human and rational, report of thee
 Even less than these!--Be mute who will, who can,
 My lips, that may forget thee in the crowd,
 Cannot forget thee here; where thou hast built,
 For thy own glory, in the wilderness!
 Me didst thou constitute a priest of thine,
 In such a temple as we now behold
 Reared for thy presence: therefore am I bound
 To worship, here, and everywhere--as one
 Not doomed to ignorance, though forced to tread,
 From childhood up, the ways of poverty;

From unreflecting ignorance preserved,
 And from debasement rescued.--By thy grace
 The particle divine remained unquenched;
 And 'mid the wild weeds of a rugged soil,
 Thy bounty caused to flourish deathless flowers,
 From paradise transplanted: wintry age
 Impends; the frost will gather round my heart;
 If the flowers wither, I am worse than dead!
 --Come, labour, when the worn-out frame requires
 Perpetual sabbath; come disease and want;
 And sad exclusion through decay of sense;
 But leave my unabated trust in thee--
 And let thy favour, to the end of life,
 Inspire me with the ability to seek
 Repose and hope among eternal things--
 Father of heaven and earth! and I am rich,
 And will possess my portion in content!"
 (IV. 34-65)

This is a continuation of the Wanderer's avowal of his
 "unabated trust" in and love for God and his handiwork.
 It is in effect an amalgam of such sentiments as "The
 heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament
 sheweth his handiwork" (Psalm XIX) and

Unto Thee, O God, do we give thanks: yea
 unto Thee do we give thanks.
 Thy name also is so nigh: and that do
 Thy wondrous works declare. (Psalm LXXV)

In the Wanderer's prayer there are also echoes of such
 Comfortable Words as "It is very meet, right, and our
 bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all
 places give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Al-
 mighty, Everlasting God" (Common Prayer, p. 413).

Like these words taken from the liturgy, the Wanderer's prayer expresses the incalculable richness of being godly and the imperious incumbency to worship God everywhere the Christian soul experiences Him.

The Wanderer then begins his Comfortable Words, which according to The Book of Common Prayer, are said to "prepare them [communicants] for discerning His [Christ's] body in the Sacrament" (p. 413). The Wanderer's subjects are chosen to help the Solitary recover from his spiritual torpor. Possessions may vanish, opinions change, and passions may fluctuate, but to man "Duty exists" as a never-failing beacon. Whereas the Solitary splenetically asserts that "Mutability is Nature's bane," the Wanderer steadfastly avers that Duty is "subject neither to eclipse nor wane" (IV. 72). This pithy remark is meant to remind the delinquent Solitary that he has been remiss in his duty towards social man and God. The Wanderer continues by describing his own practice. Though there have been changes in his life, he has never forsaken his worship of a loving God. This of course is in marked contrast to the Solitary's progress from pulpit to apostasy. The vicissitudes of life are not enough to deter the Wanderer

from what he considers the task of his life, "communion undisturbed" with the universe and God. He asserts that it is easy to despond and blame heaven for mankind's misfortunes. Addressing the apostate Solitary, he states his fundamental belief:

I cannot doubt that they whom you deplore
Are glorified; or if they sleep, shall wake
From sleep, and dwell with God in endless love.
(IV. 188-90)

Faith is the cornerstone of life, and without it life is vanity. He asseverates the authority of the conscience in words that echo Milton:

But, above all, the victory is most sure
For him, who, seeking faith by virtue, strives
To yield entire submission to the law
Of conscience--conscience revered and obeyed,
As God's most intimate presence in the soul,
And his most perfect image in the world.
(IV. 222-27)

The Wanderer then asserts his belief in the immortality of the human soul, and exhorts the Solitary to live by the rules of his conscience, for living thus, according to the Wanderer, is tantamount to living virtuously. To him who does so, there waits "a steadfast seat . . . among the happy few/ Who dwell on earth, yet breathe empyreal air" (IV. 229-30).

The Solitary's despondency is fierce, but the Wanderer's "strong discourse" capable of "lift[ing] the soul/ Toward regions more tranquil" (IV. 252-53) has begun to take effect. The Solitary, we are told,

Was less upraised in spirit than abashed;
Shrinking from admonition, like a man
Who feels that to exhort is to reproach.
(IV. 253-55)

The psychology is genuine here; for sudden external change would not be credible. The abashment is a step forward on the tortuous road to recovery of faith in God and confidence in social man.

The Wanderer, in the second half of his admonitory address, focuses on the Solitary's "loss of confidence in social man" (IV. 261). The reverend Pedlar's advice is one of moderation, to avoid the intoxication of "the unexpected transports of our age" and its polar opposite "fixed despair." He then asserts the "strict love of fellowship" that exists throughout Nature, from the warm, contented mole to the "great sun, earth's universal lord." As the minister is wont to do, the Wanderer moves from a general statement on the pervasive benignity in Nature to a very personal address. He gently reproves the Solitary:

There is a luxury in self-dispraise;
And inward self-disparagement affords
To meditative spleen a grateful feast.
(IV. 475-77)

Like the minister who invites the congregation to join in the worship of God, this "priest" of Nature invites the Solitary to give up his customary spleen and move in step with Nature. Unlike the Solitary, the Wanderer was never embittered against man or God, and in solitude he kept his mind "in a just equipoise of love" (I. 355). In his altruism, the Wanderer desires no less than he has had for the hapless Solitary who has denied himself the influences of Nature. The Wanderer's utterance, like the Comfortable Words, are calculated to prepare the apostate Solitary for meaningful participation in the Eucharist that is to follow.

As the desired atmosphere is created in the worship service, so too at this point in the pilgrimage an atmosphere that is conducive to spiritual change and growth is evoked. The taciturn Solitary is deeply moved by the Wanderer's words of comfort, and "Lifted towards the hills/
A kindling eye" (IV. 505). This bodily gesture, along with speech and singing, is an important part of the individual's response to liturgy. In liturgy there is a profound en-

gagement of the human body, in imitation of Christ himself who in prayer lifted his eyes to heaven, prostrated himself, and who used gestures to perform miracles. Secondly, in describing the Solitary's bodily gesture, Wordsworth no doubt has in mind the words of that popular Psalm of comfort and hope, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help" (Psalm CXXI). The hills in the Psalm and in The Excursion are associated with the immortal, the transcendent, the infinite. Change is slowly dawning upon the heart of the "sick" man; with change there is hope.

The Wanderer is delighted with the Poet's "accordant feelings" and once more resumes the strain of his utterance. He continues his insistent exhortation, even departing from exhortation to chide the back-sliding Solitary, as the minister normally does. His address becomes very particular as he deprecates the mind that recoils. His words describe the Solitary, whose mind is

Lost in a gloom of uninspired research;
 Meanwhile, the heart within the heart, the seat
 Where peace and happy consciousness should dwell,
 On its own axis restlessly revolving,
 Seeks, yet can nowhere find, the light of truth.
 (IV. 626-30)

The Solitary is touched by the Wanderer's discourse (IV. 631-762), and reluctantly gives vent to his scepticism:

"Love, Hope, and Admiration--are they not
 Mad Fancy's favourite vassals? Does not life
 Use them, full oft, as pioneers to ruin,
 Guides to destruction? Is it well to trust
 Imagination's light when reason's fails?
 The unguarded taper where the guarded faints?
 --Stoop from those heights, and soberly declare
 What error is; and, of our errors, which
 Doth debase the mind; the genuine seats
 Of power, where are they? Who shall regulate,
 With truth, the scale of intellectual rank?"
 (IV. 768-78)

He speaks from bitter personal experience, and his questions are genuine. His main enquiry about the nature of "error" reveals his concern about his past errors, and the extent to which he has been personally moved by the reverend sage's words of comfort and advice.

The Wanderer, no doubt pleased with these honest questions, praises the Solitary because he possesses rare qualities, and a consciousness of "How feelingly religion may be learned" (IV. 789). Like the minister who almost invariably uses a parable or anecdote to illustrate the moral lesson of his sermon, the Wanderer describes, for the spiritual uplift of the Solitary, the life of the shepherd boy, who, left alone for many silent hours, gradually begins to acquire an "intelligence for moral things,"

and early perceives "Within himself a measure and a rule,/ Which to the sun of truth he can apply,/ That shines for him, and shines for all mankind" (IV. 808-10). His imagination is not permitted to waste her powers, for it "is left free/ And puissant to range the solemn walks/ Of time and nature" (IV. 823-25). This shepherd boy soon comes to understand that a "beaming Goddess with her Nymphs," the "lurking Satyrs," and Pan himself, were creations of the imagination responding to the "Life continuous [and] Being unimpaired" that rolls through all things.

The Wanderer's words have a marked positive effect on the Solitary. It is described in this way by the Poet:

The strain was aptly chosen; and I could mark
 Its kindly influence, o'er the yielding brow
 Of our Companion, gradually diffused,
 While, listening, he had paced the noiseless turf,
 Like one whose untired ear a murmuring stream
 Detains

(IV. 888-93)

Like the "kindling eye" raised towards the hills, the "yielding brow" is another liturgical bodily gesture. It suggests the gradual yielding of an obdurate mind to the soothing influence of cogent argument. It is a propitious sign, one indicative of the Solitary's slow but

steady progress in his spiritual journey. But his customary scepticism is far from destroyed as he questions the propriety of the Wanderer's sowing "afresh/ The weeds of Romish phantasy" (IV. 907-08). Still a scoffer, the Solitary comments wryly on the "blessed restoration," and the activities of St. Anne, St. Fillian, and St. Giles, saints especially revered in Scotland. Behind the grim irony of his words, there is an inadvertent sense of patriotism at play, as the Solitary is gradually emerging from his self-imposed cocoon of taciturn dormancy.

In response the Wanderer continues his discourse on the "spiritual presence," and the immutable "law of duty." He gently pleads with the Solitary to seek "lights and guides" more edifying than Candide because the distressed spirit cannot hope to find any lasting comfort in the levity of this "dull product of a scoffer's pen." The "sick" man, we are told, is "touched/ With manifest emotion" by the words of his reverend friend (IV. 1078-79). The "yielding brow" suggests the pliant heart and mind. Doubt still lingers in the Solitary's mind, but through the fading mists we catch glimpses of the kindling fires of spiritual longing:

But how begin? and whence?--'The mind is free--
 Resolve,' the haughty Moralist would say,
 'This single act is all that we demand.'
 Alas! such wisdom bids the creature fly
 Whose very sorrow is, that time hath shorn
 His natural wings!--To friendship let him turn
 For succour; but perhaps he sits alone
 On stormy waters, tossed in a little boat
 That holds but him, and can contain no more.
 Religion tells of amity sublime
 Which no condition can preclude, of One
 Who sees all suffering, comprehends all wants,
 All weakness fathoms, can supply all needs:
 But is that bounty absolute?

(IV. 1080-93)

Like the unregenerate sinner in the presence of the Lord, the Solitary wonders whether he is worthy to receive God's "bounty absolute." For God's gifts, he reasons, are rewards for service on earth, and he has done so little that can be considered service. He asks if Heaven will condescend to him, the most unworthy of men, because his heart does not confess God. He wonders too if God will send "showers of grace" to the "parched and withered land" of his soul. Somewhat like Pilgrim, "a poor burdened sinner," on his way to that "place where stood a Cross,"⁷ he wonders whether "the groaning spirit" can "cast her load/ At the Redeemer's feet" (IV. 1098-99). This questioning seems genuine and represents a gigantic step for the changing Solitary. Gradually, the light of honest doubt has begun to dispel the gloom of disillusionment

that has palled his mind since his abortive hopes for the French Revolution. To this point in his spiritual excursion, these words are by far his most significant, and betray a promising spiritual condition.

The spiritual questioning of the Solitary is answered by the Wanderer's "discriminating sympathy," as he avers that there are as many ways of reaching God as there are "manifold degrees of guilt and shame." And because he and the Poet have heard the Solitary's voice gradually soften, and have seen his eye kindle "like an altar lit by a fire from heaven" (IV. 1121), the Wanderer can, in all sincerity, say to his apostate friend, "For you, assuredly, a hopeful road/ Lies open" (IV. 1117). To illustrate his point, he uses the story of the "curious child" who applies "to his ear/ The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell" to reinforce his message that the inner voice of conscience imparts "Authentic tidings of invisible things" and that there is a "central peace subsisting at the heart/ Of endless agitation" (IV. 1146-47). He further asserts that Nature never fails to "provide/ Impulse and utterance" to the heart that is open to receive her (IV. 1169-70). By contemplating the forms of Nature in the relations they bear to man, the individual

can learn acceptable lessons "Of human suffering, or of human joy" (IV. 1237-38), until a radical change is effected in sentient man. With the new change, the "naked spirit" shall cease to "deplore/ The burden of existence" and Science shall become "a support/ Not treacherous, to the mind's excursive power" (IV. 1261-62). By "deeply drinking-in the soul of things," the individual shall "raise to loftier heights/ Of divine love, his intellectual soul" (IV. 1274-75).

Before ending his Comfortable Words, the reverend Wanderer extends an invitation to his friend to accompany the Poet and himself as they seek to hear and understand "the inarticulate language" of Nature which perforce speaks at heaven's command. The Wanderer's utterance serves to prepare the Solitary for meaningful participation in the Eucharist that is to follow.

In the morning, the steadfast Wanderer dissuades the reluctant Solitary from leaving their company, and convinces him to continue with them to the village-churchyard among the mountains: "You cannot leave us now,/ We must not part at this inviting hour" (V. 71-72). There is a sense of urgency in the words of the Wanderer, for he realizes that the Solitary has shown genuine change. As

a good Christian, he cannot, must not, lose this chance of endeavouring to save this friend from a life of despair.

