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THE REVISIONS OF WORDSWORTH'S "YARROW REVISTED" VOLUME OF 1835, AND THE FORM OF WORDSWORTH'S LATER POETRY

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INTRODUCTION

Early in 1835 William Wordsworth, then nearly 65 years old, produced his volume of occasional verse, "Yarrow Revisted and Other Poems", which was printed as usual by Longman. It is often uneven, and many poems are dull or declamatory, but it also includes works like the "Evening Voluntaries" which are both successful in themselves and very good examples of the quiet and artistic style of Wordsworth's later work. It includes poems of most of the genres favoured by Wordsworth in his maturity, and illustrates clearly the range of techniques and styles of which he always remained master, and the blend of delicacy and crudity which is characteristic of these poems. The volume has been chosen precisely because of its representative quality: it has bad poems as well as good, sonnets as well as verse-tales, and the general impression it creates gives a not unjust picture of the later work as a whole.

The book itself is neatly produced, with ample margins, clear and varied type, and few errata. The cover was of stout buff cardboard, with the title, "Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems", on a small panel on the spine. The pages were foolscap octavo in size. The title-page, which was preceded by two blank sheets, bore the title, "Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems" by William Wordsworth, in capital letters, shaped as a colophon in the top half of the page. This was followed by a small panel of lower case letters -

> " . . . . Poets ... dwell on earth
> To clothe whate'er the soul admires and loves
> With language and with numbers."

and then the author of the lines, "AKENSIDE". Beneath this, again in the form of a colophon, was: "London: Printed for Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown,

Green & Longman, Paternoster-Row; and Edward Moxon, Dover Street, 1835". The whole of this latter section was in capitals, the name of the city being the largest of all, and the names of the printers slightly smaller. Next came a blank page, and then the dedication, "To Samual Rogers, Esq. as a testimony of friendship and an acknowledgement of intellectual obligations, this volume is affectionately inscribed, by William Wordsworth. Rydal Mount, Dec.11, 1834." The entire dedication was in capital letters, Rogers' name in the largest type, and "this volume" and the poet's own name in the next largest. On the next page was the Advertisement, giving details of the poet's reasons for issuing his poems thus: "It was the Author's intention to reserve the contents of this volume to be interspersed in some future edition of his miscellaneous Poems; but it is obvious that, by so doing, the purchasers of his former works, who might wish for these Pieces also, would have reason to complain if they could not procure them without being obliged to re-purchase what they already possessed: from this consideration, and at the request of many of his friends, they are now published in a separate volume, uniform with former editions." On the next seven pages were the Contents. Following these were the few Errata and Emendations, only four in all. On the next page the title was repeated. The first poem began on page 3, and gives its name as title to the whole volume: "Yarrow Revisited". The poems took up until page 322, after which the postscript, upon general social abuses of the time, continued to page 349.

The history of the book both before and after publication is interesting since it shows Wordsworth's extreme care for every detail of

the production of his works. In 1832 Wordsworth had issued a new four-volume edition of "The Poetrical Works of William Wordsworth", and it was from this time, and especially during his 1833 tour of the Isle of Man and Scotland with his son John and friend Henry Crabb Robinson, that he began to consider a new book (which was finally also to contain the "Poems composed During a tour in Scotland, and on the English border, in the autumn of 1831", as well as a number of earlier miscellaneous poems not polished enough for the edition of 1832).

These tours gave the poet a great deal of pleasure, and his letters to friends are full of pretty visual details and imaginative visions and recollections. On 7th November, 1831, for instance, he writes to his friend Hamilton of "most beautiful appearances of floating vapours, rainbows, weather-gales and sunbeams innumerable, so that I never saw Scotland under a more poetic aspect."(1) In a letter to Gardner of 27th December the same year he talks of "the appearances most exquisite of faded and fading foliage".(2) The 1835 poems themselves also illustrate this deep responsiveness to the beauties of Nature and the legendary or historical associations of place. Clearly, then, as the poetry proves, Wordsworth was still capable of being moved and still of a creative frame of mind. His work now is graceful and sometimes even vigorous, but far removed from his early passion.

