

WORDSWORTH'S PRELUDE AND THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL

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AND
THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

The categories of the Sublime and the Beautiful, popularized during the eighteenth century, are central to Wordsworth's major poem The Prelude. In this poem, phrases which pair off fear or terror and love obviously recall Burke's theory of the sublime as having to do with ideas of self-preservation and the beautiful with ideas of love and society. In Book I of The Prelude Wordsworth interprets his formative experiences in terms of solitude and society, experiences of fear and friendship. This interpretation governs the entire poem, though in the final Books Wordsworth deprecates his tendency to respond excessively to the sublime. Other ideas of the sublime than Burke's also affected him powerfully. The theme of the mind's steady acquisition of power through its perception of nature as forming and mirroring the mind runs through The Prelude; it is stated at the conclusion of Book VII and in the "Climbing of Snowdon" episode of Book XIII. This theme is a modification of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Longinian sublime, which examines the mind's activities when it confronts grand and vast natural forms, and attributes to the mind capacities of expansion and elevation. In his own essay, "The Sublime and the Beautiful", belonging to the same period as his Guide to the Lakes, Wordsworth elaborates this idea, claiming that the mind is likely to respond in terms of either awe or elevation when it confronts forms

combining "individuality of form" with "duration" and "power". In The Prelude significant experience, involving the arousal and exercise of imagination, generally arises from some combination of simplicity, duration and power in phenomena. Wordsworth's interest in the sublime and beautiful developed through conventional, sensationalist response to the mountainous Lake District environment of his boyhood, and to the Alpine region he visited in 1790. But gradually he evolved a series of laws, stated in "The Sublime and the Beautiful" and implied in The Prelude, which accounted for the imaginative significance of sublime phenomena in terms of their ability to suggest unity, infinity and power. These qualities, once perceived, provided emblems of the imagination and provoked its exercise. The Prelude traces the growth of the imagination, explores its powers, and links it with sublimity. At the end of the poem, however, Wordsworth attaches equal importance to love and beauty. After the crisis of the French Revolution his sister Dorothy, Mary Hutchinson and Coleridge helped to restore his faith in man and nature by directing his attention to the beautiful. The Prelude therefore suggests that the beautiful is fundamentally important in promoting moral and spiritual health. But the poem's major theme is the growth of a poet's mind and imagination, and it is the sublime that is consistently yoked with imaginative vitality.

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When he saw that I was interested in Wordsworth and the sublime, Professor Owen very generously supplied me with the version he had edited of Wordsworth's unpublished essay on the Sublime and the Beautiful, in the form of corrected page proofs from the forthcoming Prose Works, of which he is co-editor. I am grateful for his kind permission to quote from this material here.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Enquiry Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. Second edition (London, 1759).
- E. Y. Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, ed. E. de Selincourt. Second edition, revised by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967).
- Guide Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes. Fifth edition (1835). Ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1970).
- Prel. The Prelude, ed. E. de Selincourt. Second edition, revised by Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1959). The text of 1805 is cited unless otherwise stated.
- Prose The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford, 1973).
- Zall Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth, ed. P. M. Zall (Lincoln, 1966).

I
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this essay is to explore, as specifically as possible, Wordsworth's use of the Sublime and Beautiful, twin categories of eighteenth-century aesthetics and psychology. The Prelude seems to be the work most obviously relevant to this exploration, since it is a poem about the growth of Wordsworth's mind and reveals, through discussion and example, how that mind interpreted nature through the years of its development.

The extraordinary number of doublets throughout the poem suggestive of these twin categories of experience makes obvious Wordsworth's assumption of a common way of viewing phenomena. The "sublime and beautiful" topic springs to mind immediately Wordsworth tells us that Man first became important to him because of his association with "objects that were great and fair" (The Prelude, VIII.451);¹ doublets of this kind, whether they simply typify landscape in a general way (e.g., "sublime and lovely forms"--XIII.146), or transpose the reference to psychological states induced by landscape (e.g., "danger or desire"--I.498), will appear so persistently

¹Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the poem are drawn from the 1805 version as printed in The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd ed. rev. Helen Barbichine (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). Quotations from the poem will be identified by book and line number alone.

throughout the following chapters that the multiplication of instances here is unnecessary. Yet few writers on The Prelude have recognized the underlying reference to a philosophy of aesthetic and psychological experience so popular during the eighteenth century, let alone thought it worth their while to consider that the reference might be more than superficial. Samuel Monk, in his classic study The Sublime, considered it unquestionable that "Wordsworth was a sharer of that experience which the eighteenth century had called 'sublime'", and drew attention to the Burkean antithesis of fear and love in Book I; but Monk was writing a study of the history of an idea, and his short discussion does not allow Wordsworth any more than a tenuous connection with the philosophy of his time: "Wordsworth could not wholly escape the aesthetic ideas of his age."² Marjorie Hope Nicolson, who in her book Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory approached the topic of the sublime from the standpoint of shifting attitudes to nature, made much more of Wordsworth's admiration for mountains and quoted to effect from Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes as well as from The Prelude; but she, too, was writing a general history which precluded an intensive study of Wordsworth.³ And in spite of the work of these writers in drawing attention to Wordsworth's place in a tradition of thought, references to Wordsworth and the Sublime and

²The Sublime. A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England (1935; rptd. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 227-32.

³Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory. The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite (Norton Library ed., New York, 1963), pp. 388-93.

Beautiful have occurred infrequently, and have remained superficial and unspecific.⁴

The obvious starting-point for an assessment of this topic in The Prelude must be Book I, which takes for granted to such an extent the two Burkean faces of fear and love, and accordingly I devote much of the first part of this study to a specific comparison of Burkean citations with the incidents of Wordsworth's childhood as they are recorded in the poem. But much of the material of The Prelude seems dependent on other models of the sublime than Burke's. W. J. B. Owen confirmed this when he published, in his Wordsworth as Critic, substantial portions from a hitherto unpublished manuscript essay by Wordsworth, directly concerned with the Sublime and Beautiful.⁵ This manuscript essay shows only slight continuity with the Burkean implications of Book I, but rather connects with such passages as the praise of mountains at the conclusion of Book VII, which speaks of the capacities of nature to elevate the mind. When eighteenth-century theorists like John Baillie referred to elevation as an effect of sublimity they generally quoted selected passages from "Longinus", and it is to this tradition that much of The Prelude belongs. He followed such theorists as Baillie and Gerard, too, in seeking to define those

⁴Two recent studies, however, relate the sublime and beautiful to The Prelude, recognizing more fully than previous writers the significance of the relationship. See James A. W. Heffernan, Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry. The Transforming Imagination (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 156-69; and M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism. Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 97-112.

⁵Wordsworth as Critic (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969). See especially Chapter 8, section IV, pp. 203-10.

qualities in objects necessary for sublimity. He found that they were individuality of form, duration and power; and the recurrence of such words as "simplicity", "endurance" and "power" in The Prelude suggests that the basic philosophy expressed in an essay written some five years after the first complete version of the poem might be the same as that pervading The Prelude. I have called this philosophy Wordsworth's "paradigm of grandeur" in order to differentiate it from the more strictly Burkean aspects of the poem on the one hand, and more conventional, untheoretical natural sublimity on the other.

No type of sublimity is without its underlying philosophy, crude or otherwise; but the kind of basic response to European mountain scenery which became so automatic with imaginative writers of the late eighteenth century, and which pervades travel diaries, journals and letters, alike in life and fiction, is often no more than Burke stripped of any basis in aesthetics. I call this the "sensational sublime". It is present wherever a writer or artist exploits scenery for emotional purposes, making nature the excuse for emotional theatricals, as when an artist makes the spectators' response a measure of the power of an avalanche, or a writer peoples his alpine tract with wolves, birds of prey and whitened bones. This, too, must be considered, because something led Wordsworth beyond the sensationalism of his early Descriptive Sketches to the formulation of an intelligent psychology and aesthetic in The Prelude and the essay "The Sublime and Beautiful"; this "something" probably explains Wordsworth's mature criteria for perception.

The sublime, perhaps to a lesser extent than the beautiful, is

undefinable, but in this essay I have used it only in the senses indicated above, not in the general sense of "high" nor as a term with rhetorical reference. The sublime of the following chapters has to do with the experience of distanced fear (Burke); with elevation of the mind and soul responding to certain forms of nature ("Longinus" as interpreted by the eighteenth century); with objects simple, durable and powerful (Wordsworth); or with types of sensation provoked by Alpine and similar scenery. The aim is not to prove influences on Wordsworth, but to place his own ideas in a more general context. Therefore I have been selective in my choice of authors and quotations, using them only when I believe that a certain passage throws light on what Wordsworth is saying in his prose or in The Prelude; similarly, passages from Wordsworth's prose, especially the essay "The Sublime and Beautiful" and the Guide to the Lakes have been used where they seem to illuminate The Prelude.

This study is concerned with the Beautiful to a much lesser extent than the Sublime, though I have devoted a chapter to it. There are several reasons for this. The beautiful has always stubbornly resisted definition, and when the sublime became a popular category of aesthetic psychology, it tended to find definition by simple contrast with the less stubborn sublime; thus, if sublimity implied disorder, beauty was seen as order. Wordsworth makes the sublime interesting because his imaginative processes are so clearly provoked by it. If we wish to understand why he made poetry out of certain phenomena we must have some understanding of what exercised power over his mind, and this leads directly into the sublime. Beauty, on the other hand, seems

to have had little to do with the imaginative process; in Book XIII of The Prelude it is associated with moral and emotional health in life. Wordsworth, like Burke, links beauty and love, but he is not at all interested in defining physical beauty. The topic of the picturesque does not enter the study at all, because Wordsworth himself defines it as a sterile methodology of perception, unrelated to meaningful imaginative experience.

This fuller study of Wordsworth's Prelude in its relationship to the Sublime and Beautiful, made possible by the new light thrown on Wordsworth's thought by his own essay, should show how conventional were the bases of his thought, and how integral the sublime became to his poetry and to his theory of the imagination.

II

BURKE AND WORDSWORTH ON THE SUBLIME

In the final book of The Prelude Wordsworth celebrates the faculty of the imagination in "higher minds" and acclaims the freedom and liberty he finds in those minds, in possession of a mature imagination, that are "truly from the Deity". He numbers himself among the genuinely free, attributing this freedom "to fear and love,"

to early intercourse,
In presence of sublime and lovely forms,
With the adverse principles of pain and joy.
(XIII.145-47)

This passage at the climax of the poem echoes, in its pairing of fear with love, pain with joy, and sublime with lovely forms, several similar references throughout The Prelude to emotions and qualities linked for purposes of association and contrast. Among these references may be mentioned "danger or desire" (I.498), "beauty and . . . fear" (I.306), fear and pleasure (I.631-32) and "Terror or . . . Love, / Or Beauty" (III.132-33). Wordsworth reiterates, time and again, that he associates healthy emotional and imaginative growth with a certain kind of response to the environment, in which nature appears as both beautiful and sublime, evoking in the perceiver now love, now fear; now joy, now pain.

When Wordsworth associates "fear and love" with "early intercourse / In presence of sublime and lovely forms" he is clearly adverting to the categories of the sublime and the beautiful so

popular among theorists and poets of the eighteenth century; and the use of the three terms "sublime", "fear" and "pain" in close proximity seems to echo particularly Burke's definition of the sublime:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Enquiry, I.vii)

In his definition of beauty, too, Burke offers a clue to Wordsworth's "lovely forms" and his juxtaposition of the words "love" and "beauty": "By beauty I mean, that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it" (Enquiry, III.i). Insofar as Wordsworth repeatedly associates fear and love as the two dominant human emotions it is likely that he is recalling the categories of the sublime and beautiful as Burke interpreted them, referring them to significant emotions in response to certain definable qualities in phenomena; and that Wordsworth's "fear", "pain" and "danger" are to be simply understood in terms of Burke's sublime of terror.¹ Much in The Prelude, in short, echoes not only general ideas of sublimity but specifically Burke's sublime of terror. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a basis for evaluating the role of the sublime of fear in The Prelude by outlining Burke's theory in its essentials² and then examining Wordsworth's theory in "The Sublime

¹"Terror" is Burke's characteristic term; I speak indiscriminately of terror and fear insofar as they refer to one theory of the sublime. Terror simply denotes a strong form of fear.

²It is not to our purpose to make any use of the physiological data of Part IV of the Enquiry, a section of Burke's theory that most

and the Beautiful" for comparison.

I

In a sentence that expresses most directly the essential point of his theory, Burke states that "terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime" (Enquiry, II.ii); for his comprehensive treatment of the sublime and the beautiful rests not, as we might expect, on qualities discovered in objects, but on the sensations and experience of the subject. The significance for Burke of the sublime--produced as it is by whatever awakes "ideas of pain, and danger"--is that it is productive of strong emotion and involves passions which relate to ideas of self-preservation; hence terror is its measure. Moreover, the effect of the terrible sublime is to thwart the mind so that it loses its power to entertain other emotions and thoughts: "No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear" (Enquiry, II.ii). The sublime seizes the mind and, in the strongest word Burke applies to the experience, astonishes it: "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (Enquiry, II.i). The ultimate sublime, then, rests on the union of terror with astonishment noticed previously by John Dennis:

of his critics deplore. See W. J. Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-century British Aesthetic Theory (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), p. 98.

Things then that are powerful, and likely to hurt, are the causes of Common Terror, and the more they are powerful and likely to hurt, the more they become the causes of Terror, which Terror, the greater it is, the more it is join'd with wonder, and the nearer it comes to astonishment.³

Like Dennis, Burke recognizes a scale of emotion, in which "Astonishment . . . is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect" (Enquiry, II.i). The sublime scale runs the gamut from astonishment to respect, but every step depends on an apprehension of terror, imminent or potential, or on circumstances associated with terror.

Because the thrust of his theory is sensationalist, raising itself on the experiences of the subject, Burke discards the tendency of his predecessors to define sublimity in terms of the qualities of objects, claiming that "Whatever . . . is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror, be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on any thing as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous" (Enquiry, II.ii). The sublime is not to be associated with physical grandeur or vastness alone; a mountain may be considered sublime to the extent that it can cause fear, and conversely a venomous snake will certainly evoke the sublime, inspiring terror.

In resisting the notion that experience of the sublime involves an intellectual response to qualities in objects, Burke short-circuits the mind; for he defines astonishment as that state of the soul, in which all its motions are

³The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry (London, 1704), pp. 69-70.

suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. (Enquiry, II.i)

The sublime at its most powerful usurps the mind's powers; "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" in fact forces the mind into a temporary abeyance.

If this were all that Burke had to say about the experience of the sublime, his theory would be merely an eccentric dead-end, for the fascination of the sublime lay in its demand for an explanation of the satisfaction men can derive from the overpowering and menacing as they do from the beautiful. As Walpole remarked in a letter to Richard West, "Mount Cenis . . . carries the permission mountains have of being frightful too far; and its horrors were accompanied with too much danger to give one time to reflect upon their beauties." ⁴ The eighteenth-century man thought of the sublime as a necessarily pleasurable experience in the face of potential terror; and Burke, while denying any role to "reflection" in his theory, had to account for the satisfaction attendant upon the sublime. Consequently, he modifies his emphasis upon astonishment and horror to admit that effective danger precludes the sublime:

terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close. (Enquiry, I.xiv)

⁴Letter dated September 30, 1793 (U.S.), quoted in Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 355.

When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience. (*Enquiry*, I.vii)

To Burke, experience of the terrible, when it does not actually threaten the observer, is neither simply painful nor simply pleasurable, and he is careful to prepare the foundations for his theory of the sublime of terror by positing the existence of a kind of pleasure that is entirely distinct from "positive pleasure" and that allies itself with the potentially painful without sharing the characteristics of "positive pain". To this state he gives the name "delight". When the sublime is experienced it is affording delight, not pain nor pleasure. A precondition for, though not the cause of, the delight that offers itself in the terrible sublime is the freedom of the experiencing subject from actual terror. At the same time, nothing that is not to some degree potentially terrible or analogous to terror will affect with delight.

Clearly Burke's ultimate, astonishing terror does not permit of the traditional notion of the sublime, deriving from Longinus, that it affords satisfaction by expanding or elevating the mind: "It is our nature to be elevated and exalted by true sublimity. Filled with joy and pride, we come to believe we have created what we have only heard." ⁵ Longinus is talking about the rhetorical sublime, but from Boileau on the theorists applied the notion of elevation to the natural sublime, so that Gerard can state, echoing several ideas of

⁵"Longinus", *On Sublimity*, tr. D. A. Russell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 7.

Burke, that

We always contemplate objects and ideas with a disposition similar to their nature. When a large object is presented, the mind expands itself to the extent of that object, and is filled with one grand sensation, which totally possessing it, composes it into a solem sedateness, and strikes it with deep silent wonder and admiration: it finds such a difficulty in spreading itself to the dimensions of its object, as enlivens and invigorates its frame: and having overcome the opposition which this occasions, it sometimes imagines itself present in every part of the scene, which it contemplates.⁶

Gerard's statement, later than Burke's Enquiry, demands quotation because it puts so clearly the classic sublime theme of elevation. When the eye and the mind encounter a sublime object something happens, but that "something" can be stated only in terms of "as if". It is as if the sublime object actually challenges the powers of the observer; as if the mind possesses material and spatial qualities; as if the mind can expand; and as if in expanding it can overcome the object presented. Burke incorporates this idea only in passing, in a section entitled "Ambition"; clearly the notion is not entirely consistent with his emphasis on terror. Nevertheless he recognizes its relevance:

Now whatever either on good or upon bad grounds tends to raise a man in his own opinion, produces a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind; and this swelling is never more perceived, nor operates with more force, than when without danger we are conversant with terrible objects, the mind always claiming to itself some part of the dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates.

(Enquiry, I.xvii)

Although hardly compatible with the complete subjugation of the mind that Burke calls astonishment, "swelling and triumph" is a part of

⁶An Essay on Taste (London, 1759), p. 14.

the sublime experience when terrible objects that have "dignity and importance" are contemplated by a subject in no danger from them.

In Burke's theory, then, the sublime is defined primarily without description of objects and their qualities. His sublime depends on the experience of the delightfully terrible, what might be called unarmed terror, and this terror is sublime whether or not it resides in an object of magnitude; thus Burke frees the sublime from its generally inevitable attachment to natural grandeur. The sublime makes its effect prior to the subject's reasoning faculties coming into play, but when terror is linked with "dignity and importance" (terms which imply some degree of physical grandeur) the mind can be elevated and dignified. Such are the essentials of Burke's theory; only secondarily does he turn to a consideration of specific qualities in objects or sense-data that, annexed to terror or analogous to it, awaken the sublime.

Part II of the Enquiry is a catalogue of qualities in the objects of sense perception that call forth sublimity. He starts with the idea of obscurity, linking this with terror:

To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger. (Enquiry, II.iii)

Full knowledge precludes the sublime, so that it is such "privations" as vacuity, darkness and silence that, giving scope to the imagination, impart apprehension and fear. By extension, Burke can claim that "a clear idea is a little idea" and argue for the superiority of

literature over painting on account of the former's greater power to suggest. For the production of grand images, obscurity and darkness are pre-eminent; and "An immense mountain covered with a shining green turf, is nothing . . . to one dark and gloomy; the cloudy sky is more grand than the blue; and night more sublime and solemn than day" (Enquiry, II.xvi). Obscure sounds, low, tremulous and intermitting, "leave us in . . . fearful anxiety concerning their causes" (II.xix). Obscurity is productive of the sublime simply because obscure conditions promote anxiety and terror.

Infinity, because it does not permit bounds, is a further sublime idea. In fact, there are few ideas and no images that are truly infinite, but many objects and ideas which strike the observer as unbounded "make some sort of approach towards infinity" (Enquiry, II.iv):

the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so. We are deceived in the like manner, if the parts of some large object are so continued to any indefinite number, that the imagination meets no check which may hinder its extending them at pleasure. (Enquiry, II.viii)

Infinity can be suggested in objects of a reasonable size by an inherent pattern. This infinity Burke calls the "artificial infinite" and it is produced where the object meets the requirements of "succession" and "uniformity", that is, where it convinces us that it progresses "beyond [its] actual limits" by a regular, uniform extension in one direction. According to this law Burke finds the rotunda sublime, but not the exterior of a church with transepts.

Power suggests the sublime and is involved necessarily in all

sublimity; Burke knows of "nothing sublime which is not some modification of power. And this branch rises . . . from terror, the common stock of every thing that is sublime" (Enquiry, II.v). By power Burke seems to mean, simply, strength that has the capability of frightening. The idea of God is the most powerful there is, because the idea of God's power strikes the senses and imagination before milder ideas connected with divinity. Moreover, power obviously resides in objects and living things that do not necessarily inflict actual terror; but "the ideas of pain, and above all of death, are so very affecting, that whilst we remain in the presence of whatever is supposed to have the power of inflicting either, it is impossible to be perfectly free from terror" (II.v). Burke's power is lodged in whatever defies our control and thus might inflict pain on us. It is not an automatic concomitant of great size or bulk, for if this were so man would find the ox and the bull equally powerful. They do indeed share the attributes of size and strength, yet are not equally powerful to Burke, since the former is subservient to man, the latter potentially dangerous. The bull has sublimity but the ox is relatively contemptible:

That power derives all its sublimity from the terror with which it is generally accompanied, will appear evidently from its effect in the very few cases, in which it may be possible to strip a considerable degree of strength of its ability to hurt. When you do this, you spoil it of every thing sublime, and it immediately becomes contemptible. (Enquiry, II.v)

A second kind of power, that of force exerted in the subjugation of materials for man's purposes, Burke calls "difficulty"; Stonehenge's "rude masses of stone, set on end, and piled each on

other, turn the mind on the immense force necessary for such a work" (Enquiry, II.xii). The emphasis here is not on the object itself but on the reflections it inspires. Man feels awe because he senses the forces and strength involved in raising such a monument, and presumably terror is also indirectly involved in this experience, since such force and energy could be imagined capable of inflicting pain and death.

Burke is nowhere interested in grandeur or size for its own sake, and he refuses to make such qualities a necessary condition of the sublime. In the section on "Vastness" (II.vii) he asserts that "greatness of dimension, is a powerful cause of the sublime" but he links the idea of size with other ideas. Vastness itself refers more particularly to extension in plane surfaces; it would be conducive to sublimity presumably in its relation to infinity. The other two forms, height and depth, relate more easily to the notion of terror itself. Thus, to look down from a precipice would be a more sublime experience than looking up to a summit, and "the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished". While the sublime in grand natural forms (such as ocean, desert and mountain) depends upon the two ideas of danger and infinity, "magnitude in building" depends upon the infinite only: "To the sublime in building, greatness of dimension seems requisite; for on a few parts, and those small, the imagination cannot rise to any idea of infinity" (Enquiry, II.x). Burke is again referring to the "artificial infinite" here, for he adds that "Designs that are vast

only by their dimensions, are always the sign of a common and low imagination." Infinity is a suggestion of pattern rather than of mere extension.

Finally, Burke discusses light, colour and sound in terms of the sublime. Both light and sound convey sublimity when they are extreme or sudden. Extreme light, such as the direct glare of the sun, indeed approaches darkness in its effect by blotting out the objects of sight. "Natural effects like thunder and the sound of cataracts overpower. Lightning affects by its rapid motion, and similarly sudden beginnings or cessation of considerable sound affect. Concentrated, forceful and repeated sound (like that of the "striking of a great clock when the silence of the night prevents the attention from being too much dispersed") produces awe.

Burke's sublime is consistently a sublime of terror, building itself on the assumptions that sublimity issues from strong emotion, and that the strongest emotions are connected with ideas of self-preservation. Basically sensationalist, his theory refers the sublime emphatically to human experience as it is felt prior to the activity of complex reflection. Phenomena come under the dominion of the sublime only insofar as they have to do, directly or indirectly, with ideas of danger, pain and terror. With reference to the human mind Burke's sublime affects more by astonishing than by elevating; with reference to sense-data, obscurity and power are the major constants in promoting terror. By choosing to emphasize terror, Burke has discounted physical greatness; more importantly, he has brought mind

and phenomena into a close relationship with each other by seeking for a series of laws under which the mind is affected in the sublime experience.

II

Wordsworth published no systematic theory of the sublime and beautiful but he did intend one; and besides his Guide to the Lakes, which contains scattered observations on the topic, we have his fragment "The Sublime and the Beautiful", ⁷ unpublished during his life, which constitutes a coherent if incomplete account of his mature thinking about the sublime. Like Burke, Wordsworth emphasizes the processes of mind involved in sublimity rather than qualities in objects which can, per se, be considered sublime:

I am persuaded that it is of infinite importance to the noblest feelings of the Mind & to its very highest powers that the forms of Nature should be accurately contemplated, &, if described, described in language that shall prove that we understand the several grand constitutional laws under which it has been ordained that these objects should everlastingly affect the mind. (Prose, II, p. 350)

Wordsworth is interested in those laws under which the mind operates and, like Burke, thinks it important to discover them. Objects demand accurate attention not for their own sakes but for what they reveal about the human mind. Their importance is that through converse with the forms of Nature the human mind may recognize its own operations and powers.

⁷Much of my discussion of Wordsworth's theory of sublimity here and in Chapter IV overlaps with W. J. B. Owen's section on "The Power of the Sublime" in Wordsworth as Critic, pp. 203-10. This is inevitable, because his book is the only one yet to make use of the essay "The Sublime and the Beautiful".

Wordsworth's discussion focuses largely on the form of the mountain. For the mountain form to be felt as sublime it is necessary that the complete form be seen and that it be the only object that is seen. This is a condition, not a cause; for its sublimity will consist in three senses the spectator derives from it: a sense of individual form, a sense of duration and a sense of power. The spectator experiences the sublime only when he can attribute these three qualities to one form. He must sense that this form has existed since time immemorial, and that it is able to exert power.

Of these three qualities, "power" fascinates Wordsworth most, evidently because it is that power inherent in objects also possessing individual form and duration which claims some kind of relationship with the observer's mind: "with [a sense of individual form and a sense of duration] must be combined impressions of power, to a sympathy with & a participation of which the mind must be elevated--or to a dread and awe of which, as existing out of itself, it must be subdued" (Prose, II, pp. 351-52). In fact, Wordsworth does not define power explicitly, but its meaning emerges from considering its force on the mind. On the one hand, power may impress the mind and, by offering a challenge, persuade the mind of its own power; this is a common notion of the sublime, already exemplified in passages from Longinus, Burke and Gerard. Longinus talks about the elevation and exaltation of our nature; Burke about "a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind"; and Gerard about "expansion". Wordsworth's "sympathy with & participation of" power

seems akin to Gerard's notion that the mind "sometimes imagines itself present in every part of the scene which it contemplates." To all three of the writers on the natural sublime the experience can be elevating inasmuch as it persuades the subject to believe that his mind enlarges to share the sublime characteristics of the object. For Wordsworth this characteristic is power. On the other hand, the form contemplated may possess such grandeur and communicate such power that it subdues the mind. It is this second possibility that Burke emphasizes, a process in which the mind is astonished, the motions of the soul "suspended, with some degree of horror."

There are patterns and shapes in natural forms, specifically here mountains, Wordsworth believes, that determine the nature of the spectator's response, either raising him to sympathy and participation or subduing him to dread and awe:

A mountain being a stationary object is enabled to effect [these] in connection with duration and individual form, by the sense of motion which in the mind accompanies the lines by which the Mountain itself is shaped out. These lines may either be abrupt and precipitous, by which danger & sudden change is expressed; or they may flow into each other like the waves of the sea, and, by involving in such image a feeling of self-propagation infinitely continuous and without cognizable beginning, these lines may thus convey to the mind sensations not less sublime than those which were excited by their opposites, the abrupt and the precipitous.

(Prose, II, p. 352)

The division of these patterns into flowing and abrupt recalls Burke; the first bears a similarity to his discussion of the "artificial infinite" in which succession and uniformity persuade the observer that the pattern is, in Wordsworth's phrase, "infinitely continuous"; the second is akin to his statement that "the effects of a rugged and

broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished." Wordsworth does not share Burke's preference for "strong emotion" but obviously both Burke and Wordsworth link the abrupt and rugged with dread and danger, the smooth and flowing with infinity.

Burke wrote that he knew of "nothing sublime which [was] not some modification of power", linking power with terror; for terror remained the essential spring of his sublime. Power seems to play the equivalent role in Wordsworth's theory. Throughout "The Sublime and the Beautiful" Wordsworth reiterates the point about the different conditions under which power "awakens the sublime". When the mind is elevated, roused to a "sympathetic energy", the sublime achievement is that the mind, while not attaining its goal, "participates force which is acting upon it"; when the mind is humiliated or prostrated, its grandeur "subsists in the naked fact of being conscious of external Power at once awful & immeasurable". In both of these states the spectator enjoys a sensation of "intense unity" in which he loses consciousness of himself as separate from the object before him (Prose, II, p.354).

Later in the essay Wordsworth adds yet a third condition under which power effects the sublime--"resistance". Power acts "upon our moral or spiritual nature" by "awakening energy either that would resist or that [hopes] to participate" (Prose, p. 355). Presumably power too immediately forbidding to invite participation incites the mind to resist it, if that power is not so forbidding that it prostrates the mind. Evidently the mind's achievement of the sublime by this act of resistance is greater than in the act of sympathy and

participation:

there is no sublimity excited by the contemplation of power thought of as a thing to be resisted & which the moral law enjoins us to resist, saving only as far as the mind, either by glances or continuously, conceives that that power may be overcome or rendered evanescent, and as far as it feels itself tending towards the unity that exists in security or absolute triumph. (Prose, II, p. 356)

Wordsworth might seem to be introducing a confusion into his theory by describing this third mode of response to power, whose end would seem to be to plunder the object of its sublimity by rendering its power evanescent. However, the confusion is apparent rather than real, and this third mode is but a different way of presenting the idea of participation in the force of the sublime object; and this idea, as we have seen, is a classic element of the sublime, deriving from Longinus. It is the emphasis that is different in this additional statement, and that emphasis is on the notion of resistance: the subject confronts the powerful object and his mind, in the words of Gerard, finds "such a difficulty in spreading itself to the dimensions of its object, as enlivens and invigorates its frame." Gerard presupposes that the object constitutes a "challenge"; to Wordsworth, a powerful object promotes the experience of sublimity in this way (i.e. by challenging or inviting resistance) only when the subject believes that his mind will prove superior to the power contemplated, even to the extent of rendering that power "evanescent". To put it simply, the basis of resistance is belief that the resistance will prove successful; but it is the process of resistance that is central to the experience, and presumably all that is necessary for the experience to be satisfactory is that the mind may feel itself "tending towards the

unity that exists in security or absolute triumph." Thus Wordsworth's third mode is not far removed from Burke's "swelling and triumph . . . extremely grateful to the human mind."

Wordsworth himself provides, in "The Sublime and the Beautiful", a sophisticated model to illustrate the notion of resistance, in the account of the fall of the Rhine at Schaffhausen, where the two forces opposed are rock and water--"the Rock in the middle of the fall of the Rhine at Chafhausen, as opposed for countless ages to that mighty mass of Waters":

there are undoubtedly here before us two distinct images & thoughts; & there is a most complex instrumentality acting upon the senses, such as the roar of the Water, the fury of the foam, &c.; and an instrumentality still more comprehensive, furnished by the imagination, & drawn from the length of the River's course, the Mountains from which it rises, the various countries thro' which it flows, & the distant Seas in which its waters are lost. These images & thoughts will, in such a place, be present to the mind, either personally or by representative abstractions more or less vivid. Yet to return to the rock & the Waterfall: these objects will be found to have exalted the mind to the highest state of sublimity when they are thought of in that state of opposition & yet reconciliation, analogous to parallel lines in mathematics, which, being infinitely prolonged, can never come nearer to each other; & hence, tho' the images & feelings above enumerated have exerted a preparative influence upon the mind, the absolute crown of the impression is infinity, which is a modification of unity. (Prose, II, pp. 356-57)

Wordsworth denotes the rock's resistance as "of a passive nature" whereas the mind of the resisting observer is hardly so; the rock and waterfall are in a "state of opposition & yet reconciliation" unlike the observer confronting his powerful object in the hope of making it "evanescent"; yet in both cases the key to sublimity is resistance yielding unity. The resistant mind approaches "the unity that exists in security or absolute triumph"; to use Gerard's words, it "imagines

itself present in every part of the scene, which it contemplates" and knows it as a whole, identical with the experience of the observer's mind. The rock and the waterfall are like parallel lines continued infinitely; an example of Burke's "artificial infinite", they can be compared with his example of the rotunda and, having neither beginning nor end, they can indeed seem "a modification of unity".⁸

Burke's power, a strength threatening danger to man, invites astonishment; Wordsworth's power invites elevation, participation and even opposition.⁹ In general, Wordsworth finds sublimity where

⁸Elsewhere, Wordsworth has this comment on the relationship between infinity, multitude and unity:

It is indeed true, that in countries where the larch is a native, and where, without interruption, it may sweep from valley to valley, and from hill to hill, a sublime image may be produced by such a forest, in the same manner as by one composed of any other single tree, to the spreading of which no limits can be assigned. For sublimity will never be wanting, where the sense of innumerable multitude is lost in, and alternates with, that of intense unity. (Guide, p. 87)

⁹In the following passage Hume not only admits the common idea of elevation but hints at the concepts of resistance and opposition of which Wordsworth was to make so much:

'Tis a quality very observable in human nature, that any opposition, which does not entirely discourage and intimidate us, has rather a contrary effect, and inspires us with a more than ordinary grandeur and magnanimity. In collecting our force to overcome the opposition, we invigorate the soul, and give it an elevation with which otherwise it wou'd never have been acquainted. Compliance, by rendering our strength useless, makes us insensible of it: but opposition awakens and employs it.

This is also true in the universe. Opposition not only enlarges the soul; but the soul, when full of courage and magnanimity, in a manner seeks opposition. . . .

Whatever supports and fills the passions is agreeable to us; as on the contrary, what weakens and infeebls them is uneasy. As opposition has the first effect, and facility the second, no wonder the mind, in certain dispositions, desires the former, and is averse to the latter.

These principles have an effect on the imagination as well as

countervailing forces achieve some kind of satisfying stasis, where powers of destruction are opposed. Yet in a revealing passage in his Guide to the Lakes he admits a susceptibility also to Burke's destructive power. Comparing the Alps to the mountains of the Lake District for evidences of sublimity he notes that

Among the Alps are few places that do not preclude this feeling of tranquil sublimity. Havoc, and ruin, and desolation, and encroachment, are everywhere more or less obtruded; and it is difficult, notwithstanding the naked loftiness of the pikes, and the snow-capped summits of the mounts, to escape from the depressing sensation that the whole are in a rapid process of dissolution; and, were it not that the destructive agency must abate as the heights diminish, would, in time to come, be levelled with the plains. Nevertheless, I would relish to the utmost the demonstrations of every species of power at work to effect such changes. (p. 99)

The exhibition of this destructive power might be impressive, and sublime in a crude way; but the balance of resisting forces produces a higher kind of sublimity, and it is this balance Wordsworth makes a feature of in the essay.

To summarise, power is the main quality of Wordsworth's sublime, cohering in forms that instance individuality and duration; it awakens the sublime response by inviting the mind to sympathise with it or by convincing the mind, unable to raise itself, of its superiority; it invites, in certain circumstances, resistance; it leads to a sensation of unity. It is obviously linked with fear to the

the passions. To be convinc'd of this we need only consider the influence of heights and depths on that faculty. Any great elevation of place communicates a kind of pride or sublimity of imagination, and gives a fancy'd superiority over those that lie below; and, vice versa, a sublime and strong imagination conveys the idea of ascent and elevation. (A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. Ernest C. Mossner [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969], pp. 480-81).

extent that it may induce dread and awe, but it has a much wider scope. It seems to signify that grandeur and energy in natural forms which invite the observer to answer by recognizing a corresponding grandeur and energy in his own mental faculties.

The significant distinction between Burke's theory of the sublime and that of Wordsworth is the basic emphasis the one gives to the notion of terror, the other to the idea of power. As we have seen, Wordsworth's discussion begins with a definition of the sublime as that which, when contemplated as an entire grand form, imparts a sense of individual form, of duration and of power. The notion of fear enters the discussion apparently only incidentally, when Wordsworth considers possible objections to his linking of individual form, duration and power as necessarily combined. It might be objected, for example, that a person familiar with mountainous country remembers having been impressed in childhood "by a sensation of sublimity from a precipice, in which awe or personal apprehension were the predominant feelings of his mind, & from which the milder influence of duration seemed to be excluded." Wordsworth proceeds to answer this objection by exemplifying a child's reaction to a cloud. A child can imagine the cloud as a precipitous form, solid like a precipice and able "to support a substantial body." He might even imagine himself seated on this cloud, investing it thereby "with some portion of the terror which belongs to the precipice." Yet in fact the child realises that the cloud lacks duration, and consequently is more likely to think of the cloud as evanescent than to find it exciting in him those "feelings of dread" associated with the features of a precipice.

(Prose, II, p. 353)

Fear seems to be excluded from Wordsworth's direct definition of the sublime because fear, insofar as feelings of sublimity depend on it, diminishes with growth, knowledge and experience. Wordsworth had earlier maintained that increasing knowledge of and familiarity with sublime objects were not likely to destroy the appreciation of them as sublime. By contrast, Burke's "astonishment" seems to imply the opposite as likely. But Wordsworth's theory takes account, as Burke's does not, of personal development. As the child grows, objects do not lose their power to impress as sublime; they simply impress for other reasons:

Familiarity with these objects tends very much to mitigate & to destroy the power which they have to produce the sensation of sublimity as dependent upon personal fear or upon wonder; a comprehensive awe takes the place of the one, and a religious admiration of the other, & the condition of the mind is exalted accordingly. (Prose, II, p. 353)

In terms of Burke's degrees of the sublime, Wordsworth's process of growth involves a descent from astonishment to awe and respect with a gain in the capacity of the mind to be exalted; where Burke had emphasized the sublimity of astonishment and similar strong emotions that subjugate the mind, Wordsworth sees maturity as strengthening the mind's power so that sublimity calls forth a corresponding grandeur in the subject.

On the other hand, if "personal fear & surprize or wonder have not been carried beyond certain bounds" children and novices can experience the sublime of fear. Fear conveys sublimity when it "suspends the comparing power of the mind & possesses it with a

feeling of intense unity without a contemplation of parts." This state of unity is "the consummation of the sublime". In that it robs the mind of certain of its normal powers, this state seems comparable to Burke's astonishment in which "all [the] motions [of the soul] are suspended, with some degree of horror." Like Wordsworth, Burke had recognized that when fear presses too close it forbids the experience of the sublime; a person about to be crushed by the force of an avalanche will hardly be disposed to appreciate its sublimity. To Wordsworth, the "feeling or image of intense unity" is destroyed when too much personal fear is felt, because the fearful spectator wishes to separate himself from "the object exciting the fear" (Prose, II, pp. 353-54).

When he comes to talk about fear in connection with the Deity, Wordsworth again disagrees with Burke in dissociating the sublime from terror. Burke had asserted that when our thoughts turn to God, the immediate impression or sensation we entertain is of the fearful, potentially destructive power of God. Wordsworth would consider this to prevent the sublime:

if the object contemplated be of a spiritual nature, as that of the Supreme Being, for instance (though few minds, I will hope, are so far degraded that with reference to the Deity they can be affected by sensations of personal fear, such as a precipice, a conflagration, a torrent, or a shipwreck might excite), yet it may be confidently affirmed that no sublimity can be raised by the contemplation of such power when it presses upon us with pain and individual fear to a degree which takes precedence in our thoughts [over] the power itself. (Prose, II, p. 354)

Here as elsewhere in the essay Wordsworth puts severe limits on the sensational powers of the sublime. He would not agree with Burke's characteristic tribute to the sublimity that "hurries us on with an

irresistible force".

The difference between the two theories is one of emphasis. Both writers evidently consider that the sublime has more to do with the operations of the human mind than with external phenomena. Both regard power as a notion central to sublimity. Where Wordsworth disagrees with Burke it is because he has given more thorough attention to the two polar effects of the sublime, those of elevation and prostration; and because he has accounted more carefully for the role of fear. Because Burke starts from the extreme position of basing the sublime on terror, he gives minimal attention to that aspect of the experience which establishes some approach to analogy between mind and nature. And because his theory is static, he gives no thought to the effects of experience on the mind. Wordsworth admits fear to his theory, but only as a preparative influence whose importance diminishes as knowledge, accurate contemplation and increased powers of mind lead to maturity. Burke's spectator must perforce remain largely passive in the face of the sublime; Wordsworth grants that passivity is sometimes inevitable, but he generally views sublimity as a challenge to the mind which can be met with a resulting access of power to the experiencing subject. It is this split that is involved when Burke places a premium on the upper rungs of the ladder of emotions--astonishment, terror and wonder--while Wordsworth emphasizes the lower rungs of awe, admiration and respect.

