

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

HUMAN SUFFERING
IN
WORDSWORTH'S EARLIER AND LATER POETRY

by
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Introduction

When William Wordsworth started his poetical career in the late eighteenth century, it was, as Robert Mayo puts it, "a period of poetic inflation."¹ Among the poetical subjects presented in the magazines of the time was that of human suffering. Such characters as beggars, outcasts, idiots, deserted women, bereaved mothers, the insane and the decrepit appeared frequently in the magazine verse. Generally speaking, according to Mayo, those poems dealing with human suffering displayed humanitarianism and sentimental morality²; they intended to raise social protest through the description of pathetic stories and to use the description as a moral agent. Like his contemporary magazine poets, Wordsworth also produced a gallery of suffering characters. However, his attitude toward his characters is more diverse and his treatment of human suffering is more complex than can be interpreted merely in terms of humanitarianism and sentimental morality.

Although critics have time and again discussed in different contexts Wordsworth's poetry about the humble suffering people, especially the poetry written in his early years, specific studies of the poet's treatment of human suffering have been comparatively few. Among these few studies, most concentrate on those poems composed before 1805. For example, Cleanth Brooks' "Wordsworth and Human Suffering: Notes on Two Early Poems"³ discusses only "The Old Cumberland Beggar" and "The Ruined Cottage." Jonathan Wordsworth's The Music of Humanity⁴

centers its discussion on "The Ruined Cottage," and canvases briefly Wordsworth's earliest poems and the 1800 Lyrical Ballads only to give his argument a context. And Bennett Weaver presents in "Wordsworth: The Property of Fortitude"⁵ some facts of the poet's early life and the descriptions of human misery and death in the poet's early poetry. He also concentrates on the poems written before 1805. Since human predicaments and suffering characters are by no means rare in Wordsworth's poetry composed after 1805, these studies can not be considered as comprehensive views of the poet's treatment of the subject of human suffering.

Some studies of the subject have included the poems written after 1805. O. J. Campbell, for instance, examines the poems including The Excursion (1814) in "Sentimental Morality in Wordsworth's Narrative Poetry."⁶ However, Campbell seems to have over-simplified Wordsworth's treatment of suffering by asserting that the poet's description of the humble rustic people is "the result of [his] complete adoption of the moral doctrines of 18th century humanitarian sentimentalism"⁷: he sees no difference between Wordsworth's attitude toward suffering in the Lyrical Ballads and that in the churchyard tales in The Excursion.

Unlike O. J. Campbell, Edward E. Bostetter, whose study of the subject also includes The Excursion, sees a change in the poet's attitude toward his suffering characters. He thinks that in "The Ruined Cottage" and some early works such as the "Salisbury Plain" drafts and many of the Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth has compassion for the sufferers and manifests his social concern. However, the

persistence of suffering and the presence of hostility in nature, as it is most strongly manifested in the death of John Wordsworth, gradually draw the poet away from his humanitarian concern. Unable to rationalize or to alleviate human suffering, Wordsworth simply refuses to see it, except as an object of contemplation. His compassion is thus gradually replaced by moralizing, by facile complacency. The withdrawal from humanity, Bostetter holds, begins as early as "The Old Cumberland Beggar," and the Pastor's tales in Books V through VII of The Excursion are "the logical end of the psychological retreat."⁸

In fact, though unlike O. J. Campbell, who over-simplifies Wordsworth's treatment of human misery by simply applying "sentimental morality" to the tragic stories, Bostetter still overlooks the complexity of the poet's attitude toward human suffering. Indeed, Wordsworth's humanitarian concern with the humble sufferers begins to fade after the composition of "The Ruined Cottage"; however, it is only after freeing himself from using the pathetic story as a means for social indictment that the poet is able to learn more about those characters. Moreover, Bostetter seems to say that Wordsworth gradually becomes one who not only shuns the suffering of humanity but also eschews his own suffering, for he thinks that John's death accelerates the poet's withdrawal from humanity. As a matter of fact, after the death of his brother by drowning in 1805, the poet, being "humanized" in his soul through unutterable grief,⁹ begins to show his sympathy with man as a fellow sufferer. His treatment of human suffering after the catastrophic event changes dramatically. He focuses his concern with human misery

thereafter almost uniformly on whether or how the sufferer succeeds in coping with his suffering.

Some critics have already pointed out that Wordsworth's thought and poetry undergo a considerable change during the years around 1806. Geoffrey H. Hartman, for example, sees Wordsworth's poetry as a struggle to reconcile a radical opposition between the imagination, "consciousness of self raised to an apocalyptic pitch," and nature, which the "supervening consciousness" of imagination seeks to obliterate or go beyond, and holds that John's death accelerates drastically the completion of the reconciliation.¹⁰

John Jones, who also sees in Wordsworth's poetry a conflict between mind and nature, considers that partly because of the death of John, the poet loses his "sense of possible sublimity" he experienced previously in nature and is led gradually toward orthodox Christianity."¹¹ John Beer also discerns a change in the poet in the years following John's death. According to him, after the death of John, Wordsworth begins to retreat from his former imaginative poetic universe and gradually becomes reconciled to the world of actuality.¹²

These critics all hesitate to say that the death of John decisively and dramatically changes Wordsworth's thought and poetry. However, as far as the subject of human suffering is concerned, John's death in 1805 is indeed the decisive, if not the only, cause of the poet's change in his treatment of the subject. The purpose of this thesis is to represent this change.

So far, James H. Averill's Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering¹³ is the most substantial study of the poet's attitudes

toward human suffering, though it also focuses on the early poetry. Averill gives a fairly detailed description of the continuity, and evolution, of Wordsworth's attitudes toward the projections of human misery, upon which, he thinks, the poet's early poetry relies. His study is centered on "the Wordsworthian spectator and the suffering to which he responds," on "the authorial self of Wordsworth's narrative poems who hovers over the actions and feelings of the characters, responding at once to them and to the feelings they evoke within him."¹⁴ He thus sees a pattern of "suffering and calm" in the poetry before 1798, "experiments in pathos" in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads, and "the union of tenderness and imagination" in the second volume of the 1800 Lyrical Ballads.

The first chapter of this thesis will also display Wordsworth's diverse attitudes toward human suffering in the poetry written before 1805, but it will approach this subject from a different point of view. It will show, first of all, that the poet is impressed with the wretchedness of humanity and attracted by the images of helpless and distressed sufferers in the earliest poetry. In "The Ruined Cottage" and the two volumes of Lyrical Ballads, he is fascinated by both the afflictions and the affections of the suffering characters. The interplay of their afflictions and affections is the subject of most of the poems dealing with human suffering in this period. In the years from 1801 to 1804 the poet, with his sense of death growing strong, seems to have directed his attention to the indomitable power of man's mind in coping with suffering. This study of Wordsworth's diverse treatments of suffering in the early

poetry is to serve an important purpose; it is to provide a contrast with the poet's uniform treatment of the same subject in his later poetry. Disagreeing with Averill's notion that Wordsworth in his later poetry regards human suffering mainly as a metaphysical or philosophical problem,¹⁵ this thesis will continue to demonstrate that the poet's concern with human suffering after 1805 is closely connected with his personal experience of suffering. The second chapter, thus, will investigate the influence of the death of John in 1805 on Wordsworth's view of human suffering by exploring the poet's endeavor to reconcile himself to his grief and analyzing the poems related to this accident. The final chapter will then display his addiction to the theme of reconciliation, his fixed or stock response to the suffering characters owing to his experience of grief, and hence, in comparison with the earlier works, the uniformity of treatment of suffering in his later poetry written after 1806.

Chapter One: The Inexplicable Human Suffering
in the Poetry before 1805

On the whole, in the poetry Wordsworth wrote before 1805, human suffering is for the poet an inexplicable problem. He holds diverse attitudes toward it and explores it vigorously from shifting moods and points of view. His treatment of it can be roughly divided into three stages. Before 1798, the poet is impressed with the images of calamity, especially those caused by natural, social or political evils. He sympathizes with people in their afflictions and attempts with all efforts to incite one's sympathy by presenting the distress and helplessness of the sufferers. In the subsequent important period of the Lyrical Ballads, his interest in suffering characters is twofold. On the one hand, the calamities of human life and his sense of pathos aroused by them continue to take hold of him. On the other hand, he begins to be fascinated by the primary passions he finds in the rustic suffering people; he is delighted with the strength and beauty of the elementary affections of their hearts. As a result, his mood in treating the subject of suffering varies from exultant joy to melancholy sadness. In the following stage, which spans the years approximately from 1801 to 1804, Wordsworth's sense of death and ineluctable suffering grows continuously, but he also endeavors to reconcile himself to the feeling of pathos by looking into the mind to find the very power that would sustain one in suffering. There are in this stage some remarkable poems

particularly dealing with the unflagging and indomitable power of man's mind in encountering adversities.

In his earliest poetry, Wordsworth's presentation of human suffering centers on what had impressed him so deeply in his youth, the "images of danger and distress /And suffering . . . /Man suffering among awful powers and forms."¹ His description of the suffering characters emphasizes their helplessness and desperation in encountering the overwhelming powers and forms.

Some of the characters are tortured by a hostile Nature, such as the freezing beggar family in "An Evening Walk" (1788-1789), and the chamois-hunter in "Descriptive Sketches" (1791-1792). Nature in the two episodes in these two poems is presented as a cruel destroying power, responsible for the suffering and death of the characters. Though the suffering of the female beggar and her babies in the former poem is partly due to the war, which has taken the husband and father away, the war is not further explored as a cause of human suffering. Instead, it is the result--the exposure of the family to the torture of Nature--that is pictured. Nature is apparently the inflictor in this episode. The family is tormented first of all in summer under the scorching sun. The mother is dragging her babies along the "weary way" while "arrowy fire extorting feverish groans, /[Shoots] stinging through her stark o'er-labour'd bones."² Later, as the poet imagines, they are assailed by "the bitter showers" and "the torrent gale" of winter. At length, the children die in their dead mother's arms in the fierce and freezing tempest.

The episode of a chamois-hunter's death in "Descriptive Sketches"

represents in another way a puny man victimized by nature. The destroying power of nature here is mixed with supernatural elements. The lost hunter seems to have intruded himself into a sacred place of the spirits among the high Alps, and is finally annihilated by the evil spirits. He pursues his way

Thro' wastes, of Spirits wing'd the solemn home,
 Thro' vacant worlds where Nature never gave
 A brook to murmur or a bough to wave,
 Which unsubstantial Phantoms sacred keep;
 Thro' worlds where Life and Sound, and Motion sleep,
 Where Silence still her death-like reign extends
 (PW, I, 64, ll. 371-76)

He slashes his feet in order to climb "the peak's impracticable sides" (l. 394). He is hungry and exhausted, but still can not find his way out. At once, "bewildering mists around him close . . . [and] /The Demon of the snow with angry roar /Descending, shuts for aye his prison door" (ll. 398-401). Finally, the "raven of the skies" and the "eagle of the Alps" appear to await the end.

In the four or five years following 1792, Wordsworth's mind was deeply and intensely absorbed in social and political problems. Already depressed with the failure of the French Revolution, he was dejected by the calamitous social conditions of England and dismayed at the declaration of war between France and his own country. Such being the case, in the poetry of this period the image of man suffering in hostile nature is replaced by that of man being victimized by war and social wrongs. The most prominent examples of this are the two drafts of "Guilt and Sorrow," namely

"Salisbury Plain" and "Adventures on Salisbury Plain,"³ written from 1793 to 1795, the most obscure years in the poet's life. In these two drafts, Wordsworth presents the poor innocent people's calamities and attacks war and social injustice which cause the calamities. The Female Vagrant, for instance, was first of all oppressed so that she had to leave the land on which she had happily passed her childhood and maidenhood. Later the American war caused the death of her husband and children and turned her life into endless vagrancy. She is now aimless and hopeless, having no earthly friend and "no house in prospect but the tomb" (Gill, p. 34, "Salisbury Plain," l. 393). The traveller in "Adventures on Salisbury Plain" is also a victim of social and political evils. The tragedies are drawn in dark colors. The horrific and ghostly atmosphere reflects the poet's turbulent and depressed state of mind. For instance, his picture of the horrors of war the Female Vagrant experiences is lurid and appalling:

"Ah! how unlike those late terrific sleeps!
 And groans, that rage of racking famine spoke,
 Where looks inhuman dwelt on festering heaps!
 The breathing pestilence that rose like smoke!
 The shriek that from the distant battle broke!
 The mine's dire earthquake, and the pallid host
 Driven by the bomb's incessant thunder-stroke
 To loathsome vaults, where heart-sick anguish toss'd,
 Hope died, and fear itself in agony was lost!"⁴

The characters are also suffering from natural disasters. But

it is not the poet's intention to present Nature as an overwhelming destructive power. In "Salisbury Plain," for example, what the traveller suffers on Salisbury Plain before he meets the Female Vagrant seems inconsiderable compared with the woman's ineffable wretchedness. The starving and exhausted traveller is plodding over the plain and looking in vain for shelter at nightfall when a storm is threatening:

Hurtle the rattling clouds together piled
 By fiercer gales, and soon the storm must break.
 He [stands] the only creature in the wild
 On whom the elements their rage [can] wreak
 (p. 23, ll. 64-67)

He approaches Stonehenge, but is bid to avoid the place by a dreadful voice, which tells him about the barbarous human sacrifice at the pile in the past. The storm comes. He trudges on until he reaches the Dead House, where he meets the vagrant woman. Undoubtedly, he has experienced physical and mental torments; yet, after listening to the woman's even more wretched experience, he seems to have been cleansed of his own pain and fear:

. . . human sufferings and that tale of woe
 [Have] dimmed the traveller's eye with Pity's tear,
 And in the youthful mourner's doom severe
 He half [forgets] the terrors of the night
 (p. 34, ll. 399-402)

Wordsworth seems to say that the social wrongs and the barbarities of war man suffers from are such that before them natural evils and

supernatural horrors both pale into insignificance. Nevertheless, in this draft the poet still has faith in the ultimate triumph of reason, which, he thinks, will contribute to a reformed society and make impossible the calamities such as the Female Vagrant suffers from.⁵

In "Adventures on Salisbury Plain," Wordsworth's view of human suffering is more pessimistic than that in the previous draft. His faith in reason has vanished. The picture of the injustice of social conditions is drawn in still darker colors. To the Female Vagrant's sufferings he now adds the details of how she and her father were oppressed by the wealthy and how she was treated "with careless cruelty" (p. 143, l. 493) at the hospital. More important, the traveller's role is elaborated. He was seized by the "ruffian press gang" (p. 125, l. 80) to fight in the American war and driven to robbery and murder in the desire to provide food for his family by the "slaves of Office" (p. 125, l. 91), who denied the pay due to him on his discharge. Since committing the crime, he has been leading a fugitive life and suffering from his sense of guilt and fear of punishment. Though a criminal himself, he is also a victim. Though he committed a crime, the crime, instead of hardening his heart, enlarges his sympathies, for it teaches him to make all other people's misfortunes his own. Yet, when he finally gives himself to be hanged, there is no act of mercy to mitigate his penalty. And his death is not considered as a matter of justice. The "violated name of Justice" (l. 819) is ironically said to have performed an act of mercy for once in that it frees him from

the misery of life. The end of this draft depicts, with savage satire, how "dissolute men, unthinking and untaught, / [Plant] their festive booths beneath [the hanged traveller's face]" (ll. 821-2), and fathers with their wives and children make holiday at the foot of the gallows.