Within the village church, the Solitary assumes a meditative pose as he leans against the baptismal font. He is, in the words of the Poet,

Standing apart; with curved arm reclined
On the baptismal font: his pallid face
Upturned, as if his mind were rapt, or lost
In some abstraction;--gracefully he stood,
The semblance bearing of a sculptured form
That leans upon a monumental urn
In peace, from morn to night, from year to year.
(V. 211-17)

The "pallid face/ Upturned" is another liturgical gesture and recalls the "kindling eye" and the "yielding brow." Furthermore, "gracefully" is a pregnant word, especially since it is used in connection with "the baptismal font" and a spiritually changing sceptic. Although its denotative meaning is certainly applicable here, its connotative suggestions seem to be primary in the author's mind. It recalls the "showers of grace" that the Solitary longs for and wonders whether he is worthy of obtaining (IV. 1096-98). Symbolically, the Solitary is standing unawares in the plenitude of God's grace, which is freely given. He is not saved; but this tableau vivant suggests the pos-

sibility of salvation, and anticipates the Solitary's baptism into grace and into the fold of human fellowship at the end of Wordsworth's projected continuation of The Excursion.

Pauline conversions are rare; the scepticism born of chagrin returns to plague the yielding mind of the Solitary. From observation on the inherent rightness of baptism, a pivotal liturgical sacrament, he descends into an acrid harangue on religion and philosophy. His wonted mental attitude returns to question and to doubt the mysteries and truths that his companions categorically accept. With verbal fillip from the Poet, he launches into another obloquy on the unjust contradictions that beset man's life:

"Yet life, as with the multitude, with them
Is fashioned like an ill-constructed tale;
That on the outset wastes its gay desires,
Its fair adventures, its enlivening hopes,
And pleasant interests--for the sequel leaving
Old things repeated with diminished grace;
And all the laboured novelties at best
Imperfect substitutes, whose use and power
Evince the want and weakness whence they spring."
(V. 431-39)

The Solitary's acerbity is interrupted by the approach of the "reverend Pastor," who, after exchanging

salutations with the three pilgrims, accedes to a fervent request by the Wanderer:

"--Accord, good Sir! the light
Of your experience to dispel this gloom:
By your persuasive wisdom shall the heart
That frets, or languishes, be stilled and cheered."
(V. 481-84)

The Pastor has been given a specific task, that of bringing the sinning Solitary back into the fold of Christian believers. The Wanderer, it seems, has done all he can at this point. He has shown the Solitary, by example of his rich life, the virtue of living in harmony with man, Nature and God, and exhorted him to do likewise. As a lay "priest" he can do all but perform the sacraments of baptism, marriage, and the Eucharist. He has prepared the Solitary for his meeting with the Pastor, creating in the "sick Man" a spirit of genuine questioning, a desire for "showers of grace" (IV. 1095-1100). The Pastor, an ordained minister of the Church of England, is the only one who can celebrate the Eucharist. Bringing recidivists into the fold of Christianity is more appropriately the task of the ordained representatives of the Good Physician. The Wanderer, rich in the wisdom of "our daily life," does not possess the experience with death that the Pastor has. This experience

is what the Solitary needs at this point. The Wanderer has facilitated the Pastor's task by preparing the "sinner's" mind to receive the message of "Authentic epitaphs" (V. 651).

The Wanderer wishes to hear the Pastor pronounce some "Authentic epitaphs" so that the listening pilgrims may learn to value human life and reverence the dead. Again we sense that the Pastor's office is not as much for the Wanderer and the Poet as it is for the spiritual uplift of the saturnine Solitary, who has just uttered his heart-rending remorse at renouncing the productive life of "the sturdy plough," the "patient spade," and "the simple crook."

The Pastor then begins his homily on epitaphs, which has as its subject the theme of sic transit gloria mundi. The sermon embraces histories of men and women from the various social echelons--from the "wedded pair in childless solitude," the lowest in social rank, to the "flaming Jacobite" and the "sullen Hanoverian," two men of high military rank, to the knight of Eliza's days who "fixed his home in this sequestered vale." Peasant, shepherd, patriarch, soldier, and noble knight are repre-

sentative of the social spectrum. Most of the bitter experiences that attended the lives of the deceased echo the Solitary's own experiences. But the utter trust they displayed in their lives is in marked contrast to the Solitary's loss of faith. The central truth of the Pastor's sermon is that chance is an integral part of the divine plan, and must be seen as subservient to the inscrutable workings of Providence. The roses of kings droop and fall, the stars of human glory are cast down, but God ineluctably brings this transitoriness to divine fruition. So moving is the Pastor's sermon that the Wanderer suggests that it would be fitting if the three pilgrims thank him whose "Authentic epitaphs" evoke deep feelings for man and God.

The Solitary, now referred to as the "pensive Sceptic" (VIII. 1), agrees with the Wanderer's acknowledgements, and in this verbal gesture we realize that a change has been wrought in the "yielding" speaker. However, he shrinks "with backward will" when the Pastor invites the three pilgrims to his dwelling. Whenever an invitation to social fellowship is offered, it seems, the Solitary, recalling his days of morose self-sufficiency, is apprehensive, and reluctant to accept.

The Wanderer soon embarks on a caustic critique of

existing social conditions, upon the baleful effects arising out of an ill-regulated and excessive application of powers so admirable in themselves. All men, he declares, must recognize the primacy of moral law, and must act in accordance with its dictates, especially in the "temple" of industry. The Solitary joins the Wanderer in his bitter criticism by advocating peasant education. This is the Solitary at his critical best, completely oblivious of his own situation, and championing the cause of the unfortunate, uneducated poor. By virtue of his selfless criticism, the Solitary has symbolically entered the fellowship of social man; for as his speech indicates, he can once more sympathize with others less fortunate than he (VIII. 334-57). Here he can think of the multitudes, who from crawling infancy have breathed the "unimprisoned" air, yet are "abject" and "degraded." He can lose himself in the woe of others, and consider ways of improving their wretched lot. He can even advocate a time when peasants no longer will be "sluggish, blank, and ignorant, and strange," but will walk in the daylight of knowledge and intelligence. He can anticipate a time when the infant peasant will be happily studying the Christ-crossrow, puzzling through a primer, line by

line, until "perfect mastery crowns the pain at last" (VIII. 415). No longer will the rustic mind be captive to ignorance; it shall become a station of liberty, as mental vistas broaden and barriers of benightedness fall.

Once within the Pastor's dwelling, and after they have met "the Lady of the Place," the company partake of "a plain repast" (VIII. 519). The Solitary has said his confession, the Wanderer has uttered his prayer of thanksgiving and supplication and his Comfortable Words, and the Pastor has delivered his sermon on "Authentic epitaphs." It is fitting, and in accordance with liturgical structure, that the pilgrims now participate in Holy Communion. The meal, like the prescriptive Communion fare, is a "plain repast." Unlike the diversity of foods in the "pastoral banquet" (II. 671-84), the meal here is of simple preparation, frugal, not fancy or rich. While "repast" has not been directly applied to the Lord's Supper as "banquet" has, it can assume symbolical significance as in Lamb's "spiritual repasts."⁸ This "plain repast" is, to use Lamb's words, "least stimulative to appetite, and leaves the mind most free for foreign considerations."⁹

Participation in the Holy Communion is very appropriate at this stage of the Solitary's spiritual pilgrim-

mage, for he is well on the road, it seems, to recapturing his lost faith in social man and in God. By actively participating in the Eucharist, the Christian expresses through his ritualistic gesture that he is one with both man and God. The Solitary's willing sharing in this Eucharistic "plain repast" symbolizes his re-entry into the fold of true believers. Significantly, it is only after the Solitary has partaken of the symbolic communion that we begin to see tangible signs of his spiritual change. The "plain repast" has replaced the "healing food" of the Eucharist, but its effect is the same. The Solitary is, for the time being, a new person. He joins the company in "desultory talk/ From trivial themes to general argument/ Passing" (VIII. 521-23), and this marks a radical departure from his wonted splenetic reserve. He takes not only a "willing" role in this pleasant confabulation, but also a "forward part":

While question rose
 And answer flowed, the fetters of reserve
 Dropping from every mind, the Solitary
 Resumed the manners of his happier days;
 And in the various conversation bore
 A willing, nay, at times, a forward part;

Yet with the grace of one who in the world
 Had learned the art of pleasing, and had now
 Occasion given him to display his skill,
 Upon the steadfast 'vantage-ground of truth.
 (VIII. 524-33)

This is indeed a changed Solitary as he resumes the manners of his happier days. He seems to have regained, temporarily at least, his confidence in social man. Furthermore, his attitude towards the "goodly Matron" and his praise of "the consummate harmony serene/ Of gravity and elegance, diffused/ Around the mansion and its whole domain" (VIII. 538-40) suggest that he has been cured of some of his inveterate spleen. As soon as he can voluntarily sympathize with others, the albatross of "self-indulging spleen" falls from his stubborn neck. He can now utter, "with a tender sigh/ Breathed over them," these simple, genuine words of praise, "A blessed lot is yours!" (VIII. 542). The "tender sigh" may well be a passing wistfulness as his now tranquil mind conjures up a similar domestic scene had fate spared his wife and children. The pliant Solitary can now almost bless the Pastor's wife "shining in the beams" of domestic bliss. The "plain repast" has effected, it seems, an enormously positive change in the mind and heart of the Solitary.

After the meal is over, and every heart seems to be made glad and strong, the Wanderer begins a discourse, asserting that "an active Principle" pervades the universe and its noblest seat is the human mind (IX. 1-135). His utterance seems to serve a function similar to that of "The Prayer of Oblation" that sometimes follows the Sacrament. "The Prayer of Oblation" is said "if there is any room for doubt as to the completeness of the Oblation as made by the acts and words of Consecration" (Common Prayer, p. 422). The Wanderer's words are calculated to reinforce the Solitary's gesture of faith and fellowship. When he sympathizes with the unfortunate, we realize that his spiritual change has been reaffirmed by the Wanderer's moving discourse. The Solitary seems capable of selflessness:

"Then," said the Solitary, "by what force
 Of language shall a feeling heart express
 Her sorrow for that multitude in whom
 We look for health from seeds that have been sown
 In sickness, and for increase in a power
 That works but by extinction? On themselves
 They cannot learn, nor turn to their own hearts
 To know what they must do; their wisdom is
 To look into the eyes of others, thence
 To be instructed what they must avoid:
 Or rather, let us say, how least observed,
 How with most quiet and most silent death,
 With the least taint and injury to the air
 The oppressor breathes, their human form divine,
 And their immortal soul, may waste away."

(IX. 138-52)

The "feeling heart" that expresses concern and "sorrow for that multitude" of less fortunate people is none other than the Solitary's. So meaningful is this change in him that he is solicitous about the oppressed losing "their human form divine" and their "immortal soul."

The Solitary's change is further evidenced by his lack of protest at the Matron's invitation to journey to an island across the lake. Upon invitation, the narrator tells us, "all were pleased," and "pursued their way, a broken company, / Mute conversing single or in pairs" (IX. 435-36). This is the first time in The Excursion that the Solitary has acceded willingly to such an invitation. All hearts are glad; and complete harmony exists between man and man, and between man and God. To objectify the beatification of this moment, Wordsworth uses a "twofold image":

In a deep pool, by happy chance we saw
 A twofold image; on the grassy bank
 A snow-white ram, and in the crystal flood
 Another and the same! Most beautiful,
 On the green turf, with his imperial front
 Shaggy and bold, and wreathed horns superb,
 The breathing creature stood; so beautiful,
 Beneath him, showed his shadowy counterpart.
 Each seemed the centre of his own fair world:
 Antipodes unconscious of each other,
 Yet in partition, with their several spheres,
 Blended in perfect stillness, to our sight!
 (IX. 439-51)

This is indeed an awe-inspiring moment when there is perfect communion among all creatures in the universe. "Antipodes unconscious" blend "in perfect stillness" and heaven and earth are in unison. This is the goal of Holy Communion and all, including the Solitary, seem to have attained it.

During their short stay on the island, the company share a "choice repast" (IX. 530). This meal should be compared with the "plain repast" shared at the Pastor's dwelling. The word "choice" suggests a feast rather than a Eucharist. What Wordsworth has in mind here, it seems, are the Whitsuntide revels traditionally celebrated as a feast. This ancient festival commemorates the day on which God gave the law to Moses, and, in the New Testament, the day on which the Holy Ghost descended upon the disciples in tongues of fire:

The original feast of Pentecost was instituted by God (as it is supposed) as a memorial of the day on which He gave the law to Moses, and declared the Israelites "a peculiar treasure a kingdom of Priests, and a holy nation" (Exod. xix. 5, 6). But the prominent character of the day was that of a solemn harvest festival. On the morrow of the Passover Sabbath, fifty days before, the first cut sheaf of barley was offered to God, waved before the altar, with supplication for a blessing on the harvest that commenced. On the day of Pentecost two loaves of bread made from the new corn were offered (with appointed burnt offerings), in thanksgiving for the harvest now ended. Each of these objects

of the harvest has a significant typical application. It was on this day that the Holy Ghost descended to sanctify a new Israel, that they might be "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter, ii. 9) (Common Prayer, p. 303)

The several elements here--a feast, the fires of Pentecost, thanksgiving, the sanctification of a new nation--are in a sense all in The Excursion, and their presence suggests Wordsworth's poetic intentions. In Book IX, the Wanderer describes what is in effect a new England:

O for the coming of that glorious time
 When, prizing knowledge as her noblest wealth
 And best protection, this imperial Realm,
 While she exacts allegiance, shall admit
 An obligation, on her part, to teach
 Them who are born to serve her and obey;
 Binding herself by statute to secure
 For all the children whom her soil maintains
 The rudiments of letters, and inform
 The mind with moral and religious truth,
 Both understood and practised,--so that none,
 However destitute, be left to droop
 By timely culture unsustained; or run
 Into a wild disorder; or be forced
 To drudge through a weary life without the help
 Of intellectual implements and tools;
 A savage horde among the civilised,
 A servile band among the lordly free!
 (IX. 293-310)

This, to modify somewhat the words of The Book of Common Prayer, is a sort of sanctification of a new nation, a

chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people. Unlike the Solitary's speech on the rightness of baptism (V. 259-91), these words of the Wanderer are uttered within the temporal context of the "choice repast." In a more than tenuous way they seem to be part of the feast.