III

THE SUBLIME OF FEAR IV WORDSWORTH'S PRELUDE

Arguing that "the pervasive influence of Burke's Enquiry on language and habits of observation cannot be discounted" a recent editor of that work recognizes the strong possibility that Burke's influence is to be seen in The Prelude:

In the discipline of "beauty" and of "fear" of which Wordsworth makes so much in The Prelude we may have a relic--given, of course, added significance by the poet's personal vision--of Burke's division of aesthetic experience into that which causes "love, or some passion similar to it", and that which "operates in a manner analogous to terror". The presentation of certain events in the poem also gives more than a hint that Wordsworth's method of self-analysis had been at least partly shaped by his reading of the Enquiry. Book I of The Prelude, for example, in which he begins to show how Nature filled his mind "with forms sublime or fair", turns principally on evidence of "the impressive discipline of fear".¹

It is not part of my argument to claim that Wordsworth was directly influenced by Burke's treatise, though he had probably read it; but, given the persistence with which The Prelude reiterates the dual influence of fear, danger and pain on the one hand and love on the other,² the Burkean sublime pervades the poem as more than a "relic". This chapter attempts a close analysis of fear in the poem in the

¹Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. ci.

²See, for example, the following passages: I.305-06, 494-501, 631-40; III.131-36; IV.240-46; XIII.143-49, 244-46.

light of the Enquiry. Such an analysis reveals that, however much Wordsworth may be said to have developed a rather different critique of the sublime, certain of Burke's principles are at work throughout the poem; and, as Boulton suggests, the experiences of Book I provide the logical starting-point for an exploration of these principles.

The "stolen boat" episode (I.372-427) is certainly the most striking, as it is the most obviously Burkean, of Wordsworth's instances of Nature's "ministry / More palpable" in The Prelude. It is an account of how a state of guilt operated in alliance with external circumstance to produce terror. Stealing, or (more accurately) borrowing the boat was to the small boy "an act of stealth / And troubled pleasure". As in the earlier "snaring woodcocks" episode, feelings of guilt had the effect of sharpening the young Wordsworth's responses to the sense data around him so that he noticed such sounds as "the voice / Of mountain-echoes" which accompanied the boat's movement through the water. But a natural illusion troubled the pleasure of the rower. Moving away from a mountain ridge but still facing it, he could not see until he was some distance from it--and it had ceased to bound the horizon--that behind it was another, taller ridge; and as he rowed away, the dominating ridge, as it rose above the smaller one, appeared to grow in size and so to move towards him. The spectacle impressed with such terror that the boy returned the skiff to harbour rapidly; for some time the cliff's remembered image thwarted his ability to perceive the ordinary world of "familiar shapes" and "hourly objects".

The poetic account of this experience is notably successful in reproducing all the elements and imagery of the incident through the stages of its effect on the young boy. The boat is discovered by "unexpected chance" though the act of borrowing it is one "of stealth / And troubled pleasure", but the effect of the incident is portentous and lasting. At first the action of rowing produces something like a musical cadence, but when the "huge Cliff" looms up, the oars strike in desperation. The boat moves "like a Man who walks with stately step / Though bent on speed" and heaves "through the water, like a Swan"; but later it is the cliff that strides after the boy "with measur'd motion, like a living thing".³ Before the cliff is thrust into view the mountains are "hoary" but everything else clear, the moving boat

Leaving behind her still on either side
 Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
 Until they melted all into one track
 Of sparkling light (391-94);

³With the description of the "huge Cliff" as replacing the lesser steep and becoming a new bound to the horizon, blotting out the stars and seeming to possess "voluntary power", compare the following passages from drafts of "The Sublime and the Beautiful":

these outlines [i.e., of mountains] also affect us not merely by sensations referable to motion but by dim analogies which they bear to such parts of organized bodies as height of stature head neck shoulders back breast &c. which are dignified in our estimation as being the seats & instruments of active force

the influence of these lines is heightened if the mountain before us be not over-topped by or included in others but does itself form a boundary of the horizon for thus all these turbulent or awful sensations of power are excited in immediate contrast with the fathomless depth & the serenity of the sky or in contrast of another kind the permanent mountain's individual form is opposed to the fleeting or changeful clouds which pass over it or lastly the sense of grandeur which it excites is heightened by the powers of the atmosphere that are visibly allied with it (Prose, II, pp. 352-53, app. crit.)

the cliff has the effect, immediate and prolonged, of blotting out the stars and imposing utter darkness. Moving out into the lake the boy "proudly row'd / With his best skill" but the return is furtive: "with trembling hands I turn'd, / And through the silent water stole my way".

The terror that this situation imposed was remarkable for its extended effect. The boy returned home "with grave / And serious thoughts" but the cliff continued to pursue him:

and after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Work'd with a dim and undetermin'd sense
Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
There was a darkness, call it solitude,
Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty Forms that do not live
Like living men mov'd slowly through my mind
By day and were the trouble of my dreams. (417-27)

The cliff's immediate effect was to blot out the stars; in the longer term it usurped not only the horizon but also the boy's eye and mind, introducing Burke's four "general privations": vacuity ("blank desertion, no familiar shapes"), darkness, solitude and silence. The overpowering memory (or, even, presence) of the cliff left no room for the actual and perceivable images of everyday nature. What was more terrifying, to the boy Wordsworth the object seemed to possess attributes of life, although this life was clearly not that of "living men"; it could move and, like Burke's powerful animals, it seemed to have the will and the strength to inflict suffering. In The Prelude this incident seems to be a clear example of the sublime of fear raised to its most dramatic pitch, that of astonishment; and it is

Burke's definition of astonishment that provides the clearest commentary upon it:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force.
(Enquiry, II.i)

The "mind . . . so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other" describes precisely Wordsworth's state for many days after he went rowing in the borrowed skiff.

Does this "spot of time" record an experience of sublimity, or one of closely-pressing terror precluding sublimity? For Burke's description of sublime causes at their most powerful, and Wordsworth's account of his early experience of astonishment, both puzzle when we recall that both writers stressed that an over-balance of personal fear is not conducive to the sublime. Certainly the young boy who thought he saw a "huge Cliff" pursuing him would not recognize anything sublime about the experience, but he would certainly feel terror. Indeed, Wordsworth the boy would be totally ignorant, we might suppose, of what was meant by sublimity. Even the mature writer of The Prelude, however, provides no direct evidence that he now regards this early experience as imparting a sense of sublimity. We have to enquire whether this is an experience of naked fear precluding sublimity or an experience of sublimity founded on terror. Neither Burke nor Wordsworth offers any help in fixing the boundary between fear and

sublimity; they simply agree that when fear presses too close it precludes the sublime.

The answer to this question may be implicit in the theory of fear. Fear is decreased as its causes are distanced, and this distance can be established by removal in space or time. Such a distance is automatically involved, too, when the experience is not apprehended directly but in a work of art. As Scott has one of his characters remark, "to witness scenes of terror, or to contemplate them in description, is as different . . . as to bend over the brink of a precipice holding by the frail tenure of a half-rooted shrub, or to admire the same precipice as represented in the landscape of Salvator." ⁴ A clear example of how distance modifies terror and admits the sublime can be seen in a comparison of two paintings of the Romantic period. In a painting by J. M. W. Turner, Cottage Destroyed by an Avalanche (1812), ⁵ a huge mass of rock and pine trees is about to crush a small alpine log cabin. The cabin is reduced to insignificance by the forces of nature arrayed against it--oppressive atmosphere, craggy mountains, pine forests and rock formations. The painting might seem to be illustrating Wordsworth's comment, quoted in the preceding chapter, about the "havoc, and ruin, and desolation, and encroachment" that evince the destructive powers seen at work in alpine surroundings. Wordsworth compared this power unfavourably to

⁴Guy Mannering, Centennial edition (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1885), p. 203.

⁵Reproduced in William Gaunt, Turner (London: Phaidon, 1971), Plate 10.

the "tranquil sublimity" inspired by his own Lake District, but remarked that he would, nevertheless, "relish to the utmost the demonstrations of every species of power at work to effect such changes" (i.e., changes in the Alps due to the "dissolution of the heights"). Such power might be sublime when its manifestations are viewed from a distance, but--to revert to Turner's painting--its presence in the avalanche could hardly appear sublime to anyone in its path, least of all to the occupants of the cottage about to be obliterated. Sublimity as the demonstration of power might be called the "spectacular" or "sensational" sublime, especially as it is offered to the spectator by Salvator Rosa and his successors.⁶ The painting I offer as a contrast to Turner's, Loutherbourg's An Avalanche in the Alps (1803),⁷ is patently intended as an essay in the spectacular sublime. The avalanche itself is similar to Turner's--there are craggy rocks, uprooted pine trees, turbulent atmosphere and a seething mass of falling rubble--but the sublimity of power is clearly being appreciated by three travellers who strike statuesque poses in the safe distance of a raised path. These poses suggest a mixture of surprise, awe and horror, but the horror is emphatically modified by the absence of pressing danger; the spectators' experience is

⁶For a general account of Salvator Rosa and the painters of the spectacular sublime, see A. S. Byatt, Wordsworth and Coleridge in their Time (London: Nelson, 1970), Ch. 7 passim. For the influence of Burke on painters of the pre-Romantic and Romantic periods, see James T. Boulton's introduction to his edition of Burke's Enquiry, pp. cix-cxviii.

⁷Reproduced in Peter Quennell, Romantic England. Writing and Painting, 1717-1851 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 146.

evidently pleasurable, and by their poses they are showing the person who views the painting how he ought to react to the depicted avalanche. Loutherbouurg's painting exemplifies double distancing; the travellers are safely distanced from immediate danger, and the painting itself distances the terror, allowing its viewer a demonstration of the sublime.

As Marmaduke suggests in Wordsworth's early play The Borderers, terror recalled has an effect different from terror felt: "In terror, / Remembered terror, there is peace and rest" (ll. 1468-9). The terror of the cliff that seemed to possess "voluntary power" was real and pressing to the boy Wordsworth but, recollected when the apparent danger had passed, terror could yield to awe and so convey sublimity to Wordsworth and to readers of The Prelude. The belief that the cliff pursued him obviously precluded an immediate sense of sublimity, but in other respects the effect of the escapade is accounted for in a passage from Wordsworth's "The Sublime and the Beautiful" which corresponds to Burke's description of the effects of astonishment:

it cannot be doubted that a Child or an unpracticed person whose mind is possessed by the sight of a lofty precipice, with its attire of hanging rocks & starting trees, &c, has been visited by a sense of sublimity, if personal fear & surprize or wonder have not been carried beyond certain bounds. For whatever suspends the comparing power of the mind & possesses it with a feeling or image of intense unity, without a conscious contemplation of parts, has produced that state of the mind which is the consummation of the sublime. (Prose, II, pp. 353-54)

If "personal fear & surprize" disqualified the experience from being immediately an instance of "the consummation of the sublime" there can be little doubt that, adding to Burke's description of astonishment

the idea of growth, it enabled a specific imagery of sublimity to take root in Wordsworth's mind, an imagery of "huge and mighty Forms that do not live / Like living men". The point at which the reported incident becomes most relevant to the structure of the poem as a whole is the application of it to the growth of the mind. In this mind the mountain form--like the cliff evincing simple form, duration and power--was to assume the force of a central image relating mind to nature; and it could do this because experience, through this and similar encounters, had discovered life, movement and power in the mountain.

The episode just examined is the most striking of a group of incidents forming, with their associated apostrophes, the core of Book I. This core extends from line 305 to line 501. It begins with a thematic indication, "Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up / Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear", but within the core passage specified the emphasis is on fear. Three short vignettes follow: snaring woodcocks (309-24), removing birds trapped by others (324-32) and plundering nests (333-50); the ensuing commentary (351-71) strengthens the thematic indication of fear by referring to the "ministry / More palpable" of nature, and this leads on to the narrative of the borrowed skiff and striding cliff, after which the idea of fear is further reinforced in an apostrophe to the "Wisdom and Spirit of the universe" (428-41) and a tribute to that which sanctifies "both pain and fear". The core ends with the vivid account of evening skating (452-89) and a concluding apostrophe (490-501) to the "Presences of Nature" which

Impress'd upon all forms the characters
 Of danger or desire, and thus did make
 The surface of the universal earth
 With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear,
 Work like a sea (497-501).

Within this passage as an entirety one can see a general Burkean emphasis on fear, associated with a tautening of the young boy's senses by various patterns of natural phenomena; several explicit parallels to Burkean circumstance; and an overriding account of growth which inevitably leads beyond Burke and is specifically Wordsworthian.

The last incident of the group, skating on Esthwaite, provides the most obvious parallel to a natural phenomenon linked by Burke with sublimity, though in fact it has nothing to do with fear. "Whenever we repeat any idea frequently," Burke states (II.viii), "the mind by a sort of mechanism repeats it long after the first cause has ceased to operate. After whirling about; when we sit down, the objects about us still seem to whirl." It is exactly this process Wordsworth recalls in his account of skating:

and oftentimes
 When we had given our bodies to the wind,
 And all the shadowy banks, on either side,
 Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
 The rapid line of motion; then at once
 Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
 Stopp'd short, yet still the solitary Cliffs
 Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had roll'd
 With visible motion her diurnal round (478-86).

What is, of course, missing in Burke is the sense of wonder that informs the poetry; to the experiencing boy this was no mere natural phenomenon.

A more significant example of the Burkean sublime occurs in

the short section that recalls the snaring of woodcocks. Setting these snares by night and alone (Burkean privations) the young school-boy "seem'd to be a trouble to the peace" of the stars. Having stolen birds trapped by the preparations of others, he

heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod. (329-32)

Such "sounds / Of undistinguishable motion" recall Burke's "low, confused, uncertain sounds" that "leave us in the same fearful anxiety concerning their causes, that no light, or an uncertain light does concerning the objects that surround us" (II.xix). There are other examples of "intermitting" in The Prelude,⁸ but the description Burke gives of this phenomenon as "leav[ing] us in . . . fearful anxiety concerning their causes" is particularly relevant to the central episodes of Book I which, taken together, record the growing sense of a puzzling non-human but purposive life in nature. "The sky seem'd not a sky / Of earth", "low breathings" emanated from "among the solitary hills" and "huge and mighty Forms that do not live / Like living men"

⁸Cf. IV.170-80 where, alone in the twilight, Wordsworth experiences this phenomenon, a tautening of the senses supervening on tranquillity:

before a rippling breeze
The long Lake lengthen'd out its hoary line;
And in the shelter'd coppice where I sate,
Around me, from among the hazel leaves,
Now here, now there, stirr'd by the straggling wind,
Came intermittingly a breath-like sound,
A respiration short and quick, which oft,
Yea, might I say, again and yet again,
Mistaking for the parting of my Dog,
The off-and-on Companion of my walk,
I turn'd my head, to look if he were there.

haunted the boy adventurer. Some power of Nature was giving to "forms and images a breath / And everlasting motion".

Whereas in Burke's account of the sublime of fear external circumstances such as obscurity and intermittent sound produce a state of tension in the senses, in The Prelude a preliminary feeling of guilt is also involved. In MS. JJ, which dates from winter 1798-99 and contains the earliest form of material which later constituted the core of Book I, Wordsworth suggests that aggressive activity in this early stage of his boyhood produced immediate self-examination:

I would not strike a flower
As many a man [would] will strike his horse; at least
If, from the wantonness in which we play
With things we love, or from a freak of [power] thought
Or from involuntary act of hand
Or foot unruly with excess of life
It e'er should chance that I ungently used
A tuft of [] or snapp'd the stem
Of foxglove bending o'er his native rill
I should be loth to pass along my road
With unreprieved indifference. I would stop
Self questioned, asking wherefore that was done
For seeing little worthy or sublime
In what we blazon with the names [of power
And action] I was early taught to love.⁹

Such actions of wanton aggression are the episodes under consideration: snaring woodcocks ("In thought and wish . . . I was a fell destroyer"), stealing birds trapped in the preparations of others, plundering nests (a "mean" object) and taking the skiff ("an act of stealth / And troubled pleasure"). To these may be added the episode recorded in "Cutting", a poem which originally and appropriately formed part of what is now Book I: the act of robbing a hazel tree or

⁹Prel., p. 641; cf. the passage from MS. 18a cited pp. 612-14, and XII.47-52 where the context suggests a quite different application of "power and action".

its clusters of nuts, which is seen as a "devastation", an act of "merciless ravage". These actions, which Wordsworth himself calls "involuntary act[s] of hand / Or foot unruly with excess of life", seem to be the ordinary and hardly culpable escapades of juvenility, ones for which most boys would spare few feelings of guilt. Yet Wordsworth regarded them as not merely assaults on specific things--woodcocks, hazel trees, owners of traps and boats--but intrusions on nature itself, which exacted its own penalties; if the boy was "loth to pass along my road / With unreprieved indifference" nature was the reprover. Setting snares, the adventurer hurried on while

moon and stars
Were shining o'er my head; I was alone,
And seem'd to be a trouble to the peace
That was among them. (321-24)

In "Nutting" the place he makes for is "one dear nook / Unvisited", "a virgin scene". In fact, in this poem the implication that he is disturbing nature is made explicit in the metaphor of death, with even a hint of murder:

Then up I rose,
And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash
And merciless ravage: and the shady nook
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
Their quiet being.

The intruder here is clearly the boy himself, yet so sheltered is the hazel grove that the sky itself seems to intrude: "I felt a sense of pain when I beheld / The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky." The "low breathings" and "sounds / Of undistinguishable motion" heard at night on the open turf and the "measur'd motion" of the cliff, then, are not instances of a vengeful nature punishing petty crime but

echoes of the boy Wordsworth's sense of intrusion, given edge by his consciousness of being a "plunderer".

The particular sublimity conveyed in these incidents, taken as a whole, is suggested by Wordsworth's comment that "Though mean / My object, and inglorious, yet the end / Was not ignoble". Elevation was potential in all of them. A sense that "there is a Spirit in the woods" is the crude form this takes in "Nutting"; risky suspension from a ridge yielded a thrilling sensation that "the sky seem'd not a sky / Of earth"; and the terrifying encounter with the cliff convinced Wordsworth that "huge and mighty Forms" were living, if not with the life of "living men". The "end / Was not ignoble" because it prepared for Wordsworth a standard of sublimity arising out of but transcending experiences of fear, and resting on a sense of grandeur in the universe and in man himself; in Wordsworth, nature intertwined

The passions that build up our human Soul,
Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man,
But with high objects, with enduring things,
With life and nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognize
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. (434-41)

Burkean circumstance thus coalesced with the psychological disposition of a "favour'd being" to provoke a sense of the sublime.

II

The sublime of Book I of The Prelude--as we have seen, a generally Burkean experience of fear involving astonishment, a tautening of the senses to natural phenomena and the acquisition of sublime "imagery"--constitutes a basis for further development and

more sophisticated interpretation of nature and experience; it is not an end in itself. We have already noted Wordsworth's comment in his prose essay "The Sublime and the Beautiful" that

Familiarity with these objects [precipitous forms capable of inspiring fear] tends very much to mitigate & to destroy the power which they have to produce the sensation of sublimity as dependent upon personal fear or upon wonder; a comprehensive awe takes the place of the one, and a religious admiration of the other, & the condition of the mind is exalted accordingly.
(Prose, II, p.353)

This comment is relevant to The Prelude, in which there is less emphasis on fear than on "the condition of the mind", especially as Wordsworth brings his story forward to adolescence and manhood. Two other comments from the essay will also serve to introduce the process we are now to examine, that of increasing susceptibility to beauty.

The first is the observation that,

though it is impossible that a mind can be in a healthy state that is not frequently and strongly moved both by sublimity and beauty, it is more dependent for its daily well-being upon the love & gentleness which accompany the one, than upon the exaltation or awe which are created by the other.--Hence, as we advance in life, we can escape upon the invitation of our more placid & gentle nature from those obtrusive qualities in an object sublime in its general character; which qualities, at an earlier age, precluded imperiously the perception of beauty which that object if contemplated under another relation would have been capable of imparting.¹⁰
(Prose, II, p. 349)

¹⁰With "obtrusive qualities" cf. Guide to the Lakes, p. 87: "Sublimity is the result of Nature's first great dealings with the superficies of the earth; but the general tendency of her subsequent operations is towards the production of beauty, by a multiplicity of symmetrical parts uniting in a consistent whole". In general, it was the "consistent whole" that interested Wordsworth, and within that whole its obtrusive features. Alexander Dyce quotes the following fragment from the poet's conversation:

In writing poetical descriptions of natural objects, it is better not to write them on the spot, because if you do, you will enter into a great deal of unnecessary detail: you

Secondly, the same scenes can, at different times, affect with both beauty and sublimity: "the same object may be both sublime & beautiful; or, speaking more accurately, . . . it may have the power of affecting us both with the sense of beauty & the sense of sublimity; tho' . . . the mind cannot be affected by both these sensations at the same time, for they are not only different from, but opposite to, each other." In The Prelude, in the context of the rich, poetic account of his experiential growth, we find Wordsworth holding to this consistent set of axioms: exaltation of the mind replacing fear, a growing responsiveness to beauty as natural, and the ability to see the same objects as beautiful and sublime at different times, according to the "condition of the mind".

The stage of his life at which Wordsworth places a growing susceptibility to the beautiful is variously located, though the kind of shift involved is consistently seen as occurring between the two Burkean poles of terror and beauty or love. At the end of The Prelude it is the influence of his sister Dorothy which he acknowledges as the cause of a "softening down" of the admiration he had previously given the terrible in nature, an influence not exerted till "the very going out of youth": ¹¹

should write just after the object is removed from your sight, and then its great features only will remain impressed upon your mind. (Richard J. Schrader, ed., The Reminiscences of Alexander Dyce [Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1972], p. 187.) For a similar emphasis on seeing "consistent whole [s]" see also The Prelude, VII.707-12.

¹¹R. D. Havens dates this from the Wordsworth "a" settlement at Racedown in September 1795. See The Mind of a Poet (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1941), II, 626.

spite of thy sweet influence and the touch
 Of other kindred hands that open'd out
 The springs of tender thought in infancy,
 And spite of all which singly I had watch'd
 Of elegance, and each minuter charm
 In nature and in life, still to the last
 Even to the very going out of youth,
 The period which our Story now hath reach'd,
 I too exclusively esteem'd that love,
 And sought that beauty, which, as Milton sings,
 Hath terror in it. Thou didst soften down
 This over-sternness; but for thee, sweet Friend,
 My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had been
 Far longer what by Nature it was framed,
 Longer retain'd its countenance severe,
 A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds
 Familiar, and a favorite of the Stars:
 But thou didst plant its crevices with flowers,
 Hang it with shrubs that twinkle in the breeze,
 And teach the little birds to build their nests
 And warble in its chambers. (XIII.216-36)

Quite apart from Wordsworth's attribution of this "softening" process to Dorothy, consonant with Burke's associating the beautiful with the feminine, the general nature of the contrast offered is Burkean; and despite the suggestion that terror is a species of love and beauty, the contrast that emerges between terror and love is radical. Moreover, the terms that Wordsworth chooses are directly reminiscent of Burke, assuming as they do that the prime significance of the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful is found in the passions they arouse--the sublime awakening terror, the beautiful drawing out love and tenderness. The imagery, too, is decisive, aligning terror with the impressive and mysterious in nature ("A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds / Familiar, and a favorite of the Stars") and beauty with the elegant and minute ("each minuter charm / In nature and in life"; "flowers", "little birds"). In view of this sharp dichotomy, Wordsworth's self-characterization in sublime

terms and that of Dorothy in terms of the beautiful is interesting, for again it aligns beauty with the feminine. In the final version of the poem Coleridge stands clearly with Dorothy as a modifying influence, in his case shedding a "mild Interposition" of the human on the "self-haunting spirit":

Thy kindred influence to my heart of hearts
 Did also find its way. Thus fear relaxed
 Her overweening grasp; thus thoughts and things
 In the self-haunting spirit learned to take
 More rational proportions; mystery,
 The incumbent mystery of sense and soul,
 Of life and death, time and eternity,
 Admitted more habitually a mild
 Interposition--a serene delight
 In closelier gathering cares, such as become
 A human creature, howsoever endowed,
 Poet, or destined for a humbler name.

(1850; XIV.281-92)

Here, the relaxation of fear accompanies a move to the rational; and one recalls that, in Burke's terms, the sublime "far from being produced by them, . . . anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force". Whereas Dorothy's "interposition" taught Wordsworth to appreciate minuter charms and common things, Coleridge is thought of as having given him "delight / In closelier gathering cares" suitable to a "human creature". This recalls Burke's distinction between the passions of the sublime turning on ideas of self-preservation and those of the beautiful on ideas of society. But to an essentially Burkean view of the sublime of fear as distinct from and antithetical to the beautiful--an idea with which, as we have seen, he agreed--Wordsworth adds the idea of growth from the one to the other in his own life; and this is a leading motif of The Prelude.

At the close of the poem, then, Wordsworth claims that he broke away from his appetite for terror at a relatively late period of his life as it is recorded in The Prelude: that of his return from France, his disillusion with the fruits of the French Revolution and his brief engagement with Godwinian philosophy. It was during and immediately after these events that Dorothy and Coleridge exerted a strong influence on him. In other parts of the narrative, however, the process is seen as having occurred much earlier. Remembering his first university summer vacation spent at Hawkeshead, he notes that it was then he first thought of the objects of his love (that is, natural forms) as existing also for others; his love for these forms then acquired a "human-heartedness". This is in contrast to an earlier stage of his youth, when

Whatever shadings of mortality
Had fallen upon these objects heretofore
Were different in kind; not tender: strong,
Deep, gloomy were they and severe; the scatterings
Of childhood (IV.240-44).

The language of this passage allies it with another emphasis of the early books, which sees the most basic function of the imagination as one of intensifying or adding colour to the observed world (a metaphor from painting); the young Wordsworth evidently saw his world (trees, mountains and stars) through the lens of the sublime, shading it to conform to his own predilections. The words "strong" and "severe" recall Burke's description of the kind of pleasure to be derived from the sublime, insofar as it consists in "modifications of pain": "The delight which arises from the modifications of pain, confesses the stock from whence it sprung, in its solid, strong and severe

nature" (I.v).¹² Wordsworth's phrase "shadings of mortality" seems to indicate a belief that children tend to see objects as menacing--that this process of sublime shading is therefore characteristically the "scatterings / Of Childhood".¹³ But Wordsworth, as his later essay confirms, learned to "scatter" what he wished onto a scene, in accordance with the mind's laws; and an account of a vacation later than his first return from Cambridge to Hawkeshead shows such "scatterings" involved with perception of the beautiful, arising from the new "human-heartedness" of the youth's reaction to natural forms:

In all that neighbourhood, through narrow lanes
Of eglantine, and through the shady woods,
And o'er the Border Beacon, and the Waste
Of naked Pools, and common Craggs that lay
Expos'd on the bare Fell, was scatter'd love,
A spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam.
(VI.240-45)

This vacation Wordsworth spent with his sister Dorothy and Mary Hutchinson; and the account of it points to an earlier "softening" process than that described in Book XIII.

¹²Wordsworth, in The Prelude, uses "delight" to mean "pleasure"; but the following usage, from a sublime scene in Descriptive Sketches (1793), conforms with Burke's notion and terminology:

How still! no irreligious sound or sight
Rouzes the soul from her severe delight.
(430-31)

¹³The language of the 1850 Prelude sharpens the association between childhood perception and the sublime of fear:

Whatever shadings of mortality,
Whatever imports from the world of death
Had come among these objects heretofore,
Were, in the main, of mood less tender: strong,
Deep, gloomy were they and severe; the scatterings
Of awe or tremulous dread.

(XIV.248-53)

When read in conjunction with an account of another, earlier incident that occurred in the same locale (the vicinity of the Border Beacon above Penrith) this passage exemplifies the power of terror and love to modify the way in which a landscape is viewed; it shows how sublimity and beauty can emerge as a result of what a person "scatters" onto a scene. The earlier incident had occurred when Wordsworth was a very small boy, "not six years old" by his own account. In the company of an older, more experienced horseman, the young Wordsworth went riding towards the hills. He became separated from his guide, dismounted because he was afraid, and led his horse down to a declivity of the "rough and stony Moor". Wordsworth indicates that his initial fear stemmed from the disappearance of "honest James" his guide; but evidently he knew that at this "bottom" of the moor an executed murderer had previously been "hung in iron chains". And although the paraphernalia of the hanging had all but disappeared, Wordsworth could see the initials of the felon's name cut into the turf:

The monumental writing was engraven
 In times long past, and still, from year to year,
 By superstition of the neighbourhood,
 The grass is clear'd away; and to this hour
 The letters are all fresh and visible.
 Faltering, and ignorant where I was, at length
 I chanced to espy those characters inscribed
 On the green sod: forthwith I left the spot
 And, reascending the bare Common, saw
 A naked Pool that lay beneath the hills,
 The Beacon on the summit, and more near,
 A Girl who bore a Pitcher on her head
 And seem'd with difficult steps to force her way
 Against the blowing wind. It was, in truth,
 An ordinary sight; but I should need
 Colours and words that are unknown to man

To paint the visionary dreariness
 Which, while I look'd all round for my lost Guide,
 Did at that time invest the naked Pool,
 The Beacon on the lonely Eminence,
 The Woman, and her garments vex'd and toss'd
 By the strong wind. (XI.295-316)

Having recounted this incident, Wordsworth deliberately and directly associates it with the later one, recorded in Book VI, of the vacation walks in the same vicinity with his sister and Mary Hutchinson, by repeating a line from that passage--"The spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam":

When, in a blessed season
 With those two dear Ones, to my heart so dear,
 When in the blessed time of early love,
 Long afterwards, I roam'd about
 In daily presence of this very scene,
 Upon the naked pool and dreary crags,
 And on the melancholy Beacon, fell
 The spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam
 (XI.316-23).

On the first visit "visionary dreariness" "invested" the scene; on the vacation excursion, in the company of people he loved, the "spirit of pleasure" "fell" onto it.

Although we are told that the scene in itself was ordinary, its details, which give the passage such vividness and strength, were obviously memorable and affected the boy strongly; they bring out a sublimity latent in the scene itself, despite the fact that nothing recorded marks out the moor as a sublime landscape. The scene and the incident in fact owe their significance to Wordsworth's plainly repudiating the power of the landscape to produce of itself an impression of "visionary dreariness" and establishing instead certain "laws of the mind" by which the landscape becomes subject to the

observer or participant.

The "law of the mind" basic to this passage is that of the power of a young boy's fear to invest an ordinary scene with "shadings"--"strong / Deep, gloomy . . . and severe". This fear arose from two circumstances: first, the separation of the boy from his guide James ("through fear / Dismounting"); and secondly from the recognition that the letters cut into the turf were an actualized fragment of the awesome story of the felon who had been hung in chains near to the spot where he had committed his crime. In the 1805 Prelude Wordsworth's account of the local legend itself is obscured by inaccuracies and vagueness; that of the incident is even more elusive, but consequently it gains in effectiveness. The reader must work out for himself that the young boy must have heard the story, the local legend of a notorious murder and execution, before encountering the three characters cut into the turf; had he not been familiar with the story, the inscription could have had scant effect on him. The reader must also establish that the text ironically displaced, at least partially, one cause of fear (for the boy, having seen the inscription, would no longer be totally "ignorant where [he] was") only to replace it with another, which impelled the boy to "reascend", seeing reflected in a few sharply-defined and memorable objects his own sense of fear, vulnerability, isolation and exposure. It was hardly necessary, but in revising this evocative passage Wordsworth inserted a line to make clear that it was the sight of the engraved characters that raised fear in the boy: "A casual glance had shown them, and I fled" (1850; XII.246).

This is a clear instance of Burke's sublime of terror: circumstances "conversant about terrible objects" producing "the sublime . . . the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling." In Wordsworth's experience this terror is an emotion associated with youth; it is beneficial in its end; it allies itself with the natural tendency of youth to colour its environment; and it is always viewed in the context of growth. Yet the terror is not permanently thwarting; a landscape of horror, Wordsworth demonstrates, can later be seen as one of beauty, reflecting love, if it is encountered with strength of mind and memory. "Diversity of strength / Attends us, if but once we have been strong", says Wordsworth (XI.327-28); it is a case of the strongest emotion, terror, being met with corresponding strength of perception, and thus overcome. The remembered landscape in all its "visionary dreariness" does not dominate, but rather strengthens and liberates the imagination.

The analogy to Burke's "strong emotion" in The Prelude is the particular yoking of experiences of fear with childhood, for in a process of emotional growth we should expect strong emotions to emerge before responses to milder phenomena and experience. It is this point to which Wordsworth gives historical resonance when he remarks that "sublimity is the result of Nature's first great dealings with the superficies of the earth", beauty in detail emerging later. As with nature, so with mind. Sublimity and beauty are the two polar aspects of nature, the one primitive, grand and unified, the other consisting in detail, minuteness and decoration. The first makes its impact

early and directly, the second demanding time and the development of finer senses. Wordsworth makes this point when he comments on the effects of alpine scenery:

Finally whate'er
I saw, or heard, or felt, was but a stream
That flow'd into a kindred stream, a gale
That help'd me forwards, did administer
To grandeur and to tenderness, to the one
Directly, but to tender thoughts by means
Less often instantaneous in effect;
Conducted me to these along a path
Which in the main was more circuitous.
(VI.672-80)

The response to beauty is delayed, since it is response to the subtle, the minute, the muted in the environment. As a boy living among mountains, Wordsworth says, man claimed little of his attention; naturally,

Far less had then
The inferior Creatures, beast or bird, attun'd
My spirit to that gentleness of love,
Won from me those minute obeisances
Of tenderness, which I may number now
With my first blessings. Nevertheless, on these
The light of beauty did not fall in vain,
Or grandeur circumfuse them to no end.
(VIII.490-97)

The point is glossed in the later essay "The Sublime and the Beautiful":

Sensations of beauty & sublimity impress us very early in life; nor is it easy to determine which have precedence in point of time, & to which the sensibility of the mind in its natural constitution is more alive. But it may be confidently affirmed that, where the beautiful & the sublime co-exist in the same object, if that object be new to us, the sublime always precedes the beautiful in making us conscious of its presence (Prose, II, p. 350).

The prior claim of the sublime is stated here rather more tentatively than in The Prelude, where it is more obvious that "in its natural

constitution" in youth the mind responds more immediately to the sublime. Wordsworth's point applies also, of course, to sublimity and beauty in different objects. Obviously, a young boy having in view a rugged precipice and a beautiful small bird would notice the precipice first, and respond to it--not least on account of its physical impressiveness. However, a practiced viewer might well be found more attentive to the bird.

Wordsworth's sublime of fear, indeed his whole treatment of the sublime and beautiful in The Prelude, differs from the major treatises in that its concern is with something much wider than the psychological and the aesthetic. Terror and love, with all their permutations, are fundamental to the experience of youth because they secure the boy to his world and provide nourishment for his imagination while challenging it to grow beyond crude psychological response.

III

It would be absurd to instance all experiences of fear and experiences accompanied by Burkean circumstances in The Prelude as sublime. Fear and such privations as obscurity and silence, which Burke makes so much of, are indeed involved in Wordsworth's experience of sublimity, but they do not of themselves constitute the sublime; for, by definition, Wordsworth's sublime stimulates and elevates the subject by provoking his powers of mind and imagination. So much can be demonstrated from the poem itself, by examining briefly three experiences which have in common the Burkean species of fear but which

can hardly be admitted as sublime experiences: Wordsworth's memory of the man drowned in Esthwaite Lake (Book V); the confusion of a night spent in the open air outside the town of Gravedona (Book VI); and the account of a nightmare experienced in a Paris hotel shortly after the September massacres of 1792 (Book X).

There is, Wordsworth implies in his account of the drowned man of Esthwaite (V.450-81), a "vulgar fear" which suppresses the mind and imagination; this notion accords with the assertion of both Burke and Wordsworth that closely-pressing terror precludes the sublime. But the incident under discussion is curiously neutral. The dead man is acknowledged to have been "a spectre shape / Of terror", yet that shape imparted neither "vulgar fear" nor any challenge to the boy's imagination. The absence of "vulgar fear" is readily explicable; the man was dead, incapable of inspiring direct menace and so--one would think--ideally suited to be a source of Burke's sublime. What was it about the situation that precluded any provocation to the imagination? The young Wordsworth, walking around the lake at twilight (a time of day pre-eminently qualified to assist in arousing terror), saw a pile of discarded clothes on the shore and surmised that they belonged to somebody bathing. The following day, "those unclaimed garments telling a plain Tale", the lake was dragged:

At length, the dead Man, 'mid that beauteous scene
Of trees, and hills and water, bolt upright
Rose with his ghastly face; a spectre shape
Of terror even! and yet no vulgar fear,
Young as I was, a Child not nine years old,
Possess'd me; for my inner eye had seen
Such sights before, among the shining streams
Of Fairy Land, the Forests of Romance:

Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
 With decoration and ideal grace;
 A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
 Of Grecian Art, and purest Poesy.

(V.470-81)

Wordsworth's own explanation for the absence of fear is hardly convincing; to imagine or read about death does not prevent its presence from affecting strongly, as we know from the gibbet episode. All that we know here is that the corpse and the circumstances surrounding its discovery did not make Wordsworth's imagination restless. The dead man remained but a lifeless image. Perhaps the fact that the young boy was prepared for the situation, having seen the pile of clothes, and the daylight and public recovery of the corpse, lessened the interest of the incident. At any rate, it became food for romance, not imagination. Fancy could embellish and embroider what gave the imagination no scope: the clothes and corpse were totally self-revealing.

The discharged soldier of Book IV provides the direct contrast most helpful in establishing the relationship between sublimity and imagination. Another upright and stiff shape like the drowned man, he affected with something of the sublime of terror. The beginning of Wordsworth's encounter with him was attended with several circumstances favourable to the Burkean sublime. The young Wordsworth was alone, it was dark, and the silence was broken only by the "intermitting" sound of a brook. The soldier came into view at "a sudden turning of the road" and the moonlight made his mouth show "ghastly". The "uncouth shape" itself possessed such attributes as appear always to have fascinated Wordsworth, and moreover the

attendant circumstances conspired to leave him a sufficiently obscure figure to promote fear:

He was alone,
Had no attendant, neither Dog, nor Staff,
Nor knapsack; in his very dress appear'd
A desolation, a simplicity
That seem'd akin to solitude. Long time
Did I peruse him with a mingled sense
Of fear and sorrow. (IV.415-21)

The fear is not lasting, but it is one among other circumstances that stretch the imagination, impelling Wordsworth to see the soldier as one of his Lake District shepherds, a man "suffering among awful Powers and Forms" (VIII.213), a figure like the leech-gatherer, evoking awe and promising revelation.

If a total lack of obscurity played any part in depriving the drowned man of Esthwaite of any sublime effect, the night of sleepless frustration spent on the banks of Lake Como, recounted in Book VI (621-57), was replete with Burkean circumstances of obscurity and intermitting sound. At the conclusion of their Alpine tour Wordsworth and his companion Jones, thinking that a clock signalled imminent day-break, left the town of Gravedona hoping to catch a sight of Como "in its most deep repose". They had, however, misunderstood the clock and were forced to wait out the hours of night "lost, bewilder'd among woods immense":

On the rock we lay
And wish'd to sleep but could not, for the stings
Of insects, which with noise like that of noon
Fill'd all the woods; the cry of unknown birds,
The mountains, more by darkness visible
And their own size, than any outward light,
The breathless wilderness of clouds, the clock
That told with unintelligible voice

The widely-parted hours, the noise of streams
 And sometimes rustling motions nigh at hand
 Which did not leave us free from personal fear,
 And lastly the withdrawing Moon, that set
 Before us, while she still was high in heaven,
 These were our food (VI.641-54).

Here is fear, and a veritable illustrative catalogue of Burke's sublime agents: the cries of animals (641-44)--"such sounds as imitate the natural inarticulate voices of men, or any animals in pain or danger, . . . capable of conveying great ideas" (Enquiry, II.xx); the palpable darkness of a great object (645-46)--"more productive of sublime ideas than light"; ¹⁴ suddenness (647-49)--"few things being more awful than the striking of a great clock, when the silence of the night prevents the attention from being too much dissipated" (II.xviii); and intermitting (649-51)--"productive of the sublime . . . some low, confused, uncertain sounds, leave us in the same fearful anxiety concerning their causes, that no light, or an uncertain light does concerning the objects that surround us" (II.xix). Such a catalogue of Burkean instances might seem to argue that Wordsworth consciously intended to record a night of sublime

¹⁴"Darkness visible" is an echo of Paradise Lost, I.63, which describes the flames afflicting the fallen angels; ironically, Burke's instance of sublime darkness draws from Milton's description of God:

Our great poet was convinced of this; and indeed so full was he of this idea, so entirely possessed with the power of a well managed darkness that, in describing the appearance of the Deity, midst that profusion of magnificent images, . . . he is far from forgetting the obscurity which surrounds the most incomprehensible of all beings, but

--With the majesty of darkness round
 Circles his throne.

(Enquiry, II.xiv; Burke quotes Milton inaccurately.)

impressions. But, while he and Jones, susceptible--as the Descriptive Sketches demonstrate--to a "literary" sublimity, undoubtedly appreciated the sublime aspects of their unexpected night in the open, in the context of Book VI the incident stands as the last of a series of frustrations, which began when Mont Blanc appeared to Wordsworth as "a soulless image on the eye" (454). Just as a too directly apprehended fear is destructive of the sublime, so must frustration be, introducing thoughts of self into an experience intended to expel all such thoughts and self-preoccupation.