When he composed "Adventures on Salisbury Plain," Wordsworth was at the "lowest ebb" of his moral crisis. Talking about his state of mind at this period, the poet says in The Prelude:

I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarities,
Yielded up moral questions in despair
. . . . (p. 406, X, 898-901)

However, after settling with Dorothy at Racedown in September 1795 the poet gradually recovered from his despondency; his turbulent emotions were before long tranquillized. When he wrote "The Ruined Cottage," he had emerged from the stage of depression and could depict a woman's silent suffering with calmness and great restraint.

Composed during 1797 and 1798, "The Ruined Cottage"⁷ both manifests the poet's old preoccupation with the wretchedness and helplessness of the sufferers and anticipates a new reconciled view of suffering which he will develop in the Lyrical Ballads. Margaret in this poem is very like the Female Vagrant of the "Salisbury Plain" drafts except that she stays in her cottage instead of wandering about the world. War and unemployment are again the background of her personal tragedy. However, the poet does not raise any social

or political indictment here; nor does he present a hostile Nature attacking the sufferer. Instead, he focuses on the silent endurance and gradual decline of Margaret; and the figure of the meek sufferer is beautifully harmonious with her surroundings, the cottage she dwells in and its garden.

Margaret's story is related effectively through the calm tone of an old man, a pedlar by profession. He uses restraint and is careful not to make any overt bid for sympathy. His description of Margaret's decay is paralleled with that of the collapsing of the cottage and the lack of attention to its garden. When he saw the woman's drooping and declining after the disappearance of her husband, it seemed to him that the plants and flowers in the garden were also suffering in their decaying and withering. In the setting as he saw it,

The unprofitable bindweed spread his bells
 From side to side and with unwieldy wreaths
 Had dragg'd the rose from its sustaining wall
 And bent it down to earth. . . .

(Butler, p. 63, "The Ruined Cottage," ll. 314-17)

When grief and poverty came nearer to her, the Pedlar found that the earth in her garden was hard, "With weeds defaced and knots of withered grass" (p. 69, l. 415); that the better part of her herbs and flowers seemed to be "gnawed away /Or trampled on the earth" (p. 69, ll. 418-19); and that a chain of straw lay at the root of a dying young apple-tree. Though it is a realistic description of a garden lacking attention, the scene seems to manifest a sympathetic natural

surrounding, which reflects faithfully its dweller's breaking down.

On the other hand, while physically declining, Margaret was tenaciously clinging to the torturing hope that her husband might return. She would sit half a day long and look in the distance, expecting to see him coming back. If a stranger came by, she would make an inquiry, hoping to learn her husband's fate. Even after her baby died, she lived on for five years more with her hope unvanquished. This tenacity, though there is certainly a measure of unbalance and discord, is none the less an expression of human grandeur. This dimension of Margaret's suffering is an important part of the elements that make this tragic story stand further from those in the earlier poetry and closer to those in the Lyrical Ballads.

Margaret's is originally a tragic story without relief; it ends with the final decline of the cottage and Margaret's death.⁸ When he reworked the poem in early 1798, Wordsworth added the dramatic framework: the opening lines (1-54), two interruptions in the narrative (185-237, 362-76), and the conclusion. In such a revision the story of Margaret's suffering is entrusted with a purpose; it is employed by the Pedlar to initiate his young friend into not only the presence of human suffering but also the proper attitude toward it. It is his intention to arouse the young man's sympathy and moral sense by relating a distressing story of human sorrow; as he says in the midst of his narration:

. . . we have known that there is often found
In mournful thoughts, and always might be found,
A power to virtue friendly. . . .
(p. 59, ll. 227-29)

He also intends to initiate the young man to the experience in which one's sympathy with human suffering in supplementing his sympathy with natural objects is able to effect, as it were, a "transcending joy." In this case, the "Addendum" which Wordsworth originally affixed to MS. B of "The Ruined Cottage"⁹ will assist in expounding the Pedlar's intention.

In the "Addendum" the old Pedlar explains to his friend how one can become spiritually accomplished through having "sympathies" with nature and with man. By having sympathies with "things that hold /An inarticulate language" (PW, V, 400, ll. 2-3), according to the old man, we will feel the "joy of that pure principle of love" (l. 7). Our feelings of aversion will be "softened down"; and we will sense a "holy tenderness" pervading our being. The influence of natural objects on man will be even more powerful when we relate the objects to human passions:

And further, by contemplating these forms
In the relations which they bear to man
We shall discover what a power is theirs
To stimulate our minds, and multiply
The spiritual presences of absent things.
Then weariness shall cease. (ll. 24-29)

"Weariness," "oblivious sleep" (l. 77), and "fretful dreams /Of feverish nothingness" (ll. 77-78) describe the unstimulated, weary existence such as the narrator knows at the poem's beginning. In that state one "dimly pores on things minute, /On solitary objects, still beheld /In disconnection dead and spiritless" (ll. 60-62)--

the "insect host. . . joined their murmurs to the tedious noise /Of seeds of bursting gorse" ("The Ruined Cottage," ll. 24-26). But if one's mind is stimulated through his sympathies with the objects with human associations, one will read in the objects some "sweet and tender lesson to [his mind] /Of human suffering or of human joy" (ll. 34-35). Thus, before he knows the story of Margaret, the ruined house and the deserted garden are insignificant to the young man; he can not see things which the Pedlar sees around the place. But after listening to the Pedlar's story, he is moved. The deserted place is no longer insignificant to him. He turns toward the ruined cottage to "trace with nearer interest /That secret spirit of humanity" (ll. 112-13). However, the young man's response still does not satisfy the old Pedlar, for he has given himself to excessive sorrow. Seeing his friend being overcome with intense pathos, the Pedlar says:

"My Friend, enough to sorrow have you given,
 The purposes of wisdom ask no more;
 Be wise and chearful, and no longer read
 The forms of things with an unworthy eye.
 She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.
 I well remember that those very plumes,
 Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,
 By mist and silent rain-drops silver'd o'er,
 As once I passed did to my heart convey
 So still an image of tranquillity,
 So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
 Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
 That what we feel of sorrow and despair
 From ruin and from change, and all the grief
 The passing shews of being leave behind,
 Appeared an idle dream that could not live
 Where meditation was. I turned away
 And walked along my road in happiness."
 (PW, V, 403, "Addendum," ll. 118-35; Butler, pp. 73 & 75,
 "The Ruined Cottage," ll. 508-25)

This is in fact a "spot of time" in which the Pedlar sees into "the life of things" (PW, II, 260, "Tintern Abbey," l. 49); actually, the old man's experience anticipates the poet's exalting joy gained through his sympathies with nature and with "the still, sad music of humanity" in the "Tintern Abbey" poem. The old Pedlar seems to say that since he had seen the whole course of Margaret's suffering, the plants in the ruined place, which seemed to have suffered with Margaret, after her death appeared to him to have come to a repose. And in the image of tranquillity seen in the "plumes," the "weeds" and the "high spear-grass," the dead Margaret, for all her miseries and torments while she was alive, also seemed to have been in harmony with her surroundings (presumably because he had this feeling before, the Pedlar says to his friend: "She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.") With this feeling of stillness and harmony, the old man was purged from his "uneasy thoughts," from what he felt of sorrow and despair caused by his contemplation of Margaret's suffering. So at last, he could turn away and walk along his road in happiness.

Edward E. Bostetter holds that the Pedlar's attitude is a kind of complacency, in which the old man tries to explain social and natural evils away and relieves himself of "any responsibility to act within the present frame of things."¹⁰ In fact, as is mentioned previously, Wordsworth does not intend to raise any social indictment in relating Margaret's story. Instead of concerning himself with the causes of human suffering, the poet rather dwells upon the poor

woman's patient endurance and gradual decay. Nor is human suffering justified in any way. Though Margaret is seen, or is imagined, to be in harmony with her surroundings in death, her suffering is not retrospectively explained or condoned. The Pedlar, as Wordsworth explains more clearly in the fragment "The Pedlar,"¹¹ is a man who has achieved the perfect spiritual equilibrium that Wordsworth felt he himself was approaching.¹² He has deep sympathy with man, he can "afford to suffer /With those whom he [sees] suffer" (Butler, p. 410, "The Pedlar," ll. 28-29), but is free from excessive passion and despondency. His is not complacency, but peace of mind "unvexed, unwarped /By partial bondage" (p. 408, ll. 315-16).

By the time "The Ruined Cottage" is finished, Wordsworth's attitude toward human suffering has advanced into a new stage. According to James H. Averill, the poet at this period in his life becomes interested in contemporary science. This interest results in his experimental and clinical approach toward pathos in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads. The "contemplation of suffering," Averill says, "is important for [the] Wordsworth of [the 1798 Lyrical Ballads] . . . as a source of energy upon which he can draw to explore, clarify, and illustrate other questions about poetry and human psychology."¹³ This view indeed explains well Wordsworth's treatment of suffering in such poems as "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," "Simon Lee," and "The Thorn."¹⁴ In "The Thorn," for instance, Wordsworth intends to "exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind"¹⁵; and what is connected with the superstition in the poem is an image of human

suffering, the wretchedness of a deserted woman. However, Wordsworth's other approach to human suffering in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads is at least of equal importance. This approach has to do with the poet's view of human nature formed at this time.

Having recovered from his depression caused by the social and political upheavals, the poet finds "Once more in man an object of delight, /Of pure imagination, and of love" (The Prelude, p. 440, XII, 54-55). He finds in those "who lead the simplest lives most according to nature," those "who [ha]ve never known false refinements, wayward and artificial desires, false criti[ci]sms, effeminate habits of thinking and feeling, or who, having known these [t]hings, have outgrown them,"¹⁶ such as are found in peasants, shepherds, beggars, and outcast women, the elementary feelings or the essential passions of the heart are at their purest and simplest. He finds those humble rustic people are the best measure of human nature.¹⁷ Because of this, though he is still sympathetic with human miseries, his concern with suffering no longer centers on its pathetic aspect. The strength and beauty he has found in the humble sufferers' feelings and passions enable him to look at those sufferers even with delight and happiness.

1798 is for Wordsworth a year of great happiness.¹⁸ In the 1798 Lyrical Ballads, though there are undertones of tragic suffering, the prevailing notes are joyful and exultant. Several of the humble sufferers are presented with a delightful mood hardly found in the poet's later poems on human suffering. "The Idiot Boy" is the best example.

An idiot is usually regarded as an unfortunate and disagreeable, if not disgusting, being who often causes pain and suffering to his family. But in this poem, idiocy is seen in its pure and lovely aspect. The idiot boy has undergone a perilous but happy moonlight ride and is finally found sitting upright on the feeding pony near the waterfall, as if stunned by the wonder of the natural phenomenon. The boy's mother, instead of seeing her idiot son as a burden, loves him and is proud of him. The mother's love and tenderness are seen, for instance, in the scene in which she is sending the boy to fetch a doctor for her sick neighbor:

And now that Johnny is just going,
 Though Betty's in a mighty flurry,
 She gently pats the Pony's side,
 On which her Idiot Boy must ride,
 And seems no longer in a hurry.

(PW, II, 69, ll. 67-71)

With nobody else to help, she is anxious to send her son away because the neighbor is seriously ill. She gently pats the pony's side because it is going to carry her son; and she seems no longer in a hurry because she does not really want him to go, knowing that the boy is only "half-wise." Thus, this poem, which might have been another suffering story, becomes a comic and beautiful tale depicting a happy journey of an idiot boy, the love of the mother, and finally, the miraculous recovery of the neighbor from her sickness because of her concern for the missing idiot boy and his mother. Wordsworth

himself said that he "wrote the poem with exceeding delight and pleasure, and whenever [he] read it [he] read it with pleasure."¹⁹

Some other poems dealing with suffering characters in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads--though they were obviously not written with so much pleasure nor do they provide so much delight as "The Idiot Boy"--are also far from dwelling upon the distress and helplessness of the characters. The strength and beauty of the sufferers' primary passions have tempered in one way or another the pathetic aspect of the stories.

Among the primary passions, love is the poet's favorite subject in these Lyrical Ballads. Besides "The Idiot Boy," maternal love is also treated in "Her Eyes Are Wild" and "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman." In the first poem, Wordsworth presents the complicated state of mind of a deserted woman who is inclined to fall into complete insanity and yet is pulled back to normality by her love for her infant child. The distress and the deranged state of the woman contribute to the pathos of this poem. But the strength of her love creates a force to reconcile one's pathetic feeling incited by her miseries. Similarly, in the second poem, the situation of the sick Indian woman left behind by her people arouses one's pity; but her love for her child, which enables her to cleave in solitude to life and society at the approach of death, invites one's admiration and gives one a sense of relief.

What the shepherd in "The Last of the Flock" has shown is another kind of love, the love of property. Yet this love appears to be a vigorous instinct closely interwoven with the noblest feelings. The shepherd loves his sheep as deeply as he loves his children. When he

is obliged to sell his sheep one by one in order to support his family, he is driven nearly crazy and finds that he also loses the power to love his children. Again, the weeping shepherd is an object of sympathy; but one's sympathy for him is paralleled by an appreciation of the tenacity of his heart.