The "choice repast" the company share does not comprise the "two loaves of the first bread" as the traditional Whitsuntide celebration does; but the word "choice" suggests at least an appropriate alternative. The fish caught by the boys earlier that day and now served acquire a ritualistic significance. Besides being an early symbol of Christ, the fish became a symbol of the neophyte,¹⁰ a meaning which applies almost directly to the Solitary. In addition, in the fourth and fifth centuries, the fish became an emblem of the Eucharist, "frequently found in the paintings in the catacombs in combination with bread and wine."¹¹

Fire is a pregnant symbol of God's protective presence in the Bible, from the burning bush to the Pentecostal flames. In this part of The Excursion, Wordsworth endows fire with at least two symbolic meanings. To the Solitary, the dying fire on the beach is an emblem of the

ephemerality of earthly joys and desires. In this way it is an appropriate image of one of the salient themes of The Excursion--sic transit gloria mundi:

. . . as we re-embarked,
 Leaving, in quest of other scenes, the shore
 Of that wild spot, the Solitary said
 In a low voice, yet careless who might hear,
 "That fire, that burned so brightly to our wish,
 Where is it now?--Deserted on the beach--
 Dying, or dead! Nor shall the fanning breeze
 Revive its ashes. What care we for this,
 Whose ends are gained? Behold an emblem here
 Of one day's pleasure, and all mortal joys!"
 (IX. 546-55)

But there is another more important fire in this section of the poem which answers, in a sense, the Solitary's question, "The fire, that burned so brightly to our wish,/ Where is it now?" This fire is, in effect, a Pen-tecostal fire:

Already had the sun,
 Sinking with less than ordinary state,
 Attained his western bound; but rays of light--
 Now suddenly diverging from the orb
 Retired behind the mountain-tops or veiled
 By the dense air--shot upwards to the crown
 Of the blue firmament--aloft, and wide:
 And multitudes of little floating clouds,
 Through their ethereal texture pierced--ere we,
 Who saw, of change were conscious--had become
 Vivid as fire; clouds separately poised,--
 Innumerable multitude of forms
 Scattered through half the circle of the sky;

And giving back, and shedding each on each,
 With prodigal communion, the bright hues
 Which from the unapparent fount of glory
 They had imbibed, and ceased not to receive.
 That which the heavens displayed, the liquid deep
 Repeated; but with unity sublime!
 (IX. 590-608)

The refulgence of this glorious sunset is a "prodigal communion" shed on the world, a Pentecostal fire bringing some measure of understanding into the mysteries of the divine Being, for it is an "effluence of God," "To the infirmity of mortal sense/ Vouchsafed" (IX. 618-19). Like the tongues of flame that descended on the apostles on the first Pentecost, this fiery effluence descends upon this band of faithful pilgrims. It is a symbol of God's protective presence, an assurance that he is not a deus absconditus, but a living God speaking to these nineteenth-century pilgrims as he spoke to the men and women of the Bible. He showers his blessings upon this group of followers gathered to participate in a naturalized version of this age-old ritual. The manifold "floating clouds" becoming "Vivid as fire" is a sort of covenant between "the living God" (I. 212) and his people, somewhat like the covenant in the rainbow given to Noah and his family.

The Pastor is profoundly moved by the "refulgent spectacle" and indicates that he understands its emblematic significance. In holy transport he bursts forth in a prayer of thanksgiving and praise:

"Eternal Spirit! universal God!
 Power inaccessible to human thought,
 Save by degrees and steps which thou hast deigned
 To furnish; let thy Word prevail,
 Oh! let thy Word prevail, to take away
 The sting of human nature
 --Father of good! this prayer of bounty grant,
 In mercy grant it to thy wretched sons."
 (IX. 614-48)

Soon after the "choice repast" is over, the Pastor's daughter sings a "simple song," which sinks into the hearts of the pilgrims and "charm[s] the peaceful flood" (IX. 537). This song is analogous to the recessional hymn or the Gloria in Excelsis, a hymn of thanksgiving sung after Holy Communion. This finished, the company engage in a spontaneous act of gathering "flowery spoils/ From land and water; lilies of each hue--/ Golden and white," and leaves of the lily of the valley (IX. 538-44). The gathering of lilies and leaves of the lily of the valley, both having traditional Christian symbolism, seems, in this subjective version of the Whitsuntide feast, to be a naturalized adaptation of the ritualized offering of the "two loaves

of bread" at Pentecost. Wordsworth is true to his promise of finding "love and holy passion" in the "simple produce of the common day" (Prospectus, 54-55). Orthodox liturgy and prescriptive elements of a studied ritual are replaced by natural and spontaneous utterances and accessible objects which assume the sacramental significance of what they have supplanted.

Once the "prayer of bounty" is over, and the recessional hymn sung, the Pastor pronounces his benediction. The benedictional tone of the Pastor's final utterance is suggested by Wordsworth's borrowing the phrase "all blessings flow" (IX. 754) from that very popular doxology of Thomas Ken:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

As the benediction invariably closes the liturgy, so too does this benediction. Once over, we are told, "This vesper-service closed without delay . . ." (IX. 755). The vesper-service no doubt refers to the utterances and the activities on the island. But the phrase also serves to remind the careful reader that the entire

spiritual excursion of the Solitary has been initiated and terminated by the first and last elements of an unorthodox Anglican Communion service.

The Solitary is not saved, nor even converted at the end of The Excursion; there is, however, a promise of more to come. The largest fish here as in the story of the two young fishermen is still to be caught. The Solitary has regained something of his former relationship with social man, with Nature, and with God. He has recovered some of his lost Christianity, as indicated by his response to the rites and formulas of Anglicanism.

In his use of the liturgical pattern in The Excursion, it is possible to see Wordsworth's answer to deism.¹² Deism was a concomitant of the Enlightenment, that period of total reassessment of man's past history, the workings of his mind, his esthetic concerns, his scientific discoveries, and his religious beliefs. It was a response to traditional Christianity that renounced dogmatic Christian beliefs in an attempt to justify human life on purely secular grounds. Deists held that traditional Christianity had perverted the pristine monotheism, which they considered the cornerstone of all religion. They endeavoured to create a pure religion, devoid of the misleading encrustations that had developed over

seventeen hundred years. Accordingly, they execrated priestcraft, rejected the importance of rituals, questioned the authenticity of Scripture, discredited the role of the imagination, and renounced the validity of biblical revelation. Though they believed in a "supreme Being," they also deified Nature. They replaced the Bible with the book of Nature, where all men could find ample and reasonable evidence of God. Deism blurred the distinction between God and Nature, and in so doing outraged many Christians.

John Wilson and Patty Smith were two Christians who were outraged at what they considered to be deism in The Excursion. Wilson laments the total absence of "Revealed Religion" in The Excursion, and roundly asserts that Wordsworth "certainly cannot be called a Christian poet."¹³ He also states that Wordsworth does not fear "to declare to all men that he believes himself to be one of the order of High Priests of nature" (p. 59). Replying directly to Patty Smith's censure, Wordsworth answers Wilson's charge and states the anti-deist message of The Excursion:

She [Patty Smith] condemns me for not distinguishing between Nature as the work of God, and God himself. But where does she find this doctrine inculcated? Whence does she gather that the author of The Excursion looks upon Nature and God as the same? He does not indeed consider the Supreme being as bearing the same relation to the Universe, as the watchmaker bears to a watch¹⁴

The Excursion is among other things a paeon to the Church of England, into which Wordsworth was baptised and from which he received the last rites. His respect and reverence for the Church are evident in the role he gives the Pastor, the representative of orthodox Anglicanism, in the Solitary's spiritual renewal, and in the Poet's address to Church and State:

--Hail to the State of England! And conjoin
 With this a salutation as devout,
 Made to the spiritual fabric of her Church;
 Founded in truth; by blood of Martyrdom
 Cemented; by the hands of Wisdom reared
 In beauty of holiness, with ordered pomp,
 Decent and unreprieved. The voice, that greets
 The majesty of both, shall pray for both;
 That, mutually protected and sustained,
 They may endure long as the sea surrounds
 This favoured Land, or sunshine warms her soil.
 (VI. 6-16)

For Wordsworth the life of the Church was inextricably connected with that of the State, their relationship being one of mutual protection and sustenance. To him, as Sperry says, the Church was a storehouse and

transmitter of tradition, "the strongest buttress of the English Constitution, and therefore . . . necessary to the life of the nation."¹⁵ But Sperry is only half correct when he states that the Church was important to the poet "not because it provided sermons and sacraments, but because it kept the memory of the successive generations of his fellow-countrymen" (p. 189). The Pastor's words on baptism (V. 950-52) and the essential truth of the Solitary's ironic description of its ritual efficacy indicate Wordsworth's feelings towards the significance of sacraments in the Church of England:

And when the pure
 And consecrating element hath cleansed
 The original stain, the child is there received
 Into the second ark, Christ's church, with trust
 That he, from wrath redeemed, therein shall float
 Over the billows of this troublesome world
 To the fair land of everlasting life.
 (V. 279-85)

Wordsworth had much more than a secular interest in the Church.¹⁶ Spiritually he was devoted to the Church and, in Moorman's words, saw "her as a rock of refuge in the raging sea of change" ¹⁷

The Excursion is principally anti-deist in its justification of revelation and in its celebration of the imagination. There are, besides that of the young Wanderer (I. 197-218), two significant examples of visionary experience in the poem: that of the Solitary (II. 829-75), and that of the "happy few" (IX. 590-608). Wordsworth deliberately patterns the former after the more famous revelation of John to suggest the importance of biblical revelation to human life, and also to show that the apostate Solitary cannot respond meaningfully to such experiences. The latter is an "effluence" from "the living God," a sort of covenant between Him and these nineteenth-century wayfarers. Such revelatory experiences engage the responses of the heart, the soul, and the imagination. Revelation is an ideal towards which the Romantic spirit ceaselessly strives in its desire to participate in the sacrament of living imaginatively.

The liturgical pattern in The Excursion reflects Wordsworth's familiarity and reverence for the Bible, The Book of Common Prayer, and the Church of England. At the same time, The Excursion is an account of Wordsworth's spiritual odyssey from childhood to putative

old age. That he may be called a Christian poet is the consensus of those who have written on his religion, though each of his critics qualifies his Christianity in a different way.¹⁸ Inge, for instance, sees Wordsworth's Christianity as a blend of Platonism and orthodox Christianity, while Trilling asserts that the cardinal virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity are essential to his credo, and praises his "quietism." Fairchild, coming close to stating that Wordsworth's religion is religiosity, concludes with these words: "At heart he never strays very widely from the Christian sentimentalism or sentimental Christianity of the softer type of eighteenth-century latitudinarianism" (p. 261). Batho, in a sympathetic chapter, asserts that it "is the High Church of which we ought to think in connection with Wordsworth" (p. 239). Brantley, in a recent study, argues that Wordsworth's "natural Methodism" is closer to Evangelical Anglicanism and Evangelical Nonconformism than to orthodox Anglicanism. This religious outlook he developed while still a young man reading the tracts of Wilberforce and listening to John Wesley and other Evangelical preachers. Havens is closer to the truth when he writes, "Yet until he was thirty-five or forty, there

was nothing distinctively Christian about his thought. Throughout his boyhood and great creative period the Bible, the church, the Christian conception of God, the personality of Jesus and his death on the cross appear to have exerted little direct influence on him. He believed in them, he accepted them as a matter of course but apparently without thinking much about them" (p. 180). In what is perhaps the most balanced analysis of Wordsworth's religion, Sperry agrees with Haven on the lack of importance Christian doctrine held for Wordsworth until he was thirty-five or forty (p. 185). He adds that though evidence can be found to support the poet's Christianity, he cannot be considered orthodox (p. 201). He describes the poet as being "one of those men, and they are not uncommon, whose deeper nature contains an unstratified, elemental religiousness, and whose superficial character shows theological strata not derived from basic substance" (p. 185). His religion, Sperry continues, "as we have it in his mature work, is the cosmic faith, man's spiritual traffic with an infinite universe" (p. 191).

As these opinions indicate, Wordsworth's faith, however it is labelled, cannot be termed orthodox.

If we may believe Crabb Robinson, Wordsworth by his own admission excludes himself from the company of orthodox believers when he says: "I can feel more sympathy with the orthodox believer who needs a Redeemer and who, sensible of his own demerits, flies from one refuge to Him (though I do not want one for myself) than with the cold and rational motives of the Unitarians."¹⁹ Again, we find him unable to accept the doctrine of the Atonement; though he disagreed with Coleridge's unorthodox view of miracles as "not a necessary part of a Christian's creed."²⁰

Wordsworth's faith, finally, partakes of two religious attitudes: a reverence for Nature and a quasi-orthodox belief in Christianity. It is as useless to try to separate these credal strands as it is pointless to deduce which was more important to him. More than likely, Wordsworth never saw them as being discrete, but equipollent and complementary. Those who seek to make him into merely a thoroughgoing nature worshipper or an orthodox Christian do him wrong. His view of the world was too unified to admit this kind of division. Writing to Francis Wrangham on June 5, 1808, Wordsworth outlines his religious stance: "My meaning is that piety and

religion will be best understood by him who takes the most comprehensive view of the human mind"21

His faith is syncretic, drawing its life from whatever was personally attractive and appropriate. Its breadth and the poet's almost deliberate avoidance of making statements of precise credal commitment allowed many differing responses to his faith. Katherine Peek²² discusses the attraction Wordsworth's expression of religious faith had for Roman Catholics, Unitarians, and Quakers, though Crabb Robinson says that the Evangelicals "have been his despisers."²³

As Wordsworth grew older, he drew closer to orthodox Anglicanism. As Christianity grew stonger in his life, his poems began to take on a distinctive Christian colouring. While there is nothing distinctively Christian about "Tintern Abbey," "The Immortality Ode" or even The Prelude, there is an unabashed Christianity in "The White Doe of Rylstone," "A Little Onward," Ecclesiastical Sketches, and of course The Excursion. In both Ecclesiastical Sketches and The Excursion he chooses to celebrate the Church by using to full poetic advantage the structure and significance of the liturgy that stands at the heart of its life. In Ecclesiastical

Sketches he devotes several sonnets to such liturgical rites as baptism, confirmation, the Sacrament, the marriage ceremony, and the funeral service. The liturgical sonnets are, in Pott's words, "arranged according to the ascent and decline of human life."²⁴ In a series of sonnets which trace the history of the Church of England from the introduction of Christianity into Britain to its influence in his own day, Wordsworth celebrates the liturgy of the Church of England and describes its character and influence.