The last of these three instances of thwarted sublimity is the Paris nightmare of 1792, recounted in Book X (54-82), and it is simply an instance of an overbalance of fear felt by Wordsworth in a city made insecure by violent revolution. In a hotel,

With unextinguish'd taper I kept watch,
 Reading at intervals; the fear gone by
 Press'd on me almost like a fear to come;
 I thought of those September Massacres,
 Divided from me by a little month,
 And felt and touch'd them, a substantial dread
(X.61-66).

Such fear obviously leaves no scope for sensual gratification, awe or elevation. Too "substantial" and palpable, it leads to nightmare in which Paris assumes Macbeth's feverish self-accusation: "Sleep no more".

In Wordsworth's sublime of fear, meaningful growth, rather than impressive astonishment, is involved; and where terror astonishes it does so, as in the case of the moving cliff and the characters cut into the turf, as the first step in a process of imaginative gain. The young child, by responding to his environment, becomes like the most

important things in it, and to Wordsworth these are natural forms.

Right knowledge, in The Prelude, begins with "watchfulness":

whatsoever of Terror or of Love,
Or Beauty, Nature's daily face put on
From transitory passion, unto this
I was as wakeful, even, as waters are
To the sky's motion (III.132-36).

The mind responds to what, in Book II, is called a "universal power / And fitness in the latent qualities / And essences of things" (343-45) which demands a tuned response; the recognition of a duality, of the sublime and the beautiful, is no mere idle exercise but a conforming to the deepest actuality. This actuality is nature, and it is nature that Wordsworth recognizes as the first educator of the child, offering it ministry and discipline, building up the human soul

Vot with the mean and vulgar works of Man,
But with high objects, with enduring things,
With life and nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognize
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.
(I.435-41)

If it is not immediately clear why the experience of pain and fear should result in a recognition of the heart's grandeur, the connection of such emotions with sublimity is explicit. The idea involved is that of elevation and expansion that we have found in sublime theory from Longinus to Wordsworth. Pain and fear have a wide reference, and it becomes a truism of the theory that they must to a large degree remain potential if they are to have a role in the sublime. In Wordsworth as in Burke the experience of fear is sublime because it speaks to man of

"unknown modes of being", that is, of objects which invite men to respond to them as if they are living creatures. Thus to Wordsworth man's works are lifeless, "mean and vulgar", whereas the ministry of nature does not have a "vulgar hope" in educating the young, but invites man to aspire to the living grandeur of high, enduring, simple forms:

can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when Ye employ'd
Such ministry, when Ye through many a year
Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
Impress'd upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire, and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear,
Work like a sea? (I.492-501)

Nature is eminently qualified to be the prime educator because her forms bear the patterns of ennobling human emotions.

For a pattern of anti-natural education we have Wordsworth's satire on modern education in Book V, whose target is the boy reared in worldly and therefore, presumably, vulgar perfection--whose "moral part / Is perfect" in worldly terms. This student is beyond the reach of fear:

He is fenc'd round, nay arm'd, for aught we know
In panoply complete; and fear itself,
Natural or supernatural alike,
Unless it leap upon him in a dream,
Touches him not. Briefly, the moral part
Is perfect, and in learning and in books
He is a prodigy. (V.314-20)

Besides being a prodigy this lad to Wordsworth is also a lusus naturae who must remain unfitted to the real world, immune to grandeur, a child of vulgarity out of touch with "Grandane Earth".

Interpreting the satire, it would have to be concluded that in fact such a child had no "moral part". The real boy, by radical contrast, does not escape the irrational and mysterious in life; and Wordsworth grew up among "A race of children",

Mad at their sports like wither'd leaves in winds;
 Though doing wrong, and suffering, and full oft
 Bending beneath our life's mysterious weight
 Of pain and fear; yet still in happiness
 Not yielding to the happiest upon earth.
(V.440-44)

The experience of fear is thus a necessary condition of growth, fitting the child to the "latent qualities and essences of things" and preparing a grandeur in the heart.

In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800) Wordsworth speaks of having displayed, in "The Brothers", "the strength of fraternal, or to speak more philosophically, of moral attachment when early associated with the great and beautiful objects of nature" (Zall, p. 20). The drift of the emphasis on the discipline of fear in Book I of The Prelude seems to be that it is a necessary element in a moral education, taking the word "moral" in its widest sense. The significance of the stolen boat incident is not that Wordsworth learned that mountains speak out against theft but that, with other experiences, it told him something about the nature of the world--about grandeur, simplicity, movement and power--which natural forms exemplify for the human mind. Fear is a part of the education of the affections:

and thus
 By the impressive discipline of fear,
 By pleasure and repeated happiness,
 So frequently repeated, and by force

Of obscure feelings representative
 Of joys that were forgotten, these same scenes,
 So beauteous and majestic in themselves,
 Though yet the day was distant, did at length
 Become habitually dear, and all
 Their hues and forms were by invisible links
 Allied to the affections. (I.630-40)

To the extent that fear is a part of an educative landscape, and its experience "fits" the child to the real world, it provides a preparation for the sublime and is similar to what Wordsworth, in the later essay, calls "preparatory intercourse", necessary if the sublime is to evoke a response.

Fear has yet a stronger effect on the responsive mind. Wordsworth's introduction of the notion of "resistance" into his theory corresponds to passages in The Prelude which link the experience of terror to the growth of the imagination. The idea is that the imagination develops by encountering difficulty and resistance which must be overcome, and fear often provides such a challenge, as it did in the discovery of the gibbet. "Higher minds", says Wordsworth, gain their imaginative power by encountering challenge:

They need not extraordinary calls
 To rouse them, in a world of life they live,
 By sensible impressions not enthrall'd,
 But quicken'd, rous'd, and made thereby more fit
 To hold communion with the invisible world.
 (XIII.101-05)

This process would demand a development beyond the power of Burke's "astonishment". As Wordsworth is at pains to make clear in the essay, fear precludes the sublime when it "enthralls", but insofar as it can quicken and rouse it calls forth the latent powers of imagination.

Wordsworth's own growth among sublime and terrible forms was possible because his mind was "seized" but not "enthralled" by his environment; the advancing cliff, for example, astonished him, but he was able to make the form of the cliff a part of his own imagery, and the experience provoked his imagination. So he could say of images "of danger and distress, / And suffering" that

these took deepest hold of me,
 Man suffering among awful Powers, and Forms;
 Of this I heard and saw enough to make
 The imagination restless (VIII.212-15).

Experience of the sublime at its highest level means to Wordsworth the mind's capacity to itself become sublime by appropriating whatever strength, liberty and power it can find in its environment and experience, and by supplying such qualities when they cannot be found. At the time of the French Revolution's crisis of terror, Wordsworth says, he discovered

That under heaviest sorrow earth can bring,
 Grievs bitterest of ourselves or of our kind,
 If from the affliction somewhere do not grow
 Honour which could not else have been, a faith,
 An elevation, and a sanctity,
 If new strength be not given, or old restored
 The blame is ours not Nature's. (X.424-30)

The idea is similar to what he has to say about the "spots of time". The experience of being lost and discovering the place where a murderer had been hung in chains was fearful to the little boy, but because he responded to the scene by exerting the power of will and mind he gained new strength. What was exerted was the mind's power to make the landscape in its own image, to invest it with "visionary dreariness"; and because of this initial act of strength, the same

landscape could later exhibit "the spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam". This is a strength which issues from exposure to nature in youth, to experience of sublimity and beauty, but it is ultimately a strength independent of nature; if man does not exercise it, "the blame is ours, not Nature's":

Oh! mystery of Man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours! I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands, but this I feel,
That from thyself it is that thou must give,
Else never canst receive. (XI.329-34)

Such a perception is of course connected with Burke's attention to the operations of the mind and Wordsworth's obsession with "the laws of the mind". It is consonant with his distaste for the tyranny of the senses and his opposition of a vulgar world, a "universe of death" to the "high objects" of nature which exhibit a life analogous to that of man. The experience of sublimity, when it calls into force all correspondent activities of the mind, draws man away from the "universe of death" and gives him liberty and power, the ability to draw nature into his own life:

Gladly here,
Entering upon abstruser argument,
Would I endeavour to unfold the means
Which Nature studiously employs to thwart
This tyranny, summons all the senses each
To counteract the other and themselves,
And makes them all, and the objects with which all
Are conversant, subservient in their turn
To the great ends of Liberty and Power.
(XI.176-84)

Ultimately, nature's ministry is to serve the creative human mind.

Wordsworth's understanding of the sublime takes much of

Burke's treatise for granted; on the simplest level, several passages in The Prelude indicate that Wordsworth finds the sublime awakened by much the same sort of sense data as Burke. But in his elaboration of the analogy between mind and nature Wordsworth moves far from the sensationalism of Burke, establishing a pattern of laws by which the mind can triumph over nature. It is as a part of this process that fear is so central an idea in The Prelude, for it is in childhood, and in learning to respond creatively to fear, that Wordsworth's "higher minds" begin to develop. Wordsworth's pattern of this mind, which is a "Power", "from the Deity", is in fact himself, a man who finds every image and thought and experience throwing back consciousness of his own power and liberty; and the acquisition of these is traced to "earliest visitations" in youth, "in presence of sublime and lovely forms", the mountains and valleys of the Lake District.

Essentially, then, the sublimity of The Prelude is the process of acquiring power by meeting the challenge of high, enduring objects and such other experiences with qualities analogous to those found in them. The nature of the poem is itself a pattern of power which, beginning with the manifestation of the advancing cliff, unfolds itself to Wordsworth, showing itself to be like him, or like what he could become. Such a fundamentally simple notion is that found at the core of the essay "The Sublime and the Beautiful"; but in The Prelude we see it transcending the world of theory and evolving through the dramatic interaction of a

growing boy with his world of forms "subline and fair".

IV

WORDSWORTH'S PARADIGM OF GRANDEUR

In the preceding chapter, an analysis of certain episodes in The Prelude demonstrated that there are marked similarities between Wordsworth's exploration of youthful experience, those in which his imagination was stimulated by "images of danger and distress, / And suffering" (VIII.211-12), and Burke's theory of the sublime of terror. Yet the experience of terror itself led Wordsworth beyond the Burkean sublime, and when he came to write his own treatise, "The Sublime and the Beautiful", fear did not figure in the central definition of the sublime. According to the essay, which defines sublimity in terms of mountain forms, a sense of sublimity depends upon the co-existence of "three component parts: a sense of individual form or forms; a sense of duration; and a sense of power". This is Wordsworth's paradigm of grandeur. Early experience of sublimity depended upon the arousal of imagination by fear; later experience depended upon recognizing the co-existence in phenomena of "individual form", "duration" and "power". Like fear, this paradigm of grandeur is central to The Prelude and it too is an elaboration of notions found in treatises on the sublime. Eighteenth-century writers like John Baillie (in An Essay on the Sublime, 1747) and Alexander Gerard (in An Essay on Taste, 1759) developed the Longinian notion of the responsive and

expanding mind, and sought to explain sublimity by defining the mode of human response to the grand and vast forms of nature. The elaboration of this idea (with some sophistication and not a little confusion) exercises Wordsworth in the core of his essay and is a key theme of The Prelude.

1. Grandeur and Vastness

"Grandeur" and "sublimity" are not synonyms. Wordsworth uses the term "Grandeur" to denote one aspect of sublimity within the sublime and beautiful pair, distinct from the related concept of vastness and without implicit connection with the idea of fear. Thus, he speaks in The Prelude of "beauteous forms or grand" (I.573--"forms sublime or fair" in the 1850 version); "grandeur and . . . tenderness" (VI.676); and in "The Sublime and the Beautiful" he distinguishes between "grandeur" and "beauty". The concept of grandeur from Addison on (although he used the word "greatness") refers first to qualities inherent in forms themselves, such as height, mass, weight and extension, and then to qualities in things that are not in any literal sense high, large, heavy or extensive (such things as the products of art), and finally to the mind or soul of man, responding to the forms both of nature and art. Addison, Baillie and Gerard make no distinction between grandeur and vastness, though the two last-named naturally tend to describe horizontally extended surfaces as "vast" (rivers, the ocean, the desert and the heavens) and vertically extended forms as "grand" (e.g., mountains); but considered as sublime there is no distinction between grandeur and vastness, and their

sublime effect lies in their power to induce corresponding expansion or elevation in the human mind. What induces this expansion is, simply, size: "Considerable magnitude or largeness of extension, in objects capable of it".¹

Wordsworth drew from this Longinian tradition of sublimity the idea of the mind's expansion. He attacked the association of sublimity with size, however; this emphasis on size he replaced by the definition of sublimity as the co-existing senses in objects of individual form, duration and power. In the Guide to the Lakes he wrote that "a notion of grandeur, as connected with magnitude, has seduced persons of taste into a general mistake upon this subject" (p. 34); the mistake referred to is that of preferring vast expanses of water in lakes to a number of smaller lakes enclosed by mountains,

¹Alexander Gerard, Essay on Taste (London, 1759), p. 13. Gerard, whose section on sublimity is called "Of the sense or taste of grandeur and sublimity", admits a debt to John Baillie; but we shall see that he introduces several refinements into Baillie's basically obvious account. Addison, in Spectator 412, assembled the standard catalogue of sublime forms in defining "greatness":

not only . . . the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of a whole view, considered as one entire piece. Such are the prospects of an open champaign country, a vast uncultivated desert, of huge heaps of mountains, high rocks and precipices, or a wide expanse of waters, where we are not struck with the novelty or beauty of the sight, but with that rude kind of magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of nature. (Donald F. Bond, ed., Critical Essays from The Spectator [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970], p. 178.)

John Baillie, in his Essay on the Sublime (London, 1747), remarks that "we are frequently ignorant what it is in Objects which constitutes the Grand, and gives them this Power of expanding the Mind" (pp. 4-5); nothing "produces this Elevation equal to large Prospects, vast extended Views, Mountains, the Heavens, and an immense Ocean" (p. 5). He concludes that it is the "Vastness of these Objects which elevates us" (p. 6), but he could equally have called it "grandeur".

as found in the Lake District. To understand Wordsworth's notion of grandeur, then, we have to begin with the mountain form of the Lake District, the focus of his discussion in "The Sublime and the Beautiful".

2. The Mountain Form

In "The Sublime and the Beautiful" Wordsworth, having introduced the subject of sublimity in general terms, invites the reader to "contract the speculation, & confine it to the sublime as it exists in a mountainous Country, & to the manner in which it makes itself felt" (Prose, II, p. 356). This invitation initiates a discussion which states or implies general principles suggested in other of his works as far apart in period and range as The Prelude and the Guide to the Lakes. One of the earliest sections of The Prelude to be written actually anticipates the bulk of the argument of the later essay:²

Attention comes,
And comprehensiveness and memory,
From early converse with the works of God
Among all regions; chiefly where appear
Most obviously simplicity and power.
By influence habitual to the mind
The mountain's outline and its steady form
Gives a pure grandeur, and its presence shapes
The measure and the prospect of the soul
To majesty; such virtue have the forms
Perennial of the ancient hills; nor less
The changeful language of their countenances
Gives movement to the thoughts, and multitude,
With order and relation. (VII.716-29)

²Found in the Alfoxden Notebook in their fragmentary state, the lines derive from the winter or spring of 1798, before the productive stay at Goslar. They of course predate the conception of the poem; see Pril., pp. 566-67, where De Selincourt notes that they constitute a "draft of the character of the Wanderer".

Mountains, of course, are among the sublime objects of traditional lists; but Wordsworth's choice of a mountainous region as exemplifying the pre-eminent locus for the nurture of imaginative power obviously depended upon his own experience: he was nurtured (to employ his own characteristic metaphor) in just such a region. In it he acquired powers of "attention", "comprehensiveness" and "memory"; to mountains he came to attribute "simplicity", "duration" and "power"; like many others, he identified in them a grandeur which communicates itself to the human mind or soul. The mountain form became for him the paradigm of virtually all concepts necessary to his theory of sublimity and imagination.

3. "Early Converse"

Wordsworth adds a radically new element to the theory of sublimity and beauty by connecting that theory with the history of a mind's development. From the perspective of growth the common idea that familiarity with grand objects dulls their power to communicate sublimity is seen to be absurd; ³ the essay insists that "continuance

³See, for example, Baillie's Essay on the Sublime, p. 11: Uncommonness, though it does not constitute the Sublime of natural Objects, very much heightens its Effect upon the Mind: For as great part of the Elevation raised by vast and grand Prospects, is owing to the Mind's finding herself in the Exercise of more enlarged Powers, and hence judging higher of herself, Custom makes this familiar, and she no longer admires her own Perfection. It is here, as in all other things, Variety is wanting.

On the other hand, with Wordsworth's "early converse" compare Beattie's remark that "the daily contemplation of the grand phaenomena of nature, in a mountainous country, elevates, and continually exercises, the Imagination of the solitary inhabitant" (Quoted in Salvesen, The Landscape of Memory [London: Arnold, 1965], p. 42).

of familiarity" can enlarge "conceptions of the sublime". There is a corollary to this. Since conceptions of sublimity depend to some extent on preconceptions, a person used to a horizontal scenery, for example, (and so connecting sublimity with expanses of lake or desert) would not immediately respond to the sublimity of a landscape of hills. Wordsworth gives an example of this law in operation; he instances

a lady, a native of the Orcades (which naked solitudes from her birth she had never quitted), whose imagination, endeavouring to compleat whatever had been left imperfect in pictures & books, had feasted in representing to itself the forms of trees. With delight did she look forward to the day when it would be permitted to her to behold the reality, & to learn by experience how far its grandeur or beauty surpassed the conceptions which she had formed--but sad & heavy was her disappointment when this wish was satisfied. A journey to a fertile Vale in the South of Scotland gave her an opportunity of seeing some of the finest trees in the Island; but she beheld them without pleasure or emotion, & complained that, compared with the grandeur of the living & ever-varying ocean in all the changes & appearances & powers of which she was thoroughly versed--that a tree or a wood were objects insipid and lifeless. (Prose, II, pp. 358-59)

Wordsworth might have had in mind his own disappointment at finding the reality of Mont Blanc so much less satisfying than his pre-conceptions; at first sight of that celebrated peak, during the walking-tour he undertook with his friend Robert Jones as a Cambridge undergraduate, he "griev'd / To have a soulless image on the eye" (VI.453-54). In any case, he was himself subject to this law and tended to prefer the grandeur of heights over the grandeur of vastness. He insisted on the necessity of a "preparatory intercourse" with sublime objects for the later recognition and appreciation of their sublimity:

it appears that even those impressions that do most easily make their way to the human mind, such as I deem those of the sublime to be, cannot be received from an object however eminently qualified to impart them, without a preparatory intercourse with that object or with others of the same kind. (Prose, II, p. 359)

Wordsworth never gave up his idea of the necessity of this "preparatory intercourse", and it was very much in his mind when he wrote to the editor of the Morning Post in 1844 to object to the plan of bringing a railway to Windermere. The tourists who would travel into the Lake District, Wordsworth believed, would bring with them vulgar, untrained powers of perception:

a vivid perception of romantic scenery is neither inherent in mankind, nor a necessary consequence of even a comprehensive education. It is benignly ordained that green fields, clear blue skies, running streams of pure water, rich groves and woods, orchards, and all the ordinary varieties of rural nature, should find an easy way to the affections of all men, and more or less so from early childhood till the senses are impaired by old age and the sources of mere earthly enjoyment have in a great measure failed. But a taste beyond this, however desirable it may be that every one should possess it, is not to be implanted at once; it must be gradually developed both in nations and individuals. Rocks and mountains, torrents and wide-spread waters, and all those features of nature which go to the composition of such scenes as this part of England is distinguished for, cannot, in their finer relations to the human mind, be comprehended, or even very imperfectly conceived, without process of culture or opportunities of observation in some degree habitual.

(Guide, pp. 150-51)

The ordinary and obvious aspects of natural beauty "find an easy way" into human affections, but the sublimity of "Rocks and mountains, torrents and wide-spread waters" make a significant claim only on those whose perceptive powers are educated by habitual intercourse.⁴

⁴F. W. Bateson, in his Wordsworth. A Re-interpretation, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, 1956), p. 177, finds the passage quoted above inconsistent with "a central thesis of The Prelude--that the basis of

The Prelude gives a fairly complete picture of this "preparatory intercourse" in Book I, which shows the young Wordsworth in his early converse with the works of God responding with fear and awe to sublime forms. The shape of the poem naturally parallels the theory, leading from "early converse" with to explicit recognition of the sublime. Indeed, it may be significant that the poem grew out of a series of boyhood memories written down in shapeless sequence at Goslar.

Recognition and response depend upon preparation and "prepossession". Wordsworth's childhood was both of these, for he had begun

With an advantage; furnish'd with that kind
Of prepossession without which the soul
Receives no knowledge that can bring forth good,
No genuine insight ever comes to her:
Happy in this, that I with nature walk'd,
Not having a too early intercourse
With the deformities of crowded life,
And those ensuing laughters and contempts
Self-pleasing (VIII.459-67).

Both The Prelude and Wordsworth's prose theory are in accord with a central eighteenth-century assumption about the sublime, that nature in its grandest forms kindles the human mind. But whereas standard theory connected this reaction to ideas of novelty and even astonishment (so depriving sublimity of long-term effect), Wordsworth, wise from experience, in effect connected it to the process of maturing. According to him, what grows out of "early converse", if that converse is of the right kind, is enriching and permanent.

the good life is unconscious intercourse with natural beauty." But Wordsworth makes clear that he is writing about sublimity, not beauty. The passage is entirely consistent with The Prelude, VII.716-29.

4. "Attention", "Comprehensiveness" and "Memory"

Wordsworth's life-long emphasis on accuracy of observation is notorious;⁵ in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800) he made it a criterion of the success he hoped to achieve: "I do not know how . . . I can give my Reader a more exact notion of the style in which I wished these poems to be written than by informing him that I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject, consequently I hope it will be found that there is in these Poems little falsehood of description" (Zall, p. 22). Close attention was a practiced part of Wordsworth's experience, and his interest in tracing the exercise of imaginative power back to its sources in "early converse" and "preparatory intercourse" made Addison's idea of novelty and Burke's astonishment irrelevant. The idea of "attention", including both accurate contemplation and the "watchful power of love" (II.310), is basic to Wordsworth's way of seeing. He thinks we should both see accurately and know why objects sublime and beautiful affect the mind as they do:

I am persuaded that it is of infinite importance to the noblest feelings of the Mind & to its very highest powers that the forms of Nature should be accurately contemplated, &, if described, described in language that shall prove that we understand the several grand constitutional laws under which it has been ordained that these objects should everlastingly affect the mind. (Prose, II, p. 350)

Very specifically, he links the conscious development of the mind, not just to observation of forms of nature, but to observation of these

⁵For a fuller account of Wordsworth's attitude towards accurate observation, see James A. W. Heffernan, Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry, pp. 6-11.

forms as sublime and beautiful. At the conclusion of The Prelude he speaks of the liberty of the mind unoppressed by "the laws of vulgar sense":

To fear and love,
To love as first and chief, for there fear ends,
Be this ascribed; to early intercourse,
In presence of sublime and lovely Forms (XIII.143-46).

Paradoxically, accurate contemplation frees the mind, for it develops from the very beginning of life when the baby, "creator and receiver both" (II.273), is learning to exercise the "most watchful power of love". The development of perception is anchored in accurate looking and this results in a reciprocal exertion of the mind.

The first part of Wordsworth's account of his "Residence at Cambridge" in The Prelude is devoted to this reciprocal pattern of "attention", stressing now the process of looking, now the process of the mind exercising power. At Cambridge,

whatsoever of Terror or of Love,
Or Beauty, Nature's daily face put on
From transitory passion, unto this
I was as wakeful, even, as waters are
To the sky's motion (III.132-36).

On the other hand, having left behind the mountainous region of childhood, his mind was ready to exercise itself more:

from such change entire
And this first absence from those shapes sublime
Wherewith I had been conversant, my mind
Seem'd busier in itself than heretofore;
At least, I more directly recognised
My powers and habits (101-06).

Accurate contemplation had impelled his mind to a reciprocal activity, so that he went to Cambridge not only to

apprehend all passions and all moods
Which time, and place, and season do impress
Upon the visible universe,

but also to "work / Like changes there by force of my own mind"

(85-88). This in its turn produced further contemplation, so that,

As if awaken'd, summon'd, rous'd, constrain'd,
I look'd for universal things; perused
The common countenance of earth and heaven;
And, turning the mind in upon itself,
Pored, watch'd, expected, listen'd; spread my thoughts
And spread them with a wider creeping (109-14).

Such dialectic of perception, in which the subject both receives and creates, is what Wordsworth means by "attention".

"Comprehensiveness" indicates that responsiveness to the world of sense in its totality which springs from exercise of "that most watchful power of love". The baby derives from its mother the ability to see all objects irradiated and exalted "through all intercourse of sense" (II.255-60). Nature, comprehensive itself, teaches comprehensiveness:

From nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness equally are nature's gift,
This is her glory; these two attributes
Are sister horns that constitute her strength;
This twofold influence is the sun and shower
Of all her bounties, both in origin
And end alike benignant. (XII.1-7)

In building up a mature mind Nature employs both "gentlest visitation" and "ministry / More palpable"; "discordant elements" are resolved into the harmony of music (I.351-71). Nature is presumably, unlike the theorists, the most undogmatic of teachers, as Wordsworth suggests in the essay, where he observes that "conceptions of the sublime will be rendered more lively & comprehensive by more accurate observation and

by encreasing knowledge". The lady from the naked solitudes of the Orcades would learn to see sublimity in the trees and woods of the south of Scotland, and the boy who encountered an advancing cliff under circumstances which "precluded imperiously the perception of beauty" would learn, as he grew in maturity, to "escape upon the invitation of his more placid & gentle nature from those obtrusive qualities in an object sublime in its general character" (Prose, II, p. 349). A sense of comprehensiveness would permit the observer some freedom in perception, so that sublimity and beauty need not wholly exclude each other:

Even something of the grandeur which invests
The Mariner who sails the roaring sea
Through storm and darkness early in my mind
Surrounded, too, the Wanderers of the Earth,
Grandeur as much, and loveliness far more
(XII.152-57).

"Comprehensiveness" enables the perceiver to see the world as a harmonious whole, now sublime, now beautiful, now reconciling both, now modifying one by the other.

Wordsworth's ability to recall vividly objects and figures from his past life is connected in an obvious way to his theory of perception;⁶ "memory" is simply the reward of "attention". It involves both the "accurate contemplation" of individual objects, and the presence of those ideas, contributed by the mind, that make a scene memorable. Of this process there is a fine example in Book XI of The Prelude:

⁶The definitive work on the role of memory in Wordsworth's perception and poetry is Christopher Salvesen's The Landscape of Memory (London: Arnold, 1965).

And afterwards, the wind and sleety rain
 And all the business of the elements,
 The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
 And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
 The noise of wood and water, and the mist
 Which on the line of each of those two Roads
 Advanced in such indisputable shapes,
 All these were spectacles and sounds to which
 I often would repair and thence would drink,
 As at a fountain (XI.376-85).

The striking element of this passage is the determined singleness of each item; each has "indisputable shape", and it is precisely because of this that the scene as a whole possesses "singularity". The scene was not in itself particularly memorable, but acquired power from its association with a powerful event; once fixed in the memory, the scene obeyed the laws of sublimity, each item standing out with marked "individual form". Riveted in the mind as "forms" they could be subjected to repeated contemplation: "I often would repair and thence would drink, / As at a fountain". It is to the analysis of concepts like "simplicity" and "form" that we now turn.

5. "Individual form", "Duration" and "Power"

The definition of sublimity as the co-existing senses in objects of individual form, duration and power is common to both the passage from the conclusion of Book VII of The Prelude, quoted in section 2 above, and the essay "The Sublime and the Beautiful". In the Prelude passage, "individual form" appears as "simplicity" (721) and "the mountain's outline and its steady form" (723); and "duration" is clearly implied in "the forms / Perennial of the ancient hills" (726-27). The mountain form imparting senses of these properties is sublime; it

Gives a pure grandeur, and its presence shapes
The measure and the prospect of the soul
To majesty.

Although the concepts of simplicity and duration enter other discussions of the sublime,⁷ Wordsworth's yoking of them to the concept of power introduces a new definition of sublimity.

Of these three properties or attributes, only individual form and duration are definable in terms of the mountain itself; power, which is the most instrumental of the three in producing the sublime, is defined by the relationship of mind to form, and so--as we have seen⁸--is that in an object which the mind aspires to and to some degree attains and appropriates, or that which subdues the mind, filling it with awe and a "feeling of intense unity". The mind feeling

⁷See, for example, Gerard's Essay on Taste, 1759: "Objects are sublime, which possess quantity or amplitude, and simplicity in conjunction" (p. 13); "Objects cannot possess that largeness, which is necessary for inspiring a sensation of the sublime, without simplicity. . . . we take in, with ease, one entire conception of a simple object, however large" (pp. 15-16); and he includes "length of duration" as sublime, for "eternity is an object, which fills the whole capacity of the soul" (p. 16). Kant, in his early Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime, tr. J. T. Goldthwait (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), observes also that "a long duration is sublime. If it is of time past, then it is noble. If it is projected into an incalculable future, then it has something of the fearsome in it" (pp. 49-50). Both Beattie and De Quincey thought durable objects favourable to the exercise of memory, Beattie observing that "precipices, rocks, and torrents, are durable things; and being more striking to the fancy than any natural appearances in the plains, take faster hold of the memory" (Dissertations Moral and Critical [Dublin, 1783], I, 106). De Quincey echoes this thought: "In solitude, and chiefly in the solitudes of nature; and, above all, amongst the great and enduring features of nature, such as mountains and quiet dells, and the lawny recesses of forests, and the silent shores of lakes, . . . under these circumstances it is that such evanescent hauntings of our past and forgotten selves are most apt to startle and to waylay us" (quoted by Salvesen, The Landscapes of Literature, pp. 159-60).

⁸The idea of power is discussed more fully above, pp. 20-24.

dread and awe recognizes the superior power of the grand object, while the mind which can pursue its aspirations with some degree of success feels that it shares the power. An example of the former is provided by Wordsworth's account of his first entry into London, sitting "on the Roof / Of an itinerant Vehicle":

I sate
 With vulgar Men about me, vulgar forms
 Of houses, pavement, streets, of men and things,
 Mean shapes on every side: but, at the time,
 When to myself it fairly might be said,
 The very moment that I seem'd to know
 The threshold now is overpass'd, Great God!
 That aught external to the living mind
 Should have such mighty sway! yet so it was
 A weight of Ages did at once descend
 Upon my heart; no thought embodied, no
 Distinct remembrances; but weight and power,
 Power growing with the weight (VIII.694-706).

The "Mean shapes" of the city precluded the possibility of any sense of individual form being imparted to Wordsworth, although inasmuch as it was not this or that aspect of London he was experiencing, but an abstract sense of the city as a whole, it might have appeared as "simple". But he did sense "duration", because he was affected by a sense of the city as a historic entity, an accumulated "weight of Ages". In this instance the sense of power subdued Wordsworth's mind "to a dread and awe . . . as existing out of itself". He felt London's power as a weight, exercising a "mighty sway". At other times Wordsworth participated in power to some extent, as when he witnessed the growing terror of the French Revolution. Like the Hebrew prophets denouncing the corruption of societies and invoking Divine wrath, so-- says Wordsworth--

did some portions of that spirit fall
 On me, to uphold me through those evil times,
 And in their rage and dog-day heat I found
 Something to glory in, as just and fit,
 And in the order of sublimest laws;
 And even if that were not, amid the awe
 Of unintelligible chastisement,
 I felt a kind of sympathy with power,
 Motions rais'd up within me, nevertheless,
 Which had relationship to highest things.
 Wild blasts of music thus did find their way
 Into the midst of terrible events,
 So that worst tempests might be listen'd to
 (X.410-22).

Even more removed from the mountain than is London, the "object" here exciting sublimity is "rage". Evidently "simple" in its utter concentration, it also imparts a sense of duration, in that Wordsworth identifies himself with the ancient Hebrew prophets announcing divine doom and thus mastering the events provoking wrath. On this occasion the "power" inherent in the situation elevates him "to a sympathy with & a participation" in it.⁹

The notions of simplicity and duration are more readily defined than is power. "Simplicity" or "individuality of form" in natural objects seems to refer to that quality in an object which permits it to be viewed as one large, entire and bounded form. The mountain is an ideal model of this, viewed either as an individual elevation or as one peak in a range. Wordsworth's general avoidance of forms like the ocean in discussions of sublimity is readily explicable; an ocean or an expanse of water in a large lake is apparently formless. The idea of duration is self-evident, neatly

⁹With its imagery of "wild blasts of music" and its exaltation of power, this passage suggests Burke's sublime of non-rational terror; cf. *Enquiry*, II.xvii.

conveyed in "the forms / Perennial of the ancient hills".¹⁰

Wherever simplicity and / or duration are evident in The Prelude they are likely to imply power. In "The Sublime and the Beautiful" Wordsworth appears to accord each of his three requirements a rough equality,¹¹ but in reality the presence of any one of these properties in any phenomenon seems to trigger the imagination and excite energy. Aspects of sublimity are involved wherever simplicity or duration or power makes claims on the mind. The development of this idea, and its application to The Prelude, is treated in the following chapter.

¹⁰In his Guide to the Lakes Wordsworth accords greater sublimity to the Lake District than to the Alps, on account of the former's imparting a sense of greater permanence:

Again, with respect to the mountains; though these are comparatively of diminutive size, though there is little of perpetual snow, and no voice of summer-avalanches is heard among them; and though traces left by the ravage of the elements are here comparatively rare and unimpressive, yet out of this very deficiency proceeds a sense of stability and permanence that is, to many minds, more grateful

Among the Alps are few places that do not preclude this feeling of tranquil sublimity. (p.99)

The sublimity excited by the Alps depended on a state of awe in the face of exhibitions of tremendous destructive power. Again, the distinction between the Alps and the Lake District mountains is essentially that between power which elevates and power which subdues. Both are species of the sublime, but Wordsworth was clearly more responsive to the former.

¹¹Although Wordsworth states that "if any one of them were abstracted, the others would be deprived of their power to affect", power and duration are excepted, each in one instance. Power is allowed to be unnecessary for sublimity in the works of Man, "for obvious reasons" that are unstated. Duration is clearly not attributable to a cloud, yet the possibility is admitted of such an object impressing a young child with a sense of sublimity. Duration is also absent from a restatement of the definition: "Individuality of form is the primary requisite; and the form must be of that character that deeply impresses the sense of power".

6. "Steady Form"

To the conclusion of Book VII, and its passage extolling the steady form of the mountain, Wordsworth added (in a late revision) a more conventional catalogue of the sublime:

Think, how the everlasting streams and woods,
 Stretched and still stretching far and wide, exalt
 The roving Indian, on his desert sands:
 What grandeur not unfelt, what pregnant show
 Of beauty, meets the sun-burnt Arab's eye:
 And, as the sea propels, from zone to zone,
 Its currents; magnifies its shoals of life
 Beyond all compass; spreads, and sends aloft
 Armies of clouds, --even so, its powers and aspects
 Shape for mankind, by principles as fixed,
 The views and aspirations of the soul
 To majesty. (VII.745-56; 1850 version)

This passage comes closer than the original lines (which were an ordering of very early fragments of verse) to the comprehensive lists of sublime objects assembled by Addison, Baillie and Gerard among others, and follows them in its emphasis on vast forms ("the everlasting streams", desert and ocean). Yet its inappropriateness in this context is suggested by the derivative "literary" quality of phrases like "the sun-burnt Arab's eye", and in fact the typical association by Wordsworth of the elevation of the soul (to a grandeur corresponding with nature's) with the mountain form, so strongly established in the original version of The Prelude, is supported by the evidence of the Guide to the Lakes and "The Sublime and the Beautiful". Wordsworth perhaps included the concept of vastness in his general theory of the sublime, but he did not on the whole find the vast forms of desert and ocean particularly illustrative of his laws

of the sublime.¹² It has already been established that he favoured the Lake District mountains over those of the European Alps; similarly, the vastness of "American and Asiatic lakes" pleased him less than the small lakes of his home environment:

No doubt it sounds magnificent and flatters the imagination, to hear at a distance of expanses of water so many leagues in length and miles in width; and such ample room may be delightful to the fresh-water sailor, scudding with a lively breeze amid the rapidly-shifting scenery. But, who ever travelled along the banks of Loch-Lomond, variegated as the lower part is by islands, without feeling that a speedier termination of the long vista of blank water would be acceptable; and without wishing for an interposition of green meadows, trees, and cottages, and a sparkling stream to run by his side? In fact, a notion of grandeur, as connected with magnitude, has seduced persons of taste into a general mistake upon this subject. It is much more desirable, for the purposes of pleasure, that lakes should be numerous, and small or middle-sized, than large, not only for communication by walks and rides, but for variety, and for recurrence of similar appearances. (Guide, pp. 33-34)

"Variety, and . . . recurrence of similar appearances" suggests the

¹²Addison certainly favoured vastness in his definition of greatness--"the prospects of an open champaign country, a vast uncultivated desert, of huge heaps of mountains, high rocks and precipices, or a wide expanse of waters". Wordsworth does not make much use of the ocean in his discussions of sublimity, but deprecates "wide expanse[s] of waters" as they are found in lakes of magnitude. The following quotation suggests that he regarded the ocean as sublime because it combines grandeur and power:

I may add, as a general remark, that, in lakes of great width, the shores cannot be distinctly seen at the same time, and therefore contribute little to mutual illustration and ornament; and, if the opposite shores are out of sight of each other, like those of the American and Asiatic lakes, then unfortunately the traveller is reminded of a nobler object; he has the blankness of a sea-prospect without the grandeur and accompanying sense of power. (Guide, p. 34)

With Wordsworth's tendency to deprecate the merely vast, compare Saint-Evremond's comment that "great is a perfection of Minds; Vast always a Defect. A just and regulated Extent makes the Great; an immoderate Greatness the Vast" (quoted by Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, pp. 31-32).

presence of two opposing but harmonized tendencies in nature; and the instrumental presence of two such opposing principles reconciled in a single appearance is the key to Wordsworth's idea of form. Elsewhere in the Guide, remarking that "an elevation of 3,000 feet is sufficient to call forth in a most impressive degree the creative, and modifying, and softening powers of the atmosphere", he stresses that sublimity depends more on form and relationship than upon magnitude:

A short residence among the British Mountains will furnish abundant proof that after a certain point of elevation, viz. that which allows of compact and fleecy clouds settling upon, or sweeping over, the summits the sense of sublimity depends more upon form and relation of objects to each other than upon their actual magnitude. (p. 102)

The two most common versions of the idea of form as reconciling opposing tendencies are the sensing of parts and whole in a single form, and the sensing of movement and stability. There are also a number of related concepts referring to the sense of sublimity induced under essentially the same law of "simplicity": "unity", symmetry and "infinity" (which Wordsworth calls, in "The Sublime and the Beautiful", a "modification of unity").

We have noticed earlier one very suggestive definition of sublimity and beauty offered in the Guide:

Sublimity is the result of Nature's first great dealings with the superficies of the earth; but the general tendency of her subsequent operations is towards the production of beauty; by a multiplicity of symmetrical parts uniting in a consistent whole. (p. 35)

Implicit in this definition is the same ideal way of viewing held up in Book VII, where London is called "by nature an unmanageable sight" (709). By nature, London is incapable of imparting a sense either of

sublimity or beauty; but the trained eye does not see "by nature" in this sense, and indeed to that trained eye London is not wholly "unmanageable":

It is not wholly so to him who looks
In steadiness, who hath among least things
An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole.
(VII.709-12)

These lines suggest the possibility of seeing objects as both sublime and beautiful. A large object would impress with sublimity to the extent that it was viewed as a whole, in the outline that resulted from "Nature's first great dealings with the superficies of the earth" or with the "under-sense of greatest" things predominating over the perception of "least things". Conversely, a sense of beauty would be derived from attention to the "multiplicity of symmetrical parts" produced by nature in her subsequent operations. The closing lines of Book VII show that Wordsworth felt London was a manageable sight because he had seen it in both of these ways:

The Spirit of Nature was upon me here;
The Soul of Beauty and enduring life
Was present as a habit, and diffused,
Through meagre lines and colours, and the press
Of self-destroying, transitory things
Composure and ennobling Harmony.
(735-40)

The "parts" of London could be brought into meaningful relationship within a whole by means of this disciplined way of perception; and the coexistence of sublimity and beauty is neatly capsulated in the phrase "ennobling harmony", the first of the pair indicative of sublimity, the second of beauty.