Nature in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads is never described as a cause of human suffering. On the contrary, in those poems collected in the edition as well as in some verses composed at this same period, nature is benevolent, effecting beneficial influence on and giving nothing but pleasure to man.²⁰ As has already been presented in the "Addendum" to "The Ruined Cottage," the poet thinks one's sympathy with nature together with his sympathy with human suffering can enable one to feel a transcending joy. Wordsworth describes his experience of transcending joy thus gained even more explicitly and clearly in "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey":

I have learned
 To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity,
 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
 To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man
 (PW, II, 261-62, ll. 88-99)

In the joy, the poet, like the Pedlar, feels the harmonious existence

of the universe, for what is involved in the "sense sublime" is

A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.
 (ll. 100-02)

In many poems collected in the second volume of the 1800 Lyrical Ballads, human suffering is treated in a similar manner to that in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads, which becomes, with the omission of "The Convict," the first volume of the 1800 edition. "Ruth," for example, depicts a girl's unhappy childhood, her being deserted by her lover after growing up, and her miserable situation in being imprisoned after becoming lunatic. It also presents Ruth's innocence formed by nature and her sensibility, and her eventual return in idiocy to that innocence. For another example, the old Cumberland beggar in the poem of that name is in the eye of the poet both an emblem of human suffering and an embodiment of some natural force. He is helpless in appearance and always incites the country people's sympathy. He is so still in look and motion, that "even the slow-paced waggon leaves [him] behind" (PW, IV, 236, l. 66). But, as Cleanth Brooks suggests, the old beggar is also like a "noble animal,"²¹ who has been brought by the "tide of things" (l. 64) to the "vast solitude" (l. 163) and appears to "breathe and live but for himself alone, /Unblamed, uninjured" (ll. 165-66). He struggles with natural hardships, but also enjoys natural freedom. His life, which seems a useless one, bears fruit in the lives of others. When

moving around, he carries, though he himself is unconscious of it, the "good which the benignant law of Heaven /Has hung around him" (ll. 167-68): he incites the villagers' moral impulse and makes them think by reminding them of their "peculiar boons," their "charters and exemptions" (ll. 126 & 127). Thus, the poet wishes that the old beggar may continue to live and may die eventually "in the eye of Nature."

Nevertheless, on the whole, Wordsworth's tragic sense of human predicaments, especially the sense of death, prevails in the second volume of the 1800 Lyrical Ballads. Human love, the major source of his delight gained through his observation of the humble sufferers in the 1798 volume, becomes the greater part of the cause of suffering in the poetry of 1800--one suffers from the death of an individual primarily because he loves the one who is dead. The poet at this time seems to be much preoccupied with the subject of the death of young people. In such poems as "There Was a Boy," "The Childless Father," "The Brothers," the "Matthew poems" and the "Lucy poems," except Matthew himself, the lamented dead all die young and make those who love them suffer intensely from bereavement. Moreover, nature, which is all benevolent in the 1798 edition, seems now to be accused again of causing human suffering.

However, Wordsworth does not recoil to his former view of human misery, which looks at men as helpless victims of awful "powers" and "forms," as shown in the poetry before 1798; and his accusation of nature here is never placed in an explicit way. The best examples

of his view at this time are the "Matthew poems" and the "Lucy poems."

These two groups of poems focus on the subject of death and the response of the bereaved and show a well-balanced treatment of the subject. In the "Matthew poems," though death causes sorrow to the bereaved, the bereaved, instead of falling into immitigable suffering, reconcile themselves to suffering in their love and memory of the dead. In "The Two April Mornings," for instance, Matthew, a school-master of about 70, was bereaved of his daughter, but he seemed to have found comfort in his memory of her. And her death seemed to have increased his love for her:

"Six feet in earth my Emma lay;
And yet I loved her more,
For so it seemed, than till that day
I e'er had loved before.

(PW, IV, 70, ll. 37-40)

Matthew's love for his daughter was so strong that he rejected any substitute for her. Hence, when he saw the blooming Girl and felt delighted to see such a fair child, he did not wish her his daughter. Similarly, in "The Fountain" Matthew, though bereaved of all his kin, rejected the narrator's proposal to be his son.

The narrator's response to Matthew's death is also treated in a similar manner. The narrator, who loves Matthew as his own father, feels deep sorrow after Matthew died. But his lamentation over the old man's death is somewhat relieved by his memory of him. In his memory, Matthew was a "happy Soul" (PW, IV, 69, "Matthew," l. 30),

a man having an unusual capacity for joy, for "fun and madness," yet lacking not the balance of profound feeling and thoughts. Thus, in "The Two April Mornings," for instance, after recalling his journey with Matthew the narrator seems to see his old friend, who "is in his grave," "stand, /As at that moment, with a bough /Of wilding in his hand" (PW, IV, 71). The image of Matthew with a bough of wilding, a symbol of life and joy, has counterbalanced the image of Matthew in his grave and has certainly mitigated the narrator's grief for the death of his old friend.

Nature in the "Matthew poems" serves as a reminder of human suffering. In "The Fountain," for example, the constant murmuring of the stream caused Matthew to contrast his momentary life with the eternity of nature. In "The Two April Mornings," for another example, the recurrence of the season and the similarity of the day--"that April morn, /Of this the very brother"--aroused Matthew's feeling about his dead daughter and reminded him of his suffering. Nevertheless, Wordsworth never presents nature as a tormenting force as he did before.

The balanced treatment of human suffering is carried to an even higher level in the "Lucy poems."²² On the one hand, the lover in this group of poems grieves over the death of his beloved, a girl called Lucy; on the other, he appears to have some gains through his suffering. Nature in this group of poems is more explicitly presented as a cause of human suffering than in the "Matthew poems," but it is also described as something which assists man in reaching reconciliation to his suffering.

Lucy is unique and precious for the lover. He compares her to a half-hidden violet, beautiful but easily overlooked by the public; and to a single star shining alone in the sky, strong in radiance but attractive to him only. Her life and death, though insignificant in the public world, are of supreme importance to him. His feeling aroused by Lucy's death is therefore a total sense of loss, which is ineffable so that he can only say: "But she is in her grave, and, oh, /The difference to me!" (PW, II, 30, "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways").

However, the lover has some gains through his suffering; he obtains a better sense of himself and the world. In "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known," for instance, his thought of Lucy's death startles him into the reality that his feeling of the immortality of his beloved, a feeling easily nourished in young lovers, is only a delusion, is only one of the "sweet dreams." For another example, in "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," the lover, after Lucy's death, seems not only to have awakened from his dream, his "slumber," in which Lucy "seemed a thing that could not feel /The touch of earthly years," but also to have recognized the reality that man's death is a part of nature. He feels that Lucy after death is "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course, /With rocks, and stones, and trees."

Nature in this group of poems is assumed to have played a role in causing human suffering. In "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower" the lover seems to say that it is Nature's will that makes possible Lucy's death and that has caused his deep grief, for he

imagines that Nature noticed the loveliness of Lucy when she was a child, began to shape her into a perfect lady for Herself, and, when the work was done, took the girl away from man's world. In "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known" the lover imputes, though implicitly, his delusion of Lucy's immortality to Nature; he describes the delusion as "one of those sweet dreams," "Kind Nature's gentlest boon." He seems to say that Nature puts off his thought of Lucy's mortality, and his shock thus redoubles its intensity when he abruptly thinks of Lucy's death.

Yet nature also contributes to the lover's reconciliation to suffering. In "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," the lover seems to have achieved at least a partial reconciliation in his transcending awareness that Lucy is in death participating in the diurnal movement of nature. In "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower," though Nature's taking Lucy away has caused his suffering, Lucy's death can also be considered as a sign of Nature's blessing. Her beauty and perfection were prepared, not for dwelling in a human world, but for living in the "happy dell" with Nature. The lover seems to say that Lucy can be regarded as something like an angel, who does not belong in man's world, but will stay happily in Paradise. This imagination is perhaps the source of the lover's feeling of calm as expressed at the end of the poem:

How soon my Lucy's race was run!
 She died, and left to me
 This heath, this calm, and quiet scene;
 The memory of what has been,
 And never more will be. (PW, II, 216, ll. 38-42)

Though there is an emptiness about the landscape and a resonance in the "never more," which express the sense of loss, the heath, the calm and quiet scene, also reflects the lover's feeling of tranquillity.

Certainly, the treatment of suffering in the "Lucy poems" is far different from that in the earliest poems written before 1798. It is also different from that in "The Ruined Cottage." Margaret in "The Ruined Cottage" is distressed and helpless; her suffering is a destructive power, checked in its overwhelming force only by her tenacious hope for her husband's return. But the narrator in the "Lucy poems" is not helplessly wretched after Lucy's death. His suffering, instead of destroying him, enables him to have a better sense of himself, of the world and of Lucy. Wordsworth's consciousness of the beneficial influence of suffering on the sufferer himself here, in fact, anticipates his reaction to the death of his brother John in 1805 and his treatment of human suffering thereafter. Besides, the pathos of Margaret's story in "The Ruined Cottage" is reconciled in the transcending vision which the Pedlar obtains partly through his sympathies with nature, a vision in which he sees beyond all earthly agonies. But in the "Lucy poems" nature does not offer the possibility for man to achieve such a transcending joy. Though one has, as the lover does, a feeling of calmness, one's sense of pathos aroused by human suffering is not dissolved or transformed into happiness after reading the "Lucy poems."

It is, perhaps, partly because of the waning of the vision of joy that he sensed so intensely in 1798, and partly because of his increasing sense of death and ineluctable suffering, that Wordsworth's attention is drawn to the power of man's mind in confronting adversity as presented in some prominent poems written in the years approximately from 1802 to 1804, such as "Resolution and Independence" and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality." This change is anticipated in "Michael," the last poem that enters the second edition of Lyrical Ballads. Like most of the poems in the edition, "Michael" presents the misfortune of a humble rustic and his strength of affection in the face of the misfortune; but unlike them, this poem lays the stress on the fortitude with which Michael copes with his suffering. This stress gives this poem an importance in the sequence of Wordsworth's early poetry dealing with human suffering.

The suffering of Michael is far greater than what befalls the other earlier characters with the exception of, perhaps, Margaret in "The Ruined Cottage." What is involved in Michael's suffering is not only the loss of a loved person, his only son born in his old age, but also the loss of the hope that is attached to this person, the hope that his land would become free through his son and that his descendants would possess it, "free as is the wind / That passes over it" (PW, II, 88, ll. 246-47). Accordingly Michael suffers unutterably after the disappearance of his son, as is presented in his failure to finish the sheep-fold, the covenant between him and his son:

. . . 'tis believed by all
 That many and many a day he thither went,
 And never lifted up a single stone.
 (ll. 464-66)

But, unlike Margaret, who fails to perform her duty to take care of the cottage, the garden, and her baby, Michael in his suffering goes about his daily work and lives after his son's disappearance for the length of seven years.

Nevertheless, there is still human weakness in Michael's fortitude. Another poem "Resolution and Independence" written in 1802 depicts a character, a leech-gatherer, in such a way that he becomes absolutely an emblem of fortitude. When he sees the old leech-gatherer, the poet is wandering upon the moor with a depressed mind, thinking that he might some day in the future suffer from "Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty" (PW, II, 236, l. 35). He thus unconsciously describes the old man, on the basis of his own low spirits, as a suffering being:

His body was bent double, feet and head
 Coming together in life's pilgrimage;
 As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
 Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
 A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.
 (ll. 66-70)

But the old man's words remove the suffering image from the poet's mind right away. The old man tells him that he, being old and poor, is roaming from pond to pond and from moor to moor to gather leeches

to gain his maintenance. It is a hazardous and wearisome employment; and "he [has] many hardships to endure" (l. 102). Leeches, he says, "have dwindled long by slow decay," yet "still [he perseveres], and [finds] them where [he] may" (ll. 125-26). The old man does not feel sorry for himself; nor does he intend to invite one's pity. Instead, he seems to have overlooked his suffering, for soon with his description of his hardships "he other matter [blends], /Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind, /But stately in the main" (ll. 134-36). The "Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor" thus becomes a symbol of resolution and independence, who gives the poet human strength by "apt admonishment."

By the time "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" is finished, namely in March 1804,²³ Wordsworth seems to have accomplished a reconciliation to his sense of death and ineluctable suffering by finding in his own mind the very strength that sustains him in his experience of loss. In one sense, the Intimations Ode also depicts the death of youth, in particular, the death of the poet's own youth. According to Wordsworth himself, the Ode rests upon two recollections of his childhood: "one that of a splendour in the objects of sense which is passed away, and the other an indisposition to bend to the law of death as applying to our particular case."²⁴ In other words, the poet suffers, in growing up, the loss of the vivid sensations and the sense of immortality of his childhood.

As a matter of fact, Wordsworth had already mentioned the loss of his sensational pleasure obtained in nature in the "Tintern Abbey"

poem. In "Tintern Abbey" the poet's faith in a benevolent Nature, "which never did betray /The heart that loved her," and which would lead man "From joy to joy," was so strong that he could already associate his loss of sensational pleasure with the gaining of a sober pleasure, which he reached through "hearing oftentimes /The still, sad music of humanity." However, in the great Ode, it seems, the conviction so firmly made in the year of 1798 can no longer sustain him in the loss of his past grandeur. Nature, in spite of all its offering of joy and pleasure, continually reminds the poet of his loss:

I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
 --But there's a Tree, of many, one,
 A single Field which I have looked upon,
 Both of them speak of something that is gone:
 The Pansy at my feet
 Doth the same tale repeat:
 Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
 Where is it now, the glory and the dream?
 (PW, IV, 280, ll. 50-57)

What gives him relief this time is his awareness of the power of the human heart obtained through his recollection of the experience of growing up. His thanks and praise are given, not to "Delight and liberty, the simple creed /Of childhood" (ll. 137-38), but to the Child's strength in confronting his suffering from doubts and fears in growing up:

Not for these I raise
 The song of thanks and praise;

But for those obstinate questionings
 Of sense and outward things,
 Fallings from us, vanishings;
 Blank misgivings of a Creature
 Moving about in worlds not realised,
 High instincts before which our mortal Nature
 Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
 But for those first affections,
 Those shadowy recollections,
 Which, be they what they may,
 Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
 Are yet a master light of all our seeing
 (ll. 140-53)

In other words, it is the "primal sympathy," the energy of the heart manifested in the Child's fitting his new existence to existing things, in the Child's overcoming the fear and the doubt of the unknown, that "doth live" "in our embers." It is the work of the "primal sympathy" that transmits intimations of immortality to man when he no longer has that sense of immortality of his childhood, for that energy of the heart has power to "make /Our noisy years seem moments in the being /Of the eternal Silence" (ll. 154-56), and to enable us to "have sight of that immortal sea" (l. 164) upon whose shore the Children are sporting. Thus, though the Child's "visionary gleam" is fading and at length "the Man perceives it die away," the Man will not grieve, he will "rather find /Strength in what remains behind":

In the primal sympathy
 Which having been must ever be;
 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering;
 In the faith that looks through death,

In years that bring the philosophic mind.
(11. 182-87)

In the poetry before 1798, the sufferers are all helpless and wretched people; what they can incite in the reader is only pathetic feeling. In "The Ruined Cottage," the poet endeavors to lighten the pathetic and tragic elements of human suffering by looking at the tragedy from a transcending view which looks beyond earthly agonies. In the "Tintern Abbey" period, the pathetic feeling caused by human suffering is to a great extent relieved by the delight gained through the observation of the beauty of the sufferers' primary passions. Subsequently, the poet's tragic sense of human predicaments, especially his sense of death, grows strong. Many of the characters in the poetry of this period suffer intensely because of the death of their beloved persons. And now in the Intimations Ode, there are soothing thoughts coming out of human suffering.