A perusal of The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth indicates the poet's familiarity with and reverence for the Bible and The Book of Common Prayer.²⁵ To him the Bible was the most interesting and instructive book ever written. It had for him "a majesty, a beauty, a simplicity, an ardour, a sublimity, that awes and overpowers the spirit of Poetry in uninspired men" (p. 186). Its true value to human life has not been celebrated and he wished he were "equal to anything so holy" (p. 187). Next to the Bible, The Book of Common Prayer was more familiar than any other book, according to Batho (p. 242). He "reverenced and loved it as the Church's precious heritage of primitive piety, equally admirable for its

matter and its style" (Critical Opinions, p. 188). Many of the collects he deemed as "examples of perfection, consisting . . . of words whose significance filled up without excess or defect the simple and symmetrical contour of some majestic meaning, and whose sound was a harmony of accordant simplicity and grandeur . . ." (p. 188).

The liturgy was imbedded early in Wordsworth's life and remained with him throughout his life. In the later years when the visionary gleam had fled, and when he began to lean towards the Church, he, as Batho argues, "makes it plain that the offices of the Church, or at least the fundamental doctrines of the Church, did compensate for the loss of those early visions" (p. 311). It is quite possible, though hard to prove, that his early Anglican training, especially the Catechism, which taught him that there is "an inward spiritual grace" to an "outward visible sign" (Common Prayer, p. 469), played a crucial role in the way he looked upon Nature. The Catechism taught him that by means of "inward grace" everyday objects are bound up with the eternal, and that in Nature are to be found the visible symbols of infinity. We can then interpret his use of the liturgical pattern

in The Excursion and elsewhere in his poetry as a personal recognition of the profound import the forms of spiritual worship of the Church of England held for him in his later years.

In its description of the upbringing of the Solitary and of the effects of the French Revolution on him, The Excursion is an extension of The Prelude. The hero's struggle out of despondency to re-entry into the fellowship of believers in social man and in God to a certain extent mirrors Wordsworth's own struggle to attain his equilibrium after the French Revolution, to attain the "meditative calm" of the Wanderer. This pilgrimage from despondency to meditative equipoise is a reworking of the theme of the fall and redemption of man. We know that Coleridge's recommendations for "The Recluse" affected the content and structure of The Excursion.²⁶ Wordsworth affirms a fall, and declares a manifest scheme of redemption, within which the Solitary represents postlapsarian man expelled from his garden of bliss, his domestic affairs and his communication with God in disrepair. Like Adam the sinning Solitary must learn the virtue of obedience to God's ordinance, and

the value of human fellowship, if he is once more to lead a meaningful life. Like Pilgrim, he must face "absolute despair," and conquer it, before he can attain the City of God. He must slough off his "epicurean selfishness" and seek to gain the wisdom, the sense of fellowship, and the unshakable faith in God that the "steadfast" Wanderer possesses. Towards this plateau of philosophical equilibrium both the Solitary and Wordsworth are struggling.

It is in this struggle towards reconciliation with man and God that we find some of the significance of the liturgical pattern in The Excursion. For liturgy is a framework within which the individual moves spiritually to a closer relationship with mankind and with God. The forms and ceremonies which comprise the liturgy are "manifestations of spiritual worship, and the ordinary means by which that worship is expressed to God" (Common Prayer, p. 5). There is in liturgy a two-way movement from God to man and from man to God, taking place in that order. For the liturgy was originally ordained by God (Common Prayer, p. 11), and through this ceremonial worship of song, word, and bodily gesture, the Christian communes with God. Liturgy is a structure which reflects

the basic principle of the redemptive scheme of Christian history. God spoke to man by word, by gesture, and through the sacrifice of Christ. In imitation of divine acts, man in turn speaks to God through word, gesture, and personal sacrifice. The pivotal event in Christian history is also at the heart of the liturgy. As Christ's sacrifice redeems sinful man, participation in the memorial of that sacrifice cleanses man's sinful nature and brings him closer to God.

This is the framework within which Wordsworth has his Solitary move from despondency to a projected acceptance of the goodness of social man and the benevolence of God. The Solitary, bound on a personal quest, engages in public worship characterized by the rites, words, and gestures of the Church of England. In the Solitary's quest we catch glimpses of Wordsworth's spiritual excursion from the quicksands of post-revolutionary chagrin to the haven of quasi-orthodoxy within the Anglican Church.

In 1933, Batho, reviewing Wordsworth's spiritual life, wrote, "The effect upon Wordsworth, not only of the Church catechism alone, but of the whole Prayer Book and all his Anglican training, is usually overlooked, and sometimes with consequences of serious misunder-

standing" (p. 242). The liturgical pattern in The Excursion has too long been overlooked, resulting in a diminished understanding of the structure and overall meaning of the poem. The Excursion reveals how Wordsworth uses to good poetic advantage his reverence for the Church of England and for her two sacred books. It shows also how he adapts a fixed, traditional liturgy to a subjective poetic treatment.

Notes

Chapter Three

- ¹ The Excursion: A Study, pp. 66-121.
- ² Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, ed. Edith Morley (London: Dent, 1938), vol. I, p. 138. Crabb Robinson writes: ". . . I believe his religion to be like that of the German metaphysicians, a sentimental and metaphysical mysticism in which the language of Christianity is used, which is a sort of analogy to this poetical and philosophical religion"
- ³ A Concordance to the Poems of William Wordsworth, ed. Lane Cooper (London: Smith, Elder, 1911).
- ⁴ The Annotated Book of Common Prayer, annot. Rev. John Henry Blunt (London: Rivingtons, 1876), p. 188. Hereafter cited as Common Prayer.
- ⁵ E. F. Scott, The Lord's Prayer (New York: Scribners, 1951), p. 79.
- ⁶ Scott, p. 89.
- ⁷ John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), pp. 56, 69.
- ⁸ "Grace Before Meat," Essays of Elia and Last Essays of Elia (London: Dent, 1962), p. 107.
- ⁹ "Grace Before Meat," p. 107.
- ¹⁰ The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F. L. Cross (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), p. 514.
- ¹¹ Cross, p. 514.

¹² For discussions of deism, see Carl Becker, The Heavenly City of Eighteenth-Century Philosophers (1932; rpt. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967); Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation (New York: Knopf, (1969), vol. II, 127-66; Frank Manuel, The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods (1959; rpt. New York: Atheneum Press, 1967), pp. 57-70; E. Cassirer, The Philosophy of The Enlightenment (1932; rpt. Boston: Beacon, 1960); Leslie Stephens, English Thought in the Eighteenth Century (1876; rpt. London: Harbinger, 1962), vol. I, pp. 76-233; and Peter Gay, Deism: An Anthology (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1968).

¹³ Recreations of Christopher North (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1857), II, p. 55. It is interesting to note that Coleridge too accused Wordsworth of deism. Writing generally of his friend's poetry, and not specifically of The Excursion, Coleridge states: "I will not conceal from you that this inferred dependency of the human soul on accidents of birthplace and abode, together with the vague, rather than mystic, confusion of God with the world, and the accompanying nature-worship, of which the asserted dependence forms a part, is the trait in Wordsworth's poetic works that I most dislike as unhealthy, and denounce as contagious . . ." (Table Talk & Omniana (Oxford: Clarendon, 1917), pp. 428-29).

¹⁴ Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20, p. 618.

¹⁵ Willard Sperry, Wordsworth's Anti-Climax (1935; rpt. New York: Russell, 1966), p. 189.

¹⁶ It is worth mentioning that Wordsworth entered Cambridge in preparation for holy orders, but did not take them after the French Revolution and his affair with Annette Vallon, because he "was not virtuous enough" (Crabb Robinson, Books and Their Writers, I, p. 190). He became a poet instead and transferred the reverence he had for the priesthood to his craft. Being a poet became a sacred office; and poetry he saw as spiritually akin to religion: "In all this may be perceived the affinity between religion and poetry; between religion--making up the deficiencies of reason by faith; and poetry--passionate for the instruction of reason; between religion--whose element is infinitude, and whose ultimate trust is the

supreme of things, submitting herself to circumscription, and reconciled to substitutions; and poetry--etherial and transcendent, yet without sensuous incarnation" ("Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," Prose Works, III, p.65.

- 17 Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth, II, p. 478.
- 18 R. W. Inge, Christian Mysticism (London: Methuen, 1912); Lionel Trilling, "Wordsworth and the Rabbis," The Opposing Self (New York: Odyssey, 1955), pp. 118-50; H. N. Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, III (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1949); Willard Sperry, Wordsworth's Anti-Climax; Edith Batho, The Later Wordsworth (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1933); Richard Brantley, Wordsworth's "Natural Methodism" (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974); and R. D. Havens, The Mind of a Poet, I. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1941), pp. 179-200.
- 19 Henry Crabb Robinson's Diary, ed. Thomas Sadler (London: Macmillan, 1869), vol. I, p.87.
- 20 Books and Their Writers, II, pp. 481-82.
- 21 Letters, The Middle Years, 1806-11, p. 225.
- 22 Katherine Peek, Wordsworth in England (Pennsylvania: Bryn Mawr, 1943), pp. 101-06.
- 23 Henry Crabb Robinson's Diary, II, p. 314.
- 24 The Ecclesiastical Sonnets of William Wordsworth: A Critical Edition, ed. Abbie Findlay Potts (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1922), p. 69.
- 25 The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth, ed. Markham Peacock, Jr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1950).
- 26 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Table Talk & Omniana (Oxford, 1917), pp. 188-89.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TOPOGRAPHICAL PATTERN

A large structural pattern in The Excursion is the vital relationship between the minds of the wayfarers, especially the mind of the Solitary, and the poetic landscape.¹ In this relationship there emerges a pattern that weaves together chronology and movement, the poetic landscape, and the wayfarers' responses to it. While there is an essential reciprocity between the mind and the poetic landscape, there is no allegorical correspondence. Topographical ascents and descents do not necessarily represent emotional rises and declines. In The Excursion the mind of the individual can be equally edified while he climbs a mountain, descends a valley, or paces a flat common. As the Fenwick Note indicates, Wordsworth adjusts actual topography to suit his poetic intentions in The Excursion. Topography serves to mark various stages of the Solitary's spiritual progress, from "self-indulging spleen" to a partial recovery of faith in the benevolence of Nature, social man, and of God.

From the opening sequence to the closing lines of The Excursion, Wordsworth places his wayfarers in situa-

tions that reveal how their minds respond to certain features of the poetic landscape, creating a bond of imaginative sympathy with objects and imparting to them a sanctity and freshness imperceptible to the bodily eye. The responses of the Pastor, Poet, and the Wanderer quite often show the inadequacy of the Solitary's responses. Before the Solitary appears, Wordsworth illustrates how the imaginative responses of the Poet and the Wanderer are in marked contrast to the superficial ones of the Solitary who, according to the Wanderer, "live[s] . . . at safe distance from a world/ Not moving to his mind" (II. 313-15). The "sick" Solitary begins his excursion on the morning of the fourth day from Blea Tarn, which has no prospect, journeys across two valleys, and reaches on the evening of the fifth day his destination on a grassy slope on Loughrigg Fell, which commands a panoramic view of the Vale of Grasmere and the surrounding hills. The difference between the lack of prospect at the beginning and the wide prospect at the end of the journey suggests the broadening of the Solitary's sensibilities, and an enlargement of his capacity to respond imaginatively to Nature, social man, and God.

As in so much of Wordsworth's best poetry, the landscape of The Excursion is used both literally and figuratively. It is the object over which the mind throws "a certain colouring of the imagination,"² thus transforming the object. This transformation is the result of at least three factors: the mood of the mind, the quiddity of the object, and the readiness of the imagination to recreate what the bodily eye sees. Small objects excite a sense of the beautiful; large objects, the sublime. Whereas the mind can easily accommodate the beautiful, as illustrated in the "twofold image . . . [of] . . . / A snow-white ram, . . . in the crystal flood" (IX. 439-51)--the significance of which has been discussed in Chapter III (pp. 188-89)--it is forced to expand to admit the existence of a more powerful presence.³ There are three such experiences in The Excursion: when the young Wanderer beholds the rising sun (I. 199-219); when the Solitary envisions "the revealed abode/ Of Spirits in beatitude" (II. 829-75); and, most tellingly, when the pilgrims share a rare Pentecostal experience on the grassy slope of Loughrigg Fell (IX. 590-608).

The poetic landscape is deliberately chosen. It is, as Harper and the Fenwick Note remind us, primarily that of the Lake Country. Harper writes that The Excursion

. . . is pre-eminently the poem of the Lake Country, and in no other poem of Wordsworth or anyone else has the life of a particular "nook of English ground" been portrayed with more distinctness and poetic truth.⁴

Harper's statement can be misleading because it suggests that Wordsworth made the Lake Country his poetic mise en scène. In actuality, he uses in Book One "observations made in the South-West of England . . . in Somersetshire or Dorsetshire,"⁵ and in Books II to IX, only a very small part of the Lake Country--a few miles of a region that extends for eight hundred and sixty-six square miles. As Wordsworth indicates, only two relatively small valleys are traversed:

In the poem, I suppose that the Pedlar and I ascend from a plain country up the Vale of Langdale, and struck off a good way above the chapel to the western side of the vale. We ascended the hill and thence looked down upon the circular recess in which lies Blea Tarn, chosen by the Solitary for his retreat. After we quit his cottage, passing on a low ridge we descend into another vale, that of Little Langdale, towards the head of which stands, embowered or partly shaded by yews and other trees, something between a cottage and mansion or a gentleman's house such as they once were

in this country. This I convert into the Parsonage and at the same time and as by the waving of a magic wand, I turn the comparatively confined vale of Langdale, its Tarn, and the rude Chapel which once adorned the valley, into the stately and comparatively spacious vale of Grasmere, its Lake, and its ancient Parish Church; and upon the side of Loughrigg Fell, at the foot of the Lake, and looking down upon it and the whole vale and its accompanying mountains, the Pastor is supposed by me to stand, when at sunset he addresses his companions in words which I hope my readers will remember, or I should not have taken the trouble of giving so much detail of the materials on which my mind actually worked.⁶

This passage describes the precise geographical ambit of the pilgrims; indicates the adjustment of actual topography, and shows that Wordsworth is in control of his material. In choosing his poetic backdrop, Wordsworth sought to immortalize scenery he dearly loved, and also to place his pilgrims among the "grand objects of Nature":

Do you not perceive that my conversations almost all take place out of doors, and all with grand objects of Nature, surrounding the speakers, for the express purpose of being alluded to in illustration of the subjects treated of?⁷

In this reply to Mrs. Clarkson's letter, which contained Patty Smith's censure of The Excursion, Wordsworth justifies the setting of the poem, and asserts the vital interplay between the "discerning intellect of Man" and the poetic landscape.