Another mode of grandeur is produced by coexisting stability

and movement. On the one hand, the form of mountains is "steady" and "perennial"; on the other,

The changeful language of their countenances
Gives movement to the thoughts, and multitude,
With order and relation. (727-29)

If one interprets these lines in the light of the definition just quoted from the Guide one can ally "steady" and "perennial" with sublimity, "movement" and "multitude" with beauty, and "order and relation" with the process of harmony which draws parts into a whole. However, in "The Sublime and the Beautiful" this duality of direct influence is traced to the sublime itself. A mountain is a "stationary object" ("steady form"); yet the mind enjoys a "sense of motion" arising from the "lines by which the Mountain itself is shaped out":

These lines may either be abrupt and precipitous, by which danger & sudden change is expressed; or they may flow into each other like the waves of the sea, and [involve] in such image a feeling of self-propagation infinitely continuous and without cognizable beginning (Prose, II, p. 352).

Later in the essay infinity is called "a modification of unity". To this same duality of influence, whether considered as an endowment of sublimity or of sublimity and beauty,¹³ Wordsworth attributes his resilience in escaping from the tyranny of adolescent "fancy":

¹³In the essay Wordsworth says that he "take[s] for granted that the same object may be both sublime & beautiful; or, speaking more accurately, that it may have the power of affecting us both with the sense of beauty & the sense of sublimity; tho' . . . the mind cannot be affected by both these sensations at the same time, for they are not only different from, but opposite to, each other". For the perception of change as connected with the beautiful, cf. Book IV, 181-99 and 222-46. For an extended discussion of the relationship between perception in terms of sublimity and beauty see Chapter VII below. It seems consistent with everything Wordsworth wrote on the subject to suggest that whenever "multitude" is seen as cohering in "order and relation", beauty is yielding to sublimity.

Yet in the midst
 Of these vagaries, with an eye so rich
 As mine was, through the chance, on me not wasted
 Of having been brought up in such a grand
 And lovely region, I had forms distinct
 To steady me; these thoughts did oft revolve
 About some centre palpable, which at once
 Incited them to motion, and control'd,
 And whatsoever shape the fit might take,
 And whencesoever it might come, I still
 At all times had a real solid world
 Of images about me (VIII.594-605).

To some extent, then, grandeur results from the modification of fixity or steadiness by a sense of movement. It is this sense of movement which, giving to "forms and images a breath / And everlasting motion" (I.428-31), imparts grandeur by making possible the attribution of life to natural forms.

Parallelism and symmetry are types of formal patterning approximate to simplicity and unity. Wordsworth's discussion of the "Rock in the middle of the fall of the Rhine at Chafhausen" in the essay (quoted in Chapter II above) relates the idea of "opposition and reconcilment" to sublimity and says that it is "analogous to parallel lines in mathematics which, being infinitely prolonged, can never come nearer to each other". Parallelism suggests infinity, and infinity is "a modification of unity", perhaps because in forms truly suggestive of infinity (such as parallel lines) nothing breaks the simplicity of the form. To quote again a significant remark from elsewhere in the essay,

whatever suspends the comparing power of the mind & possesses it with a feeling or image of intense unity, without a conscious contemplation of parts, has produced that state of the mind which is the consummation of the sublime.

(Prose, II, pp. 353-54)

Unity, of course, is similar to simplicity, a term Wordsworth uses as a variant of the essay's "individual form". The relationship between these concepts is suggested, for example, in the following passage from the Guide, which refers to the primitive nature of the patterns of mountain-clusters and lake beds in the Lake District:

The bases of those huge barriers may run for a long space in straight lines, and these parallel to each other; the opposite sides of a profound vale may ascend as exact counterparts, or in mutual reflection, like the billows of a troubled sea; and the impression be, from its very simplicity, more awful and sublime. (p. 35)

Here we have the association of simplicity with sublimity, and types of patterning with simplicity.

From the passages of the Guide cited in this section, the reasons behind Wordsworth's rejection of magnitude as a determinant of sublimity in favour of form become clear. The consummation of the sublime occurs when consciousness of parts is lost in contemplation of the whole; but consciousness of unity is achieved by an ability to interpret parts in terms of wholes, to see "the parts / As parts, but with a feeling of the whole". Wordsworth's rationale of form is clearly no abstract construct of the mind. It is, rather, the result of a way of looking at natural forms with just such a sense of unity and diversity.

V

GRANDEUR IN THE PRELUDE

Having defined what Wordsworth meant by grandeur and given to that concept a fairly specific content, we now proceed to examine grandeur as it is manifested in the phenomena and experiences of The Prelude. Where simplicity, duration and power are present singly or in combination in natural objects, human figures and the works of intellect and art, Wordsworth almost invariably attributes to them a capacity to stir the imagination and dignify the mind. Meaningful human growth and health are dependent upon them; in phenomena and circumstances lacking in grandeur the human mind must exert itself to overcome a threat to the imagination. In this chapter we shall examine Wordsworth's method of interpreting his world by the standards of grandeur, directing our attention to the urban and social in London and Cambridge, to human figures, and to mathematics and art.

1. London (Book VII)

Wordsworth's account of London in Book VII of The Prelude is a fascinating record of the impact of the city on a young man's mind and senses. As a young resident Wordsworth viewed London daily "with keen and lively pleasure even there / Where disappointment was the strongest" (141-42); he yielded to the enchantment and felt its

"motley imagery" as "a vivid pleasure". But the London of memory and imagination created in The Prelude is the "unreal city" of Baudelaire and Eliot, a city of Ovidian metamorphosis which lacks solidity and form, in which the real is submerged beneath the mimic and pantomimic. Wordsworth's method is to present London both as a disjunctive series of random parts and as a procession which passes before the eyes as a stream; the point of the image is that in such a procession nothing has separate identity, all its parts being melted into an amorphous mass.¹ The "broad high-way appearance" of the city is communicated in a series of abstracts and generalized plurals:

the quick dance
Of colours, lights and forms, the Babel din
The endless stream of men, and moving things,
From hour to hour the illimitable walk
Still among Streets with clouds and sky above,
The wealth, the bustle and the eagerness,
The glittering Chariots with their pamper'd Steeds,
Stalls, Barrows, Porters (156-63).

In a sense, this is a way of seeing "the parts / As parts, but with a feeling of the whole". For London passes before the eyes rapidly and incoherently as a succession of parts or "shapes" (the latter is a recurrent word in the Book, occurring at 228, 427, 576, 601 and 621)

¹With the "stream" imagery of Book VII compare the first part of T. S. Eliot's Waste Land ("A crowd flowed over London Bridge") and Blake's lyric "Holy Thursday" from Songs of Innocence in which the Charity children's processional into Saint Paul's is like the flow of the Thames. R. F. Storch ("Wordsworth and the City: 'Social Reason's Inner Sense'", The Wordsworth Circle, I [1970], 114-22) notes that the "metaphor is by no means original to Wordsworth but seems to have occurred about 1660. Language in fact hands down such metaphors of natural forms applied to human life as part of a universal education." Storch uses the paradigm from the conclusion of Book VII as a critique of London in the way that I do, but does not relate the concepts of simplicity, duration and power to an overall pattern of sublimity.

lacking in essential form; but as a "whole" every part of the city can be seen as an aspect of "spectacle", a scene from an extended pantomime. As used throughout the Book, the word "spectacle" encompasses all phenomena forced onto the viewer in random encounter; it comprehends and confuses the theatrical and the real, indicating that London's characteristic effect is to obliterate distinctions between the two. To cite only those instances where the word "spectacle" is actually used, the performing animals of indoor amusement houses (245-47) and Bartholomew Fair are spectacles, but so also are the woman whom Wordsworth first heard utter "blasphemy" (413-20) and the blind beggar wearing a "written paper" of his history (610-23). This is to suggest not that Wordsworth made no distinction between these two very different kinds of spectacle, but that Londoners did not,

Living amid the same perpetual flow
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end
(701-04).

Bartholomew Fair and the performing animals are spectacular in the sense of being theatrical exhibitions, while the blaspheming woman and the blind beggar are so perhaps in the more prosaic sense of being things presented to the sight.² London tends to subsume both under the first definition, as is aptly suggested by Wordsworth's story of

²These two meanings of "spectacle" correspond with definitions 1 and 3 in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. Bartholomew Fair is "a specially prepared display of a more or less public nature . . . forming an impressive or interesting show for those viewing it"; the blind beggar should perhaps be merely "a thing seen or capable of being seen; a sight", but by donning his written paper of explanation, he presents himself as a "spectacle" in the first sense also.

the "rosy Babe" seated upon a refreshment table at a theatre and made the centre of attraction for "a Ring / Of chance Spectators":

Upon a Board
Whence an attendant of the Theatre
Serv'd out refreshments, had this Child been plac'd,
And there he sate, environ'd with a Ring
Of chance Spectators, chiefly dissolute men
And shameless women; treated and caress'd,
Ate, drank, and with the fruit and glasses play'd,
While oaths, indecent speech, and ribaldry
Were rife about him as are songs of birds
In spring-time after showers. (382-91)

London sobers because it dehumanizes man. Wordsworth recalls the "lovely Boy" "as if embalm'd / By Nature" in order to dissociate him from the degradation of London. For this episode clearly deserves the commentary offered on the sight of the blaspheming woman:

a barrier seem'd at once
Thrown in, that from humanity divorced
The human Form, splitting the race of Man
In twain, yet leaving the same outward shape.
(423-26)

In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802) Wordsworth notes this same degrading quality of large cities, this same "savage torpor" paradoxically produced by, and productive of, "the application of gross and violent stimulants". Anticipating many more recent critics of urban societies, Wordsworth laments the blunting of discrimination:

For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. (Zall, pp. 43-44)

To compare the indecencies of dissolute men surrounding a little boy

to the songs of birds is ironically to draw attention to this loss of discriminatory power, and the perverse nature of some of the "gross and violent stimulants" used.

London submerges humanity beneath spectacle. One notices only things that stand out, that are "conspicuous less or more" among the random; but because the city is a stream, conspicuousness is not particularly significant apart from offering items for a catalogue:

See, among less distinguishable Shapes,
The Italian, with his frame of Images
Upon his head; with Basket at his waist
The Jew; the stately and slow-moving Turk
With freight of slippers piled beneath his arm.
(228-32)

And, with a "written paper, to explain / The story of the Man, and who he was", the blind beggar, merely one in this "moving pageant".

Intimations of submerged humanity come to Wordsworth from such deprived and deformed figures singled out from the mass; two cripples attract notice in a group that includes a nurse, a bachelor, a "military Idler" and a dame (216-26), and it is a crippled boy who, returning to Hawkeshead school from a visit to London, gives Wordsworth to believe that London must be reckoned with in terms other than those of fancy and romance. What he had imagined about London held Wordsworth with wonder and delight, but there was an aspect of the city these took no account of:

I well
Remember that among our flock of Boys
Was one, a Cripple from his birth, whom chance
Summon'd from School to London, fortunate
And envied Traveller! and when he return'd,
After short absence, and I first set eyes
Upon his person, verily, though strange

The thing may seem, I was not wholly free
 From disappointment to behold the same
 Appearance, the same body, not to find
 Some change, some beams of glory brought away
 From that new region. Much I question'd him,
 And every word he utter'd, on my ears
 Fell flatter than a caged Parrot's note,
 That answers unexpectedly awry,
 And mocks the Prompter's listening. (93-108)

The structural unity of Book VII is suggested in this contrast between the London of fancy, romance and spectacle on the one hand, and the submerged, real city on the other. A product essentially of the imaginative reconstruction and thought that were involved in writing the poem, this contrast did not altogether elude the young man who set up house in London for a few short months in 1791 and 1793³ and who was both fascinated by the enchanting surface and sobered by its undertones of perverted humanity:

Marvellous things
 My fancy had shap'd forth, of sights and shows,
 Processions, Equipages, Lords and Dukes,
 The King, and the King's Palace, and not last
 Or least, heaven bless him! the renown'd Lord Mayor:
 Dreams hardly less intense than those which wrought
 A change of purpose in young Whittington,
 When he in friendlessness, a drooping Boy,
 Sate on a Stone, and heard the Bells speak out
 Articulate music. Above all, one thought
 Baffled my understanding, how men lived
 Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still
 Strangers, and knowing not each other's names.
(108-20)

The imaginative resonance of Book VII results from this interplay of unreality and reality, the "marvellous things" and "sights and shows"

³Book VII, recording Wordsworth's impressions of a novel environment, probably deals partly with his stay there after his return from the Alpine tour he made with Robert Jones. For a biographical account see Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth, A Biography: The Early Years (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 153-60.

on the one hand, and on the other the problem of striking down to a firm reality in a milieu where next-door neighbours are strangers to each other.

As implied by the word "spectacle", the metaphor on which the Book is founded is that of the theatre; sections of the narrative are indeed concerned with the theatre itself, and almost every aspect of London life is seen in terms of that metaphor, or variations of it. In the core of the Book (248-588) Wordsworth begins with a treatment of mimicry in art, proceeds to pantomime and theatre, and finally extends the metaphor to the real world, in which members of different professions seem to be acting parts. Despite the savagery with which Wordsworth treats Bartholomew Fair, the climax of the spectacular, as a monstrous dream, it is clear that as a young man the surface of the city delighted him; only gradually did he begin to see London as a massive spectacle obliterating humanity and deadening the imagination.⁴ Theatres, he says, "then were my delight,"

A yearning made more strong by obstacles
Which slender funds imposed. Life then was new,
The senses easily pleased; the lustres, lights,
The carving and the gilding, paint and glare,
And all the mean upholstery of the place,
Wanted not animation in my sight:
Far less the living Figures on the Stage,
Solemn or gay (437-45).

As had been the case during his first year at Cambridge, his "sight / Was dazzled by the novel show" (III.202-03). Since Wordsworth is

⁴In fact, Wordsworth's description of Bartholomew Fair may derive from his visit there in the company of Charles Lamb in 1802. See William Heath, Wordsworth and Coleridge. A Study of their Literary Relations in 1801-1802 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 82.

interpreting London from the standpoint of maturity it is necessary to distinguish between the reactions of the younger man and the reflections of the Grasmere poet. Both are caught in the poetry, the superficial delight in the crisp and vivid itemizing of impressions and richness of imagery, the sober reflection in passages like the digression on the boy who seemed "a sort of Alien scatter'd from the clouds".

If the verse, in the sheer vigour of its listing of London amusements, conveys vividly the delight of a young man whose senses were gratified by the richness of cosmopolitan urban spectacle, the language also points up the overall context in which these are to be viewed. In the section on indoor amusements (244-80) there is criticism of that perverted taste which falls under Wordsworth's scorn in Book XI as one which he had shared. Works of art that attempt to provide panoramic impressions "ape / The absolute presence of reality"; they do not attain "purest ends" but are, rather, "imitations fondly made in plain / Confession of man's weakness and his loves." They are both presumptuous (the statement that the painter tries to "plant us upon some lofty Pinnacle" recalls Satan's temptation of Christ) and trivial. The painter has a "greedy pencil"; he attempts to record every "scratch minute", each detail that a traveller would see if he were actually in presence of the scene. His work is a "life-like mockery". The passage in fact recalls Wordsworth's stricture on Crabbe's methods of writing poetry, and the criticism in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads of "scientific modes of

apprehending truth".⁵ No less it implicitly condemns that kind of seeing characteristic of lovers of the picturesque, a manner of perception Wordsworth admits his own subjection to:

The state to which I now allude was one
In which the eye was master of the heart,
When that which is in every stage of life
The most despotic of our senses gain'd
Such strength in me as often held my mind
In absolute dominion. (XI.171-76)

The passage in Book VII reveals a distrust of what Wordsworth calls the "rules of mimic art" (XI.154), but this was not necessarily his attitude at the time of his London sojourns.

The next section moves to "shifting pantomimic scenes".

Wordsworth's experience of the theatre in London was of obviously crude exhibitions and spectacles of delusion. In "half-rural Sadler's Wells" there was, evidently, a steady diet of spectacle, "Singers, Rope-dancers, Giants and Dwarfs, / Clowns, Conjurers, Posture-masters, Harlequins" (294-95), and pantomime. Wordsworth saw, for example, "Jack the Giant-killer":

He dons his Coat of Darkmess; on the Stage
Walks, and atchieves his wonders, from the eye
Of living mortal safe as is the moon
'Hid in her vacant interlunar cave'
Delusion bold! and faith must needs be coy;
How is it wrought? His garb is black, the word
INVISIBLE flames forth upon his Chest.
(303-09)

Evidently delighted by all this, he did not take it too seriously, watching "crude nature work in untaught minds" and noting "the laws

⁵J. A. W. Heffernan, Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry, p. 13. For a useful brief account of Wordsworth's philosophy of perception, see the first chapter of this book, "The Eye and the Heart".

and progress of belief" as later he was to examine the laws of the human mind in "The Sublime and the Beautiful".

There is little of the truly satiric, though much true wit, in Wordsworth's extension of theatrical imagery to London as a whole, as he passes

from entertainments that are such
Professedly to others titled higher,
Yet in the estimate of youth at least,
More near akin to these than names imply
(516-19).

Swift would have executed with considerably more ruthless thoroughness the reduction of lawyers, judges, senators and preachers to empty stage-strutters. Something of Wordsworth's uneasiness with the satiric mode emerges in his treatment of Pitt;⁶ the tone of this is curiously ambivalent, and we are not sure whether the epithet "tongue-favor'd" is intended as deflationary or not. The quality of the paragraph on the "show" of "holy Church" is essentially literary and diffuse with a vague allusiveness suggesting Chaucer's Pardoner, Milton's attack on the clergy in *Lycidas* and Pope's foppish rapists. The point of the

⁶Most recent commentators, following Edith C. Batho (*The Later Wordsworth* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933], p. 156n), identify the orator of 524-43 with William Pitt (1759-1806). The passage eulogizing Edmund Burke inserted into the 1850 version (512-43) conflicts both with the tone of the Book and with Wordsworth's feelings at the time of his early residence in London.

For discussions of Book VII in terms of satire and the "Juvenalian spirit" Coleridge had expected Wordsworth to assume in describing "high civilization", see Herbert Lindenberger, *On Wordsworth's "Prelude"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 233-42, and Ford T. Swetnam, Jr., "The Satiric Voices of *The Prelude*" in *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 92-110. Lindenberger's treatment is marred by a lack of sympathy with the mode of verse in Book VII, which he compares unfavourably with the satiric style of Pope and Johnson.

inclusion of a very mildly satiric element in the Book seems to be its place in revealing something of Wordsworth's attitudes at the time of his stay. His purpose was not (like Swift) to lash the follies of the age, nor (like Pope) to reduce the over-serious to comic proportions. "Candidates for regard" like the orators and judges, and the more serious manifestations of folly, vice and extravagance, were simply part of the "common produce" and everyday spectacle which engaged the young countryman's mind fairly superficially:

Such Candidates for regard,
Although well pleased to be where they were found,
I did not hunt after, or greatly prize,
Nor made unto myself a secret boast
Of reading them with quick and curious eye;
But as a common produce, things that are
To-day, to-morrow will be, took of them
Such willing note as, on some errand bound
Of pleasure or of love some Traveller might,
Among a thousand other images,
Of sea-shells that bestud the sandy beach,
Or daisies swarming through the fields in June.
(576-587)

In terms of the sustained subject of The Prelude, the growth of mind and imagination, London represents the same kind of experience as Cambridge. At the university, Wordsworth tells us, he had a watchful eye that busied itself with observation and analysis (III.103-13, 156-59); so, in London,

the mind
Turn'd this way, that way! sportive and alert
And watchful, as a Kitten when at play,
While winds are blowing round her, among grass
And rustling leaves. (469-73)

Imagery and a rather literary use of personification, that tool Wordsworth affected to despise so much, suggest that London seemed to

him to be a microcosm of an outside world demanding observation, and on this aspect of Book VII a passage from the conclusion of his account of Cambridge might well serve as epigraph:

I play the loiterer: 'tis enough to note
That here, in dwarf proportions, were express'd
The limbs of the great world, its goings-on
Collaterally pourtray'd, as in mock fight,
A Tournament of blows, some hardly dealt,
Though short of mortal combat; and whate'er
Might of this pageant be suppos'd to hit
A simple Rustic's notice, this way less,
More that way, was not wasted upon me.
--And yet this spectacle may well demand
A more substantial name, no mimic shew,
Itself a living part of a live whole,
A creek of the vast sea. (III.614-26)

In view of Wordsworth's habitual linking of grandeur with simplicity and sharply-defined form, the imagery of London is significant; the city is a "quick dance / Of colours, lights and forms" (156-57), its population is an "endless stream of men" (158), "a weary throng" (171) and a "tide" (206), and the streets are "labyrinths" (201) which must be threaded. "Attention" could hardly derive from this environment of "random sights" which "press forward . . . on the sight".

London, like Cambridge, tended to suppress imagination; as Wordsworth's "imagination slept" (though not completely) during his Cambridge stay so it did in London, even when theatrical tragedy filled his heart (500-02). Yet the account of London certainly reveals an "imaginative power" in its concentration of impressions of fluidity and formlessness into a coherent symbolic whole, and in apologizing for his descent into humble subject matter Wordsworth confesses that when he thinks of "more lofty Themes" (such, perhaps, as he contemplates in Book I as fit themes for a major work) he feels "imaginative

Power / Languish" within him (496-500). Reflection, then, tells Wordsworth that his experience of London has a distinctive role to play in the history of his imagination; it is

not to be despis'd
By those who have observ'd the curious props
By which the perishable hours of life
Rest on each other, and the world of thought
Exists and is sustain'd. (491-95)

The melodramatic tragedy of the theatre, for example, affected him only superficially, making a slight impression on his faculties, affecting only the "suburbs of the mind", but even it could communicate something of "real grandeur" insofar as bad acting, by contrast or opposition, evoked the "Spirits that mov'd / Amid the Poet's beauteous world" and helped Wordsworth to formulate distinctly the vague idealizations of imagination (506-16).

As contrast (between the fluid, superficial world of spectacle and the underlying human reality it conceals, for example) is a major structural principle in Book VII, so it was the principle by which "single forms and objects" drew their power to affect Wordsworth strongly. This he makes explicit in a passage inserted into the 1850 version:

As the black storm upon the mountain top
Sets off the sunbeam in the valley, so
That huge fermenting mass of human-kind
Serves as a solemn back-ground, or relief,
To single forms and objects, whence they draw,
For feeling and contemplative regard,
More than inherent liveliness and power.
(619-25; 1850 version)

Thus the moving stream of London shapes, while imposing anonymity on its individual constituents, throws into relief particular spectacles

like the blind beggar whom Wordsworth chooses as the instance of the above generalization. This blind beggar is one of "such structures as the mind / Builds for itself" (624-25), that is, he is a figure capable of activating the symbol-making power of the imagination, and--as we might expect--he is to that extent an instance of sublimity, an admonition from another world. In terms of the paradigm analysed in the preceding chapter, he evinces singularity, duration and power. Whereas the stream of passing Londoners was indistinct and dream-like, becoming for Wordsworth "A second-sight procession, such as glides / Over still mountains, or appears in dreams" (601-02), the beggar arrested the view abruptly and with singularity. Here was a stark, simple entity that detached itself from the perishable life of the city, acquiring the duration and power of a symbol:

'twas my chance
Abruptly to be smitten with the view
Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face,
Stood propp'd against a Wall, upon his Chest
Wearing a written paper, to explain
The story of the Man, and who he was.
My mind did at this spectacle turn round
As with the might of waters, and it seem'd
To me that in this Label was a type,
Or emblem, of the utmost that we know,
Both of ourselves and of the universe;
And, on the shape of the unmoving man,
His fixed face and sightless eyes, I look'd
As if admonish'd from another world.

(609-22)

The blind beggar, like the discharged soldier of Book IV, reveals some final truth about the nature of reality. He becomes a living symbol of the London in which next-door neighbours remain strangers to each other. Yet if he possessed sublimity, it must have been the sublimity that awes, subdues and depresses, rather than that which exalts and

raises. Seeming an emblem of the mind's limitations, of "the utmost that we know," he stands as the polar opposite in The Prelude to the scene from Snowdon (Book XIII), which appeared to Wordsworth as "The perfect image of a mighty Mind". London and nature offer radically different emblems of ultimate truth.

London is indeed the "dear domain" of "foolishness and madness in parade" (588), though of course these are to be found everywhere. Equally, however, this parade sets off--like a theatrical back-drop--individual sights and figures which awake the imagination or touch the heart. "He, rather," Wordsworth says,

it employed, to note, and keep
In memory, those individual sights
Of courage, or integrity, or truth,
Or tenderness, which there, set off by foil,
Appeared more touching. (598-602; 1850 version)

The 1850 version makes this point very clear, for the above-quoted remark introduces the vignette of the tender artisan with his "sickly babe" seen in an open square, a passage which Wordsworth moved to Book VII from the end of Book VIII, where it stands rather inappropriately in the earlier version. This vignette is in turn followed by the simile that compares the way in which background throws into relief single sights with the black storm setting off the valley sunbeam (quoted above), an observation which introduces the account of the blind beggar. This principle of contrast is of course illustrated throughout Book VII, for besides the "motley imagery" and "random sights" of London, so vividly recorded, there are also the starker symbols of imaginative interest like the two cripples (215-23), Mary of Buttermere (346-64), the "rosy Babe" exhibited at the theatre

(365-412) and the blaspheming woman (413-35). Insofar as these become symbolic of the deeper reality all but submerged by the ocean-like city they are, "though rear'd upon the base of outward things", "such structures as the mind / Builds for itself" (623-25).

Like Book III, the account of London is bound up with an exploration of developing powers of mind and imagination, and the central question is, "what role is there for active employment of the imagination when one encounters a spectacle so deadening as London?" It is this question that occupies Wordsworth in the last section of the Book (623-740). To find in the blind beggar an emblem of man's limited knowledge of himself and the universe is, we are told, to build a "structure", "rear'd upon the base of outward things" but certainly not self-evident; in such an activity the mind is exerting itself. Other phenomena, however, are entirely self-revealing--"the peace / Of night, for instance" (627-28). So they seem, but even these require co-operation from the perceiver if they are to take "possession of the faculties". They are

things that are, are not,
Even as we give them welcome, or assist,
Are prompt, or are remiss. (642-44)

Most phenomena, it would seem, leave some welcome scope for the mind and imagination of the viewer. Some aspects of London, however, are utterly deadening in their effect:

What say you then,
To times, when half the City shall break out
Full of one passion, vengeance, rage, or fear,
To executions, to a Street on fire,
Mobs, riots, or rejoicings? From these sights
Take one, an annual Festival, the Fair
Holden where Martyrs suffer'd in past time,

And named of Saint Bartholomew; there see
 A work that's finish'd to our hands, that lays,
 If any spectacle on earth can do,
 The whole creative powers of man asleep!
 (644-54)

What Wordsworth intends us to say about such spectacles is simply that not only do they present themselves to the eye and the mind fully formed, but also they forbid the mind to exercise itself imaginatively. The blind beggar presents himself, and the mind responds by dealing with him in the strength of its powers. The peace of night presents itself, apparently fully self-evident, but even this invites some exertion of the mind to give it welcome. The crude spectacles detailed in the quoted passage above are radically different. Not only do spectacles like Saint Bartholomew's Fair take full "possession of the faculties", they also completely cauterize the imagination; in underlining this maiming effect of spectacle, Wordsworth ironically calls on the Muse's assistance in describing the fair. From a vantage-point only a little "above the press and danger of the crowd", what appears is both an exaggeration of all the spectacle previously noted in the Book and a parody of what, in nature, awakens human imagination. The fair is anarchic, an unreal, monstrous hell with the unnatural and false life of a phantasm. Like the form of the mountain the fair has "colour, motion, shape, sight, sound" (661), but in perverted, anti-natural formlessness. It is indeed an assembly of

All out-o'-th'-way, far-fetch'd, perverted things,
 All freaks of Nature, all Promethean thoughts
 Of Man; his dulness, madness, and their feats,
 All jumbled up together to make up
 This Parliament of Monsters. (687-91)

Bartholomew Fair, a Hell for the imagination, is

blank confusion! and a type not false
 Of what the mighty City is itself
 To all except a Straggler here and there,
 To the whole Swarm of its inhabitants
 (695-98).

This central Book of the 1805 Prelude is, however, not simply a descent into Hell. London fascinated the young resident considerably. The disturbing dehumanizing effect of city life in which next-door neighbours remained strangers did not preclude a responsiveness to show and spectacle. The young visitor had made some progress "in meditations holy and sublime" (477), yet the novelty of the city attracted him; his mind, "watchful as a kitten when at play" (471), recognized the "real grandeur" that lay ideally behind the theatrical incarnations. As a whole, London did not lay the "whole creative powers" of Wordsworth asleep. Lacking essential sublimity itself, it achieved meaningful form because it was grasped by an imagination and a strength of perception gained through "early intercourse, / In presence of sublime and lovely Forms" (XIII.145-46). Wordsworth's mind remained healthy because it had been "frequently and strongly moved both by sublimity and beauty" (Prose, II, p.349). He did not reject the experience of London, but rather saw it through eyes and mind trained by nature. Of itself the city was an "unmanageable sight" which lacked form and grandeur, a

perpetual flow
 Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
 To one identity, by differences
 That have no law, no meaning, and no end
 (701-04).

But Wordsworth looked in steadiness, and retained "among least things / An under-sense of greatest". Behind the boy exhibited at the

theatre and the blaspheming woman he saw Mary of Buttermere, and her dead child who slept in peace, a part of nature; behind the random motion of the fair he saw "the mountain's outline and its steady form" giving movement to the thoughts and grandeur to the mind. London was neither sublime nor beautiful, but through trained perception it could share pervading sublimity and beauty, the twin laws under which phenomena gain significant form:

The Spirit of Nature was upon me here;
The Soul of Beauty and enduring life
Was present as a habit, and diffused,
Through meagre lines and colours, and the press
Of self-destroying, transitory things
Composure and ennobling Harmony.
(735-40)

2. London (Book VIII)

The sections of Book VIII which summarize the force of Wordsworth's experiences at Cambridge and London have something of the nature of second thoughts; having characterized life at the university and in the city as a superficial if brilliant charade, Wordsworth adopts a tone of more serious retrospect in order to do justice to the impact both experiences made on his imagination. Addressing London, he admits that he returns to it in order to speak of its grandeur:

Erewhile my Verse play'd only with the flowers
Enwrought upon thy mantle; satisfied
With this amusement, and a simple look
Of child-like inquisition, now and then
Cast upwards on thine eye to puzzle out
Some inner meanings, which might harbour there.
Yet did I not give way to this light mood
Wholly beguiled, as one incapable
Of higher things, and ignorant that high things
Were round me. (VIII.680-89)

This passage refers to the composition of Book VII rather than to

Wordsworth's reactions at the time of his London visits, and it offers fair comment on that Book. The "flowers / Enwrought upon thy mantle" are presumably such things as the diverse human figures and entertainments listed, while in his treatment of the boy exhibited at a theatre and the blind beggar, Wordsworth "puzzle [s] out / Some inner meanings". Yet if Cambridge and London were, on the whole, conglomerates of vulgarity which possessed a superficial fascination, where did their grandeur lie? What were the "high things" round Wordsworth? The answer is suggested in the brief summary of Cambridge:

Ere long transported hence as in a dream
 I found myself begirt with temporal shapes
 Of vice and folly thrust upon my view,
 Objects of sport, and ridicule, and scorn,
 Manners and characters discriminate,
 And little busy passions that eclips'd,
 As well they might, the impersonated thought,
 The idea or abstraction of the Kind.
 An Idler among academic Bowers,
 Such was my new condition, as at large
 Hath been set forth; yet here the vulgar light
 Of present actual superficial life,
 Gleaming through colouring of other times,
 Old usages and local privilege,
 Thereby was soften'd, almost solemnized,
 And render'd apt and pleasing to the view
(VIII.641-56).

A sense of tradition and history modified Wordsworth's view of both Cambridge and London, raising them above the meanness and vulgarity of the everyday.

The imagery of the above-quoted passage shows that to Wordsworth Cambridge and London were the same kind of experience. In both places, according to the poem, he was the solitary observer moving amid experience so unreal to him that it had to be described as dream or pageant. Phenomena seemed to press in upon him, the passive

spectator, with both the appealing unreality of works of fancy and the dead weight of "present actual superficial life". But his imagination needed some middle ground between the unreality of dream and the dead actuality of the superficial to engage it. This middle ground was the sense of both places as embodiments of history, able to exert a kind of power and to evoke awe. We have already discussed Wordsworth's account of his entry into London in such terms, an entry in which a "weight of ages" seemed to press down upon him as he rode into the city; and to a lesser degree the few lines in Book III referring to the entry into Cambridge convey the same sense of power being asserted:

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

(III.10-12)

Like London, Cambridge at this moment exerted power--presumably because of its historical associations, the "colouring of other times, Old usages and local privilege" by which the everyday and superficial were "solemniz'd". A sense of extended history could make buildings seem "high", able to support thought and feed the imagination.

London exhibited strongly this sublimity of duration and power which at Cambridge was felt as little more than a modifying "colour". London's "duration" made the city, in this one respect, like nature:

a sense
Of what had been here done, and suffer'd here
Through ages, and was doing, suffering, still
Weigh'd with me, could support the test of thought,
Was like the enduring majesty and power
Of independent nature (VIII.781-86).

By "independent nature" Wordsworth seems to mean the comparatively

uninhabited nature of the Lake District which formed his conceptions as a young boy. We have seen the central place occupied by the idea of duration in "The Sublime and the Beautiful" where specifically "independent nature" is being discussed. Book VIII of The Prelude attributes a sublimity to London quite impossible in terms of the account in Book VII but reasonable if one follows Wordsworth's treatment of the city as a simple idea like a mountain, possessing "enduring majesty". Where in Book VII London appears as a jumble of random sights, in Book VIII it is presented as a unity, though not a physical unity, which embodies a variety of great ideas, 'a

vast Metropolis,
The Fountain of my Country's destiny
And of the destiny of Earth itself,
That great Emporium, Chronicle at once
And Burial-place of passions and their home
Imperial and chief living residence.
(746-51)

A feeling for London as an abstract whole enables Wordsworth to compare it with "independent nature".⁷

While there is no problem in recognizing how London as a whole can be said to possess grandeur, it is more difficult to reconcile with his earlier view of the city Wordsworth's claim that he found power "in all things":

I sought not then
Knowledge; but craved for power, and power I found

⁷Only single buildings in London could be said to possess that "individuality of form" Wordsworth considered essential for sublimity. But in Book VIII this criterion could hardly apply. Wordsworth is not talking about this or that single building or part of London, but about the city as an abstract whole. "Simplicity", a term used frequently in The Prelude, would seem to be the equivalent of "individuality of form" in areas where the latter is irrelevant.

In all things; nothing had a circumscribed
 And narrow influence; but all objects, being
 Themselves capacious, also found in me
 Capaciousness and amplitude of mind
 (754-59).

The 1850 version⁸ makes it clear that Wordsworth intended "being / Themselves capacious" as a phrase of specification: such objects as were themselves capacious had more than "a circumscribed / And narrow influence". Even so, and granted that we are not told which of London's objects specifically did impress Wordsworth, the claim that he found power in all things seems large. Much of the long passage on London in Book VIII (678-859) answers the question as to how he found objects themselves, as distinct from the city as a whole, embodiments of power; but his answer is in a somewhat confusing form.

The accumulating weight and power felt on first entering London was, we are told, a transitory experience--it "came and went / As in a moment" (708-09). Yet something like this experience persisted, for in lines 742-51 Wordsworth notes having first "been mov'd / With a swell of feeling", then having had "a blank sense of greatness pass'd away", and finally having "afterwards continu'd to be mov'd". The reason that he was so moved is suggested in lines 746-51 quoted above: he was moved by the sense of London as a historical force, an instrument of destiny; the effect of being moved by this is described in the long simile in the epic manner of the preceding paragraph (711-41). The long simile, that is, tells us how

8

whate'er was in itself
 Capacious found, or seemed to find, in me
 A correspondent amplitude of mind
 (604-06).

the "power" of London affected Wordsworth's perception, while the commentary on that simile points to the source of this power.

The simile itself links this sublime perception to a version of Burke's obscurity. The experience of a man who enters a "grotto", "den" or "cavern" bearing a torch is illusory and fantastic. While the torch at first seems to illuminate the limits of the cave, it rapidly confuses the sight by mingling "substance and shadow". The flame of the torch throws erratic patterns of light and shadow on the ceiling, creating extravagant shapes which constantly "shift and vanish, change and interchange / Like Spectres". This process Wordsworth calls a "ferment quiet and sublime"; presumably it is the sublime of obscurity that Burke makes much of, for it lasts only briefly and

works less and less,
Till every effort, every motion gone,
The scene before him lies in perfect view,
Exposed and lifeless, as a written book. (724-27)⁹

These stages of ferment and its disappearance correspond to the first "swell of feeling" and the subsequent "blank sense of greatness pass'd away". However, the first effect can be recaptured if attention is diverted from the cave's ceiling and then thrown onto it again, allowing the torch to resume its magic operations:

a new quickening shall succeed, at first
Beginning timidly, then creeping fast
Through all which he beholds; the senseless mass,
In its projections, wrinkles, cavities,
Through all its surface, with all colours streaming,

is "Like a magician's airy pageant" (729-34). So, after the sense of

⁹Cf. *Enquiry*, II.iv, especially the suggestive dictum that "a clear idea is . . . another name for a little idea".

greatness seemed to have vanished from London, did Wordsworth continue to be moved.

Interpreting the Book VIII version of Wordsworth's London experience according to the simile, we can say that the torch was the sense of romance stimulated by London's historical associations. London was a place of "strong Sensations, teeming . . . / Of past and present". Presumably because of the richness, variety and even, perhaps, vagueness of the associations Wordsworth brought to the city, "nothing had a circumscribed / And narrow influence", and anything which could be thought of as capacious (such "objects", one would suppose, as St. Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament) struck an answering capacity in the visitor's mind; here again we see the Longinian notion of expansion in the mind corresponding to some grandeur in external phenomena. Thus London, seen as a city of "shapes" and "objects", could seem to be an environment as powerful as that of the Lake District:

Even individual remembrances,
By working on the Shapes before my eyes,
Became like vital functions of the soul;
And out of what had been, what was, the place
Was throng'd with impregnations, like those wilds
In which my early feelings had been nurs'd,
And naked valleys, full of caverns, rocks,
And audible seclusions, dashing lakes,
Echoes and Waterfalls, and pointed crags
That into music touch the passing wind.

(787-96)

The overall effect of the Book VIII "retrospect" as far as London is concerned is to counter the Bartholomew Fair episode which portrays one aspect of urban life as death and indeed hell to the imagination. But although there is a marked difference in the two

accounts of the city, both ultimately make the same point. At the end of Book VII, Wordsworth says that a way of perception learnt from nature can make sense of what otherwise would be an "unmanageable sight"; in Book VIII the most glorious truths of the imagination are acknowledged to have derived from "the external universe, / . . . striking upon what is found within" (761-69). In both discussions the mind and imagination are recognized as creative faculties which never defy external nature but which can work in co-operation with it and even redeem its imperfections. Even in London this was possible:

Thus here imagination also found
 An element that pleas'd her, tried her strength,
 Among new objects simplified, arranged,
 Impregnated my knowledge, made it live,
 And the result was elevating thoughts
 Of human Nature. (797-802)¹⁰

Perhaps the best commentary on the function of London in the development of imagination is found at the end of Book XI, where Wordsworth invokes that vital principle which seems to be a test of the operations of the imagination in every episode of the poem-- "action from within and from without" (370-79). Insofar as London could offer "action from without" to provoke "action from within" it was a theatre of sublimity, elevating mind and imagination.

3. The Shepherd Form (Book VIII)

One of the major themes of The Prelude is the account of how

¹⁰Since only "imagination" can be the subject of "simplified, arranged, / Impregnated", it is probably also the subject of "tried"; the comma at the end of line 798 is unnecessary, but the sense would demand one to follow "objects" in the next line.

man gradually came to interest Wordsworth, to grip his imagination and evoke his love. Book VIII, "Love of Nature leading to Love of Man", tells the story of the place man occupied in Wordsworth's early affections, in the context of his upbringing in the pastoral highlands of the Lake District. It is therefore not only a record of the development of a feeling for humanity but also a commentary on the values Wordsworth associates with the "real" pastoral environment of his youth contrasted with a far more traditional, "literary" pastoralism. Man takes his place as a part of nature, hardly to be thought of apart from the surrounding natural environment yet standing out from it, and to be understood in the same context of sublimity and beauty. The two themes of pastoralism and humanity are so closely allied because Wordsworth first

look'd
At Man through objects that were great and fair,
First commun'd with him by their help. (450-52)

The conventional pastoral offered nothing strong or rich enough to grip the imagination; the real pastoral with its mountains and mountain shepherds could evoke a response of awe and love.