The nature of the "soothing thoughts" that spring out of human suffering here can not possibly be the same as that of the "joy /Of elevated thoughts" the poet senses through his hearing of the still, sad music of humanity in the "Tintern Abbey" poem. Otherwise, "Tintern Abbey" would suffice, and the Intimations Ode would be unnecessary. The poet here probably means that he, like the lover in the "Lucy poems," has gains not through his contemplation of human suffering but through his own experience of suffering, his consciousness of the loss of his past grandeur. While the lover's suffering makes possible his recognition of the truth of nature, the poet's suffering brings forth his awareness of the power of

regeneration of the heart. This awareness in turn gives him the faith that man will be strong enough to cope with his suffering, will gain soothing thoughts out of his suffering. Thus at length, the poet gives his thanks "to the human heart by which we live . . . to its tenderness, its joys, and fears" (ll. 201-02).

In fact, since the composition of "The Ruined Cottage," the poet has been conscious of the power of man's heart in encountering suffering. Each of the figures of Margaret, Michael and the Leech-gatherer has in her or his turn shown some strength in endurance. But it is not until now that Wordsworth's attention is particularly drawn to the power itself. Nevertheless, his complete awareness and confirmation of the power of the human heart in coping with suffering would probably have never occurred, at least would have not occurred soon, had he not suffered the most staggering and insupportable catastrophe of his whole life, namely the death of his brother John in 1805.

Chapter Two: The Effect of John Wordsworth's Death on the Poet's View of Human Suffering

The poet's brother John Wordsworth, captain of the East-Indiaman Earl of Abergavenny, died in the wreck of his ship on February 5, 1805. John's death, as Ernest de Selincourt indicates, was "the most terrible blow that either William or Dorothy [Wordsworth] had ever suffered."¹ This experience of suffering set the poet to much soul-searching. His endeavor to reconcile himself to the agony caused by the catastrophe enabled him to arrive at a new view of human suffering. Personal suffering, he asserted thereafter, was indispensable for developing the power of one's mind and for elevating one's spiritual condition. More important, his treatment of human suffering in the poetry thereafter was to center on the theme of the sufferer's reconciliation to suffering and his spiritual triumph through trials and tribulations.

R. C. Townsend holds that Wordsworth used to look at his brother John in imaginative terms, for the poet did not have much chance to have contact with him either personally or by correspondence after they grew up. In Townsend's opinion, Wordsworth had regarded John as the embodiment of his ideals; and John's death in 1805 "could only reflect and intensify the nature and the loss of those ideals."² Indeed the poet and his sister met their brother only four or five times after they grew up;³ however, in the four or five times, John had left them plenty of pleasant memories, as the

poet told his elder brother Richard: "John who was almost perpetually in our minds was always there as an object of pleasure, never was presented to us in any other point of view."⁴ Though one may doubt how much truth there is in the poet's description of the excellences of his brother's character in his letters,⁵ it is certain the poet and his sister had much appreciated John's character and had included him as one of the members, as John Beer puts it, of the "community of heart."⁶ Above all, Wordsworth had seen in John the love of nature and art such as he and Dorothy had. The two brothers agreed that one took the responsibility of financial support so that the other could be free for poetry. And it was deeply expected that, as Wordsworth repeatedly said in the letters written after the death of John, the time would come when John "would settle near [them as] the task of his life would be over."⁷ The poet said persistently in the letters that John was the "delight and hope" of the family.

Such being the case, when John secured the command of the Earl of Abergavenny, which promised great profits, it seemed the fulfillment of the hope of the Wordsworths was near. When John died, the shock and anguish on the poet's part came as much from the loss of the hope which he had long nourished as from the loss of an admirable brother.⁸ Wordsworth said to his elder brother: "We have lost him at a time when we are young enough to have been justified in looking forward to many happy years to be passed in his society and when we are too old to outgrow the loss" (EL, p. 570, March 19, 1805). In addition, the distress of the bereaved was accentuated by the public

reports, which vaguely but persistently hinted that John was responsible for the death of over two hundred lives as well as a cargo worth £2000,000.⁹

This "grievous disappointment,"¹⁰ to use his own words, had set the poet to much heart-searching. He went so far as to question the goodness of Providence. In the long letter to Sir George Beaumont dated March 12, 1805, Wordsworth was attempting to find a reasonable answer to the untimely death of John and found himself being led on a dangerous road:

[A] thousand times have I asked myself, as your tender sympathy led me to do, "why was he taken away?["] and I have answered the question as you have done. In fact, there is no other answer which can satisfy and lay the mind at rest. Why have we a choice and a will, and a notion of justice and injustice, enabling us to be moral agents? Why have we sympathies that make the best of us so afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the supreme governor? Why should our notions of right towards each other, and to all sentient beings within our influence differ so widely from what appears to be his notion and rule, if every thing were to end here? Would it be blasphemy to say that upon the supposition of the thinking principle being destroyed by death, however inferior we may be to the great cause and ruler of things, we have more of love in our Nature than he has? The thought is monstrous; and yet how to get rid of it except upon the supposition of another and a better world I do not see. (EL, p. 556)

It is obvious that he did not embrace religious faith after the catastrophe; he was rather forced to accept religious faith. Accordingly, he had to find another way to achieve his reconciliation to distress. And it is through patience that he succeeded eventually.

He chose not to dally with the blasphemous thought again by assuming that it was God's will that John should be taken away and considered it the duty of the bereaved to "reconcile [themselves] to the loss" and make "it of use to [them] to prepare [them] for similar separations" (EL, p. 579, April 15, 1805).

Wordsworth's endeavor to reconcile himself to his distress proceeded in parallel with his endeavor to write a poem to commemorate John. In the middle of April 1805, he wrote to Thomas Evans, saying that they "had begun to reconcile [themselves] as well as [they] could to [their] grievous disappointment" (EL, p. 579). However, in early May, he told Sir George Beaumont that he had a strong impulse to write a fitting tribute to John but he "was overpowered by [his] subject and could not proceed. . . ." He said the work "must rest awhile till [he was] something calmer" (EL, p. 586, May 1, 1805).

While trying to reconcile himself to grief, Wordsworth continued his work on The Prelude, which was resumed in January 1804 after being laid aside for several years since it was started in 1798. He completed it in May 1805.¹¹ Under the great affliction, which he was still striving to reconcile, the poet was able to write of

the glorious faculty
Which higher minds bear with them as their own.
That is the very spirit in which they deal
With all the objects of the universe:
.....
Such minds are truly from the Deity,
For they are powers; and hence the highest bliss
That can be known is theirs--the consciousness
Of whom they are, habitually infused

Through every image, and through every thought,
 And all impressions; hence religion, faith,
 And endless occupation for the soul,

 Hence cheerfulness in every act of life,
 Hence truth in moral judgements; and delight
 That fails not, in the external universe.¹²

The "glorious faculty" with which higher minds deal with visible and invisible things in the universe is actually the power of mind that is designated "Imagination."¹³ The strength of the imagination reminds one of the energy of the "primal sympathy" in the great Ode, which sustains man's loss in his growing up and transmits intimations of immortality, for from the progress of the imagination we draw "the feeling of life endless, the great thought /By which we live, Infinity and God" (The Prelude, p. 468, XIII, 183-84). The similarity between the spirit of the great Ode and the sentiment in the passage cited just now makes it reasonable to say that Wordsworth fully trusted the power of the mind in coping with the catastrophic blow, be the power called "primal sympathy" or "glorious faculty" or "imagination."

However, the poet needed time to reach reconciliation to his grief. On June 8, 1805, his feeling being stricken by the sight of the place where he and Dorothy had parted from John nearly five years before, he "poured out his heart in some beautiful verses to the memory of [his] lost Brother. . . ." He "was overcome . . . and with floods of tears wrote [some] verses" (EL, p. 599, June 11, 1805). This is the poem entitled "Elegiac Verses in Memory of My Brother, John



Wordsworth."

In this poem, the poet emotionally indulges himself in grief though claiming to have solace. For instance, the fourth stanza reads:

Full soon in sorrow did I weep,
 Taught that the mutual hope was dust,
 In sorrow, but for higher trust,
 How miserably deep!
 All vanished in a single word,
 A breath, a sound, and scarcely heard.
 Sea--Ship--drowned--Shipwreck--so it came,
 The meek, the brave, the good, was gone;
 He who had been our living John
 Was nothing but a name.
 (PW, IV, 264, ll. 31-40)

The "higher trust" reminds one of his faith, though made reluctantly, in a "better world" expressed in the letter to Sir George Beaumont cited previously. But, inserted between the disappointment with the loss of the hope--"the mutual hope was dust"--and the shock and woe which accompany the mind's picture of the shipwreck, the "higher trust" seems weak and isolated. Besides, Wordsworth does not make clear in any other place of this poem what this "higher trust" is. He says he has gains as other sufferers have; to his pain, there comes a "mild release" from "many a humble source" such as the Moss-campion, which is "in its beauty ministrant /To comfort and to peace" (ll. 49-50). However, by using the subjunctive mood in addressing the plant--"He would have loved thy modest grace, /Meek Flower! To him I would have said . . ." (ll. 51-52), the poet

immediately associates the plant with his loss, for John will never come back "to see it in its pride" (l. 59). Finally, the words he would like to inscribe on his brother's monumental stone convey a strong feeling of disappointment and even a sense of betrayal:

--Brother and friend, if verse of mine
 Have power to make thy virtues known,
 Here let a monumental Stone
 Stand--sacred as a Shrine;
 And to the few who pass this way,
 Traveller or Shepherd, let it say,
 Long as these mighty rocks endure,--
 Oh do not Thou too fondly brood,
 Although deserving of all good,
 On any earthly hope, however pure!

If this passage implies any feeling of religious consolation, in which the higher trust in heaven might be hinted by denouncing the earthly hope, that feeling is overwhelmed by his grievous disappointment.

The next poem written to the memory of John is "To the Daisy (Sweet Flower!)." The poet in this Daisy poem is far calmer than he was in the "Elegiac Verses." In this poem he finds comfort, on the one hand, in John's gentle and virtuous character and his innocent life. Though taking the career as a sailor, John was in nature more like a poet (he was called by Wordsworth a "silent poet" in another poem.¹⁴) "When called ashore, he sought /The tender peace of rural thought" (PW, IV, 261, ll. 22-23). He liked to frequent the abodes of the daisy and was as gentle and sweet as the flower he was fond of. Wordsworth soothes himself, on the other hand, by thinking of

John's bravery and nobleness in meeting his death. In the subsequent weeks after the shipwreck, Wordsworth attempted in his grief and distress to clear his dead brother of any imputed dishonor.¹⁵ In April 1805, he was greatly relieved when he was certain that John did "every thing that man could do: and was placed in such a situation that he could not have been saved consistent with his duty till after the Ship was gone to the bottom" (EL, p. 583, April 16, 1805). He said to his elder brother, "This is a great comfort to me: he went a brave and innocent Spirit to that God from whom I trust he will receive his reward" (EL, p. 583). In this Daisy poem, which was written probably between May 20 and July 5, 1805, Wordsworth presents, besides the gentleness of John's nature, the strenuous struggle of the crew and the heroic image of the captain of the ill-fated ship in the storm: "And through the stormy night they steer . . . 'Silence!' the brave Commander cried" (PW, IV, pp. 261-62, ll. 39 & 43). Once regarded as a heroic death, John's fate is accepted calmly. His death in the sea is purified by imagination: "Six weeks beneath the moving sea /He lay in slumber quietly" (ll. 50-51). Finally, his being buried near what he loved gives a sense of tranquil bliss of being one with nature in death:

That neighbourhood of grove and field
 To Him a resting-place should yield,
 A meek man and a brave!
 The birds shall sing and ocean make
 A mournful murmur for his sake;
 And Thou, sweet Flower, shalt sleep and wake
 Upon his senseless grave. (ll. 64-70)

In "To the Daisy" Wordsworth was able to do "justice to [his] departed Brother's memory";¹⁶ and he seemed to have comforted himself much by reciting to himself these verses.¹⁷ However, the poet's striving for total reconciliation to his suffering was still under way. Much of his attention was drawn to the exertion of the mind which deals with the changes of the outer world. Such words as might have given him some solace appear in a sonnet of Michael Angelo's, which he translated in October 1805:

His hope is treacherous only whose love dies
 With beauty, which is varying every hour;
 But, in chaste hearts uninfluenced by the power
 Of outward change, there blooms a deathless flower,
 That breathes on earth the air of paradise.
 (PW, III, 14, ll. 10-14)

At about the same time, he wrote "Character of the Happy Warrior," which was inspired by the death of Lord Nelson on October 21, 1805. Wordsworth said that "many elements of the character . . . portrayed [in this poem] were found in [his] brother John."¹⁸ In fact, quite a few lines were rather reflections of his own feeling and obsession, as shown in the following:

Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,
 And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
 Turns his necessity to glorious gain;
 In face of these doth exercise a power
 Which is our human nature's highest dower;
 Controls them and subdues, transmutes, bereaves
 Of their bad influence, and their good receives:

More skilful in self-knowledge, even more pure,
 As tempted more; more able to endure,
 As more exposed to suffering and distress;

 Whom neither shape of danger can dismay,
 Nor thought of tender happiness betray;
 Who, not content that former worth stand fast,
 Looks forward, persevering to the last,
 From well to better, daily self-surpast
 (PW, IV, 86-88, ll. 12-18, 23-25, & 72-76)

Finally, in "Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont" (1806),¹⁹ the last of his poems occasioned by the death of John, Wordsworth is able to achieve a resolution.²⁰ He claims that he has

submitted to a new control:
 A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
 A deep distress hath humanized [his] Soul.
 (PW, IV, 259, ll. 34-36)

The picture, which Wordsworth saw in Sir George Beaumont's house in the spring of 1806, seemed to have stimulated his reflections on his own state of mind after the death of John; he realized how much energy he had had in coping with the catastrophe. The shipwreck scene on the picture, the "Hulk which labours in the deadly swell,/[The] rueful sky, [the] pageantry of fear" (ll. 47-48), is not a dismal one for him and does not prompt him to fall into sorrow by reminding him of his brother's death. Instead, he is impressed by the spirit in it. He sees in the castle which rears its battlements against the storm a reflection of his own spirit

in its dire need and austere power against the storms of human life.