The landscape of Book One is a "bare wide Common," whose flatness is broken by "a brotherhood of lofty elms" and a "roofless hut." Across this common, in the opening sequence of the poem, the Poet is "toiling" under a summer sun that "had mounted high." To the south, "the landscape indistinctly glared/ Through a pale steam" (I. 2-3), but to the north, the surface was "dappl'd o'er with shadows flung/ From brooding clouds" (I. 5-6). The presence of vapours, shadows, clouds and sunshine seems to suggest an inclination to rest and idleness to him who knows how to respond fully to this atmospheric effect. These airy, drifting features of the poetic landscape are "most pleasant" (I. 9) to the person who is "careless," that is without cares. Such a person the Wanderer appears to be: he is "Recumbent in the shade" (I. 36), enjoying the idleness and rest of the forenoon. The Poet, however, is

. . . toiling
 With languid steps that by the slippery turf
 Were baffled; nor could my weak arm disperse
 The host of insects gathering round my face,
 And ever with me as I paced along.
 (I. 21-25)

There is an implied contrast of spiritual states here. The Wanderer is resting because he has already reached his spiritual equipose; the Poet, evidently, is

still some way off. The spiritual voyage of the Poet is further adumbrated by the ship metaphor used in connection with the "toiling" pilgrim. The Wanderer is the "wished-for port to which [his] course was bound" (I. 27). The Poet's haven is out of the sun into the genial shade of spiritual calm that the Wanderer has found:

Mine was at that hour
 Far other lot, yet with good hope that soon
 Under a shade as grateful I should find
 Rest, and be welcomed there to livelier joy.
 (I. 17-20)

A "livelier joy" awaits the individual who attains the Wanderer's spiritual and philosophical serenity.

The "bare wide Common" may represent the flats of everyday living for the Poet as the plain does for the pilgrims in the final book (IX. 756). The realistic detail of the "host of insects" corroborates this reading, especially when it is juxtaposed with another host of insects:

Far on that superior height
 Who sits, is disencumbered from the press
 Of near obstructions, and is privileged
 To breathe in solitude, above the host
 Of ever-humming insects, 'mid thin air
 That suits not them. (IX. 69-74)

The insects are symbolic in both descriptions of the "cares/ Of ordinary life" (I. 356-57), which do not vex the Wanderer (I. 357).

On this flat landscape, the most affecting object is a "roofless hut." This "lonely hut/ abandoned to decay" (I. 508-09) works its romantic spell on the Wanderer, who can see into the life of things: "I see around me here/ Things which you cannot see" (I. 469-70). Gazing at this ruined hut, the mistress of which he loved "As [his] own child" (I. 500), his mind is wedded to the affecting object:

Sympathies there are
More tranquil, yet perhaps of kindred birth,
That steal upon the meditative mind
And grow with thought. (I. 481-84)

This marriage of mind and object creates the poetry that moves the listening Poet to change his mind about the ruined cottage. Before hearing the haunting story, the spot is "cheerless" (I. 463); after the narrative, he is compelled to say:

I stood, and leaning o'er the garden wall
Reviewed that Woman's sufferings; and traced
Fondly, though with an interest more mild,
That secret spirit of humanity

Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies
 Of nature, 'mid her plants, and weeds, and flowers
 And silent overgrowings, still survived.
 (I. 921-30)

For the Poet this has been a meaningful vicarious experience. He is able to share in the broad sympathy of the Wanderer, and can understand, in some measure, the "secret spirit of humanity" that lingers about this "roofless hut." He has learned to respond imaginatively to this object in the poetic landscape.

This ruined cottage is neither beautiful nor sublime in itself,⁸ but assumes human value through the transforming power of the imagination. Even the waters of the nearby spring, according to the Wanderer, seem to feel the "bond/ Of brotherhood . . . broken" (I. 486-7) at the passing of the last tenant of these ruined walls. In him, a "man of kindlier nature" (I. 415), there lives a spiritual affinity with the natural world, which is imaged by Wordsworth's use of the identical visual effect on the surface of the landscape (I. 5) and on his face (I. 440). Both are dappled by the natural objects playing upon their countenances; the landscape by the "brooding clouds," and the Wanderer's face by "the shadows of the breezy elms

above" him. Somewhat like the leech-gatherer in "Resolution and Independence," standing "motionless" at the margin of the flood, the Wanderer seems a natural part of the landscape.

There are varying levels of spiritual attainment on the flat common. The Poet's journey to "these clustering elms" is a journey of hope. He hopes to meet as planned his reverend friend, and, more importantly, he hopes to hear a tale that will bring him "livelier joy." The Wanderer returns to a cherished spot, and, while there, allows his memory and imagination free rein. The Poet's hopes are thus realized. Temporarily, by the quickening virtue of the Wanderer's poetry, the Poet has joined the "bond/ Of brotherhood" that embraces all things. There is reciprocity here in the Poet's attitude. He seems to receive comfort from reviewing Margaret's sufferings, and he blesses her in turn both for her gift to him and in her plight. The disquieting insects that gathered round the Poet's face during the forenoon have given way at the crepuscular hour to the reassuring sounds of birds:

A linnet warbled from those lofty elms,
A thrush sang loud, and other melodies,
At distance heard, peopled the milder air.
(I. 962-64)

These pleasing sounds of closing day seem to confirm the spiritual uplift that the two pilgrims have experienced.

After spending the first night at a village-inn, the Poet and the Wanderer, "under favourable skies," travel through what one might call the landscape of memory (II. 33-37). The Wanderer's "overflowing spirit" (II. 41) embraces reptiles, fish, fowl, dog, the landscape and its dwellers. For the Poet this is a vicarious experience of the Wanderer's ability "to suffer/ With those whom he saw suffer" (I. 370-71). His guide's "love/ And rich humanity" (II. 54-55) so embrace him that he can say among unfamiliar scenes and people, "I at once forgot, I was a Stranger" (II. 62).

"After the rising sun/ Had three times called [them] to renew [their] walk" (II. 85-86), the two pilgrims leave the open moorland and rural abodes, and move towards a different landscape:

We started--and he led me towards the hills,
Up, through an ample vale, with higher hills
Before us, mountains stern and desolate;
But in the majesty of distance, now
Set off, and to our ken appearing fair
Of aspect, with aerial softness clad;
And beautified with morning's purple beams.
(II. 90-96)

There is a corresponding emotional ascent rendered by means of a comparison between the "wealthy" in their chariots and the two pilgrims "pacing side by side" (II. 96-110). The "luxurious," if they have "health and hearts at ease" (II. 112), can enjoy nature, though not to the same degree as the pilgrims. For the "wealthy" never stop, in their haste, to look closely and lovingly at the simple objects of great beauty. They do not for instance care to "lend the listening sense/ To every grateful sound of earth and air" (II. 106-07). But the pilgrims "paus[e] at will," and with "spirits braced" entertain thoughts that are "Pleasant as roses in the thickets blown,/ And pure as dew bathing their crimson leaves" (II. 109-10).

As in Book One, the sun is once more present.⁹ In words that recall Ovid's wistful lover, "Mount slowly, sun! that we may journey long" (II. 111),¹⁰ the sun is invoked as the natural keeper of time. Whereas Ovid's lover wishes that the "horses of the night" may mount slowly so that he could longer "lie in the arms of [his] darling" (xiii. 5), Wordsworth has his Poet ask the sun to slow down its inevitable rise so that he and the Wanderer might have more time to indulge their love of Nature. Journeying towards the western side of the broad vale, the pilgrims espy a

throng of people proclaiming an age-old ritual, "the annual Wake" (II. 120):

By the broad hill, glistened upon our sight
 That gay assemblage. Round them and above,
 Glitter, with dark recesses interposed,
 Casement, and cottage-roof, and stems of trees
 Half-veiled in vapoury cloud, the silver steam
 Of dews fast melting on their leafy boughs
 By the strong sunbeams smitten. Like a mast
 Of gold, the Maypole shines; as if the rays
 With gladsome influence could re-animate
 The faded garlands dangling from its sides.
 (II. 126-38)

Here, as in the poem's opening sequence, vapour, steam, dew and sunshine predominate. Such phrases as "glistened," "Glitter," "silver," "gold," and "shines" indicate the extent to which the Poet's view is affected by the atmospheric effects. There are also, here, deliberate echoes of Homer's description of the shield of Achilles, which in Chapman's Homer--which Wordsworth most probably knew--reads as follows:

Next to these he cut a dancing place
 All full of turnings, that was like the admirable maze
 For faire-haired Ariadne made by cunning Daedalus;
 And in it youths and virgins danc't, all young and beautiful,
 And glewed in another's palms weeds that the winde did tosse
 The virgines bore, the youths, woven cates that cast a faint
 dim glosse,
 Like that of oyle. Fresh garlands too the virgines' temple
 crowned;

a "steep ascent" (II. 324), and reach

. . . a dreary plain
With tumultuous waste of huge hill tops
Before us; savage region! (II. 324-26)

All is not well with the Poet; he tells us that he "paced/ Dispirited" (II. 326-27) the "dreary plain." It is likely that his dispiritedness has been caused by the Wanderer's "serious words" about the Solitary. Though not as affecting as the story of Margaret, the "preparatory notices" have moved the Poet, who has learned, by the Wanderer's example, to find the "secret spirit of humanity" among men and Nature. His mental state is, as well, a function of his response to the "savage," "dreary" landscape which now seems so very different from its appearance in "the majesty of distance" and enamelled by "morning's purple beams" (II. 96).

From the eminence of the "savage region," the two wayfarers behold "a lowly vale, . . . yet uplifted high/ Among the mountains" (II. 329-30). This deep "Urn-like" vale seems "to be shut out from all the world" (II. 332), from time immemorial by the very wish of the mountains themselves. There is, however, "one small opening," with a "liquid pool that glittered in the sun." The

presence of sunshine seems to suggest that there is hope for the Solitary, the tenant of this vale. Likewise the "one small opening" metaphorically represents the hope of positive change that remains for him.

The "quiet treeless nook" provokes a languorous response from the Poet (II. 349-69). In his view, this "enclosed nook" is uniquely beautiful in its solitude and in its sense of perfect security. It is self-sufficient, "finished in itself," providing "the few needful things that life requires." It seems to him an image of Eden, "tenderly protected," untouched by the passage of time, by outside reports, by "Sickness, or accident, or grief, or pain."

Still on the "dreary plain" that overlooks the urn-shaped valley, the pilgrims' meditative response to the landscape is broken by an ascending funeral dirge (II. 372-76). The sounds continue, and soon behind the hut in "that profound abyss," appears a funeral procession:

. . . forth appeared in view a band
 Of rustic persons, from behind the hut
 Bearing a coffin in the midst, with which
 They shaped their course along the sloping side
 Of that small valley, singing as they moved;
 A sober company and few, the men
 Bare-headed, and all decently attired.
 (II. 386-92)

This is in deliberate contrast to the Maypole dance. The merriment of the "party-coloured knot" contrasts with the "sober company . . . all decently attired." The pagan ritual contrasts with the Christian rite. On the shield of Achilles there is an embossed contrast; here we have a living one, suggesting the emotional poles and representing the syncretic nature of peasant life which draws its meaning and sustenance from the older Paganism and the newer Christianity. The "annual Wake" is seen as the pilgrims moved "Up through the ample vale" (II. 91); the funeral is seen as they "lay/ In silence musing" on the "dreary plain" that overlooks the Solitary's dwelling-place.

Eager to ascertain whether the funeral is the Solitary's or not, the two wayfarers descend from their craggy eminence (II. 403-10). This "steep and difficult descent" attests to the security from the outside world which the Solitary must feel in his "cell." The urn-shaped vale is, for its "troubled" tenant, the valley of the shadow of death. Wordsworth's generalized description in Essay Upon Epitaphs-I nicely adumbrates the Solitary's spiritual condition:

. . . when Death is in our thoughts, nothing can make amends for the want of the soothing influences of Nature and for the absence of those types of renovation and decay, which the fields and woods offer to the notice of the serious and contemplative mind.¹²

The Solitary is not dead, of course, but the funeral image suggests him to be "inwardly opprest/ With malady" (II. 305-06). In effect, he is spiritually moribund, in a self-imposed seclusion from "the soothing influences of Nature," waiting for Death:

If I must take my choice between the pair
That rule alternately the weary hours
Night is than day more acceptable; sleep
Doth, in my estimate of good, appear
A better state than waking; death than sleep:
Feelingly sweet is stillness after storm,
Though under covert of the wormy ground!
(III. 275-81)

His spiritual atrophy is also suggested by the ironic 'ecce homo' with which the Poet announces him: "Behold the Man whom he [the Wanderer] had fancied dead!" (II. 497).

After a glad exchange of greetings, the Solitary, showing that he has not lost his civility, invites his two guests to his dwelling to "be feasted with [the] best" (II. 653). As they enter the "cell," the Poet describes what he sees:

What a wreck
 Had we about us! scattered was the floor,
 And, in like sort, chair, window, seat, and shelf,
 With books, maps, fossils, withered plants and flowers,
 And tufts of mountain moss. Mechanic tools
 Lay intermixed with scraps of paper, some
 Scribbled with verse: a broken angling-rod
 And scattered telescope, together linked
 By cobwebs, stood within a dusty nook;
 And instruments of music, some half-made,
 Some in disgrace, hung dangling from the walls.
 (II. 660-70)

Everything external about the Solitary--his appearance, his clothes, his habitation--suggests the condition of his inner world. The "wreck" of his dwelling metonymically delineates the disorder of his mental and spiritual life.