Structurally, the pastoral section of Book VIII (1-640) is a series of passages alternating between evocations of previous pastoral landscapes and contrasting statements about the pastoral environment of Wordsworth's youth and its significance. There is the classical pastoral of Theocritus, Vergil and Horace (183-85, 312-24), the renaissance literary pastoral of Shakespeare and Spenser (186-204), an evocation of the famous gardens of Gehol made for the "delight / Of the Tartarian Dynasty", based on an account in travel literature

(123-43) and a description of the countryside around Goslar, according to Wordsworth "a pastoral Tract / Like one of these, where Fancy might run wild" (325-53). The basic distinction between these pastoral landscapes and Wordsworth's Lake District is that between fable and reality. The "domain" of the Lake District is more beautiful because it embodies "ordinary human interests" (167). Beauty here refers to a quality that includes both the beautiful and the sublime, for Wordsworth finds its reality in the "severe and unadorn'd" customs and manners so far from the May-day rituals of Spenser and such Elizabethan poets; this beauty, in fact, depends upon the general sublimity of an environment which was favoured "in Nature's primitive gifts" (145), and it was the specifically sublime aspects of the locality which interested Wordsworth.¹¹ Although the life of the Lake District was beautiful, with "beauty that was felt",

images of danger and distress,
And suffering, these took deepest hold of me,
Man suffering among awful Powers, and Forms;
Of this I heard and saw enough to make
The imagination restless (210-15).

Goslar was an attractive pastoral countryside, the kind of countryside perhaps familiar to the classical pastoral poets, a gentle and variegated "Pleasure-ground"; but Wordsworth rejects it in favour of the stern sublimities of his own home:

Yet hail to You,
Your rocks and precipices, Ye that seize
The heart with firmer grasp! your snows and streams

¹¹On the distinction between beauty as an inclusive term and beauty as opposed to sublimity, see A. C. Bradley's "The Sublime" in his Oxford Lectures on Poetry (1909; rptd. London and New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 38-40.

Ungovernable, and your terrifying winds,
 That howl'd so dismally when I have been
 Companionless, among your solitudes.
 (353-58)

The fabled was less attractive than the real, which riveted the imagination because of its very austerity and lent its character to the inhabitants.

The Lake District was more impressive to Wordsworth than the landscapes of traditional pastoral--more beautiful in the wider application of that word--because it was more comprehensive (see above, pp. 80-81). The shepherds of the district shared these comprehensive attributes, and were therefore loved, revered and even worshipped. Yet these shepherds are severely distanced, and when Wordsworth speaks of "love of man" he is not talking about a growing affectionate response to individual men and women but about man in general, "purified, / Remov'd, and at a distance" (439-40). "Love", like "beauty", in this context seems to be a term of wider reference than the love of the "love and fear" pair; it is an emotion that includes awe and reverence. The reason for this is that, as Wordsworth accounts for it in Book VIII, his attitude to man was shaped by a series of remarkable views in which natural phenomena literally showed off the form of man in a number of lights. In the first of these views, a shepherd and his dog acquired extraordinary significance by appearing like inhabitants of an island floating above through a sea of mist:

Along a narrow Valley and profound
 I journey'd, when, aloft above my head,
 Emerging from the silvery vapours, lo!
 A Shepherd and his Dog! in open day:

Girt round with mists they stood and look'd about
 From that enclosure small, inhabitants
 Of an aerial Island floating on,
 As seem'd, with that Abode in which they were,
 A little pendant area of gray rocks,
 By the soft wind breath'd forward. (92-101)

In the mist the shepherd and his dog are the only objects that stand out clearly, with especial distinctness because seen from below. This passage is followed immediately by the account of a similar visual phenomenon with reversed circumstances: Wordsworth, situated above a vale, looks down on a shepherd standing "in the bottom of a Vale / Towards the centre" who instructs his dog by means of signs where to move on the hillside in pursuit of the sheep.

While certainly possessing "individuality of form" and seen from sublime viewpoints above and below, these two shepherds inspired Wordsworth with "motions of delight" (80). They appealed to the sense of the beautiful rather than to that of awe. The "mists and steam-like fogs" were "not vehement, / But calm and mild, gentle and beautiful" (86-87) and the effects created by the shifting patterns of mist and sunshine caused Wordsworth to see with "joy and love". The second shepherd and dog pair were viewed with almost as "bland" a delight (101-02); this delight, however, arose not from a sport appearance but from gratification at the intelligence of a sheep dog and response to the particular beauty of a mountain sunset which seemed, with shepherd, dog and sheep, to reflect divine love.

The shepherds of Book VIII are distanced, yet more real and comprehensive than any "Corin of the groves" (420), that image of the tepid beauty of the traditional pastoral shepherd, because in them

Wordsworth sees a "sanctity of nature given to man" (430). It is in the relationship of man to the comprehensive landscape of the Lake District that man gained his grip on the imagination, and the landscape in turn is seen as borrowing glory from its inhabitants. Thus, although the gardens of Gehol were doubtless exquisitely lovely,

lovelier far than this the Paradise
Where I was rear'd; in Nature's primitive gifts
Favor'd no less, and more to every sense
Delicious, seeing that the sun and sky,
The elements and seasons in their change
Do find their dearest Fellow-labourer there,
The heart of Man, a district on all sides
The fragrance breathing of humanity,
Man free, man working for himself, with choice
Of time, and place, and object; by his wants,
His comforts, native occupations, cares,
Conducted on to individual ends
Or social, and still followed by a train
Unwoc'd, unthought-of even, simplicity,
And beauty, and inevitable grace.

(VIII.144-58)

The key to the splendour of the garden of Gehol is variegation and gentle variation; the Lake District's worth lies in the sharper contrasts seen in man and nature, contrast which is epitomized in Wordsworth's use of terms associated with the beautiful and the sublime. Man's freedom, simplicity and his individual ends point towards the sublime; his grace and his social ends to the beautiful.

Wordsworth's "far more of an imaginative form", no "Corin of the groves", was in fact a figure like Michael in the poem of that title, not merely a shepherd but a "statesman". In "Michael", Wordsworth wrote to Thomas Poole (9 April, 1801),

I have attempted to give a picture of a man, of strong mind and lively sensibility, agitated by two of the most powerful affections of the human heart; the parental affection, and the love of property, landed property, including the feelings

of inheritance, home, and personal and family independence. (E.Y., p. 322)

These affections remind one of the stress on the passions in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads,¹² and the demonstration of passion found in such ballads as "The Last of the Flock" and "The Idiot Boy". Such passions as parental affection, the love of property and independence, have more of the force of individual than social ends, or at any rate the two goals of action seem to coalesce. The sublime figure of Book VIII is just such a Statesman as Michael, as is evidenced by the anecdote of the shepherd, his son and the lost sheep in Book VIII. Both shepherd and son demonstrate the love of property, and the shepherd the power of parental affection. Thus the strong cleavage Burke sees in the Enquiry between the passions attendant on the sublime, turning on fear, and those attendant on the beautiful, turning on love, is not evident here. The story of the shepherd in search of his son, who in turn has been searching for a strayed sheep (222-311) involves both fear and love; and these emotions are inseparable in the context of this account of sublimity, which stresses the shepherd's individuality, his freedom and his affections.

¹²The following passage from the Preface can stand as a prose commentary on the theme of Book VIII:

Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that situation our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and from the necessary character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended; and are more durable; and lastly, because in that situation the passions of man are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature (Zall, p. 18).

However, the "affections" in the portrait seem to be stressed less than another aspect: the shepherd as a singular, simple and removed figure. As in the earlier shepherd views, this particular shepherd was apprehended materially in a way that seemed almost automatically to confer on him symbolic status. Wordsworth actually saw him as a "Freeman" offering service in "vast regions":

A rambling Schoolboy, thus
 Have I beheld him, without knowing why
 Have felt his presence in his own domain,
 As of a Lord and Master; or a Power
 Or Genius, under Nature, under God,
 Presiding; and severest solitude
 Seem'd more commanding oft when he was there.
 Seeking the raven's nest, and suddenly
 Surpriz'd with vapours, or on rainy days
 When I have angled up the lonely brooks
 Mine eyes have glanced upon him, few steps off,
 In size a giant, stalking through the fog,
 His Sheep like Greenland Bears; at other times
 When round some shady promontory turning,
 His Form hath flash'd upon me, glorified
 By the deep radiance of the setting sun:
 Or him have I descried in distant sky,
 A solitary object and sublime,
 Above all height! like an aerial Cross,
 As it is stationed on some spiry Rock
 Of the Chartreuse, for worship. (390-410)

That the word "sublime" has here more than metaphorical weight is attested by the strong visual details which make the figure "grand" in the way that mountains are. The shepherd looms up ahead, is apprehended as a "form" complimented by the effect of sunset glory, is seen uplifted "in distant sky" like a cross set high above the Chartreuse. Man, an "object", a "Power", was "Ennobled outwardly before mine eyes". Yet this perception which raised man to a spiritual height did not preclude the realization that this shepherd-figure was,

for the purposes of kind, a Man
 With the most common; Husband, Father; learn'd,
 Could teach, admonish, suffer'd with the rest
 From vice and folly, wretchedness and fear
 (423-26).

Such a figure could be the central agent or sufferer in a lyrical ballad.

We have already noted in a previous section the way in which Wordsworth claims to have used a pattern of perception gained from intercourse with natural forms as a bridge between the enduring, lively forms of nature on the one hand and the transient, dead urban environment on the other. The sublime form of the shepherd also had such a use, derived in its turn from the world of natural forms. Wordsworth benefitted from looking at Man first "through objects that were great and fair" (451); as he viewed mountains, so he viewed men, "purified, / Remov'd, and at a distance that was fit" (439-40). Like the mountain which possessed steady form, a clear outline and also lines of motion, so man was "a shape / Instinct with vital functions" (433-34). With such an idealized, sublime form before his inner eye Wordsworth could view with steadiness and safety

the weight of meanness, selfish cares,
 Coarse manners, vulgar passions, that beat in
 On all sides from the ordinary world
 In which we traffic. (454-57)

Presumably these are not unmanageable sights to "him who looks / In steadiness"; the grandeur of man stands in the same relation to these human trivialities as the grandeur of the mountain form does to the confusion of the city.

4. The Discharged Soldier (Book IV)

Of the discharged soldier, the encounter with whom he describes in Book IV of The Prelude, Wordsworth concludes that he is a figure just falling short of sublimity:

solemn and sublime
He might have seem'd, but that in all he said
There was a strange half-absence, and a tone
Of weakness and indifference, as of one
Remembering the importance of his theme
But feeling it no longer. (473-78)

Yet in describing the soldier Wordsworth uses most of the concepts applied elsewhere in the poem to instances of sublimity, and this "uncouth" figure did exhibit a remarkable dignity of form and behaviour. The "wandering" during which the chance encounter occurred was one of those "that have left behind / Remembrances not lifeless" (360-61); the account describes one of those "primitive hours" when

I experienc'd in myself
Conformity as just as that of old
To the end and written spirit of God's works,
Whether held forth in Nature or in Man.
(356-59)

Now the discharged soldier holds forth this "end and written spirit" when he reproves Wordsworth for the latter's well-meant but inept suggestion that he should in future need seek nearby assistance; the soldier assures him that "'my trust is in the God of Heaven / And in the eye of him that passes me'" (494-95). By this statement of trust the soldier clearly exemplifies the "end and written spirit of God's works", yet the "weakness and indifference" with which he answers the questions put to him seem, to Wordsworth, to detract from the sublimity of his demeanour and attitude--perhaps because they draw

attention to the soldier's humanity.

Despite Wordsworth's tone of qualification, the whole passage (363-504) shows the circumstances of the evening encounter as sublime in their suggestions, and the figure of the soldier sublime in terms of Wordsworth's own theory. Parts of the story can be isolated as re-workings of very early drafts dating from the beginning of 1798,¹³ a period when Wordsworth was interpreting his boyhood experience in terms of fear and the kind of obscurity said by Burke to promote fear. Solitude, obscurity and fear all contribute here to create an atmosphere of heightened awareness, almost of apprehension, which anticipates the emergence of the soldier as a figure of romance promising revelation; and the literary convention (most obviously associated in English poetry with Spenser) with which Wordsworth chooses to introduce the human figure, reinforces the invitation provided by the details of obscurity to view the soldier as a mystery-figure:

While, thus I wander'd, step by step led on,
It chanc'd a sudden turning of the road
Presented to my view an uncouth shape
(400-02).

The sublime of obscurity and the language of romance combine to establish an atmosphere of apprehensive expectation.

The beginning of the episode brings together several of Burke's examples of general privations: darkness, desertion and

¹³See Beth Darlington, "Two Early Texts: A Night-Piece and The Discharged Soldier" in Jonathan Wordsworth, ed., Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, pp. 425-28.

silence.¹⁴ The walk leads

Along the public Way, when, for the night
Deserted, in its silence it assumes
A character of deeper quietness
Than pathless solitudes. (365-68)

But there is light from the moon, permitting some grotesque visual effects when it throws the form of the soldier into stark relief, and the contrast between this strange pole-like figure and the nearby sleeping village in which "every silent window to the Moon / Shone with a yellow glitter" (452-53) gives an atmosphere of muted eeriness to the episode.

In terms of Wordsworth's triad of individuality of form, duration and power, which co-inhere in impressions of sublimity, the first two are emphasized in the portrait of the soldier, while power, not specifically mentioned, is implied by the strong hold the figure exerts on Wordsworth's imagination. Individuality of form the soldier certainly possessed, both in form and utterance projecting a stark and weathered austerity:

He was of stature tall,
Stiff in his form, and upright, lank and lean,
A man more meagre, as it seem'd to me,
Was never seen abroad by night or day.
His arms were long, and bare his hands; his mouth
Shew'd ghastly in the moonlight; from behind
A milestone propp'd him, and his figure seem'd
Half-sitting, and half-standing. (405-13)

The moonlight gives the scene a Burkean flavour, intensifying the

¹⁴In the early manuscripts the suggestion of Burkean sublimity is augmented by the detail of a dog's howling, an example of inter-mitting sound; but the noise was heard during a walk taken by William and Dorothy during January 1798. See Beth Darlington in Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, p. 427, and ll. 80-83 of MS Verse 18A appended to her article.

ghost-like effects of the scene, yet equally it throws the military figure into stark relief. The soldier possesses clear outline of form and extension. He is like a mountain peak, to be grasped by the eye as entirely single:

He was alone,
Had no attendant, neither Dog, nor Staff,
Nor knapsack; in his very dress appear'd
A desolation, a simplicity
That seem'd akin to solitude. (415-19)

The kind of life the soldier embodies seems like the life of the mountain form.¹⁵ His "form / Kept the same steadiness" and when he eventually stirred his arm moved "In measur'd gesture". A sense of steadiness and measured movement Wordsworth elsewhere attributes to mountain forms, such as the one in Book VII whose "outline and . . . steady form / Gives a pure grandeur" yet also, as we have seen, "Gives movement to the thoughts"; the advancing cliff of Book I strode after the boy "With measur'd motion, like a living thing". Measured motion, a quality of movement shared by the soldier and the mountain, produces a degree of awe--Wordsworth looked the soldier over "with a mingled

¹⁵Several details of description and comment which were deleted from the early manuscript versions emphasize the un-humanness of the soldier:

He appeared
Forlorn and desolate, a man cut off
From all his kind, and more than half detached
From his own nature.

.

I think
If but a glove had dangled in his hand
It would have made him more akin to man.

The above lines are from the edited version of MS Verse 18A (57-60, 65-67) appended to Beth Darlington's article in Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, pp. 433-37.

sense / Of fear and sorrow", a fear which on this occasion was not so thwarting as to preclude a sense of sublimity; what he had to overcome was his "heart's specious cowardise".

Though there is nothing to confirm that the soldier is actually old, duration is certainly implied throughout the narrative. He has, of course, returned from war-service overseas, so that duration figures as weight of experience rather than length of time, as "what he had endur'd / From hardship, battle, or the pestilence" (470-71). One senses this quality of endurance from the faded military garb, the "murmuring voice of dead complaint" (431) and the general slowness in speech and movement of the soldier. Like several of the heroes of Wordsworth's studies of old age like the "Old Cumberland Beggar" and "Old Man Travelling", the soldier seems fixed in a state of venerable endurance and it is hard to imagine him as ever being anything other than old.

In spite of Wordsworth's disclaimer, the soldier does emerge as "solemn and sublime". The impression is a result of the description of his appearance, movement and speech, all so marked, deliberate and dignified with that steadiness and measured gesture already noted. We have, moreover, been encouraged to accept the soldier as portentous by the account of the solitary evening walk on which the figure supervened, and the moonlight has invested the soldier with a certain ghostliness. Altogether, then, the episode as a whole gains its weight of significance by combining with Burkean incidentals the maturer paradigm of grandeur under which, according to Wordsworth, it is ordained that the mind should be affected by a sense of sublimity.

It would be impossible to conclude a discussion of the discharged soldier episode without mentioning the leech gatherer of "Resolution and Independence". He, too, is a figure of tremendous starkness and endurance upon whom Wordsworth "chances". If the rigidity of the soldier suggests that he is a natural form which has been moulded by time or endurance into fixed shape, like an old tree, the leech gatherer's body, "bent double", demands description by means of the famous double simile in which he is compared to a "huge stone" lying atop a peak, and the stone is in turn likened to a sea-beast possessed of just sufficient power of movement to crawl onto the ledge.¹⁶ The simile imparts a sense of minimal life and requires its modification in order to comprehend the ideas of both steadiness and measured movement. Venerable and dignified, the leech-gatherer shares steady form and measured movement with the soldier:

Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call;
And moveth all together if it move at all.
("Resolution and Independence")

The leech gatherer carries a weight of age and endurance, as if unpleasant experience "A more than human weight upon his frame had cast". He too delivers a simple message of perseverance and trust. But the power these two figures exercised upon Wordsworth's imagination derived not from their oracular utterance but from their embodiment of

¹⁶The clearest explanation of how the double-simile works, and the reason it was necessary, remains that of Wordsworth himself in the Preface of 1815; see Zall, pp. 148-49.

those "several grand constitutional laws under which it has been ordained that . . . objects should everlastingly affect the mind".

5. Mathematics and Books

Wordsworth's observation in Book VIII that he first "look'd / At Man through objects that were great and fair" holds true for more than man. Every part of his experience as recorded in The Prelude and discussed in this chapter gained its value for Wordsworth by being perceived through objects "great and fair". Only the French Revolution could not be made coherent in these terms, and of course England's intervention in that event set in motion the temporary rejection by Wordsworth of the imaginative perception he had spent his childhood and youth in acquiring. Otherwise, the sublime and beautiful forms of his boyhood surroundings provided him with criteria by which everything could be judged. The criteria for sublimity listed in the essay "The Sublime and the Beautiful" are especially important, for we find them recurring singly, in pairs or in a triad throughout The Prelude; and while the presence of any one of the three concepts (individuality of form or simplicity, duration and power) does not justify the label of "sublime" being immediately applied, it does give Wordsworth's explanation of the basis for his response to the particular object or phenomenon.

Apart from The Prelude, the document of the period that extrapolates most ambitiously certain laws of the mind from the Lake District environment is the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800). In that document the sublimity of the region appears as the co-existence of

permanence and simplicity in the natural forms; these features, it is claimed, become a part of the life of the area affecting the passions and manners of the inhabitants. This doctrine is often glanced at in The Prelude, where Wordsworth expresses gratitude for having been

born in a poor District, and which yet
Retaineth more of ancient homeliness,
Manners erect, and frank simplicity,
Than any other nook of English Land
(IX.217-20).

In the Preface Wordsworth draws comfort from the link he detects between grandeur and permanence in nature and in the mind; he says that,

reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonourable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it which are equally inherent and indestructible. (Zall, pp. 21-22)

Such a reflection lay behind the aesthetic and poetic of the Preface, of course, and dictated the choice of "low and rustic life" for the ballads, of "characters of which the elements are simple, belonging rather to nature than to manners, such as exist now and will probably always exist, and which from their constitution may be distinctly and profitably contemplated" (Zall, p. 20). In his attempt to yoke art and nature, the concept of duration or permanence proved instrumental;¹⁷ the analogy between mathematics and nature derived more from the idea of simplicity which generally accompanies the firmer idea of duration.

Mathematics seems to have been the only branch of study

¹⁷For a critical examination of the use Wordsworth makes of the notion of permanence in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800), see W. J. B. Owen, Wordsworth as Critic, pp. 7-15.

besides literature to have seriously held Wordsworth's interest as a student at Cambridge, and it was to the study of Geometry that he turned for a period after England's declaration of war on France had undermined his trust in the emotions. In Book VI he explains the attraction of geometry, a study from which he derived "elevation and composed delight" (120, 1850 version), responses associated respectively with the sublime and the beautiful. What made geometry thought-provoking was

the alliance of those simple, pure
Proportions and relations with the frame
And laws of Nature (144-46),

the identity between natural forms in their ideality and the ideal "proportions and relations" of geometry; the particular problem that engaged Wordsworth was that of discovering a process by which geometry, like nature, could become a "leader" to the human mind, but essentially he drew pleasure from it as an image of the "one / Surpassing Life" outside of time and space which gave him a "sense / Of permanent and universal sway and paramount endowment" (151-53). In his Guide to the Lakes Wordsworth in several places links aesthetic satisfaction in scenery to the gratification of the sense of proportion, and in "The Sublime and the Beautiful" there is the comparison, which we have noted earlier, between water and rock at the Schaffhausen falls and parallel lines in mathematics; it seems then that geometry, insofar as it embodied ideas of infinity, proportion and simple form, imparted a sense of sublimity to Wordsworth.

"Geometric truth" is "an independent world / Created out of pure Intelligence" (VI.186-87) which nevertheless in its simplicity

bears an analogy to nature. But like poetry it is also an artifact of man, as near to achieving the apparent duration of some of nature's forms as the work of humans can be. In The Prelude Wordsworth creates a rather curious position of analogy to works of nature for books. The "sovereign Intellect" communicates with man through "the speaking face of earth and heaven", a "bodily Image" through which is

diffus'd
A soul divine which we participate,
A deathless spirit. (V.12-17)

Man, correspondingly, converses with himself by means of books, "Things worthy of unconquerable life", yet perishable. Nature is also liable to destruction by violent natural paroxysm of some kind or other, or even by decay,¹⁸ but Wordsworth cannot conceive of its final disappearance--"the living Presence would still subsist / Victorious"; but works of literature and science, enshrined as they are in books, could totally disappear. Such is the fear communicated in the apocalyptic dream of Book V, a dream in which the sublime forces of vastness, desert and ocean, threaten to bury the "Children of the Earth". The hero of the dream, an Arab Don Quixote figure, rides across the desert carrying a stone and shell, symbols of man's sublimest accomplishments. The Arab

¹⁸Wordsworth had mixed feelings about the Alps, because he thought they were decaying. On a European tour, Henry Crabb Robinson found the sadness produced in the Valais augmented, because "there Wordsworth remarked that the Alps were in a state of decay--crumbling to pieces. His is the line: 'The human soul craves something that endures'". (Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers, ed. Edith J. Morley [1938; rptd. New York: AMS Press, 1967], I, 253). See also Chapter VI below, pp. 167-68.

Was going then to bury those two Books:
 The one that held acquaintance with the stars,
 And wedded man to man by purest bond
 Of nature, undisturbed by space or time;
 Th' other that was a God, yea many Gods,
 Had voices more than all the winds, and was
 A joy, a consolation, and a hope.
 (V.103-09)

The dream, vivid and powerful, nevertheless explains the rather slender role intellectual influences play in The Prelude. The "sovereign Intellect" is embodied in natural forms which Wordsworth accepts as genuinely permanent; man's intellect, on the other hand, makes its home in books which are fragile. Yet poets are "Powers", their influence analogous to nature's but inferior (V.218-22), and Wordsworth himself hoped to be such a poet, as he admits to Coleridge:

 forgive me, Friend,
 If I, the meanest of this Band, had hope
 That unto me had also been vouchsafed
 An influx, that in some sort I possess'd
 A privilege, and that a work of mine,
 Proceeding from the depth of untaught things,
 Enduring and creative, might become
 A power like one of Nature's. (XII.305-12)

Wordsworth borrowed the notion of simplicity in literature from the mountain forms and shepherds of his boyhood environment; from them, too, he derived notions of permanence, duration and endurance; now we see him aspiring to create a work of art that will also embody a power like that found in nature. Thus he bridges the gulf between sublimity in the works of God and sublimity in human productions; "the consecrated works of Bard and Sage" can be simple, enduring and powerful, but their sublimity would seem to be less secure than that of nature.

The topics we have treated in this chapter occupy the position they do in The Prelude because of their relationship to the imagination, a faculty that sought to exert itself towards the establishment of a mental reality corresponding to the phenomenal world, a reality which would be simple, enduring and powerful. The sublime landscape of the Lake District did not have exclusive ownership of sublimity, but it provided the model for grandeur in all other phenomena which, if they were to challenge Wordsworth's imagination, had to be seen as possessing power, duration and simplicity. London posed the first real challenge because it seemed to lack basic simplicity to which the other attributes of grandeur could be attached, and the power it undoubtedly exerted seemed to be oppressive. But London nevertheless attracted Wordsworth, and its power could be explained in terms of duration. In fact, duration--whether in the form of history, permanence or endurance--emerges as the basis for power, stemming from phenomena or impressed upon them, and it thus links the disparate entities we have analyzed in the present chapter. Cities, men and the permanent works of intellect and art all evince simplicity and power in some form; but it is the quality of duration that emerges as the sine qua non of grandeur.

VI

WORDSWORTH AND ALPINE SUBLIMITY AND BEAUTY

In the summer of 1790, the long vacation preceding his final examinations as a candidate for the Cambridge B. A. degree, Wordsworth set out on a European walking-tour with his fellow Collegian Robert Jones. This tour would take them southwards through France to the Savoy region, the French and Swiss Alps, round the Lakes of Geneva, Maggiore and Como, and through Switzerland, Germany and France back to England. The two young men had chosen a significant route, for similar itineraries had constituted the popular "tour" which such writers as Dennis, Shaftesbury, Addison, Walpole and Gray had undertaken during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.¹ This Alpine tour included as its principal features the Chartreuse region, the Lake of Geneva, the glaciers of Chamonix, Mont Blanc and Mont Cenis, the Simplon Pass and the Ravine of Gondo, Lake Como and the falls of the Rhine at Schaffhausen. Fixed in the minds of English travellers as the pre-eminent expression of natural sublimity, the tour had encouraged the vogue of the "natural" and "sensational" sublime in literature and painting. It found its classic celebrations in the

¹For an account of these tours, see Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, pp. 271-393. I have drawn freely from Professor Nicolson's material in the first part of this chapter, and the passages from Dennis, Shaftesbury, Addison, Walpole and Gray are all quoted from her book.

writings of such diverse figures as Dennis, Walpole, Shelley and Ruskin, and in the productions of such artists as Louthembourg, Martin, Turner and Ruskin.

The extracts from letters and journals assembled by Marjorie Hope Nicolson in her valuable book Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory are relevant to a study of Wordsworth's account of his tour of the Alps, in Book VI of The Prelude, because they show how the perception of Alpine scenery, and the rhetoric employed to describe that perception, underwent a process of conditioning: Alpine travellers, especially those with a literary bent, arrived in Europe with a fully-formed knowledge of what to look for, how to react to what they saw, and how to describe it, all in terms of the sublime and the beautiful. Wordsworth was aware that there was eccentricity, if not recklessness, in his decision to devote his last summer vacation to Europe rather than to study; and he tells us that what gave "a charter to irregular hopes" was "mighty forms seizing a youthful Fancy" (VI.348, 347). He, too, was conditioned by what had become the "received standard" body of information and interpretation about the Alpine region.² Yet The Prelude devotes only 400 lines to the tour (VI.332-705), and this poetic account in general either eschews the conventional rhetoric of previous literary travellers, or employs it, as it does in the passage describing the Ravine of Gondo (549-72), only to transcend ultimately

²See Max Wildi, "Wordsworth and the Simplon Pass", English Studies, XL (1959), 224-32; Wildi notes that Wordsworth may have been familiar with de Saussure's Voyages dans les Alpes (1779) and William Coxe's Sketches of the Natural, Civil, and Political State of Switzerland (1779), the translation of which by Raymond, Wordsworth consulted when writing Descriptive Sketches.

techniques of sensational description. By comparing the Prelude account of the tour with the long letter to his sister written in September 1790, and the Descriptive Sketches written some eighteen months later (both documents which have much in common with conventional responses), and with the effusions of figures like Dennis and Walpole, we can see more precisely what Wordsworth was doing with the sublime and the beautiful. And if we add to these the relevant passages in the later Guide to the Lakes, we can trace the emergence of a consistent, non-sensational and non-literary approach to the sublime.

The three distinctive emphases discernible in those pre-Wordsworthian travel accounts we shall now survey are on horror, destruction and Burkean mixed emotion. All three are present in John Dennis's letter describing some mountain experiences of his 1688 tour. From the ascent of Mount Aiguebellette, Savoy, his images include "the impending Rock that hung over us, the dreadful Depth of the Precipice, and the Torrent that roar'd at the bottom"; the "craggy Clifts, which we half discern'd thro the misty gloom of the Clouds that surrounded them, sometimes gave us a horrid Prospect" (Nicolson, p. 277). Added to the sense of horror produced by rocks, precipices, yawning chasms and torrents, is the idea that this scenery is both the exhibited result of destructive forces and perilous to man. Thus he notices, in his descent of Mont Cenis, "Ruins upon Ruins in monstrous Heaps, and Heaven and Earth confounded," and "Rocks that were void of all form, but what they had receiv'd from Ruine" (Nicolson, p. 278); and he reports the alarm of journeying along mountain paths, when "we walk'd

upon the very brink, in a literal sense, of Destruction; one Stumble, and both Life and Carcass had been at once destroy'd" (Nicolson, p. 277). However, we have also the beginning of typically Burkean emotion; the experience evoked "a delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, that I was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled" (Nicolson, p. 277). Everything conspired to make up "such a Consort . . . for the Eye, as that sort of Musick does for the Ear, in which Horrour can be joyn'd with Harmony" (Nicolson, p. 278). John Dennis had also divined the polarity between the sublime and the beautiful in this Alpine environment, noticing the distinction between that which stirs the soul and that which pleases the senses:

[Nature] moves us less, when she studies to please us more. I am delighted, 'tis true at the prospect of Hills and Valleys, of flowry Meads, and murmuring Streams, yet it is a delight that is consistent with Reason, a delight that creates or improves Meditation. But transporting Pleasures follow'd the sight of the Alpes, and what unusual Transports think you were those, that were mingled with horrors, and sometimes almost with despair? (Nicolson, p. 278)

Yet if "delight . . . is consistent with Reason", the transport, horror and despair were dependent upon religion. As Professor Nicolson notes, "The true source of the Sublime, for Dennis, was in religion. Beauty might be found in the works of man. The source of sublimity was in God and in the manifestations of His greatness and power in Nature." ³

Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, had made the tour in 1686, leaving an indirect account in The Moralists (1709).

³Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, pp. 281-82; for the relevant passages in Dennis, see Grounds of Criticism, pp. 20-38.

Discussing the same scenery as Dennis he, too, found in precipices, rocks and torrents images of horror:

With what trembling steps poor mankind tread the narrow brink of the deep precipices, from whence with giddy horror they look down, mistrusting even the ground which bears them, whilst they hear the hollow sound of torrents underneath, and see the ruin of the impending rock, with falling trees which hang with their roots upwards and seem to draw more ruin after them.

(Nicolson, p. 289)

Shaftesbury's traveller finds his imagination provoked, and from the natural scene before him he constructs an embodiment of ruin and decay, pointing ahead to the final dissolution of the world:

[Men] see, as in one instant, the revolutions of past ages, the fleeting forms of things, and the decay even of this our globe, whose youth and first formation they consider, whilst the apparent spoil and irreparable breaches of the wasted mountain show them the world itself only as a noble ruin, and make them think of its approaching period.

(Nicolson, p. 289)

Addison, too, felt "giddy" among the mountains during the tour he made in 1699. Safely at Geneva, he wrote to an English friend of his "troublesome Journey over the Alpes, where I have bin for some days together shivering among the Eternal Snows". His head "still Giddy with mountains and precipices", he appreciates at last the sight of a plain. In a later account he comments on the Alps in Burkean terms, finding that they "fill the mind with an agreeable kind of horror, and form one of the most irregular, mis-shapen scenes in the world" (Nicolson, p. 305).

Walpole and Gray, travelling forty years later than Addison, report the same sensations; the former found the "horrors [of Mont Cenis] . . . accompanied with too much danger to give one time to reflect upon [its] beauties" while Gray, on the other hand, more

strictly Burkean, found that "You have Death perpetually before your eyes, only so far removed as to compose the mind without frightening it" (Nicolson, pp. 355-56). In Gray's account of the Grande Chartreuse we have again the images of ruin in impending rocks, torrents and hanging trees:

You here meet with all the beauties so savage and horrid a place can present you with; Rocks of various and uncouth figures, Cascades pouring down from an immense height out of hanging Groves of Pine-Trees, & the solem Sound of the Stream, that roars below, all concur to form one of the most poetical scenes imaginable. (Nicolson, p. 356)

If Gray calls these scenes "beauties so savage and horrid" it is nevertheless evident that he is admiring the sublime. Like Dennis, he finds the scene elevating; but in his formulation of a poetic and religious response he is preparing the ground for later travellers, who will know how to articulate the appropriate response:

In our little journey up to the Grande Chartreuse, I do not remember to have gone ten paces without an exclamation, that there was no restraining. Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry. There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other arguments. (Nicolson, p. 357)

His friend Walpole begins to offer more precise description, but offers what will become the truism of later travellers: in reality, the Alps and their region are indescribable--description tends to take refuge in romantic response, evading the extremism of the scenes themselves:

Below, a torrent breaking through cliffs, and tumbling thick fragments of rocks! Sheets of cascades forcing their silver speed down channeled precipices, and hasting into the roughened river at the bottom! Now and then an old foot-bridge, with a broken rail, a leaning cross, a cottage, or the ruins of an hermitage! This sounds too bombast and too romantic to one that has not seen it, too cold for one that has. If I could

send you my letter post between two lovely tempests that echoed each other's wrath, you might have some idea of this noble roaring scene, as you were reading it. (Nicolson, p. 357)

Walpole saw the same precipices and torrents as had Dennis fifty years earlier, but the former's account of them, while protesting the scene's indescribability, poeticizes it. The foot-bridge, cross, cottage and ruined hermitage indicate the tendency to render a scene picturesque by the inclusion of a few standard "properties", and foreshadow Wordsworth's introduction of the Chartreuse monastery into the 1850 version of The Prelude, Book VI.

Since the passages we have quoted, with the single exception of those from Shaftesbury, are excerpts from the travel literature of immediate impressions--letters and journals--the obvious point of departure for an examination of what Wordsworth gained from his tour is the long letter he addressed to Dorothy Wordsworth, begun at Kesswil and written between September 6 and 16, 1790.⁴ Unfortunately the previous letter, apparently covering the Grande Chartreuse, is not extant. The Kesswil letter is tantalisingly sketchy in its details, mixing significant comment with banal detail as when, for example, Wordsworth announces that his "Spirits have been kept in a perpetual hurry of delight by the almost uninterrupted succession of sublime and beautiful objects which have passed before my eyes during the course of the last month", only to follow this immediately with the unexciting information that "our united expenses since we quitted

⁴For the full text of the "Kesswil letter" see The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd ed., rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 32-38.

Calais . . . have not amounted to more than twelve pounds" (E. Y., p. 32). The modern reader must anticipate disappointment when Wordsworth "resume[s] the intent of this letter by endeavouring to give you some Idea of our route; it will be utterly impossible for me to dwell upon particular scenes, as my paper would be exhausted before I had done with the journey of two or three days" (E. Y., pp. 32-33). Despite this avowed summariness, fortunately, comparison of the letter with both the earlier travel documents we have noticed and Wordsworth's other Alpine material is possible, to some extent.

The Kesswil letter avoids both the emphasis upon ruin of the earlier travellers and their formulation of a kind of Burkean mixed emotion, but we will meet with these themes in Descriptive Sketches and The Prelude. Several other themes are, however, echoed in the letter. Like Dennis, Wordsworth naturally noticed the sharp contrast between mountain and lake scenery, and implied the same distinction between the emotions drawn out by them:

It was impossible not to contrast that repose that complacency of Spirit, produced by these lovely scenes [i.e., at Como], with the sensations I had experienced two or three days before, in passing the Alps. At the lake of Como my mind ran thro a thousand dreams of happiness which might be enjoyed upon its banks, if heightened by conversation and the exercise of the social affections. Among the more awful scenes of the Alps, I had not a thought of man, or a single created being; my whole soul was turned to him who produced the terrible majesty before me. (E. Y., p. 34)

No doubt if Wordsworth had felt inclined to exemplify "the more awful scenes" and the "terrible majesty" of the Alps he would have given examples similar to those of his fore-runners; and it is clear that when he uses the phrase "complacency of Spirit" produced by Como, he

has found an equivalent to Dennis's "delight that is consistent with Reason", whereas when he has the Alps precluding "thought of men, or a single created being" Wordsworth echoes Dennis's "transporting Pleasures" and "unusual Transports". Dennis, we remember, connected the sublime with religious imagery and emotion.

Wordsworth obviously has good reasons not to feel impelled to attempt detailed description of specific forms in his letter to his sister, reasons supplementary to lack of time and space. One is that, like Wordsworth himself prior to his visit, Dorothy had almost certainly read the sort of description we have found in the reports of such travellers as Walpole and Gray. Furthermore, if she had not, no description would be adequate to the reality;⁵ "You have undoubtedly heard", writes Wordsworth, "of these celebrated scenes, [the glaciers of Savoy at Chamorix] but if you have not read of them any description which I have here room to give you must be altogether inadequate" (E. Y., p. 33). Walpole had felt this difficulty, writing to his friend West: "This sounds too bombast and too romantic to one that has not seen it, too cold for one that has". Wordsworth indeed stressed his wish that Dorothy could be by his side, to appreciate the

⁵It was equally possible, of course, for description and consequent expectation to beggar reality; later in the letter Wordsworth confesses his disappointment in the Rhine falls at Schaffhausen; "I had raised my ideas too high" (although, in the later "The Sublime and the Beautiful", he was to use these same falls as a type of sublimity); this recalls also the terse lines about Mont Blanc in The Prelude:

That day we first
Beheld the summit of Mont Blanc, and griev'd
To have a soulless image on the eye
Which had usurp'd upon a living thought
That never more could be. (VI.452-56)

differences between Swiss and Lake District scenery:

I have thought of you perpetually and never have my eyes burst upon a scene of particular loveliness but I have almost instantly wished that you could for a moment be transported to the place where I stood to enjoy it. I have been more particularly induced to form these wishes because the scenes of Switzerland have no resemblance to any I have found in England, and consequently it may probably never be in your power to form any idea of them. (E. Y., p. 35)

Wordsworth was voicing a typical tourist cliché--"there is nothing like this to be seen at home"--but he evidently meant it, for he reiterates the dissimilarity in the Guide to the Lakes.

From the material of the Kesswil letter we may draw either of alternative conclusions about Wordsworth's responses, during that first European tour, to sublimity and beauty: that he responded more readily to beauty than to sublimity (which is unlikely, in view of his reiterated confession, in The Prelude, that sublimity preceded beauty in his development); or that he felt less confident about formulating his responses to the latter than to the former. In view of his reaction to the "more awful scenes of the Alps" the second of the alternatives seems probable; he recognized and responded to sublime forms, but didn't know quite what to say about them, whereas he could readily identify what gave him pleasure in the beautiful and the picturesque. The two reasonably specific impressions of the Kesswil letter are both of beauty--in the Lake of Geneva and the Lake of Como with its picturesque banks--and they recur, significantly, with little modification in later documents.⁶ Wordsworth travelled along the

⁶Some of what Wordsworth wrote about the Swiss lakes in the Guide, which was first published in 1810, dates from after the

north-western bank of Lake Geneva to the town of Villeneuve at its head. "The lower part of the lake", he remarks, "did not afford us a pleasure equal to what might have been expected from its celebrity" (E. Y., p. 33). The high ground on the south-eastern side of the lake was "veiled in a species of bright obscurity", but at least at its head the lake was sufficiently narrow to permit good views of the opposing picturesque bank; since the lowest part of the Lake of Geneva is also narrow, Wordsworth must actually have intended, by "the lowest part", the long middle section which is broad and constitutes the greater part of the lake's length. Wordsworth's aesthetic of lakes did not change and he consistently stressed the advantages of small lakes. In the Guide to the Lakes, small bodies of water such as abound in the English Lake District are preferred because of their stillness and their capability of reflecting the surrounding elevations and atmospheric phenomena; yet in spite of its size (and Wordsworth calls it "vast") the Lake of Geneva appealed more than some other Alpine lakes because its "impurities" were deposited at the lake's bed, and in its extreme lower part its narrowness prevented undue agitation.⁷

European tour he took with his wife Mary and sister Dorothy in 1820. This material found its way into later editions, but is in general accord with early impressions. In her journal of the tour (Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt [London: Macmillan, 1952], II, 7-336) and the letters written during it (The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The Middle Years, ed. E. de Selincourt [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937], II, 890-906) Dorothy Wordsworth echoes several of her brother's judgments on the scenery they passed through.