He says:

. . . this huge Castle, standing here sublime,
I love to see the look with which it braves,
Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time,
The lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves.
(ll. 49-52)

He thus welcomes not only "fortitude, and patient cheer," but also "frequent sights of what is to be borne," for he is certain that

Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.
(l. 60)

Though this "hope" might imply belief in immortality, in "another better world,"²¹ it is more likely that the "hope" lies, first of all, in Wordsworth's belief that through suffering one is able to obtain a better consciousness of oneself and of the outer world. To present such a recognition of his present spiritual condition which he has attained through suffering from bereavement, the poet juxtaposes his present state with his state of mind some eleven years ago in 1794 when he lived beside Peele Castle. At that time, his "fond illusion" nourished by the placid summer day and the quietness and peacefulness of the scene of the castle and the sea had led him to the thought that "the mighty Deep /Was even the gentlest of all gentle things" (ll. 10-11). Had he been a painter

to express what he saw, he says, he would have planted the castle
 "Beside a sea that could not cease to smile; On tranquil land,
 beneath a sky of bliss" (ll. 19-20). However, the wreck of John's
 ship has prompted him to realize that his former vision is nothing
 but an ignis fatuus of the mind, nothing but a "poet's dream"; he
 finds himself betrayed by his own "fond illusion."

It has been suggested that there is a conflict within the poet
 in his change from favoring his former happy delusion to welcoming
 fortitude and further suffering.²² Indeed, in recognizing that
 "a power is gone," the power "for generous error and noble illusion,
 which made life correspond to the heart's desire,"²³ Wordsworth
 does have a melancholy feeling of loss. His vivid and detailed
 description of the images which impressed him in 1794 also betrays
 his fondness of that delusion and his sense of loss--

So pure the sky, so quiet was the air!
 So like, so very like, was day to day!
 Whene'er I looked, thy Image still was there;
 It trembled, but it never passed away.

How perfect was the calm! it seemed no sleep;
 No mood, which season takes away, or brings
 (ll. 5-10)

Nevertheless, the energy with which he accepts the loss is strong
 enough, because his new viewpoint offers him a pleasure not less than
 his previous one. Early in "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth claimed that
 he was uplifted and gained a sober pleasure through his sympathy with

human suffering. At present, his own experience of bereavement has enlarged his imagination even further. His pleasure and exaltation this time lie in his better understanding of himself and of nature. He rejoices to discover the power of his mind in coping with the calamity and to come to the awareness that his former view of nature, though joyful, is after all a delusion, is "to be pitied," for "'tis surely blind" (l. 56). He thus reaches a new understanding of the existence of human suffering. After John's death, Wordsworth was compelled to think about the reason why human suffering existed. As mentioned previously, he even went so far as to question the goodness of Providence. He was also dismayed to think that "ninety-nine of us in a hundred [were] never easy in any road that [traveled] towards peace and quietness" (EL, p. 543, February 12, 1805). Now in "Peele Castle," since he, through suffering, has come to a better consciousness of himself and of nature, it seems human suffering can be justified because of its beneficial influence on the sufferer himself. Henceforth, the poet welcomes not only fortitude but also "frequent sights of what is to be borne," for further trials and tribulations promise further enlargement of imagination.

Some critics suggest that in "Peele Castle" Wordsworth's faith in nature was forfeited with the death of John,²⁴ for firstly, it was at nature's hands that John died, and secondly, nature cooperated with his own fond illusion to cheat him, he being misled to believe in a seemingly supporting and benevolent nature.

Indeed Wordsworth questioned the goodness of Providence after being shocked by John's death; but in "Peele Castle" he regards neither nature nor Providence as his enemy. If human predicaments--"frequent sights of what is to be borne"--are welcomed, and human suffering is justified, there is no reason to suppose that nature is blamed for what it has done to man. Also, as for nature's involvement in his previous delusion, it was he himself who expected nature to be more than it could be. There are inevitably and certainly storms and shipwrecks in nature; for the delusion that "the mighty Deep /Was even the gentlest of all gentle things" (ll. 10-11), the poet himself was solely responsible. A revision of the following stanza points to this thought on the poet's part:

Ah! THEN, if mine had been the Painter's hand,
 To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,
 The light that never was, on sea or land,
 The consecration, and the Poet's dream
 (ll. 13-16)

The revision runs:

. . . and add a gleam
 Of lustre, known to neither sea nor land
 But borrowed from the youthful Poet's dream
 (PW, IV, 259, Note to ll. 14-16)

While the original wording gives "a half-impression of a mysterious natural phenomenon, 'the gleam,' 'The light that never was'--something

defined only by a negative,"²⁵ the revision says affirmatively that the "gleam of lustre" was only a projection of a subjective quality of a youthful poet. Though the original surpasses the revision in its artistic achievement, the revision in fact fits better with the later stanzas of the poem, in which the poet denounces his previous view of nature and welcomes human suffering. And the fact that Wordsworth preferred the revision to the original indicates that the revision spoke out more clearly than the original about his thought on this matter.²⁶

Finally, even though around the year 1807 Wordsworth was greatly interested in Roman Stoicism,²⁷ which affirmed the absolute power of the mind, the assertion made in "Peele Castle" is not likely of stoic quality. In the poem, though the poet's assertion of welcoming fortitude and further suffering is firmly made, it is made through a "submission" to a new control; and he calls his new spiritual condition a "humanization" of his soul. Above all, what he hopes finally is not to stay aloof and remain indifferent to pleasure and pain as the stoics do, but to be ameliorated spiritually through suffering--"Not without hope we suffer and we mourn." Whether there is religious implication in this "hope" or not, the conclusion of "Peele Castle" by no means foreshadows the Roman severity.²⁸

It seems John's death actually urges the poet's consent to and even confirmation of mortality, of which the thought had haunted him earlier, for instance, in the "Lucy" and the "Matthew" poems. More important, the accident also compels him to ponder upon the

reality of man's fragility and weakness. Man hopes and plans, and is often encouraged by the outcome. But unexpectedly, a single event out of man's control can destroy everything. As Elizabeth Geen puts it, "the humbling realization of man's weakness" is "the source of the Christian concept of grace."²⁹

In brief, after John's death, as appears in "Peele Castle," the poet, like the lover in the "Lucy poems," recognizes the truth of nature, of which mortality and mutability are a part. Moreover, he acknowledges the power of his mind in encountering the catastrophe; yet, he also humbles himself through his awareness of man's fragility. And finally, he justifies the existence of human suffering as it has the possibility to open a new world for the sufferer.

In Natural Supernaturalism, M. H. Abrams says about Wordsworth's attitude toward human suffering,

Wordsworth's is a secular theodicy--a theodicy without an operative theos--which retains the form of the ancient reasoning, but translates controlling Providence into an immanent teleology, makes the process coterminous with our life in this world, and justifies suffering as the necessary means toward the end of a greater good which is nothing other than the stage of achieved maturity
³⁰

Indeed, in The Prelude, on which Abrams bases most of his argument of the poet's theodicy, Wordsworth justifies his experiences of terror, pain, error, and misery as bearing "a part, /And that a needful part" (The Prelude (1850), p. 47, I, 347-48) in making him a man and a poet; however, the poet does not publish this "theodicy

of the private life," to use Abrams' phrase, in his early poems about the humble suffering characters. It is only after John's death that Wordsworth begins to advocate that personal suffering is indispensable for achieving spiritual accomplishment. With some exceptions, his treatment of human suffering in the poems written after "Peele Castle" is uniform. His major concern is about the sufferer's turning adversity into spiritual gains; and the spiritual gains are often in religious terms.

Chapter Three: An Exercise for the Soul--
Human Suffering in the Later Poetry

'Weak is the will of Man, his judgement blind;
Remembrance persecutes, and Hope betrays;
Heavy is woe; - and joy, for human-kind,
A mournful thing, so transient is the blaze!'
Thus might he paint our lot of mortal days
Who wants the glorious faculty assigned
To elevate the more-than-reasoning Mind,
And colour life's dark cloud with orient rays.
Imagination is that sacred power,
Imagination lofty and refined:
'Tis hers to pluck the amaranthine flower
Of Faith, and round the Sufferer's temples bind
Wreaths that endure affliction's heaviest shower,
And do not shrink from sorrow's keenest wind.¹
(PW, III, 19-20)

This short poem written between 1807 and 1814 well represents Wordsworth's attitude toward human suffering after the composition of "Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle" in 1806. In the earlier poetry, the poet is fascinated, if not haunted, by his meditative pathos caused by contemplating human suffering; and explores from shifting moods and points of view the afflictions and affections of the sufferers. In the later poetry, generally speaking, human suffering has lost its sting; adversity is regarded as a test, and suffering as an exercise for the soul of the sufferer. The poet denounces fruitless sorrow on the sufferer's part and finds the value of suffering in what one suffers for, or in what one achieves through suffering.

In fact, there is a wider range of suffering characters in the later poetry than in the earlier poetry--while the sufferers in the

earlier poems are for the greatest part lowly and rustic people, those in the later ones include quite a few historical, legendary, or mythical characters such as knights, queens, the Nortons, the Russians, Laodamia, and Dion. But generally speaking, owing to his preoccupation with the sufferer's gains, Wordsworth's treatment of human suffering in the later poetry is rather uniform. The poet no longer dallies with his imagination as inspired by his free response to human suffering; instead, he is concerned most with whether or how the sufferer has gone through his predicament, no matter what identity the sufferer has, or what kind of predicament befalls him. As a result, the later poetry includes quite a few examples of spiritual victory gained through suffering such as are found in the sufferers in "The White Doe of Rylstone," most of the churchyard tales related by the Pastor in The Excursion, "The Russian Fugitive," "Inscriptions Supposed to Be Found in and near a Hermit's Cell," and "The Widow on Windermere Side." At the same time, Wordsworth also presents, but denounces, some sufferers who fail to cope with their adversities, such as the Solitary, Laodamia, and the prodigal youth in the Pastor's tales.

The sufferer's spiritual gains are always in religious terms. The problem of Wordsworth's religion has been controversial among the critics. As R. D. Havens puts it, "any study of Wordsworth's religion must inevitably come to the conclusion that no formulation of his beliefs is possible."² Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that the poet's belief was growing towards orthodox Christianity as the years

went on; and more and more, God was referred to as a person.³ As far as the subject of human suffering is concerned, the poet's tendency to present the sufferer's finding consolation in Christian faith in the later poetry is quite obvious.

The first important poem specifically dealing with human suffering after the composition of "Peele Castle" is "The White Doe of Rylstone" (1807-1808).⁴ In this poem, Wordsworth sets up a model of humility and patience winning faith and repose through suffering, of which most of the other cases of suffering in the later poetry are nothing but variations.

Human suffering itself is not intended to be the main subject in this poem as Margaret's suffering is in "The Ruined Cottage." While Margaret is drooping and declining physically in her distress, suffering in this poem is able to effect a purifying and cleansing influence on the sufferer. This is first of all presented in the case of Francis. After failing to persuade his father not to participate in the rebellion, Francis was overcome by "A phantasm, in which roof and wall /Shook, tottered, swam before his sight" (PW, III, 296, ll. 422-23); he experienced in his trance the "dimness of heart-agony" (l. 438). After the trance, "his languid eye /Was on the calm and silent sky" (ll. 427-28); and before long he was "cleansed from the despair /And sorrow of his fruitless prayer" (ll. 439-40).

What is involved in Emily's suffering, which is the main subject of this poem, is much more complicated. In a letter to S. T. Coleridge, Wordsworth says that Emily "is intended to be honored

and loved for what she endures, and the manner in which she endures it; accomplishing a conquest over her own sorrows (which is the true subject of the Poem) . . . and finally, after having exhibited the 'fortitude of patience and heroic martyrdom,' ascending to pure etherial spirituality."⁵ It seems clear that suffering results in an ascent to purity and beatification of nature for Emily. But the crux of Emily's conquest over her sorrows is how she makes the accomplishment. In the manner in which Emily endures her hardship, Wordsworth first of all presents an inappropriate road on which the sufferer might be led by his suffering.

Francis was sure that one could be "by force of sorrows high, /Uplifted to the purest sky /Of undisturbed humanity" (ll. 585-87), and adjured his sister to depend upon herself alone and to "cleave /To fortitude without reprieve" (ll. 544-45) in the catastrophe of the Norton household he prophesied. After the death of her father and all her brothers, Emily, following her eldest brother's adjuration, brought herself to "the subjection of a holy, /Though stern and rigorous, melancholy" (ll. 1596-97). Her sorrow had been borne, but at the same time, she was left "thoroughly forlorn" (l. 1622).

The strength of this stern sovereignty was tested by the appearance of the white doe, their old play companion, when she went back to Rylstone to put her fortitude to proof. At the sight of the white doe, Emily melted into tears and found her fortitude collapsed, because the doe reminded her of things past, both delights and sorrowings, which had been frozen by her rigorous fortitude and at which she had not dared to look back.