During the banquet, the Poet gazes at "two huge Peaks" that peer into the Solitary's valley. The Solitary, noticing the Poet, proceeds to describe his relationship with the high points of the distant landscape. As from an aeolian harp, from them the wind draws forth many notes, filling "all the upper air . . . / With roaring sound" during a storm, and in "the grim and breathless hour of noon," they "echo back/ The thunder's greeting" (II. 707-08). They have the power to "yield/ Music of a finer tone" (II. 709-10), which is a "language not unwelcome to sick hearts/ And idle spirits" (II. 716-17).

They are, thus, to him "prized companions" (II. 696), and an objective correlative of his aloofness and solitude.

The Solitary soon begins his narrative about the man whose funeral the Poet and the Wanderer saw a short time ago. This tale, like the tale about Margaret, reveals the speaker's responses to landscape, and affords insight into the spiritual life of the speaker. The Solitary once joined in a search for his "ancient Friend" who had been lost in a storm. Amidst "persevering rain" and "impenetrable mist," the Solitary climbs aloft and finds the waif among the hills, "breathing peaceably, / Snug as a child," by "a heap of ruin," "where in ancient time, / The peasants of these lonely valleys used / To meet for worship" (II. 814-16). Here on "that central height" the Solitary has his unprecedented vision of "the revealed abode / Of Spirits in beatitude" (II. 873-74). This visionary experience is a result of the melding of the mind, its mood of elation, and the "skiey influences" that attend the "coming on or clearing away" of a storm (Guide, p. 229). Wordsworth uses a favourite device of the mountain-top vision. But un-

like the visionary experience of the young Wanderer (I. 197-219), the Solitary's effects no lasting change in his despondent heart.

Before leaving the Solitary's valley, the pilgrims espy a "hidden nook" revealing

A mass of rock resembling, as it lay
Right at the foot of that moist precipice,
A stranded ship, with keel upturned, that rests
Fearless of winds and waves. (III. 52-55)

This, as the Guide tells us, is a familiar sight in the Lake Country: "Masses of rock, that have been precipitated from heights into the area of waters, lie in some places like stranded ships . . ." (p. 181). But there is more than mere description here. The objects on the landscape are used to intimate the spiritual condition of the Solitary. While he remains in this valley, he is like a ship, unable to move without the help of outside agency. The contrast between this instance of the ship image and its use in Book VIII to describe the Pastor's wife underscores the spiritual torpor of the Solitary. The Pastor's wife is likened to "a stately ship/ [that] Sails in smooth weather by the placid coast/ On homeward voyage" (VIII. 506-08). The Pastor's wife is on

her way home; the Solitary has foundered on the reefs of despair.

This "treeless nook" is an image of perfect solitude: "Nor is the feeling of solitude often more forcibly or more solemnly impressed than by the side of one of those mountain pools" (Guide, p. 182). The Wanderer praises the nook as "a cabinet for sages built,/ Which kings might envy!" (III. 74-75). To a mind that enjoys the essential reciprocity with the external world, the rocks here "bear/ A semblance strange of power intelligent" (III. 82-83). The Wanderer's responses are the result of the marriage of the mind and external nature, which Wordsworth speaks of in the Prospectus. The reverend man confesses that "Some shadowy intimations haunt [him] here" (III. 88), and that he can discern in the rocks

. . . a chronicle [that] survives
Of purposes akin to those of Man,
But wrought with mightier arm than now prevails.
(III. 89-91)

The recess seems, to the Wanderer, to be created for "Contemplation," which can "lift [us] high above the misty air/ And turbulence of murmuring cities vast"

(III. 104-05). It is for him a resort in whose sufficiency one can spend his days in "holier peace" (III. 107), communing ecstatically with Nature and becoming one with things:

Measuring through all degrees, until the scale
Of Time and conscious nature disappear,
Lost in unsearchable eternity. (III. 110-12)

To the Solitary, however, whose mind has lost its "excursive power," these very shapes are "The sport of Nature, aided by blind Chance/ Rudely to mock the works of toiling Man" (III. 126-27). He cannot, like the Wanderer, marry his mind with Nature, and thus he is "pleased/ To skim along the surfaces of things" (III. 135). As a result, what edifies the Wanderer and the Poet is for the "sick" recluse "Fraught rather with depression than . . . delight" (III. 156). He has "decried the wealth which is [his] own" (III. 79), and cannot realize the truth of the Wanderer's statement, "verily methinks/ Wisdom is oft times nearer when we stoop/ Than when we soar" (III. 239-31). This aphorism suggests the Solitary's lack of humility before Nature and God, and his refusal to look into his own mind for answers

to his spiritual problem. Furthermore, it suggests the Solitary's inability to enjoy the Edenic fulness of his retreat that the Poet and the Wanderer discover. To him this "sweet Recess" (II. 349), the identical phrase used by Adam to describe Eden (Paradise Lost, XI. 303-04), has been chosen to emphasize his spleen:

"Twas not for love."--
 Answered the sick Man with careless voice--
 "That I came hither; neither have I found
 Among associates who have power of speech,
 Nor in such other converse as is here,
 Temptation so prevailing as to change
 That mood, or undermine my first resolve."
 (II. 611-17)

He desires to be "shut out from all the world." In the midst of bounteous Nature, he lives an impoverished life in the hope that "he will live and die/ Forgotten" (II. 312-13).

The Solitary suggests that they leave the "hidden nook" which has provoked two differing responses from the Poet and the Wanderer on the one hand, and from the Solitary on the other. The guests are, however, "Loth to forsake the spot, and still more loth/ To be diverted from [their] present theme" (III. 330-31). They linger

in this enchanting spot long enough for the Solitary to continue and to conclude his melancholy life-story. In this "nook/ That seemed for self-examination made" (III. 471-72), the Solitary unburdens his soul, deducing at one point that ". . . Mutability is Nature's bane;/ And slighted Hope will be avenged . . ." (III. 458-59). This "bitter language of the heart" is uttered in a still, private nook where "All further progress . . . was barred" (III. 43).

As in The Divine Comedy the vision of Hell is the necessary preliminary to the visions of Purgatory and Paradise, and as Hell is the death that must artistically precede rebirth, so too, in The Excursion, it seems that the Solitary must descend to "the lowest region of the soul" (III. 654) before he can begin his ascent. His telling of his personal story is best seen as a homeopathic act; in spleen he relates his moving narrative to purge himself of his spleen. At his emotional nadir, he must relive his chagrin as a necessary preparation for spiritual change. This spiritual unburdening quite appropriately occurs in a feature of the poetic topography which seems designed by Nature for that very purpose.

The "hidden nook" has served its poetic purpose: that of illustrating how far the Solitary has to travel before he reaches the Wanderer's "just equipoise of love" (I. 355). Accordingly, Wordsworth has his pilgrims depart and continue their pilgrimage over the landscape of the Lake Country. As the Solitary ends "His mournful narrative--commenced in pain/ In pain commenced, and ended without peace" (IV. 2-3), and the Wanderer states his "belief in a superintending Providence [as] the only adequate support under affliction" (Argument, Bk. IV), Wordsworth shows his pilgrims "issu[ing] from that covert nook" (IV. 32).

Part of the Wanderer's statement is a prayer-like invocation to what he sees--the sky and the vast hills. In the "temple" of Nature (IV. 44), he is "bound/ To worship" (IV. 45-46) because he feels God's presence. This abiding sacramental relationship with the landscape is what the Solitary so tragically lacks. In his "exalted habits of Imagination,"¹³ the Wanderer as an old man is still able to "read/ Unutterable love" in the "silent faces" of the clouds, and in "the solid frame of earth/ And ocean's liquid mass" (I. 201-02),

as he did when he was young. He can understand what Abrams calls "the verba visibilia, the symbolic language of the landscape."¹⁴

Midway through the Wanderer's discourse on the necessity of a belief in a loving God and in social man, the effect of this utterance upon the "downcast" Solitary is rendered by the recluse's response to the landscape: "The Solitary lifted toward the hills/ A kindling eye" (IV. 505-06). This gesture intimates the dawn of spiritual change in the "sick" man: the "kindling eye" suggests the "kindling" of the fires of spiritual longing. The hills, we recall, were the crucible of the Wanderer's faith (I. 266). These hills, like those of Psalm CXXI, are associated with the help that comes from God.

In the "hollow dell" the Solitary has relived his agony, and the Wanderer has delivered his "eloquent harangue" on God and Nature. Before the pilgrims have time to leave this valley, the sun has begun to set, giving the pilgrims and the landscape "A dispensation of his evening power" (IV. 1307). The setting sun detains the wayfarers here, forcing them to spend the night on the floor of the Solitary's cottage "in the

guise of mountaineers" (IV. 1321). This comparison serves indirectly to establish further the relationship between the wayfarers and the poetic landscape.

On the fifth morning of the pilgrimage the Poet bids farewell to the Solitary's vale, and his "parting tribute" acknowledges the powerful effect this part of the landscape has had on him. It has caused his imagination to envision it as pristine, "wrapped . . . round" by "Primeval forests" (V. 8). In his imaginative bewitchment, the Poet apostrophizes the "deep Valley":

Majestic circuit, beautiful abyss,
By Nature destined from the birth of things
For quietness profound! (V. 9-11)

This uniquely beautiful vale seems "like the fixed centre of a troubled world" (V. 16), a trope which links through contrariety in the speaker's mind the valley with its "troubled" tenant. The Poet finds in "the fixed centre" the tranquillity that is lacking in the outer world. Understandably, the Poet describes himself as being chained to the landscape: "The chain that would not slacken, was at length/ Snapt . . ." (V. 18-19). This figure illustrates the natural allurements of the

abode, which the Solitary has unfortunately chosen for the wrong reasons. The Poet is teased by the "Majestic circuit" into a reflection upon mankind's lot, and into gratitude to the powers that have taught him to cherish retirement and solitude (V. 20-59). He is thankful that he has been allowed to settle in a peaceful retreat like the Solitary's. This retreat Wordsworth describes in Home at Grasmere as being "the calmest, fairest spot of earth" (l. 73). In the Poet's words there is a veiled criticism of the Solitary's way of viewing the world.

While the Poet has stayed behind to bid a reluctant farewell to the landscape that has deeply affected him, the Wanderer and the Solitary have pushed on. Amid ubiquitous sunshine, the three wayfarers meet on rising ground:

Following the rugged road, by sledge or wheel
 Worn in the moorland, . . . I overtook
 My two Associates, in the morning sunshine
 Halting together on a rocky knoll,
 Whence the bare road descended rapidly
 To the green meadows of another vale.

(V. 61-66)

The "rocky knoll" is a crossroads of decision for the Solitary. On this elevation he has to decide between the chance for positive change or a return to despondency. His reluctance is understandable if we recall the

Wanderer's words concerning the bond between a tenant and "his peculiar nook of earth." When the Solitary decides to follow the Wanderer and the Poet down "the bare road [that] descended rapidly/ To the green meadows of another vale" (V. 65-66), he has in effect decided to venture into a new experience. The change of vales is the beginning of an inner movement for the Solitary whose "mind/ Instinctively disposed him to retire/ To his own covert" (V. 73-75).

The decision made, the pilgrims descend to "a point" that reveals a pleasing panorama bathed in the morning sun:

On the stream's bank, and everywhere, appeared
 Fair dwellings, single, or in social knots;
 Some scattered o'er the level, others perched
 On the hill-sides, a cheerful quiet scene,
 Now in its morning purity arrayed. (V. 86-91)

Implied in this description is a contrast between "the valley stretched/ In length" (V. 78-79) and the Solitary's, which, we recall, is "With rocks encompassed" (II. 334). Unlike the urn-shaped valley with its "one bare dwelling" (II. 339), this valley shows "Fair dwellings, single, or in social knots." It is the home of social man, not of the misanthrope or the hermit. One

look at the "cheerful" landscape provokes thoughts of liberty and egalitarianism from the Poet (V. 91-98), whose mind, like that of the Pastor and the Wanderer, enjoys a deep sympathy with external nature.

This nook of "native soil" is the chosen abode of the Pastor, who, unlike the Solitary and the Wanderer, was "born/ Of Knightly race" (V. 112-13). To enjoy the fruits of a sacramental communion with man, Nature, and God, he "withdrew/ From academic bowers" (V. 114-15), and settled among the "ancient rural character" and "simple manners" of this "deep vale." For his house he chose "a turreted manorial hall/ . . . in which the good Man's ancestors/ . . . dwelt through the ages" (V. 123-25). The nobility and rank of the house suggest the nobility and richness of the Pastor's life, just as the "forbidding nakedness" (II. 640) of the Solitary's cottage suggests the poverty and vulnerability of the spiritual condition of its tenant.

In the midst of the "cheerful quiet scene," the wayfarers espy "Upon a rising ground a grey church-tower,/ Whose battlements were screened by tufted trees" (V. 79-80). The "rising ground" is a topographical way of pointing to

the hope that lies within the church. This churchyard among the mountains has great symbolic significance for Wordsworth, as he notes in Essay Upon Epitaphs-I:

A Village Church-yard, lying as it does in the lap of Nature, may indeed be most favourably contrasted with that of a Town of crowded Population; and Sepulture therein combines many of the best tendencies which belong to the mode practised by the Ancients, with others peculiar to itself. The sensations of pious cheerfulness, which attend the celebration of the Sabbath-day in rural places, are profitably chastised by the sight of the Graves of Kindred and Friends, gathered together in that general Home towards which the thoughtful yet happy Spectators themselves are journeying. Hence a Parish Church, in the stillness of the Country, is a visible centre of a community of the living and the dead; a point to which are habitually referred the nearest concerns of both.¹⁵

Here in this village churchyard, nestled in "the lap of Nature," the three pilgrims are spiritually edified. Wordsworth brings the Solitary to this appropriate topographical scene, the "visible centre of a community of the living and the dead," so that he can gain the necessary experience of life and death from the Pastor's "Authentic epitaphs." The experience in the village churchyard is a fine poetic confirmation of Wordsworth's

intention to place his speakers amid the "grand objects of Nature . . . for the express purpose of being alluded to in illustration of the subjects treated of."¹⁶

As noted in Chapter II (pp. 110-13) and in Chapter III (pp. 181-84), the Solitary's experience in this churchyard proves a turning point in his spiritual excursion. At the Pastor's "pathetic records" (VII. 1053), his thoughts, the Wanderer hopes, turn for the first time away from a longing for death, "To hope and love: to confident repose/ In God; and reverence for the dust of man" (VII. 1056-57). The "sick" Solitary (II. 612) has become "The pensive Sceptic of the lonely vale" (VIII. 1).