⁷See Guide, p. 107, pp. 32-36; on p. 33, Wordsworth remarks that at the Lake of Geneva "the proportion of diffused water is . . . too great" to admit of its always being seen as a contained form with

The most significant single description of the letter is Wordsworth's account of his walk northwards along the western shore of Lake Como, for elements of this description recur--in Descriptive Sketches, in The Prelude, in the Guide to the Lakes and in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal of the 1820 tour--with very little modification. A number of features of the scene imprinted themselves indelibly on Wordsworth's mind. He noted that the path along the lake was extremely charming, being but a small foot-path connecting the scattered villages that climbed the hills along the western shore. The walk was begun at noon, so that while he and Jones were in the shade afforded by the steep, sometimes over-hanging cliffs, the sun "illuminated the woods rocks and villages of the opposite shore". Because Como is a narrow lake, the mountains rapidly threw their shadows across it, which produced a particularly beautiful effect as they moved up the western face of the eastern hills, covering one half of a village in shade while the other half would yet remain in bright sunlight. Both shoreline and lake were striking, the former being "steeps covered with large sweeping woods of chestnut spotted with villages", the latter offering an equally intriguing surface, "part of it glowing with the richest green and gold . . . part shaded with a soft blue tint" (E. Y., pp. 33-34).

Why Wordsworth devoted such space to this single picture is explained by the passages on Como in Descriptive Sketches and The Prelude: it was a self-interpreting picture, composing in itself an

attendant advantages in clarity and stillness. On his deprecation of the American Great Lakes see above, p. 88.

imaginative, unified whole. As such, the same details come together in Descriptive Sketches (80-147) to constitute the section of that poem least marred by the addition of sentimental and histrionic interest. The account of Lake Como sticks closely to the sober details of the letter, albeit tinged by a picturesque viewpoint. Wordsworth mentions the "hidden margin" along which he roves. Como is "bosom'd deep in chestnut groves"; the hills rise steeply from "narrow deeps"; the towns around the lake cling to the water's edge, or "lurk in woody sunless groves profound", or "from the bending rocks obtrusive cling"; the hills are reflected in the water, and their shadows track the sun "up th' opposing hills", giving the impression mentioned in the letter as "half a village shines, in gold array'd, / Bright as the moon, half hides itself in shade"; the woods glow golden, reflected in the lake, and the chestnut woods are again referred to, "Th' unwearied sweep of wood thy cliff that scales".⁸ Nothing is added to these and other picturesque details by the description in Book VI of The Prelude, although Wordsworth wants to greet Como in better poetry,

a more melodious Song,
Where tones of learned Art and Nature mix'd
May frame enduring language (VI.603-05);

⁸ A direct recall of the letter's "large sweeping woods of chestnut". It is to the region of Como that Wordsworth attributes the "torrents shooting from the clear-blue sky" (130), given, in The Prelude, VI.561, to the Ravine of Gondo; cf. Journals, II, 217-18, for Dorothy Wordsworth's description of the Fiore di Latte, a clear, precipitous torrent which "issues silently from the cold cavern, slides but a very little way over the rock, then bounds in a short cataract, and rushes rapidly to the lake." The pages of the Journal dealing with the Como region self-consciously quote several phrases from the Descriptive Sketches (1793).

most of the phrases, however, simply echo Descriptive Sketches, "bosom'd up / In Abyssinian privacy" replacing "bosom'd deep in chestnut groves", and the "dark-eyed Maids" continuing to tend their plots of Indian corn although no longer, apparently contradictorily, also "fair". Clearly, with the exception of the "large sweeping woods of chestnut" (possibly an instance of that sublimity which "will never be wanting, where the sense of innumerable multitude is lost in, and alternates with, that of intense unity"--Guide, p. 87), Lake Como's attributes impart a sense of beauty as opposed to the sublimity of the Alps themselves, as Wordsworth suggests in The Prelude:

Like a breeze
Or sunbeam over your domain I pass'd
In motion without pause; but Ye have left
Your beauty with me, an impassion'd sight
Of colours and of forms, whose power is sweet
And gracious, almost might I dare to say,
As virtue is, or goodness, sweet as love
Or the remembrance of a noble deed,
Or gentlest visitations of pure thought
When God, the Giver of all joy, is thank'd
Religiously, in silent blessedness,
Sweet as this last herself; for such it is.
(VI.605-16)

This passage is not without its explicatory significance, in view of the statement of the Kesswil letter that "Ten thousand times in the course of this tour have I regretted the inability of my memory to retain a more strong impression of the beautiful forms before me". Como was the occasion of no such regret; its beauty impressed itself on the sight and the imagination with that self-evident power revealed in such qualities as virtue and love.

No less interesting than the marked congruity of the accounts of Como in the letter of 1790, the Descriptive Sketches (1793), The

Prelude and even Dorothy Wordsworth's journal, is the beginning of that process whereby Wordsworth abstracts general aesthetic laws from his own experience. Because the phenomena first described in the letter were made possible by an afternoon excursion along the western shoreline, Wordsworth recommends this course in a note to line 90 of Descriptive Sketches: "If any of my readers should ever visit the Lake of Como, I recommend it to him to take a stroll along this charming little pathway; he must chuse the evening, as it is on the western side of the Lake". By the time of the publication of the Guide, this has been made into a general principle of aesthetic perception:

A stranger to a mountainous country may not be aware that his walk in the early morning ought to be taken on the eastern side of the vale, otherwise he will lose the morning light, first touching the tops and thence creeping down the sides of the opposite hills, as the sun ascends, or he may go to some central eminence, commanding both the shadows from the eastern and the lights upon the western mountains. But, if the horizon line in the east be low, the western side may be taken for the sake of the reflections, upon the water, of light from the rising sun. In the evening, for like reasons, the contrary course should be taken. (p. 98)

This principle, as we have seen, dates from 1790 and the walk along the western bank of Lake Como.

Perhaps the description of Lake Como--given in the Kesswil letter, elaborated and slightly romanticized in Descriptive Sketches and returned to its essentials in The Prelude--should be regarded as the "set piece" of Wordsworth's attempts to discriminate between the sublime and the beautiful in Alpine scenery, as the fusing of elements mainly experienced in his journey through the Gondo Ravine stands as his classic expression of natural sublimity (The Prelude, VI.549-72). At any rate, the description from the letter provided the basis for

two poetic accounts of natural and human beauty in which various details are successfully combined into a single, unified picture; and about only one element of the scene does Wordsworth appear to have altered his original judgment.⁹

Wordsworth was able to be particular about the "beautiful" aspects of his tour but, in the Kesswil letter, he avoided such particularity about the sublime. There were "awful scenes" which diverted his thoughts from man and creation and turned his soul "to him who produced the terrible majesty before me". As if purposefully evading further comment on sublimity, he follows this confession, safely appropriate as it is in terms of what the sublime was supposed to do, with the disclaimer that he is "too particular for the limits of my paper". Similarly, although he remarks that "The impressions of three hours of our walk among the Alps will never be effaced", he neither describes the locale of the walk nor details the ineffaceable impressions; the secret was not revealed by Wordsworth till he wrote Book VI of The Prelude.¹⁰ Despite this reticence about the sublime in his letter written during the tour Wordsworth certainly luxuriated in

⁹I refer to Wordsworth's deprecation of Alpine trees and foliage, in comparison with those of Britain, in the Guide, pp. 104-06. He notes that "On the Italian side of the Alps, chestnut and walnut-trees grow at a considerable height on the mountains; but even there the foliage is not equal in beauty to the 'natural product' of this climate." However, in his earlier descriptions of the chestnut woods, they appear to instance sublimity, not beauty. Wordsworth also slights such Italian foliage as the vine and the olive.

¹⁰An interesting account of the date, time and surroundings of this particular three hours is given in Max Wildi's two articles cited above, in fn. 2 of this chapter; the "ineffaceable impressions" are, of course, imaginatively reconstituted in The Prelude, VI.553-72.

the stern aspects of his tour when he wrote the Descriptive Sketches during his second visit to France. For whereas the letter belonged to "life", the Sketches definitely belonged to "literature"; and it was in the writings of earlier literary travellers that Wordsworth discovered a mythology of sublime landscape ready to hand. He was eager, following their examples, to find the "more awful scenes of the Alps" redolent of chaos, danger, ruin and destruction. In Descriptive Sketches the sublime appears as the transformation of awe evoked by alpine scenery into a series of vignettes of natural threat and devastation. Several of the sketches are "sensational" to the point of absurdity.

When, after the account of the Ravine of Gondo in Book VI of The Prelude (549-72), Wordsworth tells us that

Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first and last, and midst, and without end,

we recognize that manifestations of the sublime and the beautiful have been brought imaginatively into a meaningful mutual relationship; resolutely separate, they yet manifest different facets of a unity. In Descriptive Sketches no such imaginative ordering is achieved.

Wordsworth tries to balance the beautiful against the sublime but presents the latter as so overwhelmingly hostile to man that the few passages depicting natural hospitality and projecting a spirit of optimism are quite unconvincing. On the other hand, so determined is Wordsworth to portray sublime nature in the extremest rigours of its

arbitrary hostility to human creatures that wild nature, too, is reduced to grotesque bathos and banality. An example of this ridiculously sensationalistic sublimity is the vignette of the Grison gypsy and the landscape of the river Reuss (188-262). The gypsy, "hand in hand with Fear", wanders "solitary through the desert drear".¹¹ Her inhospitable environment is about to be eclipsed by storm and avalanche, and the gypsy woman takes shelter in a covered bridge as rocks crash down from the cliffs and "Thunder slips abroad":

On the high summits Darkness comes and goes,
Hiding their fiery clouds, their rocks, and snows;
The torrent, travers'd by the lustre broad,
Starts like a horse beside the flashing road;
In the roof'd bridge, at that despairing hour,
She seeks a shelter from the battering show'r.
(205-10)

It is characteristic of Descriptive Sketches to multiply the woes of hapless man: we might have expected that the bridge, "tottering to its fall" under the avalanche's power, would have proved fatal to the gypsy, but she survives to be the prey to further menaces. A "death-dog" howls, a fox barks, the "Havoc" impels a predatory bear to vacate his bone-strewn lair, "Banditti voices talk" in the valley and finally the cry of the gypsy's baby (about whose existence, to this point, we have been ignorant) leads the "famish'd wolf" to his prey. At this climactically terrible point the fable is suspended.

In the following verse-paragraph we pass, all too rapidly, the beautiful vale of Urseren to

¹¹Wordsworth uses the word "desert" in Descriptive Sketches in its wider signification of "unpeopled", "waste", "desolate"; the countryside he describes in the poem is of course extremely mountainous but as little susceptible to human cultivation as vast, flat barren expanses.

Plunge with the Russ embrown'd by Terror's breath,
 Where danger roofs the narrow walks of death;
 By floods, that, thundering from their dizzy height,
 Swell more gigantic on the stedfast sight;
 Black drizzling craggs, that beaten by the din,
 Vibrate, as if a voice complain'd within;
 Bare steeps, where Desolation stalks, afraid,
 Unstedfast, by a blasted yew upstay'd;
 By cells whose image, trembling as he prays,
 Awe struck, the kneeling peasant scarcely surveys;
 Loose-hanging rocks the Day's bless'd eye that hide,
 And crosses rear'd to Death on every side
 (245-56).

The landscape of this verse is familiar to us from the travellers' accounts summarized earlier in the chapter, with its giddy heights, narrow paths, overhanging rocks, "startling" trees and yawning gulfs, but here they serve as the backdrop to vignettes of romantic tragedy such as were popularized by the artist De Loutherbourg in his Burkean canvasses.¹² What is especially noteworthy in the quoted passage is the presence of the vibrating crags, a detail which was transferred to the description of the Ravine of Condo in Book VI of The Prelude.¹³ This seems to indicate that the "stedfast sight" at least is no rhetorical flourish; Wordsworth certainly observed sublime phenomena in their constituent details on his first Alpine tour, without at that time knowing how to give them more than factitious significance in description.

If a typical mode of eighteenth-century descriptive poetry,

¹² Such paintings as, for example, The Shipwreck (1793), reproduced in Plates 125 and 126 of William Gaunt's The Great Century of British Painting: Hogarth to Turner (London: Phaidon, 1971); see Chapter III, fn. 6, above.

¹³ Besides the few lines that were incorporated into the Ravine of Condo description, ll. 492-511 were used in the "ascent of Snowdon" episode with which Wordsworth intended to conclude the poem from quite an early stage of composition of The Prelude. See below, Chapter VIII.

that in which the reader is invited to traverse vast tracts indicative of natural plenitude and to extrapolate a variety of general truths about humanity, is employed in Descriptive Sketches with disastrous results, it is perhaps because Wordsworth presses the natural sublime to its Burkean limits. This certainly occurs in the sketch of the Alpine chamois hunter (366-413), who first reflects Wordsworth's awe in the face of sublime forms and then becomes a victim to nature's excesses; the same technique is then employed in the description of the Swiss herdsman (550-621), except that in this latter vignette the herdsman's lot in life becomes an emblem of the general human condition. In the former sketch the narrator quite appropriately stands atop an eminence and surveys a vista, his soul attuned to sublimity. Far off he describes a chamois hunter who must track through "wastes" (371) and "vacant worlds" (372), worlds

where Life and Sound, and Motion sleep,
Where Silence still her death-like reign extends,
Save when the startling cliff unfrequent rends:
In the deep snow the mighty ruin drow'n'd,
Mocks the dull ear of Time with deaf abortive sound
(375-79).

This is sufficiently conventional and not essentially different from the terms in which Byron and Shelley were to conceive of Alpine scenery, as we shall see. But Wordsworth cannot resist particularizing the potentially destructive qualities of the environment, by having it wreak its power on the chamois hunter. Caught in Alpine mist and a snow storm, the hunter dies in the wastes far from home, an eagle hovering above eager to snatch its prey. Perhaps, Wordsworth remarks less than cheerfully, the hunter's son will one day pass his father's

bones and "start" at "the reliques of that very thigh, / On which so oft he prattled when a boy" (412-13). In the latter of these two vignettes a solitary herdsman meditates on the heights. In Burkean fashion, "savage Nature humbly joins the rite, / While flash her upward eyes severe delight" (554-55), but the parallel description of his emotionally mixed state, "great joy by horror tam'd dilates his heart", is surely absurd. What the herdsman sees is awe-inspiring and frightening: "Alps overlooking Alps their state upswell" while "Huge Pikes of Darkness named, of Fear and Storms, / Lift, all serene, their still, illumin'd forms" (560-65).¹⁴ As for the Alpine shepherd, Wordsworth says, so for humanity in general--brief joy cheers a "wintry way"; we all climb the "endless Alp of life" and the "avalanche of Death" destroys the "little cottage of domestic Joy". Such melodramatic episodes of gratuitous suffering and generalized moral allegory are all that Wordsworth can do with his "more awful scenes" in Descriptive Sketches.

It is instructive to compare Wordsworth's early treatment of Alpine sublimity with those of Byron and Shelley, who saw the same threatening natural phenomena yet gave to them a different significance. In Byron's Manfred (1817), a Faustian poetic drama about the torments of a damned soul that is at once alienated from yet bound to humanity, the theme of sublime ruin is embodied in the Alpine

¹⁴These Pikes are presumably such forms as Wordsworth intends in "The Sublime and the Beautiful", whose lines [are] abrupt and precipitous, by which danger & sudden change is expressed"; and they thereby differ from the mountain of "steady form" (The Prelude, VII. 723) whose lines, "flow [ing] into each other like the waves of the sea", impart a different sense of sublimity.

natural theatre which, while it invites Manfred to yield to forces which are transcendently powerful, serves as an emblem of his own heroic but ruined spirit; nevertheless, some power restrains Manfred from seeking his sepulchre in an alpine abyss. When Manfred bids the cosmic spirits appear, the "Second Spirit" instances Mont Blanc as the ancient king of mountains, accoutred with rocks, snow, clouds, forests, avalanches and glaciers; yet this monarch, potentially self-levelling, is subject to the "spirit of the place" which controls the release of the mountain's destructive energy:

Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains;
 They crown'd him long ago
 On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds,
 With a diadem of snow.
 Around his waist are forests braced,
 The Avalanche in his hand;
 But ere it fall, that thundering ball
 Must pause for my command.
 The Glacier's cold and restless mass
 Moves onward day by day;
 But I am he who bids it pass,
 Or with its ice delay.
 I am the spirit of the place,
 Could make the mountain bow
 And quiver to his cavern'd base--
 And what with me wouldst Thou?
 (I.i.60-75)

What Manfred actually seeks from the cosmic spirits is "forgetfulness", but more relevant for our purposes here is Byron's conventional treatment of the Alpine theatre as a vast collocation of destructive and even self-destructive forces held in check by a controlling power. As Manfred stands on the cliffs of the Jungfrau, he gazes "on the torrent's brink beneath" and sees "the tall pines dwindled as to shrubs / In dizziness of distance" (I.ii.13-15); besides employing the familiar rhetoric of the natural sublime, Byron suggests what was

implicit in the accounts of such travellers as Walpole--the insidious pull exerted by the depths, causing dizziness in the elevated spectator. He also has Manfred perceiving this world as perpetually falling and decaying, perhaps foreshadowing the universe's final crisis:

Mountains have fallen,
Leaving a gap in the clouds, and with the shock
Rocking their Alpine brethren; filling up
The ripe green valleys with destruction's splinters;
Damming the river with a sudden dash,
Which crush'd the waters into mist and made
Their fountains find another channel (I.ii.92-98).

Manfred himself is like the blasted scenery,

Grey-hair'd with anguish, like these blasted pines,
Wrecks of a single winter, barkless, branchless,
A blighted trunk upon a cursed root,
Which but supplies a feeling to decay
(I.ii.66-69).

Such sublime forces are made to reflect Manfred's spirit while they refuse to annihilate him, expending their wanton power instead, in Wordsworthian fashion, on innocent, unaspiring aspects of creation, falling "On the young flourishing forest, or the hut / And hamlet of the harmless villager" (I.ii.80-81). Manfred's alpine world is thus similar to Wordsworth's, awful, powerful and hostile; but it is seen from the perspective of a human creature who challenges its sublimity, not from that of vulnerable humanity.

Byron's poem also has an interesting connection with Book VIII of The Prelude, in that just as Wordsworth saw the statesmen of the English Lake District retaining patriarchal dignity among "images of danger and distress", so Manfred observes that among the Swiss Alps "the patriarchal days are not / A pastoral fable" (I.ii.49-50). The

Chamois hunter of Byron's poem, indeed, has affiliations with the mountain patriarchs of The Prelude rather than with the unfortunate victim of Descriptive Sketches. He is an embodiment of rural independence and fortitude who knows his territory and its dangers, and he attempts to reclaim Manfred to common humanity, uttering a Wordsworthian sentiment in his plea to Manfred to "Hold, madman!-- though a-weary of thy life, / Stain not our pure vales with thy guilty blood" (I.ii.110-11).

In his Kesswill letter Wordsworth did not mention Mont Blanc, presumably for the reason given in The Prelude, that the first sight of Mont Blanc's summit was a disappointment: Wordsworth was

griev'd
To have a soulless image on the eye
Which had usurp'd upon a living thought
That never more could be. (VI.453-56)

Expectation, fed by imagination, had been cheated. But in Descriptive Sketches the "soul" necessary to give meaning to the image was provided by the conventional rhetoric of alpine sublimity. As Byron sees Mont Blanc as the ancient "monarch of mountains" possessing an armoury of threatening instruments, so does Wordsworth:

Alone ascends that mountain nam'd of white
That dallies with the Sun the summer night.
Six thousand years amid his lonely bounds
The voice of Ruin, day and night, resounds.
Where Horror-led his sea of ice assails,
Havoc and Chaos blast a thousand vales,
In waves, like two enormous serpents, wind
And drag their length of deluge train behind.
Between the pine's enormous boughs descri'd
Serene he towers, in deepest purple dy'd;
Glad Day-light laughs upon his top of snow,
Glitter the stars above, and all is black below.
(690-701)

This description suggests, by comparison with that of Byron quoted above, the weakness of Wordsworth's sublime mode in the Sketches. Wordsworth's mountain, like Byron's, has its circle of pine forests and its glaciers. But whereas Byron unifies all the elements in his description to present an impression of power checked and controlled, Wordsworth both exaggerates the idea of wanton destruction by introducing such personifications as "Ruin", "Horror", "Havoc" and "Chaos", and dissipates the impression of power as Mont Blanc "dallies with the Sun" and "Glad Daylight laughs upon his tip of snow". The description fails to find a true centre. The phrase "Severe he towers" might be seen as tending towards Byron's perception of an unmoved controlling spirit or Shelley's notion of a power beyond its own embodiment, except that the surrounding details of Wordsworth's description suggest a capricious entity, sporting with the varieties of heavenly light while launching blackness earthwards--certainly no mysterious "serene" power. Evidence that Wordsworth was stumbling towards a more sophisticated mode of presenting sublimity, of which the key principle would have to be the communication of a unity of impression ("simplicity"), is provided by the note he appended to line 347 which concludes the description of an alpine storm:

I had once given to these sketches the title of Picturesque; but the Alps are insulted in applying to them that term. Whoever, in attempting to describe their sublime features, should confine himself to the cold rules of painting would give his reader but a very imperfect idea of those emotions which they have the irresistible power of communicating to the most impassive Imaginations. The fact is, that controuling influence, which distinguishes the Alps from all other scenery, is derived from images which disdain the pencil. Had I wished to make a picture of this scene I had thrown much less light

into it. But I consulted nature and my feelings. The ideas excited by the stormy sunset I am here describing owed their sublimity to that deluge of light, or rather of fire, in which nature had wrapped the immense forms around me; any intrusion of shade, by destroying the unity of the impression, had necessarily diminished it's grandeur.

Wordsworth recognized the storm as a sublime phenomenon, and realized that to convey that sublimity certain aspects of the scene would have to be omitted, and the imagery would have to be welded into a powerful unity. A similar process would have been necessary to render the sublimity of Mont Blanc; in fact, Wordsworth never succeeded in fusing what his imagination had told him about Mont Blanc with the image that met his eye, so that the sublimity of the Descriptive Sketches treatment of it is borrowed, "literary", and, in fact, false.

The most successful of the various attempts of the major Romantic poets to communicate the sense of sublimity imparted by Mont Blanc is undoubtedly Shelley's Mont Blanc (1816). It is successful because it finds an imaginative and intellectual abstraction exactly appropriate to the visual impact of the mountain (that is, for Shelley Mont Blanc did not become "a soulless image on the eye / Which had usurp'd upon a living thought") while at the same time it employs the imagery and ideas of the "ruin" mythology, which we have seen to lie behind the conventional rhetoric employed by the alpine traveller-writers. To take the second point first, Shelley follows his predecessors in seeing the tremendously powerful release of energy from Mont Blanc, indifferent if not hostile to man:

The glaciers creep
Like snakes that watch their prey, from far fountains,
Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice,

Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power
 Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
 A city of death, distinct with many a tower
 And wall impregnable of beaming ice.
 Yet not a city, but a flood of ruin
 Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky
 Rolls its perpetual stream; vast pines are strewing
 Its destined path, or in the mangled soil
 Branchless and shattered stand; the rocks, drawn down
 From yon remotest waste, have overthrown
 The limits of the dead and living world,
 Never to be reclaimed. The dwelling-place
 Of insects, beasts, and birds, becomes its spoil
 Their food and their retreat for ever gone,
 So much of life and joy is lost. The race
 Of man flies far in dread; his work and dwelling
 Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream
 And their place is not known. (100-20)

This passage combines the emphases of those of Byron and Wordsworth quoted above, but significantly it omits the mountain itself to concentrate on the forces that emanate from Mont Blanc. That mountain, indeed, seems to stand above and apart from its subject "shapes", which pose a question about the origin of so much ruin:

Its subject mountains their unearthly forms
 Pile around it, ice and rock; broad vales between
 Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps,
 Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread
 And wind among the accumulated steeps;
 A desert peopled by the storms alone,
 Save when the eagle brings some hunter's bone,
 And the wolf tracks her there--how hideously
 Its shapes are heaped around! rude, bare, and high,
 Ghastly, and scarred, and riven.--Is this the scene
 Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young
 Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
 Of fire envelop once this silent snow?
 None can reply--all seems eternal now.
 (62-75)

Although "none can reply", the suggestion that the ruin is a continuing process instigated by an ancient "Earthquake-daemon" points to a local opinion that Shelley himself noted and Wordsworth must also

have been made aware of. Shelley wrote to his friend Peacock on 24 June 1816 and included some interesting remarks of a quasi-scientific nature on Mont Blanc, the valley of Chamonix and its glaciers:

Within this last year, these glaciers have advanced three hundred feet into the valley. Saussure, the naturalist, says, that they have their periods of increase and decay: the people of the country hold an opinion entirely different; but as I judge, more probable. It is agreed by all, that the snow on the summit of Mont Blanc and the neighbouring mountains perpetually augments, and that ice, in the form of glaciers, subsists without melting in the valley of Chamouni during the transient and variable summer. If the snow which produces this glacier must augment, and the heat of the valley is no obstacle to the perpetual existence of such masses of ice as have already descended into it, the consequence is obvious; the glaciers must augment and will subsist, at least until they have overflowed this vale.¹⁵

Whereas the naturalist Saussure believed that sometimes the glaciers increased in volume and movement, and sometimes decreased (implying that relatively there would be little change in the general pattern of the landscape), the inhabitants themselves believed that the glaciers only augmented: the ice never melted, and was in fact perpetually fed by the snow from Mont Blanc, so that in time, they imagined, the vale would disappear. It is this belief that Wordsworth may well have had in mind when he denigrated the sublimity of the Alps in his Guide to the Lakes:

Havoc, and ruin, and desolation, and encroachment, are everywhere more or less obtruded; and it is difficult, notwithstanding the naked loftiness of the piques, and the snow-capped summits of the mounts, to escape from the depressing sensation that the whole are in a rapid process of dissolution; and were it not that the destructive agency must abate as the heights diminish, would, in time to come,

¹⁵This passage is quoted from Earl R. Wasserman, The Subtler Language. Critical Readings of Neoclassic and Romantic Poems, Johns Hopkins Paperback edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1968), pp. 231-32. Wasserman's reading of Mont Blanc is exceptionally helpful.

be levelled with the plains. (p. 99)

That the heights would eventually be levelled with the plains was precisely the opinion of the inhabitants as recorded by Shelley in his letter. Wordsworth, it is true, sensibly realizes that the glaciers lose their destructive power as they flow to lower ground; it is the depressing sensation that nevertheless everything surrounding the mountain is undergoing dissolution that affects him. The process of such dissolution is itself conducive to a certain sense of sublimity-- "if a traveller be among the Alps," Wordsworth advises in the Guide, "let him surrender up his mind to the fury of the gigantic torrents, and take delight in the contemplation of their almost irresistible violence" (p. 98); however, as we have learnt from our earlier analysis of "The Sublime and the Beautiful", sublimity involves exertion of the mind, so that the state involved when the mind is surrendered is perhaps something less than sublimity.¹⁶

Shelley might have agreed with Wordsworth when the latter deprecated the sublimity of the Alps as dependent upon impressive evidences of ruin and dissolution, for in Mont Blanc it is the mountain itself that challenges comprehension; and, like Wordsworth in "The Sublime and the Beautiful", Shelley attributes to the mountain as its highest quality, "Power". Energy, producing destruction and chaos, flows from the heights of Mont Blanc as from a source, but the mountain itself stands apart--"Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky, / Mont Blanc appears,--still, snowy, and serene" (60-61). The

¹⁶But cf. another passage of "The Sublime and the Beautiful", in which one species of sublimity is excited by objects "to a dread and awe of which, as existing out of itself, [the mind] must be subdued".

true sublimity of Mont Blanc, Shelley suggests, lies in its incomprehensibility; it embodies power, but is not the source of it; it transcends the energy which flows from it; and its "silence and solitude" will be utterly frightening if the mind apprehends them as mere "vacancy":

Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:--the power is there,
 The still and solemn power of many sights,
 And many sounds, and much of life and death.
 In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
 In the lone glare of day, the snows descend
 Upon that Mountain; none beholds them there,
 Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
 Or the star-beams dart through them:--Winds contend
 Silently there, and heap the snow with breath
 Rapid and strong, but silently! Its home
 The voiceless lightning in these solitudes
 Keeps innocently, and like vapour broods
 Over the snow. The secret strength of things
 Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
 Of Heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
 And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
 If to the human mind's imaginings
 Silence and solitude were vacancy?

(127-44)

Wordsworth's portrait of Mont Blanc is quite unconvincing beside those of Byron and Shelley, and it is clear that in Descriptive Sketches he is much happier describing blendings, as in the Como scene and the lines devoted to the Chamonix valley, beneath Mont Blanc. The former we have already discussed, but the latter also deserves brief notice since they, too, contributed to the Prelude account of the tour. Just as, in Shelley's Mont Blanc, the untamed torrents emanate from "secret chasms" to "Meet in the vale" where they converge to become "one majestic River, / The breath and blood of distant lands" (122-24), so Wordsworth's glaciers descend into a hospitable region

where all the seasons meet:

Last let us turn to where Chamouny shields,
 Bosom'd in gloomy woods, her golden fields,
 Five streams of ice amid her cots descend,
 And with wild flowers and blooming orchards blend,
 A scene more fair than what the Grecian feigns
 Of purple lights and even vernal plains.
 Here lawns and shades by breezy rivulets form'd
 Here all the Seasons revel hand in hand.

(680-87)¹⁷

It is this blended scene, with its descending "streams of ice" contrasting yet blending with "wild flowers" and "blooming orchards", a blending of the seasons metaphorically rather than actually, that reconciled Wordsworth to "reality" after his disappointment at Mont Blanc; as he puts it in The Prelude, echoing the phrases and ideas he had earlier used in the Sketches,

the wondrous Vale
 Of Chamouny did, on the following dawn,
 With its dumb cataracts and streams of ice,
 A motionless array of mighty waves,
 Five rivers broad and vast, make rich amends,
 And reconcil'd us to realities.
 There small birds warble from the leafy trees,
 The Eagle soareth in the element;
 There doth the Reaper bind the yellow sheaf,
 The Maiden spread the haycock in the sun,
 While Winter like a tamed Lion walks
 Descending from the mountain to make sport
 Among the cottages by beds of flowers.

(VI.456-68)

As the last image suggests, beauty here "tames" sublimity. The "dumb cataracts and streams of ice" are sublime, but at the lower reaches they are "motionless"; the eagle is confined to his element while

¹⁷Cf. Wordsworth's comparison of Lake District with Alpine scenery in the Guide, p. 101: "only during late spring and early autumn is realized here that assemblage of the imagery of different seasons, which is exhibited through the whole summer among the Alps--winter in the distance--and warmth, leafy woods, verdure and fertility at hand, and widely diffused."

below the productive, cheerful work of humanity goes on. Such a blending of elements is perhaps more characteristic of The Prelude than the creation of scenes overwhelmingly sublime.¹⁸

It is now time to turn to The Prelude itself, to see what Wordsworth does with the sublime and the beautiful in his account of the Alpine walking-tour he and Jones made, the truant excursion of Wordsworth's last Cambridge long vacation. It confirms what we have already fathomed from Descriptive Sketches and the comparison of Wordsworth's treatment of Mont Blanc there with those of Byron and Shelley--that not till some time after his early European trips was he able to formulate a philosophy of the sublime, although the principle of variegation, the constant alternation of sublime with beautiful scenes, was clear to him. Wordsworth's account occupies lines 332-705 of Book VI of the poem. It begins with the journey southwards through France (332-425). The journey itself was through "beautiful" countryside, and the social implications of the beautiful were augmented by the optimism generated by the French Revolution, for, as Wordsworth relates, he and Jones were accompanied on their southwards journey by delegates returning from the celebration of the first Fête de la Fédération, and had in fact arrived in Calais on 13 July 1790, the eve of the day when Louis XVI was to publicly swear fidelity to the new constitution. Thus, the atmosphere of the beautiful is conveyed by such accounts as how,

On the public roads,

¹⁸For a similar blending, see The Prelude, IV.330-39, discussed below, p. 196.

And, once, three days successively, through paths
 By which our toilsome journey was abridg'd,
 Among sequester'd villages we walked,
 And found benevolence and blessedness
 Spread like a fragrance everywhere, like Spring
 That leaves no corner of the land untouch'd.
 (364-70)

The principle of variegation is here provided only by the young traveller's rather self-conscious "tender melancholy / And fond conceit of sadness," indulged in such pleasant surroundings, and by the travellers' arrival at the Convent of Chartreuse where they "rested in an awful Solitude". As in the letter, Wordsworth disclaims any intention of dwelling on his journey "step by step"; the nature of its fascination was simple: nature was before them in all its variety, and as they travelled on, "earth did change her images and forms / Before us, fast as clouds are chang'd in Heaven" (429-30).

As the young travellers passed across the border to Switzerland and Chamonix it was, according to the Prelude account, the scenes of rusticity that were affecting, "Sweet coverts . . . of pastoral life". Like Byron, Wordsworth found that "the patriarchal days are not / A pastoral fable" (Manfred, I.ii.49-50):

Oh! sorrow for the Youth who could have seen
 Unchasten'd, unsubstu'd, unaw'd, unrais'd
 To patriarchal dignity of mind,
 And pure simplicity of wish and will,
 Those sanctified abodes of peaceful Man.
 (441-45)

It was during this part of the tour, however, that Mont Blanc disappointed Wordsworth, and the Chamonix valley compensated for that disappointment by providing a satisfying comprehensive picture of sternness and beauty. The succeeding paragraphs of narrative, however,

present the underlying sense of unfulfilled expectation that Wordsworth carried with him through the journey. He first confesses his immaturity--he was in an "unripe state / Of intellect and heart" (470-71), and while his heart was touched by scenes of simple tenderness he was able to indulge in what might be termed "romantic reveries":

dreams and fictions pensively compos'd,
Dejection taken up for pleasure's sake,
And gilded sympathies (481-83).

The landscape of beauty, of patriarchal Swiss herdsmen and peasant girls, encouraged a juvenile languor, a mood of sweetly-sober meditation. Yet in spite of this Wordsworth suffered disappointment, for he must have set out with a strong desire to experience what was, by now, the traditional sublimity of the region--Mont Blanc, the Chamonix glaciers, the crossing of the Alps, and the general landscape of mountains, crags, pine forest and ravine; and the dejection caused by the failure of such forms to fulfill expectation produced a real vexation in place of a literary melancholy:

Yet still in me, mingling with these delights
Was something of stern mood, an under-thirst
Of vigour, never utterly asleep.
Far different dejection once was mine,
A deep and genuine sadness then I felt
(488-92).

The beauty of the journey was obvious and gratifying, but Wordsworth also wanted to feel the "vigour" of sublimity; and, after the let-down of Mont Blanc, the failure of the crossing of the Alps into Italy to satisfy this vigour was indeed baffling. Having expected to stand atop the world, as it were, at the highest point of the Alpine range,

it must have been fully as disappointing as the Prelude account suggests to discover that at that point, further paths of ascent were indeed visible, but that the route into Italy ignored these to follow a descent by a road obscured in the "stony channel" of a stream. There was, too, an element of humiliation in the circumstances of discovering this--terse information provided by a peasant to travellers toiling up "a lofty Mountain":

Hard of belief, we question'd him again,
And all the answers which the Man return'd
To our inquiries, in their sense and substance,
Translated by the feelings which we had
Ended in this; that we had cross'd the Alps.
(520-24)

Had Wordsworth been able to follow appropriate rhetoric, an exclamation mark should have concluded the paragraph; what should have been a rapturous statement of sublime achievement is, instead, a cry of intense disappointment. The "soul" had had no opportunity to bring its powers into play.

Disappointment in objects that should theoretically impart a sense of sublimity but actually fail to do so is an experience that Wordsworth later built into his prose discussions of the subject, claiming in "The Sublime and the Beautiful" that preparation and continued "intercourse" with sublime objects is necessary if they are to have their full effect; in the Guide to the Lakes he remarks that "A stranger to mountain imagery naturally on his first arrival looks out for sublimity in every object that admits of it; and is almost always disappointed. For this disappointment there exists, I believe, no general preventive; nor is it desirable that there should" (pp. 99-

100). Obviously the allowance he makes for disappointment arises from Wordsworth's own early experiences among the Alps.

The verse-paragraph immediately following the account of frustration felt at the moment of crossing the Alps should, we feel, interpret this experience in some way. Instead, that mighty "Power" which Wordsworth celebrates in The Prelude as the faculty shaping reality rises up against him as he retraces his Alpine crossing:

Imagination! lifting up itself
Before the eye and progress of my Song
Like an unfather'd vapour; here that Power,
In all the might of its endowments, came
Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,
Halted, without a struggle to break through.
(525-30)

The frustration that marked the original experience returns when Wordsworth records it years later. Here is nothing of the subtle modification characteristic when Wordsworth recollects emotion in tranquillity, but a baffling of his powers by that very Power on which he depends to write poetry. Contrary to the opinion of many critics of the poem, the experience which is noted here (525-30) is not central to the poem, for it is in fact the only one of its kind in The Prelude. This in itself perhaps attests to the strength of the disappointment felt in the original experience of crossing the Alps. Yet the brief usurpation of the poet's imagination by that awful Power itself does not prove entirely unrewarding. Wordsworth is certainly "lost" and "Halted", as the travellers were years previously, but now he is "without a struggle to break through", and claims that in such a usurpation the "light of sense / Goes out" but it does so "in flashes

that have shewn to us / The invisible world" where "Greatness make[s] abode". This visionary experience remains stubbornly inaccessible to the reader, but the recognition that Wordsworth comes to when the light of sense is re-illuminated is certainly applicable to the experience of crossing the Alps, which involved thwarted expectation. It is man's nature to pursue "infinitude", says Wordsworth, and we may recall the role infinity plays in his own theory of the sublime, as well as that of other writers on the subject:

Our destiny, our nature, and our home
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.
(538-42)

In this sense, although crossing the Alps must have been as disappointing an experience as seeing Mont Blanc, neither calling upon Wordsworth "to grasp at something towards which [the mind] can make approaches but which it is incapable of attaining" nor "producing a humiliation or prostration of the mind before some external agency which it presumes not to make an effort to participate" (Prose, II, p. 354), it perhaps verged on sublimity in fact and in memory, as an experience of "Effort, and expectation, and desire" for "something evermore about to be."

The centrally sublime episode of his Alpine tour occurred, characteristically for Wordsworth, when he was no longer keyed up with attention and expectation, having crossed the Alps and entered the Ravine of Condo. In lines 556-72 of Book VI the power of imagination is obviously at work as Wordsworth takes certain "impressions of

three hours of our walk among the Alps which will never be effaced", impressions which he did not report in the Kesswil letter and did not weld into a meaningful unity in the Descriptive Sketches, and combines them with other impressions not attributed to the Ravine of Gondo to produce lines of poetry that transmute literary cliches and ordinary experience into a symbol of the sublime of the same order as Shelley's Mont Blanc. This "power" did not enable him to make anything of Mont Blanc or the Alpine crossing; but the Ravine of Gondo paragraph is the product of an imagination that works with rather than against the poet, that offers the one completely authentic account of sublimity denied to Wordsworth in his other Alpine experiences.

The basic scenery Wordsworth works on in this episode is that of the ravine itself and the banks of the river Reuss. It is in any case scenery that is to be found in many places among the Alps, its basic constituents being a chasm surrounded by pine forests, with cataracts, craggy rocks and a raging stream. In his book Wordsworth as Critic, W. J. B. Owen has noted the connections in treatment between the passage and the descriptions of similar scenes by earlier alpine travellers, from whose records we have already quoted.¹⁹ What is immediately clear is that Wordsworth began by embodying the sense of the scene's sublimity in the conventional mythology of ruin, which he came to regard as less than sublime but nonetheless attractive. This suggestion is enhanced by the manuscript variants of the passage, one

¹⁹Wordsworth as Critic, pp. 49-50; see also p. 209. Since the passage has been adequately analyzed by Professor Owen and others, I refrain from dwelling on it here.

of which approaches the sensationalistic tone of Descriptive

Sketches:

And ever as we halted, or crept on,
Huge fragments of primaeval mountains spread
In powerless ruin, blocks as huge aloft
Impending, nor permitted yet to fall,
The sacred Death-cross, monument forlorn
Though frequent of the perish'd Traveller
(Prel., pp. 210-11, app. crit.).

These lines were of course rejected, but the tradition to which they belong is clear. The sublimity of the scene would have had to do with the exhibition of ruin and decay in process. But Wordsworth modified the idea of energy destructively expended. The woods are decaying, but they will never be decayed; the water-falls are indeed impressive masses of released water, but looked at from a certain point of view they appear to be stationary, as if release is held in check; where Shelley has his winds "unchained", Wordsworth's thwart each other, so that the wind can no longer be regarded as a destructive force meeting no resistance; the torrents, in this context, are not wanton instruments of destruction but appear to shoot from "the clear blue sky"--their source is infinity; the rocks "mutter" but they are no longer about to fall. "The images in this passage", remarks Professor Owen, "are concerned with the perpetual release of energy from an infinite source" (p. 49); by a system of checks and balances, also, ruin and decay are restrained. Like Shelley in Mont Blanc, Wordsworth has found the right connections between the ideas of sublime phenomena, power and energy.