Among other things, the white doe is the symbol of love,⁶ for after being brought to Rylstone, she learned to love all the Nortons and she was loved by all in Rylstone-hall. She brought to Emily the saddest thoughts by reminding her of things long past. But tempered by love, the saddest thoughts would become "a gift of grace" (l. 1678). By humbling herself to accept the help of the doe, Emily transmuted her suffering that had left her thoroughly forlorn. She finally was able to receive "the memory of old loves, /Undisturbed and undistrest" (ll. 1754-55). Her soul was blest with "a soft spring-day of holy, /Mild, and grateful, melancholy" (ll. 1757-58). Through patience, humility and love, Emily was eventually by "sorrow lifted towards her God" (l. 1851). She was "Uplifted to the purest sky /Of undisturbed mortality" (ll. 1852-53); and in death, her soul "Rose to the God from whom it came" (l. 1868).

That suffering can be transmuted to effect a purifying and cleansing influence on the sufferer is more explicitly shown and further developed in The Excursion (1814). As far as the subject of human suffering is concerned, Wordsworth tries to establish in this poem a theodicy of his own through two sage-like figures, the Wanderer and the Pastor. In Book IV, after the Solitary, a despondent character in the poem, finishes relating the story of his unhappy life, the Wanderer says:

"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 disturbed, 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. . . .
 (PW, V, 110, ll. 10-22)

Similarly, in Book V, in answering the question raised by the Solitary concerning the predominance of good or evil in human life, the Pastor says:

The good and evil are our own; and we
 Are that which we would contemplate from far.
 Knowledge, for us, is difficult to gain--
 Is difficult to gain, and hard to keep--
 As virtue's self; like virtue is beset
 With snares; tried, tempted, subject to decay.
 Love, admiration, fear, desire, and hate,
 Blind were we without these: through these alone
 Are capable to notice or discern
 Or to record. . . . (Book V, 490-99)

Human suffering, it seems, is well justified in both the Wanderer's and the Pastor's way of thinking; they both assert that calamities of human life are purposely set, for man's good, by the superintending Providence. This sounds very much like the eighteenth-century optimistic notion of partial evil making universal good. However, what the two sages assert is, to use M. H. Abrams' words, a "theodicy of private life,"⁷ a theodicy that regards the experiences of pain and sorrow as indispensable conditions for one to come to a deeper sense of oneself and of God. If one is unable to transmute suffering

experiences into one's own spiritual good and hence falls into unrelievable sorrow or even despondency, he is lacking or has lost the glorious faculty, the imagination. The Solitary is such a character who has lost his power to cope with the changes of mortal life.

Although most of the Solitary's experiences of suffering are similar to Wordsworth's disasters in life, the character's weakness in the face of catastrophes is by no means shared by his creator. The Solitary's response to the death of his two children and his wife, for instance, is far different from Wordsworth's patient endeavor to reconcile himself to his grievous disappointment after John's death and later his calm acceptance of fate after the decease of his two children. The Solitary was unable to sustain himself in his bereavement. Instead of trying to reconcile himself to grief, he

Turned inward,--to examine of what stuff
Time's fetters are composed; and life was put
To inquisition, long and profitless!
By pain of heart--now checked--and now impelled--
The intellectual power, through words and things,
Went sounding on, a dim and perilous way!

(III, 696-701)

This experience of suffering is indeed "permanent, obscure and dark, /And shares the nature of infinity" as Oswald describes in The Borderers (PW, I, 188, ll. 1543-44); and the last two lines actually echo Oswald's description of his state of mind after being betrayed (ll. 1774-75). Though he did not become an intellectual villain--as

Oswald did, the Solitary turned out to be an escapist. Unable to find consolation during his suffering from bereavement, he alienated himself from life and fell into "abstraction" (III, 706), and was brought back to life only when the French Revolution broke out. But it seems he roused his enthusiasm for the Revolution primarily to forget his grief, for he regarded his social concern as a replacement of his care for his family--"Society became my glittering bride, /And airy hopes my children" (III, 735-36). This "second marriage" turned out to be a disaster, partly because of his unbalanced attitude toward it and his excessive confidence on social man. When he saw the Revolution fail and found "Liberty" but a "Shade" (III, 777), he looked for other supports and at length left for the new world. Up to this point, he had lost the power to feel and to act, for he was "convinced that all /Which [bore] the name of action, howsoe'er /Beginning, [ended] in servitude" (III, 893-95). The situation and the people in America again disappointed him. Disgusted with man, he finally fled to the country and has lived a secluded life since though he does not find comfort in nature either. Unable to find a prop in life, the Solitary is longing for the last escape, death.

Although what is involved in the Solitary's apathy and despondency is much more complicated than the description given above, weakness in character or lack of the power of regeneration seems to be the primary reason for what has become of the recluse. One more proof can be given to support this diagnosis. In Book II the Solitary

describes a transcending vision he experienced while returning from the search for the old pensioner. A step suddenly freed him from the "blind vapour" (II, 831) and revealed a scene of glory. He seemed to see the abode of "Spirits in beatitude" (II, 874) and the throne of God. He suddenly realized that in apathy and despondency he had been dead spiritually and that this miraculous vision, which appeared a revelation from God, had brought him back to life and had possibly pointed a way to redemption for him; however, he was not courageous enough to receive the blessing and to live again. In the poignancy of the sudden realization, he wished to die physically. He says to the Wanderer and the Poet:

. . . my heart
 Swelled in my breast.--'I have been dead,' I cried,
 'And now I live! Oh! wherefore do I live?'
 And with that pang I prayed to be no more!
 (II, 874-77)

Such being the case, when he comes to correct the Solitary's despondency, the Wanderer emphasizes the exercise of the faculty of imagination, whose strength is manifested in, among others, the power of regeneration or the power to cope with changes in human life.⁸ And, as Kenneth R. Johnston points out, what finally moves the skeptical Solitary is the passage in which the Wanderer describes the faculty in the human soul that is able to transfigure the accidents of mortal life to moral good:⁹

"Within the soul a faculty abides,

That with interpositions, which would hide
 And darken, so can deal that they become
 Contingencies of pomp; and serve to exalt
 Her native brightness. As the ample moon,
 In the deep stillness of a summer even
 Rising behind a thick and lofty grove,
 Burns, like an unconsuming fire of light,
 In the green trees; and, kindling on all sides
 Their leafy umbrage, turns the dusky veil
 Into a substance glorious as her own,
 Yea, with her own incorporated, by power
 Capacious and serene. Like power abides
 In man's celestial spirit; virtue thus
 Sets forth and magnifies herself; thus feeds
 A calm, a beautiful, and silent fire,
 From the encumbrances of mortal life,
 From error, disappointment--nay, from guilt;
 And sometimes, so relenting justice wills,
 From palpable oppressions of despair."
 (IV, 1058-77, the italics mine)

The faculty is called "Virtue" rather than "imagination." But, as Johnston indicates, "this one instance is among many in the latter parts of Book IV where the Solitary is urged to inspire his seeing with an impulse from his soul called, alternatively, 'virtue,' 'Imagination,' 'the imaginative will,' or 'the mind's excursive power.'"¹⁰ Through the exercise of the imagination, according to the Wanderer, one will attain love, hope, and faith in God. When faith becomes a "passionate intuition" (IV, 1296), the soul will be free from "all injurious servitude" (IV, 1298). When one's view is fixed on the other better world, immoderate sorrow in the face of suffering and death becomes impossible.

As to the question how one can exercise one's imagination so as to be able to transform the encumbrances of mortal life into "contingencies of pomp," the Wanderer's answer does not seem satisfactory

to the Solitary. The passage in which the Wanderer explains how one's sympathies with nature and with man will lead one to spiritual accomplishment (IV, 1207-75) is in fact a repeat of the "Addendum" of "The Ruined Cottage."¹¹ The "Addendum" would fit the early poem well, because the passage is addressed by the Pedlar to his young friend, a listener to a suffering story. But in Book IV of The Excursion, the Wanderer is directing his suggestion to the Solitary, a sufferer and a complicated one. As manifested in Book III, the Solitary is not totally unable to appreciate nature and to sympathize with man; rather, his problem lies in the capricious nature of his mind. For instance, he is "pleased /To skim along the surfaces of things" (III, 134-35) in the Recess described in the beginning of Book III (50-73) and enjoys the antiquarian atmosphere he imagines there; but if his spirit

be oppressed by sense
 Of instability, revolt, decay,
 And change, and emptiness, these freaks of Nature
 And her blind helper Chance, do then suffice
 To quicken, and to aggravate--to feed
 Pity and scorn, and melancholy pride
 (III, 137-42)

It seems it is only after the Pastor finishes his churchyard stories that the Solitary finds the answer to his question.¹² Most of the suffering characters in the Pastor's tales had obtained power to conquer their suffering and to find peace and repose eventually. The key to their success appears to be patience. By means of industry (mental or physical or both) and perseverance, the sufferers were led to love, hope and faith in God, which in return

offer them peace, repose, and happiness. By this means a distressed rejected lover gradually composed his fluttering nerves and restored his jarring thoughts to harmony; a miner finally, after 20 years of searching, found his reward; two men of opposite principles, a Jacobite and a Hanoverian, conquered their vexations caused by failures in public life respectively, established friendship and obtained eternal peace; a deaf man and a blind man went beyond their physical deformities and found peace and joy in their lives; a priest appeased his harsher passions gradually, freed himself from grief caused by bereavement and died in peace. Even the unamiable woman, who had "a mind never charmed to gentleness" (VI, 738), was finally "into meekness softened and subdued; /Did, after trials not in vain prolonged, /With resignation sink into the grave" (VI, 772-74). One of the two figures of failure in these portraits,¹³ the prodigal youth, failed in his life mainly because of his "irresolution and weakness."¹⁴

Of these churchyard tales, the story of Ellen's life of endurance and unflagging faith in God and finally her death with hope is the best example of the Pastor's teaching that

Life . . . is energy of love
 Divine or human; exercised in pain,
 In strife, in tribulation; and ordained,
 If so approved and sanctified, to pass,
 Through shades and silent rest, to endless joy.
 (V, 1012-16)

Since it is the most lengthy and the best developed among these portraits,¹⁵ this story is also the best example to show Wordsworth's

treatment of human suffering in the Pastor's tales.

Ellen was deserted by her lover after she was pregnant. Though suffering, she did not therefore sink into irredeemable distress; instead, before her child was born, she could still find "a meek resource" "in lonely reading" (VI, 896). After the birth of the child, Ellen found an "unexpected promise" (l. 909) in her new cares, and for a time she and her widowed mother were comforted. Then she offered her services as a nurse to a neighbouring family to support herself and the child. The parents of the foster-child were selfish and cruel, and when her own child fell sick, allowed her to make only one visit to see it. The child died, and Ellen again fell into unutterable sorrow. But her faith in God gave her such a support that she could endure silently and finally died with hope; as she said in her weakness:

'He who afflicts me knows what I can bear;
And, when I fail, and can endure no more,
Will mercifully take me to himself.'
(VI, 1046-48)

Carson C. Hamilton puts it well by saying that the story of Margaret in "The Ruined Cottage" is the result of "inspiration," while the story of Ellen here is the result of "determination." And there is a certain degree of truth in his commentary that where "Margaret's history is honest, realistic, highly probable, and of heartsick power, Ellen's story is like a whining schoolboy's concoction of loaded words."¹⁶ In fact, the Pastor has been too much

preoccupied with the instructive function of the story and is more concerned about Ellen's reconciliation than about her suffering. Though in some few places, in the scene of her child's funeral (VI, 973-82) for instance, the Pastor's description of Ellen's grief is deeply touching, the story as a whole is short of the moving power of the story of Margaret, because the readers are sure that Ellen, who had never lacked the support of faith in her suffering, will be "redeemed."

After her child's death, Ellen gradually drooped and decayed. The Pastor thus relates:

. . . and now her Spirit longed
 For its last flight to heaven's security.
 --The bodily frame wasted from day to day;
 Meanwhile, relinquishing all other cares,
 Her mind she strictly tutored to find peace
 And pleasure in endurance. Much she thought,
 And much she read; and brooded feelingly
 Upon her own unworthiness.
 (VI, 1022-29)

He concludes the story with further assertion that all is well within the framework of orthodox assurance, saying:

So, through the cloud of death, her Spirit passed
 Into that pure and unknown world of love
 Where injury cannot come:--and here is laid
 The mortal Body by her Infant's side.
 (VI, 1049-52)

As a matter of fact, the Pastor's tales include as diverse types

of human suffering as the Lyrical Ballads, but there is a basic difference between these two groups of poems. In the churchyard tales, as has been shown above, adversities and predicaments function mainly as trials for the sufferers for their strength and faith; the descriptions are focused on the sufferers' reconciliation to their suffering; and most of the sufferers have turned their adversities into spiritual gains. In the Lyrical Ballads, on the other hand, Wordsworth is fascinated with the great and simple affections of the lowly suffering people; one of his primary concerns is with the interplay of these people's suffering and their powerful feelings. Even though quite a few of these sufferers fail to sustain themselves and finally submit themselves to ill fate, they are still implicitly praised for having shown their strength in one way or another during their suffering. One thus sees in the Ballads some characters driven mad or imbecile by their suffering, such as the mad mother and Ruth; and many characters, though not distracted in mind, finding no relief or no complete relief to their pains, such as the female vagrant, the shepherd in "The Last of the Flock," Susan, the childless father, the lover in the "Lucy poems," and Michael.