The pilgrims reach the "rising ground" as the sun "had risen above the summits of the highest hills" (V. 135-36). As at the opening of the poem, the sun's "oppressive beams" (V. 137) are shunned; the pilgrims enter "the sacred Pile," perhaps the central edifice in the "cheerful" valley. Once inside, the Poet describes the change on making the "transition from the fervid air":

A grateful coolness fell, that seemed to strike
The heart, in concert, with that temperate awe
And natural reverence which the place inspired.
(V. 141-43)

While there is no marriage of mind and landscape here, there is an apparent blending of heart and "natural reverence" that creates, not a visionary experience, but a "grateful coolness." Away from the sun's heat, the heart is "inspired" in a "place" seemingly designed for that specific purpose. Though man-made the "sacred Pile" has a haphazard, rugged quality that makes it seem a natural part of the landscape (V. 144-49).

Outside the church the Wanderer, the Poet and the Solitary are visited by "affecting images and thoughts" (V. 240). As the Solitary muses on the rightness of baptism, the minds of the pilgrims entertain "such thoughts [as]/ Rise to the notice of a serious mind/ By natural exhalation" (V. 371-73). The Solitary likens the life of man to the seasonal cycle, but cannot find "glowing Summer's long rich day" nor "mellow Autumn, charged with bounteous fruit" (V. 400). Instead he finds a "hopeful and promising" Spring, and a winter that advances too quickly. Such thoughts lead him to consider the surrounding landscape:

How gay the habitations that bedeck
 This fertile valley! Not a house but seems
 To give assurance of content within;
 Embosomed happiness, and placid love;
 As if the sunshine of the day were met
 With answering brightness in the hearts of all
 Who walk this favoured ground. (V. 411-17)

But appearances are deceptive, the Solitary notes,
 and he concludes that "chance regards"

. . . forbid the judging mind
 To trust the smiling aspect of this fair
 And noiseless commonwealth. (V. 421-23)

These musings are interrupted by the arrival of the
 Pastor who, after a "general greeting," is asked to
 "dispel the gloom" raised by questions of good and
 evil. By use of the metaphor of landscape, the Pastor
 attempts to answer these essential questions, stating
 that though angels perceive "With undistempered and
 unclouded spirit/ The object as it is" (V. 487-88),
 for us "That speculative height we may not reach"
 (V. 489). If, however, "imperfect man" can submit his
 "will to reason's law" (V. 518), he shall gain/ The
 clearest apprehension of those truths" (V. 519-20)
 that is humanly possible. If, on the other hand, we
 view life with the "less exalted consciousness" of the

masses, the Pastor continues, then

We may safely affirm that human life
 Is either fair and tempting, a soft scene
 Grateful to sight, refreshing to a soul,
 Or a forbidding tract of cheerless view;
 Even as the same is looked at, or approached.
 (V. 526-30)

From a generalized comparison and a symbolic landscape, the Pastor turns his eye on a feature of the real landscape he knows better than anyone else knows--the churchyard cemetery. In its dual aspect, the result of the sun playing upon the landscape, the Pastor discerns a symbolic representation of two conflicting readings of life. Whereas in the 'cabinet for sages' episode (III. 74-194) Wordsworth allows the Solitary and the Wanderer to voice their separate contrasting responses to the landscape, here he permits the Pastor to describe two diametrically opposed views. To a mind like the Solitary's, morbidly preoccupied with death, these graves seem, in the Pastor's words,

An unillumined, blank, and dreary plain,
 With more than wintry cheerlessness and gloom
 Saddening the heart. (V. 537-39)

To the minds of the Wanderer and the Pastor, nurtured alike by Church and Nature, they present

. . . a vernal prospect . . . ,
 All fresh and beautiful, and green and bright,
 Hopeful and cheerful (V. 545-47)

The differing responses to this topographical feature represent opposing views of life. To those who can respond imaginatively to Nature, life is "fair and tempting, a soft scene/ Grateful to sight, refreshing to the soul" (V. 527-28). To those, however, like the Solitary, who are "pleased/ To skim along the surfaces of things," life seems "a forbidding tract of cheerless view" (V. 529).

From this "pregnant spot of ground," the Pastor pronounces his "Authentic epitaphs" as he contemplates the "churtyard, filled/ With mounds transversely lying side by side" (V. 534-35). Here all are spiritually nourished from the Pastor's musings on life and death. The sudden entrance of "a team of horses" interrupts the Pastor's epitaphs. The waggoner is a subtly humanized figure of Death. Death is an experience that holds a special place in this spot "consecrate . . . to Death and Life" (V. 904). This figure is portrayed in seasonal, vegetational, and atmospheric imagery, so much so that he seems a wintry

part of the landscape:

He was a peasant of the lowest class:
 Grey locks profusely round his temples hung
 In clustering curls, like ivy, which the bite
 Of winter cannot thin; the fresh air lodged
 Within his cheek, as light within a cloud

.
 (VII. 550-54)

When Death claims young Oswald, the "hero" of the "unpretending valley," there is cosmic sympathy as sun, sky, and landscape participate in his obsequies (VII. 875-81). The "glitter" and "golden lustre" of this spectacle recall the splendour of "the Annual Wake." But, while the Wake is a celebration of joy, Oswald's funeral is a sad day for the Valley:

. . . every face
 Was pallid: seldom hath that eye been moist
 With tears, that wept not then; nor were the few
 Who from their dwellings came not forth to join
 In this sad service,
 They started at the tributary peal
 Of instantaneous thunder, which announced,
 Through the still air, the closing of the Grave;
 And distant mountains echoed with a sound
 Of lamentation, never heard before!

(VII. 881-90)

This is a poetic reworking of the funeral of Dawson described in the Fenwick Note: ". . . I myself wit-

nessed the ceremony and the effect of it as described in the Poem [The Excursion]."¹⁷ Wordsworth draws upon the elegiac tradition to transform an actual funeral into a fine poetic moment. The participation of the landscape in the funeral service is a measure of the heroic proportions of the deceased, and an indication of the indissoluble bond between Oswald and "his peculiar nook of earth."

The epitaphs ended, the Pastor invites the pilgrims to his dwelling. They tread a pathway of "perennial green" which seemed a "solemn chain" fashioned to unite "The Pastor's mansion with the house of prayer" (VIII. 458). This manorial home is, like the church which it adjoins, "a reverend pile/ With bold projections and recesses deep" (VIII. 461-62). Its surroundings suggest a picturesque, idyllic tranquillity, a blend of the natural and the man-made (VIII. 468-90) which excites the pilgrims' esthetic sense. The naturalness of the "rocky mount," the man-made "beds and banks Arcadian of gay flowers/ And flowering shrubs" (VIII. 469-70), and especially the "little Gothic niche/ Of nicest workmanship" (VIII. 486-87) appear to fulfil

Wordsworth's requirements for successful landscape gardening. Landscape gardening, Wordsworth says, is an art predicated on a vital relationship between the human mind and external nature:

Laying our grounds, as it is called, may be considered as a liberal art, in some sort like Poetry and Painting; and its object . . . is, or ought to be, to move the affections under the countrol [sic] of good sense; that is, of the best and wisest, but speaking with more precision, it is to assist Nature in moving the affections; and surely, as I have said, the affections of those who have the deepest perception of the beauty of Nature, who have the most valuable feelings, that is, the most permanent, the most independent, the most ennobling, connected with Nature and human life.¹⁸

The harmony of the surroundings suggests the serenity that exists within the dwelling. Inside, away from the midday sun, the company engage in "desultory talk," during which the Solitary "Resumed the manner of his happier days" (VIII. 527). In this happy mood, his mind feeds on the landscape that he sees from where he sits:

He gazed with admiration unsuppressed,
 Upon the landscape of the sun-bright vale,
 Seen from the shady room in which we sate,
 In softened perspective
 (VIII. 534-37)

With his imagination temporarily aglow, he is for the time in charity with man and Nature. From this "vantage-ground of truth" (VIII. 533), he

. . . more than once
Praised the consummate harmony serene
Of gravity and elegance, diffused
Around the mansion and its whole domain.
(VIII. 537-40)

In words that indicate "an expanding heart," the Solitary moves from praise of the landscape to praise of the Pastor's wife.

Still at the Pastor's, the Wanderer turns his thoughts to the continuity of life from childhood to old age. Growing old, the reverend man asserts, is not to be deemed a decay or falling-off from the rapturous communion with Nature that childhood enjoys. Like the Lake Country, life has its valleys and mountains. Though age can be considered a "vale," there are compensations which make it in effect an "eminence":

Rightly it is said
That Man descends into the Vale of years;
Yet have I thought that we might also speak,
And not presumptuously, I trust, of Age,
As of a final EMINENCE; though bare
In aspect and forbidding, yet a point
On which 'tis not impossible to sit
In awful sovereignty; a place of power,
A throne, that may be likened unto his,

Who in some placid day of summer, looks
 Down from a mountain-top,--say one of these
 High peaks, that bound the vale where we are now.
 Faint, and diminished to the gazing eye,
 Forest and field, and hill and dale appear,
 With all the shapes over their surface spread:
 But, while the gross and visible frame of things
 Relinquishes its hold upon the sense,
 Yea almost on the Mind herself, and seems
 All unsubstantialized,--how loud the voice
 Of waters, with invigorated peal
 From the full river in the vale below,
 Ascending! For on that superior height
 Who sits, is disencumbered from the press
 Of near obstructions, and is privileged
 To breathe in solitude, above the host
 Of ever-humming insects, 'mid thin air
 That suits not them
 And may it not be hoped, that, placed by age
 In like removal, tranquil though severe,
 We are not so removed for utter loss;
 But for some favour, suited to our need?
 What more than that the severing should confer
 Fresh power to commune with the invisible world,
 And hear the mighty stream of tendency
 Uttering, for elevation of our thought,
 A clear sonorous voice, inaudible
 To the vast multitude; whose doom it is
 To run the giddy round of vain delight,
 Or fret and labour on the Plain below.

(IX. 48-93)

In this passage, Wordsworth uses the comparison
 between human life and topographical features to illus-
 trate his statement to Mrs. Clarkson concerning the re-
 lationship between the minds of the speakers and the
 "grand objects of Nature."¹⁹ Speaker, landscape, and
 thought are naturally connected when the Wanderer likens

the "final eminence" of man to a "peak" in the Vale of Grasmere. On the privileged vantage-ground "of Age," the Wanderer argues, we discover that we can no longer enjoy the "glad impulse" of youth (IX. 34), and we also lose the immediacy of being on the plains. But in recompense we gain a "mountain-top" perspective that permits us to see the underlying unity of all things.

Once the Wanderer's discourse is over, the Pastor's wife, noticing the shades of evening on the flowery slope, suggests a walk to the lake. Behind her suggestion is an invitation that the landscape has extended: "How temptingly the landscape shines! The air/ Breathes invitation" (IX. 423-24). As the company reach a bridge, their progress is arrested by an unusually beautiful sight:

Thus having reached a bridge, that overarched
 The hasty rivulet where it lay becalmed
 In a deep pool, by happy chance we saw
 A twofold image; on the grassy bank
 A snow-white ram, and in the crystal flood
 Another and the same! Most beautiful,
 On the green turf, with his imperial front
 Shaggy and bold, and wreathed horns superb,
 The breathing creature stood; as beautiful,
 Beneath him, showed his shadowy counterpart.
 Each had his glowing mountains, each his sky,
 And each seemed centre of his own fair world:
 Antipodes unconscious of each other,
 Yet, in partition, with their several spheres,
 Blended in perfect stillness, to our sight!
 (IX. 437-51)

This is an experience of the beautiful which leaves the mind subdued and at rest. This scene exemplifies a type of the human mind working in consummate harmony with peaceful Nature. In this "twofold image," the collective mind of the wayfarers, like the mind of the Wanderer, "gives back the various forms of things,/ Caught in their fairest, happiest, attitude" (IX. 463-64).

The journey across the lake is part of the preparation for the climactic experience that awaits the pilgrims on Loughrigg Fell. They row through a "delicious region," a landscape pleasing both esthetically and spiritually:

Cultured slopes,
 Wild tracts of forest-ground, and scattered groves,
 And mountains bare, or clothed with ancient woods,
 Surrounded us; and as we held our way
 Along the level of the glassy flood,
 They ceased not to surround us; change of place,
 From kindred features diversely combined,
 Producing change of beauty ever new.
 (IX. 503-11)

This seems like an intended reprise of the entire landscape of the five-day excursion. The landscape of the "delicious region" is similarly varied and striking; the many features are brought together in one passage to

sufficiently prepare the mind for the most powerful experience of the poem. The beauty of this landscape beggars all description, and can live only in the mind that has "recorded it with love" and "with care" (IX. 514-17).

After a "choice repast" (IX. 530), and the spontaneous gathering of "flowery spoils" (IX. 538), the pilgrims leave the shore "in quest of other scenes" (IX. 547). They row to "the western shore" of the lake,

Where the bare columns of those lofty firs,
Supporting gracefully a massy dome
Of sombre foliage, seem to imitate
A Grecian temple rising from the Deep.
(IX. 499-502)

This reached, they follow the Pastor, spiritual guide
and cicerone here, up "a green hill's side" where

The valley, opening out her bosom, gave
Fair prospect, intercepted less and less,
O'er the flat meadows and indented coast
Of the smooth lake, in compass seen . . .
(IX. 571-74)

The pilgrims are now on Loughrigg Fell, from
where, as A. G. Bradley has written, "may be enjoyed

one of the most exquisite and justly celebrated views in Lakeland."²⁰ Here on this "elevated spot" (IX. 580), the pilgrims admire "quietly/ The general aspect of the scene" (IX. 582-83). The ubiquitous sun that figured prominently on the first forenoon plays its most memorable part to this company on the fifth evening. The rays of the setting sun colour the "multitudes of little floating clouds" (IX. 597), creating "Innumerable multitude of forms/ Scattered through half the circle of the sky" (IX. 601-02). Wordsworth's use of "innumerable multitude," the identical phrase that he uses in the description of the sublime sense (Appendix to Guide, p. 222), indicates that this is an experience of the sublime. The reflection of the clouds in the lake below creates a sense of "unity sublime" (IX. 608) in a far more spectacular and affecting "twofold image" than that of the snow-white ram and "his shadowy counterpart."