The number of sublime "set-pieces" that can relate something

distinct about sublimity is limited, if they are not simply to become repetitive. Wordsworth himself produced few. In the Kesswil letter he was able to convey a sense of the beautiful in his account of Como, but the articulation of what was sublime in the "more awful scenes of the Alps" had to wait until understanding came. The Falls of the Rhine at Schaffhausen disappointed him, but much later he was able to see them as embodying a key principle of sublimity (see above, pp. 24-25). In the Descriptive Sketches he could see sublimity only in the dead, conventional terms of ruin, with the single exception of the Storm scene, where the simplicity and unity necessary to the sublime is conveyed in the images of intense light and heat. In a sense, then, the account of the Alps in Book VI of The Prelude is uneven and inadequate. There are the twin accounts of the sublime and the beautiful, in the passages on the Ravine of Condo and Lake Como; there is the account of the "blended" scene, the Chamonix valley, which alleviated Wordsworth's disappointment with Mont Blanc; the rest is an account of the various frustrations inevitable when the imagination beggars reality (as in "Crossing the Alps"), or when ordinary circumstance and accident prevent any meaningful interpretation of experience. Examples of this latter are the lines describing the overnight stay at an Alpine hospice (573-80), when the combination of the hostel's dreariness and the deafening noise of waters prevented sleep; and those describing the frustration caused by the misinterpretation of the Italian clock at Gravedona (621-57--a passage which might, however, under different circumstances, have proved sublime in

the Burkean manner; see above, pp. 59-60). By contrast with Book VII, which welds London, the antithesis of the sublime, into an imaginatively-unified experience, Book VI tends to remain in its fragments, experience to which the imagination has failed to give ultimate unity.

By placing Wordsworth's Prelude account of his 1790 Alpine tour in the context of the contemporaneous account of the Kesswil letter, the slightly later poeticized record of Descriptive Sketches, and the general prose disquisitions of a later period of his life, this chapter has tried to show how experience of the natural sublime initiated a self-education for Wordsworth, the end of which was the formulation of laws that would draw the equation between phenomena and mind he sought all his life. The conclusion of Book VI probably distorts the balance of this equation as it stood at the end of 1790, since the one passage that exhibits a high intellectual and imaginative organization of experience dates from much later than the tour itself. Indeed, as we have seen, there was little in his Alpine tour that Wordsworth could make imaginative sense of at the time. Yet in summarizing the effects of the tour, Wordsworth's "parting word" is

that not
 In hollow exultation, dealing forth
 Hyperboles of praise comparative,
 Not rich one moment to be poor for ever,
 Not prostrate, overborn, as if the mind
 Itself were nothing, a mean pensioner
 On outward forms, did we in presence stand
 Of that magnificent region. On the front
 Of this whole Song is written that my heart
 Must in such temple needs have offer'd up
 A different worship. Finally whate'er
 I saw, or heard, or felt, was but a stream

That flow'd into a kindred stream, a gale
 That help'd me forwards, did administer
 To grandeur and to tenderness, to the one
 Directly, but to tender thoughts by means
 Less often instantaneous in effect;
 Conducted me to these along a path
 Which in the main was more circuitous.
 (662-80)

In fact, even if we accept that the Alps administered to grandeur directly, to tenderness circuitously, it is nevertheless the case that such scenes as the Chamonix valley and Lake Como, predominantly "beautiful", were more accessible to Wordsworth as experiences that could be talked about, than the sublime aspects of the Alps. The Alpine tour as a whole made its effect on Wordsworth's poetry, and its lasting effect on his aesthetic only gradually; and perhaps only after the tour was concluded, and Wordsworth was beginning to assimilate its experiences, could he deny that he had stood as if his mind were "a mean pensioner / On outward forms".

VII

BEAUTY AND LOVE

Throughout The Prelude the related terms "beauty" and "love" occur as insistently as do "sublimity", "grandeur" and "fear", but they rest less obviously upon an underlying theory, and Wordsworth left no prose discussion comparable to his brief analytic of the sublime to provide a basis for extrapolating such a theory. Certainly Burke's Enquiry is less germane to an exploration of Wordsworth's philosophy of beauty than it is to the sublime; but it does provide a starting-point, and Wordsworth appears to share several of Burke's premises.

Burke arranges his treatise on the assumption that sublimity and beauty, fear and love are strongly contrasted, even mutually exclusive qualities and emotions:

[Sublimity and beauty] are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure; and however they may vary afterwards from the direct nature of their causes, yet these causes keep up an eternal distinction between them, a distinction never to be forgotten by any one whose business it is to affect the passions. (Enquiry, III.xxvii)

Wordsworth tends to blur this distinction but, by habitually linking the grand and the beautiful in a number of combinations drawn from these and their cognates, he generally implies a natural separation and contrast. Thus he writes of having grown up "foster'd alike by

beauty and by fear" (I.306); of natural forms on which are impressed "the characters of danger or desire" (I.497-98);¹ of "giddy motion" as against "a regular desire / For calmer pleasures" (II.49-51); of the "Terror or . . . Love,/ Or Beauty" perceived in nature (III.132-33); of "calmer Lakes, and louder streams" (VI.12) and of the influence of the "discipline of fear" on the one hand and "pleasure and repeated happiness" on the other (I.631-32). These contrasts employ the same general distinction between the terrible and awe-inspiring, and the calm, mild or tender, that Burke exploits in his Enquiry.

Wordsworth follows Burke in setting off the fair and beautiful directly against the sublime, thus permitting the distinction to establish itself by implicit contrast, rather than by defining the beautiful as a number of qualities (e.g., proportion, fitness or perfection) to be found in perceived objects. Both writers assume that we encounter two distinct modes of appearance in nature, and that phenomena in the environment draw forth either fear or love, or their related emotions. There is, however, a difference between Burke's approach to this and that of Wordsworth: Burke seeks to establish the most uncompromising distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, terror and love, where Wordsworth's emphasis is rather on the

¹By impressing these "characters of danger and desire" on natural forms, "Nature, says Wordsworth, made

The surface of the universal earth
With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear
Work like a sea. (I.499-501)

This further enforces the distinction between sublimity and beauty, "triumph" and "fear" suggesting the former, "delight" and "hope" the latter.

comprehensiveness of nature and experience, which employ both modes of appearance and response to achieve the complete and unified:

The mind of man is fram'd even like the breath
 And harmony of music. There is a dark
 Invisible workmanship that reconciles
 Discordant elements, and makes them move
 In one society. Ah me! that all
 The terrors, all the early miseries
 Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all
 The thoughts and feelings which have been infus'd
 Into my mind, should ever have made up
 The calm existence that is mine when I
 Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!
 Thanks likewise for the means! But I believe
 That Nature, oftentimes, when she would frame
 A favor'd Being, from his earliest dawn
 Of infancy doth open out the clouds,
 As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
 With gentlest visitation; not the less,
 Though haply aiming at the self-same end,
 Does it delight her sometimes to employ
 Severer interventions, ministry
 More palpable, and so she dealt with me.
 (I.351-71)

The key word here is "harmony". The beautiful ("gentlest visitation") and the sublime ("ministry more palpable") are different means employed by the one nature to a single end. Where Burke's distinction emphasizes the "either . . . or", Wordsworth writes in terms of "both . . . and".²

Like Burke, Wordsworth tends to assume implied environmental qualities under the responses these draw forth. Just as Burke had defined the sublime as that which excites terror, so he defines beauty as "all such qualities in things as induce in us a sense of affection

²This distinction is echoed in Wordsworth's un-Burkean assertion that "the same object may be both sublime & beautiful", though "the mind cannot be affected by both these sensations at the same time" (Prose, II, p. 349).

and tenderness, or some other passion the most nearly resembling these" (Enquiry, I.xviii). This cogent definition is almost always implied in The Prelude, and marks off experiences of fear and elevation from scenes of domesticity which evoke tenderness. The core of Book I, for example, presents a series of fearful episodes which are balanced by a section devoted to the milder domestic aspect of life at Hawkeshead:

Ye lowly Cottages in which we dwelt,
A ministration of your own was yours,
A sanctity, a safeguard, and a love!
Can I forget you, being as ye were
So beautiful among the pleasant fields
In which ye stood? (I.525-30)

In the image of the family and the domestic scene Wordsworth locates the springs of love and tenderness, as in the picture of the hen and her dependent brood:

Behold the Parent Hen amid her Brood,
Though fledged and feather'd, and well pleased to part
And straggle from her presence, still a Brood,
And she herself from the maternal bond
Still undischarged; yet doth she little more
Than move with them in tenderness and love,
A centre of the circle which they make
(V.246-52).

A more natural picture of human tenderness is that of the artificer and his child in Book VIII. By contrast to the other "spectacles" of London is this vignette of parental affection,

a Man,
Whom I saw sitting in an open Square
Close to an iron paling that fenced in
The spacious Grass-plot; on the corner stone
Of the low wall in which the pales were fix'd
Sate this one Man, and with a sickly babe
Upon his knee, whom he had thither brought
For sunshine, and to breathe the fresher air.

Of those who pass'd, and me who look'd at him,
 He took no note; but in his brawny Arms
 (The Artificer was to the elbow bare,
 And from his work this moment had been stolen)
 He held the Child, and, bending over it,
 As if he were afraid both of the sun
 And of the air which he had come to seek,
 He eyed it with unutterable love.

(VIII.844-59)

Like the memory of the Maid of Buttermere in Book VII, this picture brings a note of the real into the meaningless charade of London; the father is no actor but a workman, the incident no spectacle but a moment of intimacy glimpsed from outside, a moment the artisan had stolen from labour. In the context of Book VII, to which Wordsworth moved it during revision, this passage links with the memory of Mary of Buttermere to contrast with both the unnatural life of the city, as seen by Wordsworth, and the blind beggar who seems to epitomize the view of man as a victim of the city's impersonal processes. In its original setting at the end of Book VIII the passage contrasts with London seen under the aspect of sublimity; and Wordsworth introduces it with the statement that "in the tender scenes / Chiefly was my delight", a statement that is far from obvious from a reading of either account of London.

Like Burke, Wordsworth allied beauty with love and tenderness.

The Prelude also has in common with Burke's Enquiry the association of beauty with society and friendship. For Burke,

beauty [is] a social quality; for where women and men, and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them, (and there are many that do so) they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons; we like to have them near us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation

with them, unless we should have strong reasons to the contrary. (Enquiry, I.x)

The emphasis in The Prelude is predominantly on solitude, but there is also a counterpointing celebration of the social, especially in Book VI where the portrait of France a year after the outbreak of the Revolution reflects the young Wordsworth's sense of joy and freedom. Cambridge, too, attracted him towards friendship and society. The account of student life conveys something of the same frustration that appears in the description of London, both university and city standing as worlds of unreal dream and spectacle in contrast to those forms of reality derived from Lake District scenery and life, so that Wordsworth feels a slight sense of guilt about his attraction to company, as if the pattern of his earlier life, with its appetite for solitude and sublimity, is being challenged against his will. "My nature's outward coat changed", he writes, and

To the deep quiet and majestic thoughts
Of loneliness succeeded empty noise
And superficial pastimes (III.210-12);

but in spite of this emptiness and superficiality, clashing against the depth and majesty of his earlier rural life, he sees society in terms of "delight", "beauty" and "sweetness", offering experience different from but as pleasant as that of solitude and communion with grandeur:

And yet
This was a gladsome time. Could I behold,
Who less insensible than sodden clay
On a sea River's bed at ebb of tide,
Could have beheld with undelighted heart,
So many happy Youths, so wide and fair
A congregation, in its budding-time

Of health, and hope, and beauty; all at once
 So many divers samples of the growth
 Of life's sweet season, could have seen unmov'd
 That miscellaneous garland of wild flowers
 Upon the matron temples of a Place
 So famous through the world? (III.216-28)

Ludicrous as is the metaphor concluding this passage, the identification of Cambridge's young scholars with a "miscellaneous garland of wild flowers" clinches the relationship between the human and the beautiful. Moreover, Wordsworth adds that his own susceptibilities drew him into the social; lonesome places invited solitude, but company demanded participation:

Though I had been train'd up to stand unpropp'd,
 And independent musings pleased me so
 That spells seem'd on me when I was alone,
 Yet could I only cleave to solitude
 In lonesome places; if a throng was near
 That way I lean'd by nature; for my heart
 Was social, and lov'd idleness and joy.
 (III.230-36)

The vivid opening of Book VIII presents a clear contrast between the sublime and the beautiful insofar as the latter is associated with society, although the gathering of humble folk introduced here would hardly enter Burke's conception of society. It is in terms of the social and the humble, contrasted with Helvellyn's solitary eminence, that Wordsworth describes a Lake District summer fair:

What sounds are those, Helvellyn, which are heard
 Up to thy summit? Through the depth of air
 Ascending, as if distance had the power
 To make the sounds more audible: what Crowd
 Is yon, assembled in the gay green Field?
 Crowd seems it, solitary Hill! to thee,
 Though but a little Family of Men,
 Twice twenty, with their Children and their Wives,

And here and there a Stranger interspers'd.

.....

Immense

Is the Recess, the circumambient World
Magnificent, by which they are embraced.
They move about upon the soft green field:
How little They, they and their doings seem,
Their herds and flocks about them, they themselves,
And all that they can further or obstruct!
Through utter weakness pitiably dear
As tender Infants are: and yet how great!
For all things serve them; them the Morning light
Loves as it glistens on the silent rocks,
And them the silent Rocks, which now from high
Look down upon them; the reposing Clouds,
The lurking Brooks from their invisible haunts,
And Old Helvellyn, conscious of the stir,
And the blue Sky that roofs their calm abode.

(VIII.1-9, 46-61)

The scene of high Helvellyn towering above a summer gathering of local farmers at a fair exemplifies the sharp contrast between sublimity and beauty, even though the particular design of the long passage is to show something of their interpenetration.³ On the one hand there is the mountain, towering above the "depth of air", "solitary" and "old", dominating the "circumambient World / Magnificent". On the other hand, wrapped round by this grandeur, and viewed from the aspect of sublimity, is the humble world of shepherds and hawkers, lacking in "power" (seeming "little" in "themselves / And all that they can further or obstruct"), and for that very reason demanding love and

³Donald Wesling, in Wordsworth and the Adequacy of Landscape (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), pp. 83-85, has an interesting analysis of this passage. I am inclined to agree with his conclusion that Wordsworth fails to achieve a synthesis of the mountain and the valley folk: "Wordsworth says Helvellyn loves and approves the people in their 'secluded glen' below, but the distance remains--literal and figurative". The notion of having Helvellyn "flatter" the people below is fanciful rather than imaginative.

tenderness. The natural context for this humbleness is the beautiful setting of "soft" and "gay" "green field".

Whether or not Burke would have entered "willingly into a kind of relation" with these simple country folk and their flocks, his association of the beautiful with society illuminates this aspect of Wordsworth's "beautiful". Equally relevant to the Helvellyn passage is Burke's comment on the relationship between littleness, weakness and love:

To this day in ordinary conversation it is usual to add the endearing name of little to everything we love; the French and Italians make use of these affectionate diminutives even more than we. In the animal creation, out of our own species, it is the small we are inclined to be fond of; little birds, and some of the smaller kinds of beasts. A great beautiful thing, is a manner of expression scarcely ever used; but that of a great ugly thing is very common. There is a wide difference between admiration and love. The sublime, which is the cause of the former, always dwells on great objects, and terrible; the latter on small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered into compliance.

(Enquiry, III.xiii)

In Burke's terms, the forces of sublimity in the passage quoted from Book VIII--morning light, silent rocks, reposing clouds, Helvellyn and the sky--are "flattered" into serving the "pitiably dear" world of the summer fair.

More strictly matching what Burke means by littleness is Wordsworth's mention, at the beginning of Book VII, of a number of minute creatures seeming to send him encouragement to resume work on The Prelude--a choir of Redbreasts and a glow-worm; thus

the Child
Of Summer, lingering, shining by itself,

The voiceless Worm on the unfrequented hills,
 Seem'd sent on the same errand with the Quire
 Of Winter that had warbled at my door,
 And the whole year seem'd tenderness and love.
 (VII.43-48)

In the same way, natural benevolence--associated with plants, insects, animals and birds participating in Spring's resurgence--come to his aid when the developments of the French Revolution have impaired his imagination:

Spring returns,
 I saw the Spring return, when I was dead
 To deeper hope, yet had I joy for her,
 And welcomed her benevolence, rejoiced
 In common with the Children of her Love,
 Plants, insects, beasts in field, and birds in bower.
 So neither were complacency nor peace
 Nor tender yearnings wanting for my good
 Through those distracted times (XI.23-31).

A further example of this idea of benevolent, restorative nature, and one that dates back to the same early phase of composition, occurs in the following Book,⁴ where again the theme is nature's role in restoring Wordsworth's impaired imagination:

Above all
 Did Nature bring again that wiser mood
 More deeply re-establish'd in my soul,
 Which, seeing little worthy or sublime
 In what we blazon with the pompous names
 Of power and action, early tutor'd me
 To look with feelings of fraternal love
 Upon those unassuming things, that hold
 A silent station in this beauteous world.
 (XII.44-52)⁵

⁴See Prel., p. 610 and pp. 615-16. Fragments of the passage quoted above from Book XII occur in MS JJ, where "power and action", far from referring to the French Revolution, consist in such "involuntary acts of hand / Or foot unruly with excess of life" as snapping the stem of a foxglove. See Prel., p. 641.

⁵Other passages associating love with the minute in the animal

The idea of the minute, especially as it applies to flowers, butterflies and such "unassuming" life, is closely linked with the transitory, for part of the fascination of this kind of life lies, for Burke, in its "momentary duration":

An air of robustness and strength is very prejudicial to beauty. An appearance of delicacy, and even of fragility, is almost essential to it. Whoever examines the vegetable or animal creation, will find this observation to be founded in nature. . . . It is the flowery species, so remarkable for its weakness and momentary duration, that gives us the liveliest idea of beauty and elegance.

(Enquiry, III.xvi)

Wordsworth marks one of the stages of his youthful development as the discovery of the transitory and changing in nature, in an interesting passage that hints at the alliance between the "watchful power of love" and society on the one hand and the experience of grandeur and solitude on the other. The "watchful power" focusses on the transitory and the minute:

The seasons came,
And every season to my notice brought
A store of transitory qualities
Which, but for this most watchful power of love
Had been neglected, left a register
Of permanent relations, else unknown,
Hence life, and change, and beauty, solitude
More active, even, than 'best society',
Society made sweet as solitude
By silent inobtrusive sympathies,
And gentle agitations of the mind
From manifold distinctions, difference
Perceived in things, where to the common eye,
No difference is (II.307-20).

world are II.296-307 and XIII.149-58, 212-14; in VIII.490-97 Wordsworth refers to the comparatively late stage of development at which the "inferior creatures" claimed "minute obeisances of tenderness" from him.

The perception of life and change makes solitude more active than society, and such perception conversely makes society as "sweet" a condition as solitude; but a basic distinction follows between beauty, which involves sympathetic perception of the minute and transitory, and grandeur, which involves the powers of nature producing elevation in the solitary observer:

and hence, from the same source
 Sublimar joy; for I would walk alone,
 In storm and tempest, or in star-light nights
 Beneath the quiet Heavens; and, at that time,
 Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form
 Or image unprofaned (II.320-26).

Grandeur here, rather atypically for Wordsworth, involves dismissal of form; beauty depends upon the perception of detail in form; the essay on "The Sublime and the Beautiful" asserts, indeed, that "conceptions of the sublime . . . will be rendered more lively & comprehensive by more accurate observation and by encreasing knowledge" and adds that "this effect . . . will be much more strikingly felt in the influences of beauty" (Prose, II, p. 349).

Wordsworth shares with Burke the few basic associations of beauty with love, society and the minute and transitory that we have just noted, while using these associations for purposes Burke would hardly have approved.⁶ He finds beauty, for example, in the ordinary

⁶For example, Burke divides "society" into the "society of the sexes" and "general society", basing his analysis of beauty in this relation more on the love of a beautiful woman than on friendship, whereas Wordsworth's "love" focuses on the domestic and common as ethos (in terms of an "ancient rhetorical tradition which distinguishes between pathos and ethos as the opposing types of emotion which poetry seeks to depict"). See Herbert Lindenberger, On

and unreremarkable in natural scenes, in people and activities. In Burke's account, beauty evokes love; in Wordsworth's, love more often creates beauty. Love and beauty act as anchors holding the growing mind to "the very world which is the world / Of all of us" (X.725-26), in counterpoint against the sublime which rouses the imagination and pulls away from the common. In this respect, Wordsworth's treatment of beauty differs radically from that of Burke, which is strictly sensationalist:

It is not by the force of long attention and enquiry that we find any object to be beautiful; beauty demands no assistance from our reasoning; even the will is unconcerned; the appearance of beauty as effectually causes some degree of love in us, as the application of ice or fire produces the ideas of heat or cold. (Enquiry, III.ii)

By contrast, Wordsworth examines the growth of a capacity to respond to beauty as a process of slow and insensible "fastening on the heart".⁷ Whereas the "discipline of fear" is emphatic and therefore forces its way upon the child at an early age, affection and tenderness for the ordinary and common emerge only gradually. Much of

Wordsworth's "Prelude" (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 23-39.

⁷Nevertheless, there is a sensationalist aspect to Wordsworth's account of the passions in the Essay, Supplementary to the Preface of 1815, where he divides emotion into the "simple and direct", the "complex and revolutionary" and the "sublime". By the "simple and direct" pathetic, "if the springs of the emotion were genuine, all men, possessed of competent knowledge of the facts and circumstances, would be instantaneously affected" (Zall, p. 185). An example of the "simple and direct" pathetic in The Prelude would be the exhibition of natural devotion by the London artificer who nurses his child in a public square (VIII.837-59), discussed on pp. 185-86 above. For an analysis of Wordsworth's degrees of the pathetic, see W. J. B. Owen, Wordsworth as Critic, pp. 210-28.

Book I of The Prelude, therefore, deals with a succession of sublime experiences, while Book II recounts the gradual claims of beauty on the growing boy, the time when

the beauteous forms
Of Nature were collaterally attach'd
To every scheme of holiday delight,
And every boyish sport, less grateful else,
And languidly pursued. (II.51-55)

Such a process is associationist rather than sensationalist,⁸ and Wordsworth uses imagery that presents it as such. The young boy may dream of exotic climes and magnificent scenes of the fancy, but at just that age

the common haunts of the green earth,
With the ordinary human interests
Which they embosom, all without regard
As both may seem, are fastening on the heart
Insensibly, each with the other's help,
So that we love, not knowing that we love,
And feel, not knowing whence our feeling comes.
(VIII.166-72)

Thus in the initial stages of this process the child is largely passive; beauty does not "strike" him, does not demand a definite response, but it "fastens" and "holds" his heart:

Oh! then the calm
And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream.
Thus daily were my sympathies enlarged,
And thus the common range of visible things
Grew dear to me (II.176-83).

⁸The classic treatment of Wordsworth's associationism remains Arthur Peatty's William Wordsworth: His Doctrine and Art in their Historical Relations (1922; rptd. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962). See especially Chapters V-VII. Peatty ruthlessly excludes other influences on Wordsworth's maturity in order to emphasize a debt to the theories of David Hartley.

Experience of grandeur or sublimity characteristically occurs in solitude and draws the participant away from thoughts of man, and sometimes even from the landscape that has prompted the experience. Beauty makes different claims on the perceiver. It is undramatic, quietly celebrating the ordinary and the common, and it includes the human; the earth and its humanity both fasten on the heart, "each with the other's help". Wordsworth's report that, from feelings

humble though intense,
To patriotic and domestic love
Analogous, the moon to me was dear
(II.194-96),

points up the associationist quality of the process: one loves the moon as one loves parents and country, because all are a part of the environment and of the stuff of common life, anchors that connect the child to his world. Because of this associationism, many of those passages in The Prelude that exemplify the beautiful, picture a populated landscape; nature, seen in this way, evinces a benevolent purposiveness. Such a landscape provides the background for the "dedication" in Book IV:

Magnificent
The morning was, a memorable pomp,
More glorious than I ever had beheld.
The Sea was laughing at a distance; all
The solid Mountains were as bright as clouds,
Grain-tinctured, drench'd in empyrean light;
And, in the meadows and the lower grounds,
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn,
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
And Labourers going forth into the fields.
(IV.330-39)

The scene, potentially sublime but here modified so that the beautiful predominates, would not be complete without the labourers, who provide

a mediating link between natural benevolence and the feelings of the young Wordsworth. Together the landscape and its inhabitants are made to mirror the optimism, benevolence and purposiveness of the young man walking home from a dance with feelings of self-dedication. In a similar vein is the account in Book VI of the travels through France on the first anniversary of the Revolution (see, for example, 367-76). For Wordsworth, experience of the beautiful sometimes lends itself to Ruskin's pathetic fallacy. One of its essential features is its capacity to be used as simply celebratory of the everyday world.⁹

This association of the beautiful in nature with love of fellow humanity seems to spring from Wordsworth's account of how meaningful perception develops. We have already explored in an earlier chapter Wordsworth's claim that the sublime makes its impact on the child earlier than does the beautiful, and is therefore in some sense a stronger power. Yet in Book XIII he seems intent on shifting the balance and putting more weight on love; he claims that he has kept his mind free, unoppressed by a "universe of death" and responsive to that world which is "divine and true":

To fear and love,
To love as first and chief, for there fear ends,

⁹Wordsworth's treatment of man and nature reciprocating a mood of joy and benevolence clearly owes something to Thomson's The Seasons, in passages like this:

'Tis beauty all and grateful song around,
Joined to the low of kine, and numerous bleat
Of flocks thick-nibbling through the clovered vale.
And shall the hymn be marred by thankless man,
Most-favoured, who with voice articulate
Should lead the chorus of this lower world?

(Summer [1746], 1233-38)

Be this ascribed; to early intercourse,
 In presence of sublime and lovely Forms,
 With the adverse principles of pain and joy,
 Evil as one is rashly named by those
 Who know not what they say. From love, for here
 Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,
 All truth and beauty, from pervading love,
 That gone, we are as dust. (XIII.143-52)

The phrase "for here / Do we begin and end" might be interpreted as the magisterial literal statement of the poet, who is saying, "we began this poem by discussing love, and we are going to end it in the same way". This is possible, but unconvincing, for as we have seen, the stress in Book I in fact falls on experiences of fear. It might equally be that Wordsworth, determined to end his poem with the emphasis on love (feeling that he had over-stressed fear and the sublime), resorted to echoes of the Biblical phrase "perfect love casts out fear". Certainly it seems to have been part of his intention to end The Prelude with the elaboration of a Christian common-place, emphasizing the poet's achievement of sympathetic perception rather than imaginative power. However, an explanation for this apparent change of emphasis, with its claim that love is after all prior to fear and in fact encompasses it is to be found within the poem itself, for Book II is largely concerned with the grounding and initial education of childhood perception in maternal love.

The discussion of the genesis of meaningful perception begins as Wordsworth is about to tell how the school-boy moved from the stage of loving nature only as it formed a background for youthful sports to that of seeking it for its own sake. This account he postpones, however, questioning the possibility and worth of tracing human

affections to their origins:

Hard task to analyse a soul, in which,
 Not only general habits and desires,
 But each most obvious and particular thought,
 Not in a mystical and idle sense,
 But in the words of reason deeply weigh'd,
 Hath no beginning. (II.232-37)

Having questioned the value of this exercise, he proceeds nonetheless to "trace / The progress of our being", first discussing the growth of perception in the infant and then, at line 280, picking up his intended theme of accounting for the transition between nature as "collaterally attached" to schemes of holiday delight and nature as sought for her own sake.

Wordsworth's account of infant perception, challenging Locke's theory of the tabula rasa, derives the infant's feelings and powers from "the discipline of love" which he receives from his mother. The force of the long verse paragraph's theory is that the infant rapidly claims kinship with his environment by "gather [ing] passion from his Mother's eye"; sensing her love for him and her related-ness to her environment, he seeks to establish a relationship with that environment, and his mind soon acquires powers--that of perceiving objects as wholes, for example, and that of feeling "grief, . . . exultation, fear and joy". The infant, then, is

An inmate of this active universe;
 From nature largely he receives; nor so
 Is satisfied, but largely gives again
 (II.266-68).

What the infant gives is emotion, "working but in alliance with the works / Which it beholds" but giving creatively to the Nature from

which it has received. Put all this is possible only because of a law of gravitation, by which the baby learns from its mother that it is, indeed, at home in the world:

Thus, day by day,
 Subjected to the discipline of love,
 His organs and recipient faculties
 Are quicken'd, are more vigorous, his mind spreads,
 Tenacious of the forms which it receives.
 In one beloved Presence, nay and more,
 In that most apprehensive habitude
 And those sensations which have been deriv'd
 From this beloved Presence, there exists
 A virtue which irradiates and exalts
 All objects through all intercourse of sense.
 No outcast he, bewilder'd and depress'd;
 Along his infant veins are interfus'd
 The gravitation and the filial bond
 Of nature, that connect him with the world.
(II.250-64)

The loving mother is the child's focus; infant and environment must be brought into mutual reaction, and the mother is, as it were, the catalyst. In this way the human begins in love and, according to this account in Book II, love as a "watchful power" provides the impetus and power for all perception, whether of grandeur or beauty. Love is necessary for perception to begin; there fear begins and ends.

In spite of his protestation that "Even to the very going out of youth"

I too exclusively esteem'd that love,
 And sought that beauty, which, as Milton sings,
 Hath terror in it (VIII.222-26),¹⁰

¹⁰An echo of Paradise Lost, IX.489-91, where Satan describes Eve as

divinely fair, fit Love for Gods,
 Not terrible, though terrour be in Love
 And beautie.

Wordsworth found terror in beauty in those incidents of the Purkean

there is plenty of evidence in The Prelude that as an adolescent Wordsworth was responsive to ordinary humanity, especially that which could be thought of in terms of familial and domestic love. The impulse to see human life as evoking love and tenderness seems to have been stimulated by memories of childhood and maternal affection, so that frequently the dichotomy between beauty and grandeur appears as a dichotomy between the human and the natural. Or, to put it in another way, certain vignettes which deal with parental love and analogous emotion may represent another alternative Wordsworth provided to the sublime, that of the "pathetic"--the "profound and exquisite in feeling" as opposed to the "lofty and universal in thought and imagination" (Zall, p. 183).¹¹ In these vignettes, as we

sublime recorded in Book I, if we admit beauty as a term inclusive of the sublime; see above, p. 121, fn. 11.

¹¹ That Wordsworth recognized a distinction between the sublime and the pathetic is clear from passing remarks in the Essay, Supplementary to the Preface (1815) and the Essay upon Epitaphs (II). In the former he speaks of "the profound and the exquisite in feeling, the lofty and universal in thought and imagination; or in ordinary language the pathetic and the sublime" as being outside the dominion of taste (Zall, p. 183); later in the same essay this distinction is complicated by a differentiation between two branches of the pathetic, that involving "simple and direct" emotion, and that involving "complex and revolutionary" emotion" (Zall, p. 185). In the Essay upon Epitaphs (II), Wordsworth mentions the "primary sensations of the human heart, which are the vital springs of sublime and pathetic composition" (Zall, p. 107). Where parental love and similar emotions are illustrated in The Prelude, as they are, for example, in the lines about the London artificer (VIII.843-59) and those about Ann Tyson referred to above, it may be that the distinction is less between the sublime and the beautiful than it is between the sublime and the pathetic. However, I would hardly consider these distinctions to be altogether mutually exclusive. It is not always clear that Wordsworth intends the pathetic to preclude sublimity; and John Dennis linked, rather than distinguished between, the sublime and the pathetic.

have already noticed, love creates beauty, although beauty certainly frames them. This love that suggests the pathetic takes its tone from the domestic nostalgia of Book I and the role assigned to the mother in Book II, and it features significantly in the account of the "Summer Vacation" which returns Wordsworth to "Nature's fairest forms" (IV.9; 1850 version). And whereas the apostrophe to the "lowly Cottages" in Book I follows the episodes of fear, in Book IV the pattern is reversed, the "sublime" spot of time exploring the encounter with the discharged soldier climaxing a book which narrates return as nostalgia for the tender aspects of the past and generally exemplifies a "human-heartedness" in Wordsworth's love for objects. At the start of the Book, the view of Hawkeshead parish church, situated like "a throned Lady, sending out / A gracious look all over its domain" (IV.14-15) introduces a passage of tribute to Ann Tyson; while the countryside is certainly beautiful, Ann Tyson, the "old Dame", could hardly be termed so--but what Wordsworth feels for her, the affection of a foster son, undoubtedly belongs to the pathetic (IV.16-18, 29-32). The return to Hawkeshead is seen as a return to the feminine, domestic and humble.

More complex than Burke's static account of beauty is Wordsworth's implied attribution of development in perception to the nostalgia felt on re-visiting scenes of happy childhood, a development in precisely the opposite direction to "Love of nature leading to love of man". In three different ways we are told of a new orientation to the returning scholar's perception of the world: that he found a

"freshness . . . at this time in human Life" (181); that he looked at his old environment with "something of another eye" (200); and that he felt the "dawning, even as of another sense" (224) which made him realize that others loved objects in the same way that he did. All these modifications amount to a growing feeling for ordinary human experience and its analogy in the non-human but living world. Thus he was impressed by the process of change, discovering it

not indifferent to a youthful mind
To note, perhaps, some shelter'd Seat in which
An old Man had been used to sun himself,
Now empty; pale-fac'd Pables whom I had left
In arms, known children of the neighbourhood,
Now rosy prattlers, tottering up and down;
And growing Girls whose beauty, filch'd away
With all its pleasant promises, was gone
To deck some slighted Playmate's homely cheek.
(IV.191-99)

In a sense, these are "shadings of mortality", dim fore-shadowings of death; yet the perception of change in human life, like that of the "transitory qualities" which the seasons bestow on organic life, is an experience of the beautiful.¹² As Wordsworth notes a little later, the morbid "scatterings / Of Childhood" give way "in later youth, to beauty, and to love / Enthusiastic, to delight and joy" (IV.244-46); a fearful environment becomes lovely.

The new eye with which the youth looked at life noted with affection the details and eccentricities of ordinary people, moving him to smiles "such as a delicate work of humour breeds":

I read, without design, the opinions, thoughts
Of those plain-living People, in a sense

¹²For the suggestion that Burke was aware of a connection between the transitory and the beautiful, see above, pp. 192-93.

Of love and knowledge; with another eye
 I saw the quiet Woodman in the Woods,
 The Shepherd on the Hills. With new delight,
 This chiefly, did I view my grey-hair'd Dame,
 Saw her go forth to Church, or other work
 Of state, equipp'd in monumental trim,
 Short Velvet Cloak (her Bonnet of the like)
 A Mantle such as Spanish Cavaliers
 Wore in old time. Her smooth domestic life,
 Affectionate without uneasiness,
 Her talk, her business pleas'd me, and no less
 Her clear though shallow stream of piety,
 That ran on Sabbath days a fresher course.
 With thoughts unfelt till now, I saw her read
 Her Bible on the Sunday afternoons;
 And lov'd the book, when she had dropp'd asleep,
 And made of it a pillow for her head.

(IV.202-21)

The tone of this new appreciation is firmly caught in the
 characterization of her visit to church as a work of state, and the
 vivid metaphor "equipp'd in monumental trim", both suggesting the
 discrepancy between the value the Dame places on her activities, and
 that which we can put on them, seeing from a distance. Yet the humour
 is kind, arising from affection.

The third modification in perception applies to natural
 objects but has in common with the preceding two a "human-
 heartedness". Precisely what Wordsworth means by this is not clear,
 but it is significant that the thoughts of "change, congratulation and
 regret" are just those which occur to him in the first of these three
 paragraphs (181-99): the occupants of Hawkeshead had changed, the old
 man who used to sun himself having died, babies now prattlers and
 pretty girls married; yet instead of seeing these changes as evidences
 of mortality, Wordsworth responds with mixed feelings of regret and
 self-aware pleasure ("congratulation"). Perhaps he now sees nature as

analogous to this human pattern, and so the "scatterings of
Childhood", "deep, gloomy and severe",

had given way,
In later youth, to beauty, and to love
Enthusiastic, to delight and joy.
(IV.243-46)

Despite the general distinctness of the sublime (referable to experiences of fear and elevation) from the beautiful (predominantly tracing a pattern of the developing responsiveness of the growing boy to the milder aspects of nature and humanity) the two do interfuse to a degree, as in the two passages on ambition in Book IV. In the first (121-67) Wordsworth describes a solitary walk in a setting mildly redolent of the sublime, taken at the time of sunset:

evening soon brought on
A sober hour, not winning or serene,
For cold and raw the air was, and unturn'd:
But, as a face we love is sweetest then
When sorrow damps it, or, whatever look
It chance to wear is sweetest if the heart
Have fulness in itself, even so with me
It fared that evening. Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked as in the presence of her God.
(IV.133-42)

The hour of fading light, the harsh air, the solitary figure and the curious "self-transfiguration" of the soul are consonant with something approaching sublimity and prepare us for the ensuing meditation on the sublime powers of man. The boy feels "swellings of the spirits", he converses with promises and sees the immortal Soul as analogous to God in its power of "informing" and "creating" (the passage anticipates, undramatically and vaguely, the Snowdon episode). This is a familiar Wordsworthian tribute to the God-like Soul (perhaps

also the imagination) of man, attributing to it powers of creativity that defy death, telling

how on earth,
 Man, if he do but live within the light
 Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad
 His being with a strength that cannot fail.
 (IV.158-61)

Yet just as in the later "dedication" (330-45) which we have already discussed, the sublimity of the scene is modified (the sea "laughs", the solid mountains are bright and "grain-tinctured" and there are labourers going to work in the fields) so it is here. The happiness of the day is described in terms of the beautiful as "wide-spreading, steady, calm, contemplative", and the walk is "the circuit of our little Lake". Complementing this blending of sublime and beautiful in the outside scene is the nature of Wordsworth's meditation which begins in "swellings of the spirits" and ambitious thoughts, but ends in thoughts of domesticity and love:

Nor was there want of milder thoughts, of love,
 Of innocence, and holiday repose;
 And more than pastoral quiet, in the heart
 Of amplest projects; and a peaceful end
 At last, or glorious, by endurance won.
 (IV.162-66)

The last line is ambiguous, keeping the ideas of glory and peace resolutely apart (we might have expected "peaceful end / At last, and glorious), but the tempering of thoughts in the order of the sublime by "milder thoughts" is clear; there is to be "more than pastoral quiet, in the heart / Of amplest projects". Characteristic of The Prelude is this process of tempering and modifying, where experience that approximates to the sublime is balanced by a corresponding

emphasis on the beautiful, calm, love or tenderness.

For Wordsworth as for Burke fear and love, the emotions associated with physical characteristics in nature and man, are as interesting as the sublime and the beautiful. Both, though for different reasons, are interested in the activities of the human mind and the laws under which that mind operates. We have seen that a sublime landscape (one, that is, containing a mountain or dominating natural form) and elements of the natural sublime (storm, for example) have distinct power over Wordsworth quite apart from what he contributes to them. The same does not seem to be true of the beautiful in nature. The opening of Book VIII attracts our attention to Helvellyn and the vale of Grassmere beneath. Helvellyn is by its very nature a single form, imposing its own meaning fairly obviously without too much assistance from the poet; to put it simply, few epithets are necessary to remind us that the mountain is a sublime object. The Vale, however, asserts nothing apart from its creatures, humans and animals, that inhabit it, and both vale and creatures together are unified into a picture which simply captures and presents an impression of purposiveness and benevolence. The naturally beautiful, then, does not always suffice to evoke from Wordsworth a response of tenderness; it demands the presence of man, and accretes meaning by taking its attributes from man (thus in the Helvellyn passage the vale reflects Wordsworth's attitude to the "little Family of Men"). Man is the measure of beauty for Wordsworth, beauty founded not on Burke's undulating line or softness of texture, but on

analogous "interior" qualities like humbleness, lowliness and affection.

However this may be, one cannot then proceed to equate sublimity with nature and beauty with humanity, for Wordsworth attributes sublimity as well as beauty to man; men, no less than natural objects, arouse fear or awe. Book VIII of The Prelude claims as its subject "Love of Nature leading to Love of Man" but almost all of its human denizens are figures of awe, contrasting emphatically with the "pitiably dear" crowd of the vale. Insofar as Book VIII does deal with a process of association between nature and man, it traces the manner in which individual figures appropriate the formal characteristics and imputed spiritual attributes of a "sublime" landscape to themselves. By being a labourer in an environment of exposed hills, stark fells and unsympathetic weather the Shepherd, who is established as something of a Wordsworthian archetype in this book, seems to assume a corresponding sublimity and so, Wordsworth says, becomes

Ennobled outwardly before mine eyes,
And thus my heart at first was introduc'd
To an unconscious love and reverence
Of human Nature (VIII.411-14).

That the human form became for him an "index" of grace, honour, power and worthiness follows reasonably from this; that it also became an "index of delight", less reasonably.