Nor are these graveyard tales "but variations on the theme already brought to perfection in the poem's first book--the story of Margaret and the ruined cottage" as Mary Moorman puts it.¹⁷ Since Margaret's story appearing in the first book of the 1814 edition of The Excursion is a revised version of "The Ruined Cottage," the poem intended to be published separately in 1798, a comparison can be drawn between "The Ruined Cottage" and the churchyard tales.¹⁸ First of all, while

most of the sufferers in the Pastor's tales are able to convert evil into their own good, Margaret's suffering in the early poem is silent without any moral gain for herself; her dignity is manifested in her devotion to her husband and her endurance during the gradual decay instead of quick collapse. Secondly, in "The Ruined Cottage" the Pedlar relates the story of helpless distress because he believes that such kinds of story can effect an ameliorating influence on the listener--"we have known that there is often found /In mournful thoughts, and always might be found /A power to virtue friendly." But the Pastor in The Excursion has an idea completely different from that of the Pedlar. He thinks that stories of irredeemable grief can only propagate suffering; that the "heaven-born poet" should not "lend the echoes of his sacred shell, /To multiply and aggravate the din" (VII, 365-66) of the doleful war of human life. Instead the poet should rise and celebrate

The good man's purposes and deeds; retrace
His struggles, his discomfitures deplore,
His triumphs hail, and glorify his end
. . . . (VII, 376-78)

Finally, the feeling of calm and tranquillity the Pedlar and the younger man obtain in the end of "The Ruined Cottage" comes from a transcending vision, in which they have an intimation of immortality and are enabled to see beyond the earthly agonies. Thus, the sufferer, Margaret, can be seen in death as being part of a

total harmonious pattern, though she never reconciles herself to suffering in life and could not have found peace in death. In the Pastor's tales, on the other hand, as most of the characters are able to transform their suffering into their own moral good, their stories are not tragic. A feeling of calm and tranquillity also springs out of these tales; however the feeling comes, not from any transcending vision, but from the knowledge that the sufferers have found peace and repose in life and in death.

Moreover, death and mutability in the churchyard tales are justified as are the other forms of evil which cause human suffering. In his last story the Pastor relates a legend about a knight of the era of Queen Elizabeth I, who retired to the vale and died there, and whose monument remained in the churchyard. The passing of the knight and of what he stood for leads the Wanderer to the thought of the transitoriness of things and the revolution of society. But the thought is not gloomy, for the Wanderer perceives in the "decay restless" also "restless generation" (VII, 1002). By the law of restless death and restless production, the Wanderer says, "the mighty whole subsists: /With an ascent and progress in the main"; and "Human-kind rejoices in the might /Of mutability" (VII, 1004-05 & 1033-34). This seems to be yet another version of "intimations of immortality." But immortality in The Excursion is not merely defined in this way. Both the Wanderer and the Pastor also hold the Christian idea of immortality.

The Pastor asserts that "life is love and immortality" (V, 1002);

and that man, if "ordained" and "sanctified," will pass through "shades and silent rest . . . to endless joy" (V, 1015 & 1016).

Similarly, the Wanderer says to comfort the Solitary's sorrow for the death of his wife and children:

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)

In the period of the Lyrical Ballads, the poet may hold the idea of immortality, Christian or non-Christian, but he does not specifically profess it in his treatment of death. For example, of Matthew's death in "Address to the Scholars of the Village School of--" (1798), Wordsworth says:

Now stretched beneath his grass-green mound
 He rests a prisoner of the ground.
 He loved the breathing air,
 He loved the sun, but if it rise
 Or set, to him where now he lies,
 Brings not a moment's care.
 (PW, IV, 256-57, ll. 20-25)

The lover in the "Lucy poems," for another example, can find some solace for his grief over Lucy's death in imagining that Lucy has been taken away by Nature as shown in "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower," or in considering that Lucy after death is participating in the diurnal movement of nature as shown in "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal"--the former an imaginative vision, the latter a transcending awareness. But neither of these two ways of finding

consolation is founded on the faith that man is immortal. Even in 1805 when John died, Wordsworth could only force himself to believe that there is a better world in which the deceased dwell.¹⁹ In none of his poetical tributes to his dead brother does he express any faith in immortality.

At about the time when he composed the churchyard tales, Wordsworth wrote his first "Essay upon Epitaphs."²⁰ In the essay he advocates the idea of immortality, saying:

We may, then, be justified in asserting, that the sense of immortality, if not a co-existent and twin birth with Reason, is among the earliest of her offspring: and we may further assert, that from these conjoined, and under their countenance, the human affections are gradually formed and opened out . . . for my own part, it is to me inconceivable, that the sympathies of love towards each other, which grow with our growth, could ever attain any new strength, or even preserve the old, after we had received from the outward senses the impression of death, and were in the habit of having that impression daily renewed and its accompanying feeling brought home to ourselves, and to those we love; if the same were not counteracted by those communications with our internal Being, which are anterior to all these experiences, and with which revelation coincides, and has through that coincidence alone . . . a power to affect us. I confess, with me the conviction is absolute, that, if the impression and sense of death were not thus counterbalanced, such a hollowness would pervade the whole system of things, such a want of correspondence and consistency, a disproportion so astounding betwixt means and ends, that there could be no repose, no joy.²¹

Wordsworth says in a note to the fifth book of The Excursion that the Pastor's opinions about man's sense of immortality are in unison with those expressed in the Essay.²² It seems in this period

of his life, namely around 1810, the poet had brought himself to the belief of immortality and intended to propagate this belief. In The Excursion, the idea that death is the beginning of a possible future brighter than earthly life is advocated; suffering and the ability to conquer suffering are regarded as necessary means to gain the privilege to enter that world. In the churchyard tales, with the exception of Wilfred Armathwaite and the prodigal youth, the suffering characters, after proving that they were worthy of themselves in their lives, all died with hope and faith. As death has lost its sting, the churchyard is regarded as a sacred place, a holy ground with "soothing air," "the spirit of hope /And saintly magnanimity; that spurning

The field of selfish difference and dispute,
 And every care which transitory things,
 Earth and the kingdoms of the earth, create--
 Doth, by a rapture of forgetfulness,
 Preclude forgiveness, from the praise debarred,
 Which else the Christian virtue might have claimed.
 (VI, 485-90)

As Judson Stanley Lyon puts it, "probably the most important single purpose of The Excursion resulted from Wordsworth's own pressing need to reconcile himself to the terrible realities of life"; of his whole life, "the most staggering and insupportable catastrophe . . . was the death of his brother John by drowning on February 5, 1805."²³ Though the Wanderer, the Pastor and the despondent Solitary all represent part of Wordsworth respectively,

there is little doubt that Wordsworth intends to show what he considers the best means of moving from the cynical apathy of the Solitary to the meditative calm of the two sages.²⁴ The two sages' attitude toward human suffering, thus, must have represented Wordsworth's own viewpoint to a great extent.

Generally speaking, what is asserted about human suffering in "The White Doe of Rylstone" and The Excursion--that through the darkness of suffering man can become morally and intellectually better and can ascend even to "the fountain-head of peace divine"²⁵--is reinforced, or at least repeated, in the poems composed after The Excursion. Compared to his creative years up to 1814, the poet's years after 1814 saw fewer poems specifically dealing with human suffering. Among them "Laodamia" (1814) and "The Russian Fugitive" (1828) are perhaps the most important.

Wordsworth's preoccupation with the theme of reconciliation in treating suffering in his later poetry is particularly conspicuous in his reinterpretation of the Greek myth of Laodamia. Originally the myth is about the love and loyalty between Laodamia and her husband Protesilaus. After the death of Protesilaus, Laodamia begged the gods to take pity and let him revisit her, if only for three hours. Protesilaus' ghost came and adjured her not to delay in following him. No sooner had the three hours ended than Laodamia stabbed herself to death.²⁶ But in Wordsworth's reinterpretation, the myth becomes one that teaches fortitude in affliction and one that is in spirit similar to the churchyard tales and "The White Doe of Rylstone."

In the poem, Protesilaus' ghost was given a mission to admonish Laodamia to control her rebellious passions and ungovernable love. When Laodamia expressed her wish to die if he should leave her again, Protesilaus advised her to exercise her soul in her suffering in order to earn by virtue the privilege to enter the world of heavenly peace, love, hope and happiness after death (PW, II, 270, ll. 97-110). Nevertheless, Laodamia failed to sustain herself; she died as soon as Protesilaus' ghost disappeared. It is interesting to find that in the first writing of the poem, the heroine was dismissed to happiness in Elysium; but later the poet thought that such an ending made Protesilaus' mission to advise his wife purposeless; he thought there should be a punishment on Laodamia for her weakness.²⁷ Hence, in later editions (1845 and 1849-50), Laodamia "was dommed to wear out her appointed time, /Apart from happy Ghosts, that gather flowers /Of blissful quiet 'mid unfading bowers" (PW, II, 271, ll. 161-63). The moral lesson Wordsworth intended to teach in this poem is therefore more explicitly shown.

"The Russian Fugitive," unlike "Laodamia," is a story of a young Russian girl's success in enduring her hardship. The heroine Ina escaped secretly from her home in order to reject the Czar's proposal of marriage. With the help of her foster father and mother, she secured a secluded abode in a wild woods on an island and lived peacefully and patiently in her solitude. Like such sufferers in the Pastor's tales as the rejected lover and the deaf man, Ina was comforted by her own pure thoughts, by her intercourse with natural objects, and, above all, by her faith:

To one mute Presence, above all,
 Her soothed affections clung,
 A picture on the cabin wall
 By Russian usage hung--
 The Mother-maid, whose countenance bright
 With love abridged the day;
 And, communed with by taper light,
 Chased spectral fears away.
 (PW, IV, 189, ll. 209-16)

The Russian fugitive's virtues and courage were finally rewarded: she was pardoned by the Czar and married the hunter messenger the Czar sent to bring to her his pardon.

Besides these two rather long narrative poems, two other poems of similar sentiments are also worth mentioning, namely, "Inscriptions Supposed to Be Found in and near a Hermit's Cell" (1818) and "The Widow on Windermere Side" (1837). In the former poem, Wordsworth presents the process of a hermit's taming of his rebellious passions, his abandoning of sceptical notions for religious faith, and his eventual gaining of peace of mind. In the latter poem, a widow suffered at first from being left "beneath a weight /Of blameless debt" (PW, II, 94, ll.4-5), then from the death of all of her children. Her suffering was such that her tears never ceased to flow until one day she saw in a vision her last child transformed into an angel. Thereafter, she frequently hailed her angelic son; and "in earthly ecstasies /Her own angelic glory [seemed] begun" (ll. 41-42). Finally she died, smiling "as if a martyr's crown were won" (l. 37).

The notions that man is immortal and that through death man will be glorified provided he has proved to deserve the glorification

are also repeatedly emphasized in the poems written after The Excursion, though sometimes they are not presented in terms of Christian religion, such as is shown in "Laodamia." Besides in "Laodamia" and "The Widow on Windermere Side," the notions are also brought out in such poems as "On the Death of His Majesty" (1820), Stanza XXXI Funeral Service in "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" (1821), "Elegiac Stanzas (Addressed to Sir G. H. B.)" (1824), "Written after the Death of Charles Lamb" (1835), and "Sonnet (Why Should We Weep)" (1845-46).

From the above examination, it seems legitimate to conclude that after John's death, Wordsworth has a stock response to the subject of human suffering; in treating the subject, he is much engrossed in the theme of the sufferer's reconciliation to his suffering. Yet there are some exceptions in which the treatment of suffering is greatly different from that in most of the later poetry. For example, in "Lament of Mary Queen of Scots on the Eve of a New Year" (1817) and "Captivity. - Mary Queen of Scots" (1819), the sentiments are quite similar to such earlier poems as "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" (1798) or "The Affliction of Margaret" (1800). As the title suggests, the first poem is an overflow of the imprisoned Queen's afflictions on the eve of a new year. She was hopeless and distressed. Though she said that "Naught but the world-redeeming Cross / [Was] able to supply [her] loss, / [Her] burthen to support" (PW, II, 39, ll. 61-63), there is no indication that she was redeemed by her religious faith, for it is

said in the poem that several years more had passed before "the tired head of Scotland's Queen /Reposed upon the block" (ll. 69-70, the italics are mine). The second poem shows the imprisoned Queen's suffering from contrasting her miseries with her past joys. In the end, instead of praying Heaven to have her passions tamed and her soul purified through suffering, she prayed it to make her spirit "like [her] thralldom, strait . . . /And, like [her] eyes that [streamed] with sorrow, blind" (PW, III, 33, ll. 13-14), so that she might avoid suffering. It seems that sometimes the poet in the later years is still overwhelmed, or fascinated, by the pathos caused by human suffering.

Wordsworth's feeling of sorrow and his intention to give vent to it are especially irresistible when his impulse is excited and reflection and reason come too late to give an aid. During 1812, he lost two children, Thomas and Catharine, within half a year of each other. Compared to the death of John, these two accidents caused in him less pain and anguish; he could reconcile himself to his suffering before long. However, in "Surprised by Joy" (1813-14), a poem inspired by Catharine long after her death, grief suddenly came back to the bereaved father when he was "surprised by joy," intended to share it with his daughter, but immediately remembered that she was dead. No relief to the father's grief is found in the poem, for the return of the grievous thought "Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore" (PW, III, 16, l. 10).

Moreover, the death of John seems to have left its mark. It appears that he could not completely overcome his regret for the fact

that John died untimely; he was rather sensitive to the subject of the premature death of young people in his later years. In the "Elegiac Stanzas" in "Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820," for example, the poet laments over the death of a young American who was drowned in the Lake of Zurich. Though the tone is calm, there transpires in the poem a sense of regret for the young man's untimely death, which turns all hope and expectation into nothing, as shown, for instance, in the following lines:

Beloved by every gentle Muse
 He left his Transatlantic home:
 Europe, a realized romance,
 Had opened on his eager glance;
 What present bliss! what golden views!
 What stores for years to come!

(PW, III, 195, ll. 49-54)

In "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg" (1835), for another example, the poet first of all laments over the death of a couple of poets; then he asks: "why, /O'er ripe fruit, seasonably gathered, /Should frail survivors heave a sigh?" (PW, IV, 277, ll. 34-36). He says that one should mourn rather for Felicia Hemans, for she, "ere her summer faded, /Has sunk into a breathless sleep" (ll. 38-39).²⁸

Notwithstanding the existence of these exceptional poems, most of the time in his years after 1806, Wordsworth intended to put forward for instruction the assertion made in "Peele Castle"--"Not without hope we suffer and we mourn." In the 1845 edition of

The Excursion, he added a few lines to the end of the first book and changed Margaret into a sufferer not without consolations:²⁹

Nor more would she have craved as due to One
 Who, in her worst distress, had ofttimes felt
 The unbounded might of prayer; and learned, with soul
 Fixed on the Cross, that consolation springs,
 From sources deeper far than deepest pain,
 For the meek Sufferer.