This "refulgent spectacle" is a "prodigal communion" (IX. 606), a sort of covenant between "the living God" (I. 212) and these simple pilgrims. This Pentecostal experience discussed in Chapter III (pp. 192-94) is

the most profound of the entire poem, and occurs on "that exalted station" (IX. 756), not the highest topographical point on the poetic landscape, but without doubt the experiential summit.

Following a prayer of thanksgiving and a benediction, the company descend from the "grassy mountain's open side" to the "plain" and pursue their "homeward course." From the elevation of the Pentecostal experience, they descend to the flats of everyday living. Before reaching the Pastor's door, the Solitary exchanges farewell greetings with all, promising "That he would share the pleasures and pursuits/ Of yet another summer's day":

"Another sun,"
Said he, "shall shine upon us, ere we part;
Another sun, and peradventures more;
If time, with free consent, be yours to give,
And season favours." (IX. 779-83)

There is here a probable echo of Ulysses exhortatory words to his "brothers" in Canto XXVI of the Inferno.²¹ The contexts, prima facie, seem quite at odds: Ulysses is damned in the flames of Hell, while the Solitary, after partially recovering his faith in the benevolence of

Nature, of social man, and of God, is on his way back to his cottage. What Wordsworth wishes to convey in this literary echo is some sense of the real change that has occurred in the Solitary. Dante damns Ulysses for misusing his God-given intellect; Wordsworth shows that the Solitary, in his promissory words, ought to be praised for using his intellect properly. He will no longer, to use Ulysses' words, "deny experience following the sun" (l. 118). The wayfarers in The Excursion have in a sense followed the sun. In the opening sequence the sun "has mounted high" when the Poet first strides across the common; it is noon (I. 593) when the Wanderer finishes the first part of his narrative about Margaret; at the end of his story, the sun has begun to decline (I. 957), bringing on "the sweet hour" (I. 961). After "the rising sun/ Had three times called [the pilgrims] to renew their walk" (II. 85-86), the fourth sun sets at the end of Book IV. Here the words of the poem suggest a correlation between the movement of the sun and that of the pilgrims:

The Sun, before his place of rest were reached,
 Had yet to travel far, but unto us,
 To us who stood low in that hollow dell,
 He had become invisible,
 Leaving behind
 A dispensation of his evening power.
 (IV. 1299-1307)

When the travellers reach the churchyard, Wordsworth again--this time more pointedly--draws attention to the correlation between the sun's journey and that of the wayfarers:

. . . we pursued our way;
Nor reached the village-churchyard till the sun
Travelling at steadier pace than ours, had risen
Above the summits of the highest hills
And round our path darted oppressive beams.
(V. 133-37)

While the wayfarers are within the compounds of the Pastor's mansion, it is "noon-tide" on the fifth day. As they walk from the Pastor's to the lake's edge, "the shades of afternoon have fallen" upon the landscape (IX. 419). While they are seated on the grassy slopes of Loughrigg Fell admiring the general scene, the fifth sun is setting, bringing an end to the pilgrims' excursion. Between the fourth rising of the sun and its fifth setting, the wayfarers make their journey across two valleys of the Lake District. The many references to the sun mark the passage of time and the progress of the pilgrims.

Wordsworth employs solar imagery in The Excursion to give the distinct impression that the summer sun is always present. Sometimes its heat is uncomfortable

(I. 448-50), or "oppressive" (V. 137), and must be shunned; at other times its warmth is welcome, as indicated by the Wanderer after the "pastoral banquet" at the Solitary's when he says, "Now let us forth into the sun!" (II. 903). This widely-travelled reverend man realizes the pressing need for all men to enjoy the life-giving sun. Of all the pilgrims in The Excursion, the saturnine Solitary most needs sunshine, as indicated by his physical appearance. Unlike the Wanderer who is "stout and hale, for travel unimpaired" (I. 34), the Solitary has a "pale face" (II. 499), a "hollow cheek" (II. 525), and is "faded and dull" (II. 501). Both his life and countenance lack the healthy glow of normalcy. His seclusion in his "dark" "hermitage" (II. 648), away from sunshine has given him an anemic, asthenic appearance.

Symbolically, the Solitary lives in a world devoid of the light of hope, of social fellowship, of a sacramental relationship with Nature. His torpid life has given him a dark, benighted outlook. Like a seedling, his spirit needs the vital warmth and the attraction to light that the sun affords. During the excursion, the sun of fellowship and travel has brightened the Solitary's outlook, and though the "gloom" of "self-

indulging spleen" is not entirely dispelled, there are bright glimpses of spiritual awakening. In his final words, "Another sun . . . shall shine upon us," the Solitary, no doubt less "pale" and "faded" after two days in the sun, indicates the change the excursion under the summer sun has effected in him. No longer an anathema, the sun, "earth's universal lord" (IV. 465), will become for the chastened Solitary a lode-star and a source of life-giving light.

The pilgrims follow the sun in a journey that is characterized by topographical ascents and descents. From the Fenwick Note (quoted on pp. 217-18) it is evident that Wordsworth saw the wayfarers' excursion as a gradual ascent. The journey is thus an emotional and spiritual ascent, especially for the Solitary. This is objectified in the prospects offered at the outset and at the end of his excursion. Blea Tarn, the "liquid pool that glittered in the sun, / . . . with one bare dwelling" (II. 338-39), is the terminus a quo of the Solitary's journey. "[S] hut out from all the world" (II. 332), and "With rocks encompassed" (II. 334), it has virtually no prospect. Neither is there anything beautiful or sublime about it:

Blea Tarn is not an object of any beauty in itself, but is situated in a small, deep circular Valley of peculiar character, for it contains only one dwelling-house and two or three cultivated fields. (Guide, p. 270)

Whereas the bareness and apparent "poverty" (II. 340) of this abode suggest the essential loneliness and spiritual torpor of the Solitary, the "Fair prospect, intercepted less and less" (IX. 572) offered by the hillside of Loughrigg Fell, represents a broadening of sensibilities for him, and for all. The gradual widening of physical prospects from start to finish implies an enlargement of the capacity of the Solitary to respond to social man, to Nature and to God.

The topographical pattern shows the spiritual progress of the Solitary through his responses to features in the poetic landscape. Between the fourth rising of the sun and its fifth and final setting, he makes both a physical and spiritual excursion over the landscape of the Lake Country. His spiritual atrophy is illustrated in his negative relationship with the "Urn-like" valley in which he lives. "[P]leased/ To skim along the surfaces of things" (III. 134-35), the "sick" Solitary responds quite superficially to Nature. Unlike the Pastor, Poet, and

Wanderer, he cannot comprehend the underlying unity and purpose of Nature. In his "lowly vale," "deep as an urn," he is at his spiritual nadir. With the help of caring friends, the Solitary leaves the self-imposed seclusion of his "cell" and ventures into the sunlight of social fellowship. On a "rocky knoll" he makes his momentous decision to accompany his friends to another valley and into a new experience. This desire to change his life of despondency, quite significantly, is made on rising ground. Inside a village churchyard that stands "Upon a rising ground," the Solitary experiences further spiritual change as he listens to the Pastor's "Authentic epitaphs," a narrative response to a "pregnant spot of ground" in the poetic landscape. Within the Pastor's mansion, the Solitary's spiritual pliancy is rendered by his "admiration unsuppressed" to the "landscape of the sun-bright vale," which he sees from where he sits. Midway through the Wanderer's discourse on the necessity of believing in social man, in Nature, and in God, we recall, the Solitary's spiritual yielding was rendered by his response of "lift[ing] toward the hills/ A kindling eye." His partial recovery of spiritual faith is confirmed and reinforced by his

ability to respond meaningfully to the wide prospects from Loughrigg Fell and to the climactic experience there during the final setting of the sun.

The topographical pattern illustrates how the "inwardly opprest" Solitary, whose mind has lost its "excursive power," gradually becomes a spiritually changed person. His excursion over the landscape of the Lake Country is in effect a pilgrimage through "the healing spirit" of nature (Guide, p. 225), from "a self-indulging spleen" and an inability to respond positively to Nature to a partial recovery of faith in the benevolence of Nature, of social man, and of God.

Notes

Chapter Four

¹ Of the many books that treat of Wordsworth's use of landscape, I have found the following most helpful: M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 1-222; Herbert Lindenberger, On Wordsworth's Prelude (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 68-69; Florence Marsh, Wordsworth's Imagery (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1952), pp. 28-64; Karl Kroeber, Romantic Landscape Vision: Constable and Wordsworth (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1975); Russell Noyes, Wordsworth and the Art of Landscape (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968); and J. R. Watson, Picturesque Landscape and English Romantic Poetry (London: Hutchinson, 1970), pp. 1-107.

² "Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1805)," Prose Works, I, p. 123.

³ James Scoggins, Imagination and Fancy (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 157. Scoggins gives an excellent analysis of the significance the sublime and the beautiful held for Wordsworth.

⁴ George Maclean Harper, William Wordsworth (1916; rpt. New York: Russell, 1960), II, p. 524.

⁵ Christopher Wordsworth, ed. The Memoirs of William Wordsworth (London: Moxon, 1851), II, p. 36.

⁶ Memoirs, II, pp. 36-37.

⁷ Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20, p. 621.

8 "The Sublime and the Beautiful," Appendix III to A Guide Through the Lake Country, Prose Works, II, p. 307. Wordsworth writes: "To talk of an object as being sublime or beautiful in itself, without reference to some subject to whom that sublimity is perceived, is absurd"

9 For discussions of the solar imagery in The Excursion, see Enid Welsford, Wordsworth's Salisbury Plain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), pp. 81-92; and Abbie Findlay Potts, The Elegiac Mode (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 195-224.

10 Amores, I, xiii. 40. The famous line reads, "lente, currite, Noctis equi."

11 Iliad, XVIII, 536-49. Chapman's Homer, ed. Allardyce Nicoll (New York: Bolingen, 1950), vol. I.

12 Prose Works, II, p. 54.

13 In a letter to Beaumont, Wordsworth explains the significance of living in "habits of exalted Imagination" (Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20, p. 209). In the portrayal of the Wanderer, an idealized picture of what the poet would have been had he been born into a different social class, Wordsworth gives his finest example of such a practice.

14 Natural Supernaturalism, p. 104.

15 Prose Works, II, pp. 55-56.

16 Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20, p. 621.

17 Memoirs, II, p. 47.

18 Letters, The Early Years, 1787-1805, p. 527.
For an account of Wordsworth's views on landscape gardening, see Russell Noyes, Wordsworth and the Art of Landscape (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 91-142. For Wordsworth's opinions on the suitability of houses for the Lake Country, see Guide, pp. 211-16.

19 Letters, The Middle Years, 1812-20, p. 621.

20 A. G. Bradley, Highways and Byways in the Lake District, illus. J. Pennell (London: Macmillan, 1901), p. 229. I commend to the reader a fascinating book, The English Lakes, painted by A. Heaton Cooper, descr. by William Palmer (London: Black, 1908). Of special interest are two water colours: "Blea Tarn and the Langdale Pikes" (p. 210), and "A Glimpse of Grasmere" (p. 30), in which Cooper may have had Wordsworth's description of the "refulgent spectacle" of Book IX in mind when he painted it.

21 Inferno, XXVI, 112-17.

CONCLUSION

The elaborate structure of The Excursion reveals Wordsworth's poetic intention of presenting a comprehensive picture of Romantic man as epic hero, Christian wayfarer, and nature-lover. The three patterns portray different facets of the Solitary's journey of spiritual growth and maturation. In his use of the epic pattern, Wordsworth espouses a new epic theme and endeavours to demonstrate how the individual can assume epic stature and, like the reverend Wanderer, become a "being . . . / Sublime and comprehensive" (I. 233-34).

The epic pattern is reinforced by the liturgical pattern. The Solitary is a Christian wayfarer moving through prescribed stages of a structure that reflects Anglican dogma. His is a journey of spiritual chastening, from apostasy to partial recovery of faith in the benevolence of "the living God" (I. 212). The liturgical pattern adds a specifically theological dimension to the epic pattern. It depicts the Christian wayfarer as heir to epic heroism. This new heroism comprises a desire to worship God, to love one's fellowman, and to live in tune with Nature. Embodied most fully by the Wanderer, this

is the heroism that the Solitary is struggling to attain.

The topographical pattern, too, is essentially religious. Responding imaginatively to Nature is, for Wordsworth, an intensely religious activity. The "sick" Solitary's rapport with Nature has been broken, and until he meets the Poet and the Wanderer, he cannot ". . . look on [her] with a humble heart" (I. 241), nor "Commun[e] with the glorious universe" (I. 286). The Excursion shows the Solitary and his spiritual brothers responding imaginatively to the landscape of the Lake Country. Wordsworth's goal for the Solitary is to have him, like the Wanderer, enjoy "the peace/ And liberty of Nature" (I. 352-53), amid which he can keep "In solitude and solitary thought/ His mind in a just equipoise of love" (I. 354-55). Like the liturgical pattern, the topographical is one in which the Solitary moves closer to the Creator. In the former he is guided by prescriptive rites and formulas of the Church of England; in the latter he is led by the "sweet influence" of Nature (I. 266) to a "still communion that transcends/ The imperfect offices of prayer and praise" (I. 215-16).

The three patterns dovetail to form Wordsworth's boldest poetic structure. They portray the disillusioned Solitary in the process of spiritual change. Unlike the Wanderer and the Pastor who have attained philosophical serenity, the Solitary battles despair, doubt, and meaninglessness of existence to retrieve some sense of purpose in life. In the three aspects of the Solitary's journey we see a picture of Romantic man attempting to reconstruct a world of shattered hopes and broken dreams after the French Revolution. The epic pattern establishes the genre within which Wordsworth is working, giving form to and justifying his new heroic theme of the holy consummation between the the mind of man and external nature. Its moral and religious functions are both confirmed and enhanced by the liturgical and topographical patterns. The former Christianizes the epic theme; the latter broadens it to include the quintessential intercourse between "the individual Mind" and "the external World."

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