A central passage of Book VIII relates something like the idea of a progression from early, fearful experiences associated with nature towards a love of man and, later, animals, in terms of the

general Burkean associations of sublimity and beauty examined earlier:

Yet do not deem, my Friend, though thus I speak
 Of Ian as having taken in my mind
 A place thus early which might almost seem
 Pre-eminent, that it was really so.
 Nature herself was at this unripe time,
 But secondary to my own pursuits
 And animal activities, and all
 Their trivial pleasures; and long afterwards
 When those had died away, and Nature did
 For her own sake become my joy, even then
 And upwards through late youth, until not less
 Than three and twenty summers had been told
 Was man in my affections and regards
 Subordinate to her; her awful forms
 And viewless agencies: a passion, she!
 A rapture often, and immediate joy,
 Ever at hand; he distant, but a grace
 Occasional, an accidental thought,
 His hour being not yet come. Far less had then
 The inferior Creatures, beast or bird, attun'd
 My spirit to that gentleness of love,
 Won from me those minute obeisances
 Of tenderness, which I may number now
 With my first blessings. Nevertheless, on these
 The light of beauty did not fall in vain,
 Or grandeur circumfuse them to no end.

(VIII.472-97)

The ending of this passage with its reference to "inferior Creatures" and "minute obeisances / Of tenderness" perhaps deceptively persuades us that the paragraph is discussing a complete movement, over a long period of time, from response to sublimity ("awful forms / And viewless agencies") through response to man and nature, presumably involving love. Yet this is not the theme that dominates the Book, which is more than normally confused in its attempts to give to chronology the shape of a theme. The first section concentrates on a contrast, posed in several ways, between the real and the fabulous (119-72 contrast the real beauty of the Lake District with fabulous

beauty; 173-221 contrasts real shepherds with fabled shepherds; 312-428 essentially reverts to this contrast). Within this series of contrasts Wordsworth provides four portraits of his real shepherds, two of which show them as transfigured, distanced and idealized by a trick of the weather acting on the landscape, one showing the shepherd as confessedly sublime ("a solitary object and sublime") and one showing a shepherd and his son involved in an experience of terror. The shepherds of this book are sublime figures, remote and stoic; their function is to portray real pastoralism as against that of romance. A parallel theme of the book contrasts "willful fancy" with "plain imagination and severe", the latter being an instrument for seeing the real. Chronologically the narrative confuses, repeats ideas found earlier in the poem with little gain, and chronology and theme unite only as a means of providing a second, "sublime" interpretation of the meaning of London to the growth of the poet's mind. While the book as a whole is generally concerned with man, the particular reference of its title is to several passages which account for the emergence of man as sublime. Indeed, only one paragraph at the conclusion of Book VIII, later moved to the preceding book, presents a vignette of human action under the aspect of the pathetic and beautiful. Wordsworth was right to shift the passage, the account of the London artificer caring for his child, for it is introduced with the statement that (in London) "In the tender scenes / Chiefly was my delight", whereas both man and London, throughout Book VIII, are seen as sublime.

A draft manuscript passage originally intended for Book VIII

A garden with its walks and banks of flowers,
 A churchyard, and the bell that tolls to church,
 The roaring ocean and waste wilderness
 Familiar things and awful, the minute
 And grand. (226-34)

Generally, though not invariably or altogether consistently, the senses respond first to ocean and waste wilderness in Wordsworth's account. The milder appearances of nature, for which the child, through his mother's mediation, yearns from infancy, claim later response. Their particular connection to humanity is seen in the phrases above, for path, taper, smoke, garden and churchyard all imply human presences.¹³

In Book VIII Wordsworth describes how the child makes connections between grandeur in nature and man; in the draft manuscript, the emphasis is on beauty and humanity "fastening on the heart" insensibly but surely. These two emphases are complementary rather than opposed.

There is no doubt that in the concluding three books of The Prelude Wordsworth tips the scales to give love precedence over fear

¹³This passage may remind us of the opening of "Tintern Abbey" where smoke ascending through the trees modifies the solitude of the Wye valley scene by suggesting a human presence. The passage also recalls Blair's picture of the highest beauty:

The most complete assemblage of beautiful objects which can be found, is represented by rich natural landscape, where there is a sufficient variety of objects; fields in verdure, scattered trees and flowers, running water, and animals grazing. If to these be added some of the productions of art suitable to such a scene; as a bridge with arches over a river, smoke rising from cottages in the midst of trees, and a distant view of a fine building seen by the rising sun; we then enjoy, in the highest perfection, that gay, cheerful and placid sensation which characterises Beauty.

(Hugh Blair, An Abridgement of Lectures on Rhetoric [New York, 1821], pp. 33-34)

and grandeur: "from love . . . all grandeur comes" he says in Book XIII; the "Wanderers of the Earth" are surrounded by grandeur, but by "loveliness far more" (XIII.156-57); the liberty of exalted minds is attributed to experience of fear and love, but to "love as first and chief" (XIII.143-44). In terms of The Prelude as a whole, this emphasis can be justified by Wordsworth's account in Book II of the growth of perception in infant experience of maternal love, so that everything which we respond to we do so because we love. But the chronology of the poem clearly accounts for the later emphasis on love and beauty as the result of Wordsworth's psychological needs after his experience of and reactions to the French Revolution. The elevation of the Shepherd as a sublime figure in Book VIII tells of how Wordsworth thought of man at the beginning of the revolution. The portrait of Beaupuy testifies to the place idealized man came to assume in his development. But the real man of the Revolution was Robespierre, a man who transcended sublimity to embody unmitigated terror. For Wordsworth, the excesses of the period left nature and man all but bankrupt, and his recovery of faith owed itself to a rediscovery, with the help of Dorothy, Mary Hutchinson and Coleridge, of beauty and love. We might speculate that Wordsworth even began to distrust the sublime, and it is surely significant that "power and action", in an early draft referring to actions of violation against natural objects, in Book XII refer to the French Revolution. At any rate, the regaining of sanity is clearly acknowledged to be the work of "beauty":

Above all
Did Nature bring again that wiser mood

More deeply re-establish'd in my soul,
 Which, seeing little worthy or sublime
 In what we blazen with the pompous names
 Of power and action, early tutor'd me
 To look with feelings of fraternal love
 Upon those unassuming things, that hold
 A silent station in this beauteous world.
 (XII.44-52)

Had the French Revolution not come to represent the betrayal of all that Wordsworth aspired to believe in, then it might have exemplified a true "sublime . . . Of power and action". However, quite apart from historical causes, Dorothy Wordsworth evidently responded to beauty, the minute manifestations of nature, more readily than she did to grandeur. Quite simply, she directed her brother's attention to this aspect of nature.¹⁴

The key to Wordsworth's attitude to beauty and love from about 1798 on, at least if we can accept the poem as biographically accurate on this point, is "benevolence", a way of thinking which gave Wordsworth a renewed faith in nature after his disillusion with the course of the Revolution, which characterized his attitude to his sister Dorothy, Mary Hutchinson and the "beloved Vale" of Grasmere from 1798, which typified his relationship with Coleridge and which lies behind much of the poetry he wrote during the years he lived at Dove Cottage.

The morning shines,
 Nor heedeth Man's perverseness; Spring returns,
 I saw the Spring return, when I was dead

¹⁴Evidence of this is to be found in Dorothy Wordsworth's Alfoxden Journal. See Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. Helen Darbishire, rev. Mary Ibbman (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 1-12. Close observation of detail characterizes especially the Alfoxden period in such journal entries as those of January 31st and February 4th, 1798.

To deeper hope, yet had I joy for her,
 And welcomed her benevolence, rejoiced
 In common with the Children of her Love,
 Plants, insects, beasts in field, and birds in bower.
 So neither were complacency nor peace
 Nor tender yearnings waiting for my good
 Through those distracted times (XI.23-31).

This benevolence is no complex nor systematic philosophy, but neither is it founded on the direct responses of the senses to natural objects. Rather, it seems to be a movement of the will to see natural objects as if they reflect a genuine and pervading spirit in the world. In other words, such a way of looking at nature is intellectual rather than emotional, as Wordsworth admits:

Thus moderated, thus composed, I found
 Once more in Man an object of delight
 Of pure imagination, and of love;
 And, as the horizon of my mind enlarged,
 Again I took the intellectual eye
 For my instructor, studious more to see
 Great Truths, than touch and handle little ones.
 (XII.53-59)

Wordsworth deliberately reined in imagination and senses, and "sought For good in the familiar face of life" (66-67).

The Conclusion of the poem accepts this benevolence as the source of grandeur and love in the world, multiplying distinctions by setting a "pervading love" apart from tenderness:

Behold the fields
 In balmy spring-time, full of rising flowers
 And happy creatures; see that Pair, the Lamb
 And the Lamb's Mother, and their tender ways
 Shall touch thee to the heart; in some green bower
 Rest, and be not alone, but have thou there
 The One who is thy choice of all the world,
 There linger, lull'd and lost, and rapt away,
 Be happy to thy fill; thou call'st this love
 And so it is, but there is higher love
 Than this, a love that comes into the heart

With awe and a diffusive sentiment;
 Thy love is human merely; this proceeds
 More from the brooding Soul, and is divine.
 (XIII.152-65)

It is a "love more intellectual" (166).¹⁵

The characteristics of this "higher" love as a quality containing "awe" and "diffusive sentiment" and as "pervading" sets it apart from the manifestations of love we have already discussed, since its basis is a religious attitude to the whole of nature and man ("awe") that "pervades" them and is "diffused" through them. This being so, it reaches out naturally to embrace grandeur as well as beauty. One might say that such a higher love is obviously so distanced that it must reach out to all life and that, conversely, individual traits of grandeur (in the form of the mountain, for instance) and beauty (in a daisy, perhaps) would be irrelevant to it because too particular. In other words, there is little to be said about such benevolent "higher" love because it is so generalized and intellectual an attitude, voiding distinctions between grandeur and beauty. Thus, in Book XII Wordsworth speaks of the "Wanderers of the Earth" as appearing to him surrounded by grandeur and loveliness; conversely, he says that

Nature through all conditions hath a power
 To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
 The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
 Grandeur upon the very humblest face
 Of human life. (XII.282-86)

¹⁵For a fuller discussion of "Intellectual love" see Francis Christensen, "Intellectual Love: The Second Theme of The Prelude", PMLA, LXXX (1965), 69-75. Professor Christensen's account is clear and perceptive, but in calling it the "second theme" he overlooks the repeated linking of love with fear. Growth, through experience of fear and love, the sublime and beautiful, is the single theme of the poem.

Maybe so, but we would like to know how, for the thought is a new one, and inconsistent with all we have gathered about grandeur and beauty to this point in the poem. These paradoxical statements suggest that in the last books of The Prelude Wordsworth is moving the discussion from the level of sober experience and operations of the mind to that of faith.

In terms of the structure of the final book, "Love more intellectual" stands as a twin to imagination:

Imagination having been our theme,
So also hath that intellectual love,
For they are each in each, and cannot stand
Dividually. (XIII.185-88)

It seems that Wordsworth sets out to establish a structure in which "intellectual love" stands in relation to love and beauty as imagination does to fear and grandeur. We have seen that imagination is accounted for as the power the mind exercises upon circumstance, under such conditions as it responds to; and we have seen that those conditions are such as seem to Wordsworth to exhibit combinations of duration, simplicity and power. Anything that exhibits qualities analogous to these stimulates the imagination. All of the "spots of time" in The Prelude work upon this basic connection between sublimity and the imagination. However, it is the imagination that is apostrophized, not the materials it operates upon.

Book XIII suggests that intellectual love is intended to stand in a similar relationship to the beautiful. It builds itself upon ordinary patterns of tenderness and perception of beauty, but transcends these to include all things. And yet, despite this hint

that grandeur is a part of love, Wordsworth surprisingly asserts that intellectual love cannot exist without imagination (166-67).

Ultimately, then, the attempt to offer a coherent explanation of the relationship between this "higher love" and "imagination" founders, and Wordsworth grants each a kind of precedence over the other.

In spite of this final confusion in The Prelude it is evident that Wordsworth gives the beautiful a role in his development parallel to but distinct from the sublime; that, although he regards the sublime as exerting an influence prior to that of the beautiful in youth, he derives the development of perception from love; that he is in basic agreement with Burke as to the qualities of beauty in landscape; and that he associates beauty in human beings with moral qualities like humbleness rather than with physical attributes. Difficult as it is to state with any precision the place the beautiful occupies in Wordsworth's growth, it seems fair to say that whereas grandeur challenged his imagination, beauty and love offered a sane way of looking at the world, and a moral viewpoint.

VIII

CONCLUSION

I

The mountain, as we have seen, was for Wordsworth the pre-eminently sublime form. In The Prelude there are three important mountain passages occurring, significantly, at the beginning, middle and end of the poem:¹ the story of the pursuing cliff in Book I, the tribute to the "mountain's outline and its steady form" at the end of Book VII and the episode of the ascent of Snowdon, with its commentary, in Book XIII. Since The Prelude is a poem about the growth of powers of mind and imagination (through relationship with nature in its grand and lovely forms) and their ultimate triumph over all those facets of experience which might have discredited nature and stifled imaginative activity, these three episodes stand at logical points of the poem; for they catch the significance of natural forms to Wordsworth at three crucial points in his life. The pursuing "huge

¹The Snowdon episode, of course, has to do with the view from the mountain's summit rather than with Snowdon itself. Lindenberger (On Wordsworth's "Prelude", p. 89) notes that Wordsworth's "visionary experience on mountains was more centrally concerned with depths rather than heights"--cf. the sounds heard on Helvellyn's summit, "Through the depth of air / Ascending" (VIII.2-3). However, we have seen that Wordsworth also paid attention to the elevated shapes of mountains. The Snowdon tableau is concerned with height and depth; the sound ascends through the "blue chasm" while the moon looks down upon the scene from her solitary height.

Cliff" of Book I seemed to possess "voluntary power", and its form usurped the place of the "familiar shapes" of the everyday world to move through Wordsworth's mind and trouble his dreams, making it impossible henceforth for natural objects to seem dead, and providing a basic imagery for life and poetry. In Book VII the mountain is invoked as the source of a mode of perception which can make sense of deadening phenomena such as London; in such perception grandeur and majesty are "given" to the soul by the mountain:

The mountain's outline and its steady form
Gives a pure grandeur, and its presence shapes
The measure and the prospect of the soul
To majesty. (VII.722-25)

The soul that had appropriated something of the grandeur and majesty of the mountain form could, to a degree, contradict the debasing sights of London. But London foreshadowed the much greater challenge eventually offered to Wordsworth's imagination by England's declaration of war on France and its aftermath, the betrayal of his hopes during the years 1793-95.² Books XI and XII set out the process

²This is the subject of The Prelude, Book X. It is important to note that Wordsworth's disillusionment began with England's declaration of war on France (see X.229-51, 758-68); the effect of this was to challenge his natural patriotism and make him exult in England's defeats. The process of impairment and restoration led through a tendency to Godwinian rationalism (X.805-900), the study of mathematics (X.901-04), the adoption of "picturesque" methods of judging nature, and a sensual craving for natural forms (XI.138-95), to a restoration of a true relationship with nature, through the help of Coleridge and his sister Dorothy. The whole process, whose chronology is left vague in the poem, dated from February 11, 1793 (when England declared war on France), occupied the years 1793, 1794 and 1795, and possibly terminated with Wordsworth's taking up residence with Dorothy at Racedown, Dorset in September 1795. Wordsworth met Coleridge in August 1795 (see X.904-15).

by which his impaired imagination was restored to health. This process essentially involved the rejection of sterile responses to nature, such as picturesque methods of viewing, and the education of the mind to a point where it gave to, as well as received from, nature:

I remember well
That in life's every-day appearances
I seem'd about this period to have sight
Of a new world, a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted and made visible
To other eyes, as having for its base
That whence our dignity originates,
That which both gives it being and maintains
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without,
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.
(XII.368-79)

In view of this now explicit provision for "action from within" it is not surprising that where Wordsworth had previously seen mind as imaging nature (as in VII.722-30, for instance), in Book XIII he offers the scene viewed from the summit of Snowdon as "the perfect image of a mighty mind" (XIII.69). For in spite of the handsome tributes to nature in Books XI to XIII, their high points, especially the "spots of time" in Book XI, suggest that the mind may be "Lord and master, and that outward sense / Is but the obedient servant of her will" (272-73). This is hardly surprising; Wordsworth could not have emerged from a time of trial so heavy as that described in Book X without becoming aware that nature of itself could not restore imagination.³ The climax of The Prelude, through the image of the

³This seems to be implied in Book X, 426-30:
If from the affliction somewhere do not grow
Honour which could not else have been, a faith,
An elevation, and a sanctity,
If new strength be not given, or old restored
The blame is ours not Nature's.

Snowdon scene, quite appropriately hymns that mind which the huge cliff had usurped in childhood. Images which took root in the mind, having become part of its grandeur, can now be used by that mind to embody its sense of its own power.

The "climbing of Snowdon" episode is in two parts: an account of an actual incident (1-65) and a following commentary upon it, in the form of a meditation supposedly entertained on the same occasion, "when the scene / Had pass'd away" (66-119).⁴ The force of the commentary seems to be that, if nature is not always itself responsible for providing that patterning which impresses scenes meaningfully on the mind, it can nevertheless stand as an image of

a mighty Mind,
Of one that feeds upon infinity,
That is exalted by an under-presence,
The sense of God, or whatsoe'er is dim
Or vast in its own being (XIII.69-73).

The "mighty Mind" is presumably not itself the poet or deeply imaginative person, but may stand in relation to the "higher minds" of line 90, who possess the "glorious faculty" of imagination, as Shelley's "one great mind" does to the poets, who are its "co-operating thoughts".⁵ However, nature appears to Wordsworth as the "perfect image" of this "mighty Mind" because it can exert,

⁴As Jonathan Wordsworth points out in Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, p. 451, Wordsworth's statement that the Snowdon meditation rose in him on the night of the climb is not true; see below, pp. 228-33.

⁵Shelley's Critical Prose, ed. Bruce R. McElderry, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 19.

and seemed to be exerting during the Snowdon incident, on its scenes,
a power similar to the operations of the imagination:

above all
One function of such mind had Nature there
Exhibited by putting forth, and that
With circumstance most awful and sublime,
That domination which she oftentimes
Exerts upon the outward face of things,
So moulds them, and endues, abstracts, combines,
Or by abrupt and unhabitual influence
Doth make one object so impress itself
Upon all others, and pervade them so
That even the grossest minds must see and hear
And cannot chuse but feel. (73-84)

Wordsworth is saying that what he saw from the mountain's summit was
such a scene as would coerce even "the grossest minds" into seeing,
hearing and feeling; and, possibly, into acknowledging the
"domination" of nature. The whole passage implies that, on those
occasions when nature exerts herself in such a manner, the viewer is
as passive as was the boy of Winander when, after his mimic hootings,

the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain Heaven, receiv'd
Into the bosom of the steady Lake.

(V.409-13)

The Snowdon commentary also recalls the discussion on the relationship
between phenomena, perception and imagination in Book VII, where
Wordsworth distinguishes between structures which "the mind / Builds
for itself" (such as the emblemizing of the blind beggar) and
different scenes,

Full-form'd, which take, with small internal help,
Possession of the faculties; the peace
Of night, for instance, the solemnity
Of nature's intermediate hours of rest,

When the great tide of human life stands still
(VII.623-30).

In terms of this distinction, what Wordsworth saw after climbing Snowdon was a "full-form'd" scene, the description of which simply records what he saw and heard, without any super-added imaginative transformation; a gross mind might not be capable of writing a faithful account of the scene, but it would be as capable as Wordsworth of being impressed by it.⁶

But there is a difference between the process involved in the "boy of Winander" and the Book VII discussion on the one hand, and the Snowdon scene on the other: in the latter, Wordsworth is not talking about an already formed scene, but about one that seemed to be in the process of formation:

A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still Ocean, and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves,
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the Sea, the real Sea, that seem'd
To dwindle, and give up its majesty,
Usurp'd upon as far as sight could reach.
(45-51)

By the "full-form'd" scenes mentioned in Book VII, Wordsworth intends completed, static tableaux like the "solemn imagery", the completed "visible scene" which entered into the heart of the Boy of Winander. Here, by contrast, Wordsworth's experience seemed to be that of catching nature at the moment when it was organizing such a scene. He found himself on the shore "of a huge sea of mist", as if he had

⁶For a full discussion of these and similar passages, see W. J. B. Owen, Wordsworth as Critic, pp. 179-87.

stumbled into a theatre at the moment of a scene-change. As the "vapours shot themselves" into a variety of shapes, the "real sea" "seem'd / To dwindle, and give up its majesty"; a process of "shaping" had just been accomplished, and the scene was complete when the moon, the "blue chasm" and the usurping vapours had, as it were, been marshalled into their appropriate positions. Later, the scene "passed away".

Nature, Wordsworth is saying, often works like a poet. In the Preface of 1815, the poet's imaginative activity is seen as the manipulation of images by a mind exerting itself, "operations of the mind upon . . . objects" (Zall, p. 146); or, as he puts it in a letter to Lady Beaumont, a certain phenomenon "calls forth the poetic faculty, receiving its exertions as a tribute" (Zall, p. 81). Precisely this pattern is described in the Snowdon commentary, where Wordsworth says that Nature

Exhibited by putting forth, and that
With circumstance most awful and sublime,
That domination which she oftentimes
Exerts upon the outward face of things
(75-78).

As the poet is to phenomena, so on that occasion was Nature to the scene viewed from Snowdon's height. Just as the poetic imagination, viewed as the faculty which makes poetry out of phenomena, operates "by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses" (Zall, p. 148), by modifying, shaping, creating, "consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number" (p. 149), so Nature takes

"things" and

moulds them, and endues, abstracts, combines,
Or by abrupt and unhabitual influence
Doth make one object so impress itself
Upon all others, and pervade them so
That even the grossest minds must see and hear
And cannot chuse but feel. (79-84)

The specific mention of the "one object" that "impresses itself / Upon all others" and pervades them recalls Lamb's definition of imagination quoted by Wordsworth in the Preface, as that faculty which "draws all things to one, which makes things animate or inanimate, beings with their attributes, subjects with their accessories, take one colour and serve to one effect" (Zall, p. 150). All of these operations Wordsworth has Nature performing on the Snowdon scene. The real sea had been made to "dwindle, and give up its majesty" (abstracting); the mists and vapours had been endued with the appearance and attributes of land formations (conferring); and the varying sounds were made to coalesce into "one voice", mounting through the "blue chasm" which served as Lamb's unifying power and Wordsworth's soul and imagination:

The universal spectacle throughout
Was shaped for admiration and delight,
Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thoroughfare had Nature lodg'd
The Soul, the Imagination of the whole.
(60-65)

The central point to be made about the Snowdon passage is that it is about the "quasi-imaginative workings of Nature";⁷ Wordsworth

⁷The phrase is Owen's, Wordsworth as Critic, p. 183, fn. 61.

attributes his own imaginative activity to Nature in order to make it the "Perfect image of a mighty Mind". If nature does often work like a poet, it is the poet who makes it do so. Really, the Snowdon passage represents the culminating example in The Prelude of the Wordsworthian process of composition, demonstrating that the incident of Snowdon's ascent and the view from the summit was not like what happened to the Boy of Winander, not one of those "full-form'd" scenes referred to in Book VII "which take, with small internal help, / Possession of the faculties", but was rather an experience to be recollected in tranquillity and worked into poetry at a much later date. While it builds upon ordinary sensory experience, the Snowdon passage filters that experience through other literary passages by Wordsworth and others, distancing and modifying it to give it imaginative embodiment independent of actuality. When we know the totality of literary experience that went into the composition of the passage we can no longer be sure what Wordsworth saw on Snowdon and what he derived from literary sources; but we do know that the imagination was Wordsworth's, not Nature's.

The ascent of Snowdon was evidently memorable for Wordsworth, for he refers to it in a letter written during a later Welsh tour of 1824. He notes, of the place from where he had set out on the climb, that

The village of Beddgelert is much altered for the worse; new and formal houses have supplanted the old rugged and tufted cottages; and a smart hotel has taken the place of the lowly public-house in which I took refreshment almost thirty years ago, previous to a midnight ascent

to the summit of Snowdon.⁸

His memory, not unnaturally after such a lapse of time, was playing him false, for it must have been sometime in the summer of 1791, some thirty-three years previously, that he had ascended Snowdon during a walking-tour of North Wales he made with Robert Jones.⁹ The letter says no more about the climb, but does support certain of the circumstantial details in The Prelude. It was a "midnight ascent", undertaken at that hour because the travellers wished "to see the sun / Rise from the top of Snowdon"; refreshment taken prior to the climb is a feature of poem and letter; and "Bethkelet's huts" (XIII.3) are undoubtedly "the old rugged and tufted cottages" so unfortunately supplanted. The level of circumstantial detail is certainly the right one at which to begin an account of the passage, for Wordsworth

⁸The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The Later Years, arr. and ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), I, 154.

⁹For this date, see Mark L. Reed, Wordsworth. The Chronology of the Early Years, 1770-1779 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 315. The memory of this climb, made in the early hours of the morning, or of similar climbs, may lie behind some advice proffered in Guide to the Lakes:

It is not likely that a mountain will be ascended without disappointment, if a wide range of prospect be the object, unless either the summit be reached before sunrise, or the visitant remain there until the time of sunset, and afterwards. The precipitous sides of the mountain, and the neighbouring summits, may be seen with effect under any atmosphere which allows them to be seen at all; but he is the most fortunate adventurer, who chances to be involved in vapours which open and let in an extent of country partially, or, dispersing suddenly, reveal the whole region from centre to circumference. (pp. 97-98)

The Prelude account depends upon being "involved in vapours", but Wordsworth's meditation is presented as having occurred after their apparently sudden dispersal.

characteristically works upward from unimportant detail noticed peripherally by his protagonist, to revelation given upon relaxation.¹⁰ So here Wordsworth moves from a brief description of circumstances (1-9), to sober account of activity, in which the arduous act of climbing is diverted only by the comic drama of the attendant "Shepherd's Cur" and the hedgehog (10-35), to the moment of revelation (36-65). That revelation is preceded by the act of climbing in which the dog's adventure would be noticed because climbers naturally have their eyes fixed to the ground, both testifies to the actuality of the incident and aligns it with what we know of the processes of Wordsworthian perception.

Thus, the Snowdon episode is built upon an event. But we cannot be sure that the description of the summit view derives only from the memory of that ascent of Snowdon, because in Descriptive Sketches (1793) Wordsworth describes a similar scene:

--'Tis morn: with gold the verdant mountain glows,
More high, the snowy peaks with hues of rose.
Far stretch'd beneath the many-tinted hills,
A mighty waste of mist the valley fills,

¹⁰The classic statement of this process is Wordsworth's, as reported by Thomas De Quincey (Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets, ed. David Wright [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970], p. 160):

I have remarked, from my earliest days, that, if under any circumstances, the attention is energetically braced up to an act of steady observation, or of steady expectation, then, if this intense condition of vigilance should suddenly relax, at that moment any beautiful, any impressive visual object, or collection of objects, falling upon the eye, is carried to the heart with a power not known under other circumstances.

"There Was a Boy" (V.389-413) Wordsworth himself cited as an example of this. Other instances would be the pursuing cliff of Book I (371-412) and "A Night-Piece". W. J. B. Owen traces the relationship between "A Night-Piece" and the Snowdon episode in Wordsworth as Critic, pp. 51-52.

A solemn sea! whose vales and mountains round
 Stand motionless, to awful silence bound.
 A gulf of gloomy blue, that opens wide
 And bottomless, divides the midway tide.
 Like leaning masts of stranded ships appear
 The pines that near the coast their summits rear.
 Of cabins, woods, and lawns a pleasant shore
 Bounds calm and clear the chaos still and hoar:
 Loud thro' the midway gulf ascending, sound
 Unnumber'd streams with hollow roar profound.
 Mounts thro' the nearer mist the chaunt of birds,
 And talking voices, and the low of herds,
 The bark of dogs, the drowsy tinkling bell,
 And wild-wood mountain lutes of saddest swell.
 (492-509)

The Snowdon scene is of the landscape seen by moonlight; the Alpine scene is a morning one. The pines and cabins of the Alpine scene were presumably not a part of what Wordsworth saw on Snowdon; and the sounds mentioned in the passage from Descriptive Sketches are Swiss, not Welsh. But the question of whether Wordsworth saw two similar scenes, or whether he transferred details from the Snowdon experience to an Alpine setting for his 1793 poem, or even whether he remembered his own description of the Swiss scene when he came to write about climbing Snowdon in 1804,¹¹ becomes irrelevant once one sees the lines from Book XIII of The Prelude as fulfilling the characteristic pattern of Wordsworth's process of literary composition: that in which a scene or incident, impressed upon the memory, is enriched by other scenes and other literary influences, to achieve representation in poetry as significant imaginative unity rather than as recorded, realistic picture.

¹¹I accept Jonathan Wordsworth's assertion that "'The Climbing of Snowdon' is in its entirety the work of early spring 1804"; see Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, p. 456, fn. 10.

For the description of the vista that he saw from Snowdon, and possibly, too, from a Swiss mountain a year later, Wordsworth drew on Beattie's description of a similar scene, even to the extent of borrowing metaphor and echoing sound pattern.¹² Beattie's minstrel, in The Minstrel, 1771 (Part I, stanza XXIII), climbs a cliff to obtain a view of the world beneath, lost in mist. Gazing on the scene, he is as if on a waste coastline, looking out on an ocean of billows and gulfs, embossed with mountains. Along this ocean-like vista he hears the sounds of flocks, herds and waterfalls. To respond to the scene imaginatively by choosing to describe it in the metaphor of ocean was a very basic step but nonetheless suggestive; and Wordsworth borrowed and built on it in Descriptive Sketches and, later, in The Prelude. Beattie's minstrel sees the world beneath lost "all in mist" and views "th' enormous waste of vapour"; in Descriptive Sketches Wordsworth has "a mighty waste of mist", in The Prelude "a huge sea of mist". Beattie's description of the vapours "'ow scoop'd in gulfs" may have suggested the particular "gulf of gloomy blue" in Descriptive Sketches which becomes "a blue chasm" in The Prelude; Beattie's minstrel hears sounds "along the hoar profound" which suggests the "chaos still and hoar" and, as Jonathan Wordsworth notes (Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, p. 452), the sound-echo "hollow roar profound" of the

¹²For other discussions of the Snowdon scene which comment on Wordsworth's debt to Beattie (and others), see W. J. B. Owen, Wordsworth as Critic, pp. 50-52; and Jonathan Wordsworth, "The Climbing of Snowdon" in Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, pp. 449-74. The relevant passage of Beattie's The Minstrel is printed on p. 452 of Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies.

Sketches. The minstrel stands viewing the scene "Like shipwreck'd mariner on desert coast", and Wordsworth picks up the associations of shipwreck when he describes the tall pines, penetrating the mists, as "Like leaning masts of stranded ships". Beattie has the expanse of vapour "with mountains now emboss'd!"; in The Prelude, Wordsworth recalls lines from Milton's Paradise Lost (VII.285-86) to describe the same phenomenon: "A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved".

Undoubtedly, the Prelude episode puts the imagination to work more subtly than does Beattie in The Minstrel or Wordsworth himself in the earlier Descriptive Sketches. It accepts the ocean metaphor and exploits it by playing off the "huge sea of mist" against the "real Sea". Furthermore, having made the waste of mist into a "huge sea", Wordsworth goes on to see the vapours as land-shapes: "headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes". And, as we have noted, he makes the scene dynamic: the hills "upheaved" "their dusky backs", the vapours "shot themselves" in shapes and usurped upon the real sea, which gave up its majesty. The elements of the scene are thus made to function as dynamic entities in a drama of the landscape. But all this is preparatory to the revelation of what the scene is really all about. Here, again, Wordsworth's memory of what he experienced on Snowdon is blended with the recollection of the relationship Beattie drew between the sight of a mist-filled valley, and the sounds rising from that valley. Beattie's minstrel could "hear the voice of mirth and song rebound, / Flocks, herds, and waterfalls, along the hoar profound"; in Descriptive Sketches Wordsworth paid special attention to these

sounds. He has "Unnumber'd streams with hollow roar profound", besides

talking voices, and the low of herds,
The bark of dogs, the drowsy tinkling bell,
And wild-wood mountain lutes of saddest swell.

The parts of Beattie's "enormous waste of vapour" "scoop'd in gulfs", unconnected in The Minstrel with sound, have become "A gulf of gloomy blue, that opens wide / And bottomless", dividing the expanse of mist, and it is through this "midway gulf" that the roar of countless streams ascends; the other sounds rise separately through "the nearer mist". When Wordsworth comes to write the similar Prelude passage, his imagination, "consolidating numbers into unity", abolishes all sounds except for those of water, and makes them rise through the chasm with undifferentiated sound:¹³

and from the shore
At distance not the third part of a mile
Was a blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour,
A deep and gloomy breathing-place thro' which
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice.

Beattie had called the sight common to all these passages one of "dreadful pleasure", that is, of Burkean mixed emotion characteristic of the sublime. Wordsworth's scene in Descriptive Sketches is predominantly sublime ("to awful silence bound"), yet he asks us, of the viewer, to "Think not, suspended from the cliff on high / He looks below with undelighted eye". The scene from Snowdon, too, was both sublime and beautiful, "shaped for admiration and delight", but

¹³Jonathan Wordsworth suggests that the "unnumber'd streams" of Descriptive Sketches and The Prelude may come from James Clarke's Survey of the Lakes (1787); see Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, p.453.

evidently more awe-inspiring than delightful, for it was

Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodg'd
The Soul, the Imagination of the whole.

From being an interesting sport of nature, the scene had been transformed into an illustration of the power of both Nature and the poet, a power diffused through the scene, but lodged in the "blue chasm" and giving to every aspect of the scene and the mind a "home".

II

When Wordsworth admits that Nature, as it exhibited itself in the scene viewed from Snowdon's summit, "appear'd to me / The perfect image of a mighty Mind", he means no more than that he had indeed found an appropriate emblem in nature for the activities of the imagination; and although he proceeds to suggest that the imagination responds to both the sublime and the beautiful ("Them the enduring and the transient both / Serve to exalt"), the most striking examples of imaginative power in The Prelude are provoked by some form of sublimity. Yet in the concluding Book of the poem Wordsworth attempts to modify the emphasis we have seen developing throughout The Prelude on sublimity, deprecating his earlier esteem for the sublime, "that beauty, which, as Milton sings, / Hath terror in it" (218-19), and introducing the concept of a "love more intellectual" which apparently diffuses itself, with a feeling of awe, over the whole creation (154-58). This perhaps accounts for the ambiguity of the commentary appended to the episode of the ascent of Snowdon (66-116), in which

two somewhat contradictory doctrines of the imagination are implicit.

The first of these has to do with power. The "mighty Mind" of which Nature itself is an emblem is the mind attuned to the sublime in phenomena. It "feeds upon infinity". Burke observes that "hardly any thing can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach towards infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds" (Enquiry, II.iv). Wordsworth was certainly responsive to infinity. The classic illustration of this in The Prelude is the description of the ravine of Gondo, in which all forms of energy--woods, waterfalls, torrents, streams, clouds and sky--are feeding on infinity, like the sea of mist viewed from Snowdon. Duration, as it was sensed in London, suggests infinity. Mathematics constitutes an immutable world; in "The Sublime and the Beautiful" the centre of the power of the Rhine falls is the unalterable opposition of the rock to the waters, an opposition that is likened to parallel lines in mathematics and whose crowning impression is infinity. Infinity is a part, too, of the attraction of mountains, whose lines may "flow into each other like the waves of the sea, and, by involving in such image a feeling of self-propagation infinitely continuous and without cognizable beginning, . . . may convey to the mind sensations not less sublime than those which were excited by their opposites, the abrupt and the precipitous". Infinity is a powerful idea.

The "mighty Mind", however, is also the Longinian mind, which is attuned to exhibitions of grandeur in phenomena either because of a corresponding grandeur in itself ("whatsoever is dim / Or vast in

its own being") or because grandeur suggests the Deity. The alternatives suggest the two modes of response to the sublime Wordsworth would make so much of in "The Sublime and the Beautiful": the mind can either be raised by sublimity, enhancing its own dignity, or it can rest in awe, as it must do before God.

Wordsworth evidently began to think in terms of the possibility of an analogy waiting to be drawn between mind and nature as he was emerging from his period of mental and spiritual crisis, though the idea seems implicit throughout much of the poem. Then it was that he felt that

I possess'd
A privilege, and that a work of mine,
Proceeding from the depth of untaught things,
Enduring and creative, might become
A power like one of Nature's (XII.308-12);

then also that Coleridge expressed the thought

That also then I must have exercised
Upon the vulgar forms of present things
And actual world of our familiar days,
A higher power, have caught from them a tone,
An image, and a character, by books
Not hitherto reflected. (XII.360-65)

The nature of the analogy is framed specifically in terms of the imagination in Book XIII, where Wordsworth thinks of Nature as a kind of imagination, dominating ("with circumstance most awful and sublime") phenomena. Nature takes phenomena and "moulds them, and endues, abstracts, combines"; but, more significantly, in special cases ("by abrupt and unhabitual influence") she

Doth make one object so impress itself
Upon all others, and pervade them so
That even the grossest minds must see and hear
And cannot chuse but feel.

This is, in fact, a description of how the sublime, viewed in terms of vastness and infinity, comes to manifest its power. In the Snowdon scene infinity, characterized as both the "huge sea of mist" encroaching on the real sea and the "homeless voice of waters", becomes power when it rises through the chasm with one voice; the "breach" carries up infinity, the dim and the vast, and makes all parts of the scene acknowledge Nature's imaginative power. As we have seen, this process of finding the key to what is felt as sublime is characteristic of Wordsworth. Where that key is not found, an image that should be sublime, like Mont Blanc, remains "soulless". Where it is found, where Wordsworth discovers "The Soul, the Imagination of the whole", sublimity and power are joined. Thus, London evinces duration; the Rhine falls unlock their power in the images of rock and water, infinitely opposed; the ravine of Gondo shows energy seeking release, being thwarted by infinity, in a series of images which embody the one idea. In the "spots of time" of Book XI, psychologically powerful incidents are fixed in images. In the Gibbet episode the landscape is suffused with "visionary dreariness", and power selects certain objects to fill:

the naked Pool,
The Beacon on the lonely Eminence,
The Woman, and her garments vex'd and toss'd
By the strong wind. (XI.313-16)

Similarly, the incident of waiting for horses to appear and carry him home for the Christmas vacation, which became so curiously connected in his mind with his father's death, localized its power in "spectacles and sounds" to which Wordsworth would return and "thence

would drink, / As at a fountain":

the wind and sleety rain
And all the business of the elements,
The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
The noise of wood and water, and the mist
Which on the line of each of those two Roads
Advanced indisputable shapes (XI.376-83)

Sublimity would seem to be a factor of imagination, in which the mind acknowledges, finds or transfers power, drawing upon infinity and finding "The Soul, the Imagination of the whole". In fact, wherever The Prelude exhibits imaginative activity as defined by Wordsworth, in passages distinct from simple recollection, description or fancy, power, and therefore sublimity, seem to be involved.

The Snowdon scene and the section of its commentary discussed above are a fitting coping-stone to the theme of the poem as it concerns the growth of a mind that seeks to interpret itself, at every stage of its activities, in its relation to Nature. The ensuing part of Book XIII is not so convincing, because Wordsworth somewhat obscures his account of imagination in order to keep the sublime and the beautiful securely yoked. Wordsworth's claim that "higher minds" can "build up greatest things / From least suggestions" recalls his early mention of imagination, in a note to "The Thorn", as "the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements"; and that definition seems more appropriate to the method of the ballads than to anything in The Prelude, where power in some form seems necessary to produce power; recognition of the "transient" is in fact related to exaltation. The characteristic distinction between the

sublime and the beautiful, up to this point in the poem, has been that the mind is "quicken'd" and "rouz'd" by the sublime (which "make[s] / the Imagination restless"--VIII.214-15) and made "cheerful" by the beautiful.

Wordsworth, then, seems to be attempting to break down the distinction between sublimity and beauty, as regards their effects, in the final Book. Instead of a "yoking-with-distinction" there is a "yoking-with-conjunction". Sternness is tempered, and tenderness walks hand in hand with power:

and he whose soul hath risen
Up to the height of feeling intellect
Shall want no humbler tenderness, his heart
Be tender as a nursing Mother's heart;
Of female softness shall his life be full,
Of little loves and delicate desires,
Mild interests and gentlest sympathies.
(XIII.204-10)

Yet if distinctions are confounded in Book XIII, Wordsworth nevertheless explicitly links imagination with sublimity: he has "track'd the main essential Power, / Imagination, up her way sublime" (289-90). His business in the poem has been with mind and imagination, not with "outward illustration", "Nature's secondary grace", nor with "Fancy", the faculty which he has been employing to make poetry out of the transient, "least suggestions", and unextraordinary calls.¹⁴ Of mind

¹⁴In his book Imagination and Fancy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), James Scoggins has explicitly linked Wordsworth's imagination with the sublime, and the fancy with the beautiful; see Chapters VI and VII of his book. This linkage finds some support in the implications of Book XIII of The Prelude. For a study of the relationship between the lyrics of 1802, mainly classified as poems of the Fancy, with The Prelude, see Jared R. Curtis, Wordsworth's Experiments with Tradition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).

and imagination, "action from within and from without", The Prelude speaks eloquently, because of the "balance", that "ennobling interchange" we have traced between the extraordinary calls of, and equally extraordinary responses to, the sublime.

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