(PW, V, 39, ll. 934-39)

Finally, as late as 1846, four years before his death, Wordsworth in a sonnet reassured the reader of his idea that human suffering is a trial for human soul and a passage to a better world, here or hereafter:

Where lies the truth? has Man, in wisdom's creed,
 A pitiable doom; for respite brief
 A care more anxious, or a heavier grief?
 Is he ungrateful, and doth little heed
 God's bounty, soon forgotten; or indeed,
 Must Man, with labour born, awake to sorrow
 When Flowers rejoice and Larks with rival speed
 Spring from their nests to bid the Sun good morrow?
 They mount for rapture as their songs proclaim
 Warbled in hearing both of earth and sky;
 But o'er the contrast wherefore heave a sigh?
 Like those aspirants let us soar--our aim,
 Through life's worst trials, whether shocks or snares,
 A happier, brighter, purer Heaven than theirs.

(PW, IV, 19)

Notes

Introduction:

1

Robert Mayo, "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads," PMLA 69 (1954), 487.

2

Ibid., p. 490.

3

Cleanth Brooks, "Wordsworth and Human Suffering: Notes on Two Early Poems," in Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom, eds., From Sensibility to Romanticism (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), 373-87.

4

Jonathan Wordsworth, The Music of Humanity (London & Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1969).

5

Bennett Weaver, "Wordsworth: The Property of Fortitude," Studies in Philology 37 (1940), 610-31.

6

O. J. Campbell, "Sentimental Morality in Wordsworth's Narrative Poetry," University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 11 (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1920), 21-57.

7

Ibid., p. 24.

8

See Edward E. Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1963), pp. 52-81. The quotation is from p. 65.

9

In a poem influenced by the death of John, "Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle," Wordsworth says: "A deep distress hath humanized my Soul."

10

Geoffrey H. Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814 (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 329-30.

11

John Jones, The Egotistical Sublime (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954), pp. 50-51.

12

John Beer, Wordsworth and the Human Heart (London, Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1978), pp. 200-01.

13

James H. Averill, Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering (Ithaca, London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980).

14

Ibid., p. 9.

15

See *ibid.*, pp. 278-83.

Chapter One:

1

The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), p. 278, (1805), VIII, ll. 211-13. All references to The Prelude in this thesis, unless otherwise noted, are to the 1805 text of this edition, which will be hereafter cited as The Prelude.

2

The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-1952), I, 26, ll. 245-46. All references to Wordsworth's poetical works in this thesis, unless otherwise noted, are to this edition, which will be hereafter cited as PW.

3

All references to these two drafts are to The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth, ed. Stephen Gill (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975).

4

Stephen Gill, pp. 139-40, "Adventures on Salisbury Plain," ll. 433-41. See also similar descriptions in the draft "Salisbury Plain," p. 33, ll. 361-69.

5

See the end of "Salisbury Plain," Gill, p. 38, ll. 541-49.

7

The text of "The Ruined Cottage" used in this thesis is MS. D published in The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar, ed. James Butler

(Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979).

8

See Butler, Introduction, p. 14. See also Jonathan Wordsworth, The Music of Humanity, p. 11.

9

For the "Addendum" see PW, V, 400-04.

10

Edward E. Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists, p. 64.

11

See Butler, pp. 382-412.

12

In the I. F. note to The Excursion, talking about the Pedlar, Wordsworth says: "At all events, I am here called upon freely to acknowledge that the character I have represented in his person is chiefly an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances" (PW, V, 373).

13

James H. Averill, Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering, p. 161.

14

Averill singles out "Simon Lee" and "The Thorn" as examples for Wordsworth's "experiments in pathos." See Averill, pp. 162-80.

15

See Wordsworth's note to this poem, PW, II, 512.

16

The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 355, June 7, 1802. This edition will be hereafter cited as EL.

17

See EL, p. 355.

18

Among the evidences of Wordsworth's exultant happiness in 1798 are the verses in The Prelude, p. 480, XIII, 390-410.

19

EL, p. 355. See also I. F. note to "The Idiot Boy," PW, II, 478.

20

Besides "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," see also such poems collected in the Lyrical Ballads as "Lines Written at a Small Distance from My House," "Expostulation and Reply," and "The Tables Turned," and such poems not included in the edition as "The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale" and "A Night-Piece."

21

See Cleanth Brooks, "Wordsworth and Human Suffering: Notes on Two Early Poems," p. 379.

22

The "Lucy poems" discussed here refer to the following four poems: "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known" (PW, II, 29), "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways" (PW, II, 30), "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower" (PW, II, 214-16), and "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" (PW, II, 216).

23

I adopt Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire's dating of this poem. See PW, IV, 464-65.

24

The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years 1812-1820, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 189, January 1815.

Chapter Two:

1

Ernest de Selincourt, Dorothy Wordsworth: A Biography (1933; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 187.

2

R. C. Townsend, "John Wordsworth and His Brother's Poetic Development," PMLA 81 (1966), 72.

3

William and John were together during their early schooling, but once John went off to sea in 1788, at the age of fourteen, the brothers met only four or five times and only once for more than a few days. See Carl H. Ketcham, ed., The Letters of John Wordsworth (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969), Introduction, pp. 1-22.

4

The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver, p. 570, March 19, 1805. This edition will be cited as EL.

5

See, for instance, the letter of March 12, 1805, Wordsworth to Sir George Beaumont. EL, p. 556.

6

John Beer, Wordsworth and the Human Heart, p. 165.

7

EL, pp. 563-65, March 16, 1805. See also pp. 566, 570, 573. 575, etc.

8

Cf. Mary Wordsworth's words: "After all, as he tells us, his, is the greatest loss--because he says it is only our pleasures and our joys that are broken in upon--but [this] loss of John is deeply connected with his business." The Letters of Mary Wordsworth, ed. Mary E. Burton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 2, March 7, 1805.

9

For the details of the loss of the ship and the day-to-day details of Wordsworth's experience of his grievous loss, see E. L. McAdam, Jr., "Wordsworth's Shipwreck," PMLA 77 (1962), 240-47.

10

Wordsworth used this expression in the letter to Thomas Evans, April 15, 1805. EL, p. 579.

11

See Mark L. Reed, Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years, 1800-1815 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 248 & 290 and pp. 628-55.

12

The Prelude, pp. 462 & 464, XIII, 89-119. According to Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850, p. 520), and Mark L. Reed (Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years, 1800-1815, p. 15 and pp. 653-54), this passage is written in May 1805, and is probably a revised and extended version of material in the five-Book Prelude composed in January-March 1804.

13

The two Books of The Prelude preceding the passage quoted above were entitled "Imagination, How Impaired and Restored." Wordsworth later used the same expression, viz., "the glorious faculty," to refer to "imagination" in "Weak Is the Will of Man, His Judgment Blind."

14

PW, II, 122, "When, to the Attractions of the Busy World,"
1. 80.

15

For the details of Wordsworth's endeavor to clear his brother of any imputed dishonor, see E. L. McAdam's "Wordsworth's Shipwreck."

16

In the letter of May 1, 1805, Wordsworth said to Sir George Beaumont: "I shall, however never be at peace till, as far as in me lies, I have done justice to my departed Brother's memory. His heroic death . . . exacts this from me, and still more his singularly interesting character and virtuous and innocent life." EL, p. 586.

17

EL, p. 617, Dorothy to Lady Beaumont, Aug. 7, 1805.

18

PW, IV, 419, I. F. Note.

19

Hereafter cited as "Peele Castle."

20

Besides the three poems occasioned by John's death mentioned thus far, "Distressful Gift! This Book Receives" was also inspired by the same occasion. This short poem was composed probably between May 20 and July 5, 1805 (see PW, IV, 372-273). The sentiment in it is close to that in "Elegiac Verses in Memory of My Brother, John Wordsworth."

21

D. E. Hayden, for instance, suggests that the "hope" refers to the hope for immortality. See After Conflict, Quiet (New York: Exposition Press, 1951), p. 152.

22

Robert Daniel indicates that through "the surface statement, celebrating the new control, the fortitude and patient cheer that are now his, there transpires a melancholy 'feeling of loss,' produced by the knowledge that 'power is gone!'" (The Explicator, II (1943), 5). J. D. O'Hara goes further to assert that Wordsworth's change from his former state of mind to his later spiritual condition because of John's death is not voluntary and wholehearted. See "Ambiguity and Assertion in Wordsworth's 'Elegiac Stanzas,'" Philological Quarterly 48 (1968), 69-82.

23

Geoffrey H. Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814, p. 285.

24

J. D. O'Hara asserts that "Peele Castle" "does not find in nature a prop for faith, like the Ode; rather, it sees nature as man's enemy" ("Ambiguity and Assertion in Wordsworth's 'Elegiac Stanzas,'" p. 69.) John Beer also has a similar idea about the role of nature in "Peele Castle." See Wordsworth and the Human Heart, p. 167.

25

D. W. Harding, Experience into Words (New York: Horizon Press, 1963), p. 186.

26

The revision was adopted in 1820-1827. On the insistence of a friend, Wordsworth restored the original reading in 1832. See PW, IV, 259 & 455.

27

In John Jones' idea, the period in which Wordsworth was greatly interested in Roman Stoicism is the decade between the Intimations Ode and the publication of The Excursion. See The Egotistical Sublime, p. 142. But, Elizabeth Geen holds that by 1807 Wordsworth had rejected stoicism for Christianity. See "The Concept of Grace in Wordsworth's Poetry," PMLA 58 (1943), 700-01.

28

John Jones holds that the Roman severity is foreshadowed in the final stanza of "Peele Castle," citing the first two lines of the final stanza. See The Egotistical Sublime, p. 51.

29

Elizabeth Geen, p. 700.

30

M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), pp. 95-96.

Chapter Three:

1

This poem is used as a motto prefixed to the 1815 and 1820 editions of "The White Doe of Rylstone."

2

R. D. Havens, The Mind of a Poet (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1941), I, 197.

3

Hartman holds that Wordsworth's religion was "in process of identifying itself with Christianity" (Wordsworth's Poetry, p. 402.) In Havens' idea, "until he was thirty-five or forty there was nothing distinctively Christian about his thought." But after about the time of John's death, Wordsworth's attitude did change; and in his later years he "attached great importance to the church as an institution and tried, but with imperfect success, to accept its doctrinal teachings" (The Mind of a Poet, I, 180 & 198-99). John Jones designates Wordsworth's creative power in the years approximately after John's death the "Baptized Imagination." And Sperry also has the common understanding, as he says: "The poet himself made increasingly orthodox protestations as the years went on though he disclaimed any accurate knowledge of theological issues" (Wordsworth's Anti-Climax (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), p. 188).

4

Before "The White Doe," there are poems in which human suffering is regarded as a condition for the soul's exercise. For example, in "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle" (1806-07), it is mentioned that adversity had bred wisdom for Lord Clifford. But "The White Doe" is the first poem after "Peele Castle" in which the subject is seriously dealt with.

5

The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, 1806-11, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Mary Moorman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 222, April 19, 1808.

6

The white doe is also regarded as "a symbol of the past, the lovely phantom of buried memories" by Emile Legouis, and as "both the embodiment and symbol of the benignant powers of Nature" by S. F. Gingerich. For the references, see Alice Pattee Comparetti, ed., The White Doe of Rylstone by William Wordsworth: A Critical Edition, Cornell Studies in English XXIX (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1940), pp. 281 & 285-86.

7

M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 95.

8

See the discussion concerning Wordsworth's thought of imagination's role in encountering changes and calamities in the second chapter (pp. 41-42) of this thesis. Besides, Wordsworth in the short poem cited in the beginning of this chapter indicates explicitly that imagination is the power that enables one to cope courageously with "sorrow's keenest wind."

9

See Kenneth R. Johnston, "Wordsworth's Reckless Recluse: The Solitary," The Wordsworth Circle 9, No. 2 (Spring 1978), 133-34.

10

Johnston, p. 134.

11

For the "Addendum" see PW, V, 400-03.

12

The Solitary is greatly affected by the Pastor's stories. After the Pastor finishes his narration, the Solitary turns aside through "manly instinct to conceal [his] /Tender emotions" incited by the tales, or "with uneasy shame

For those cold humours of habitual spleen
That, fondly seeking in dispraise of man
Solace and self-excuse, had sometimes urged
To self-abuse a not ineloquent tongue.

(VII, 904-10)

It seems the Solitary has found in the characters of the Pastor's tales something he himself lacks, and realizes that he has been searching for an excuse for his own weakness.

13

The other failure character is Wilfred Armathwaite. His story was written in 1800 (see PW, V, 370).

14

See PW, V, 186, the Argument, l. 5.

15

The Pastor's descriptions of Ellen's story amount approximately to 260 lines (791-1052).

16

Carson C. Hamilton, Wordsworth's Decline in Poetic Power (New York: Exposition Press, 1963), pp. 359 & 358.

17

Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth: A Biography, the Later Years 1803-1850 (Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 181.

18

Since Butler's edition presents parallel texts of MS. B and MS. D only, for the comparison between the text of "The Ruined Cottage" and that of Margaret's story in the first book of The Excursion, see PW, V, 379-404.

19

See Chapter Two, p. 40 of this thesis.

20

Except the two stories in VI, 1080-191, which were written in 1800, the churchyard stories were composed during the years from 1809 to 1812. See PW, V, 456 & 463. The first "Essay upon Epitaphs" was written in 1810.

21

W. J. B. Owen and Jane W. Smyser, eds. The Prose Works of William Wordsworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), II, 51-52.

22

For the note, see PW, V, 444, Note 978.

23

Judson Stanley Lyon, The Excursion: A Study (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 63-64.

24

According to Lyon, the Pastor stands for "the strictly orthodox viewpoint"; the Wanderer represents "an active force of truth, goodness, and love," "the successful culmination of the unifying impulse of philosophy." On the other hand, the Solitary also represents part of the poet, the poet in the days of the Revolution. See The Excursion: A Study, pp. 67-71.

25

See the verse motto to "The White Doe," PW, III, 283.

26

For the myth, see Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Penguin Books, 1955), II, 296.

27

See The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, 1829-1834, ed. and rev. Alan G. Hill, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 215-16.

28

Felicia Hemans was a poetess befriended by Wordsworth.

29

Besides lines 934-40, from line 952 to line 955 ("that could maintain / Nowhere, dominion o'er the enlightened spirit / Whose meditative sympathies repose / Upon the breast of Faith") also appear only in and after the 1845 edition of the poem. See PW, V, 39, Book I, notes to ll. 934-40 and ll. 952-55.

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