The tone of this late verse is muted and melancholy, marked by a constant thoughtfulness directed at general topics and the past and "a power of pressing ideas out of facts".(3) Nothing big is attempted, the emotional voltage is low, and it is a quiet sadness, a persistent sense

of human humbleness and transience, that is the keynote. There may be many reasons for this. Despite his long travels and evident physical sprightliness, the poet was ageing, and it seems that few people of 65 can maintain an optimistic view of the world without an extreme effort of will. Many of his greatest friends were ill or had already died: Sir George Beaumont, his patron and companion, died in 1827; his beloved sister Dorothy was seriously ill in 1829; Crabbe died in 1832, Coleridge and Lamb in 1834, and Mrs. Hemans and James Hogg in 1835. That the loss of these friends and helpers affected him deeply, and shook his confidence in himself and the world, is clear from the great "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg", with its sorrowful burden -

"Our haughty life is crowned with darkness" (l.29)

Then, too, there was his distress at the political complexion of the day, his distaste for the Whigs and the frightening rapidity of change. This accounts in part for the Conservatism of these poems, and for the devotion to the Established Church, which Sperry explains thus: "he loved the Church of England because it kept in its perpetual care the memory of successive generations of his fellow countrymen. Within its acre tradition was powerfully felt and the continuity of the English nation guaranteed".(4) For several reasons, then, the poet was both gloomy and pensive during the preparation of the "Yarrow Revisited" volume, which helps account for its remoteness, its melancholy and its withdrawal from personal involvements. As Perkins says: "the writer's eye turns from the full horizon of life towards what can be immediately mastered",(5) which in Wordsworth's case leads to the use of the techniques of traditional

art, and the forms of a literary and Silver Age natural beauty, to deal with the philosophical problems of a meditative egoist obsessed by the past.

But, no matter what the pessimistic mood of his work, the poet was as eager as ever to have it published and to see it sell. The reasons for this are partly financial, partly emotional: as always he needed money, and as always he wished the public both to enjoy, and to be morally improved by, his work. So he devoted the utmost attention to the format and printing of the book (to ensure that the text was correct, and pleasing to the eye), and to the arrangements for its selling and the timing of its publication.

Details of the composition of the volume were evidently well advanced by 1834, for in a letter of 17th July that year, to Edward Moxon, Wordsworth speaks of offering part of the publication of "Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems" to Moxon.(6) However, the poet was in the end dissuaded from this by Longman, who thought it a bad idea which might prejudice sales. On 12th January 1835, while he was at Lowther Castle, the proof of the title-page of the volume reached him from the printers.(7) Despite his pleasure at seeing Moxon's name on it - a compromise effected with Longman - he seems to have lost some of his enthusiasm: "Owing to the state of the times I have been very slack and indifferent about pushing it through the Press: and I care as little about its publication, my mind being wholly engrossed by the wretched state of public affairs."(8) By 30th March, however, as we know from a letter to Liddell,(9) the volume had been printed, in spite of the poet's gloom and procrastination, though

Longman did not see fit to release it until the middle of April. In a letter to Joshua Watson on 16th June, 1835, Wordsworth passes on Longman's news that "upwards of nine hundred copies of (his) late volume are disposed of",(10). His comment to Moxon in a letter of 2nd August seems a fair one: "My Yarrow appears to have sold well and to be generally liked."(11)

In the latter part of 1835 and 1836 the poet was busy revising many of his poems for the ppojected stereotyped complete edition. The extent of this work was evidently considerable: in a letter to Moxon in late December Wordsworth explains - "The labour I have bestowed in correcting the style of these poems now revised for the last time according to my best judgement, no one can ever thank me for, as no one can estimate it."(12) Similarly, in a letter of 28th January, 1837, he repeats: "The value of this Ed. in the eyes of the judicious, as hereafter will be universally admitted, lies in the pains which has been taken in the revisal of so many of the old poems, to the re-modelling, and often re-writing whole Paragraphs which you know have cost me great labour and I do not repent of it."(13) Volumes I and II of this new and revised "Poetical Works of William Wordsworth" were published in 1836, the other four volumes, whose revisions were checked by Moxon and Quillinan (the poet's future son-in-law), in 1837. A letter to Moxon on 27th December, 1837, records the poet's satisfaction at the good sales of this edition.(14) The next major recension, which included many important revisions of poems in the 1835 volume, occurred for the one-volume "Poetical Works of William Wordsworth" of 1845. This was several times reissued unaltered, before

the final edition in six volumes, which embodied Wordsworth's last thoughts, of 1849-1850.

Most of the revisions were, however, made in the manuscript, before publication of any sort, and there often existed two or three much-emended manuscripts of awkward poems. But, as the poet says himself, this was far from the end of the matter, and fresh corrections of poems were made for most of the new editions until the poet's death. Many small revisions of poems in the 1835 volume were made for the six-volume "Poetical Works" of 1836 and 1837. The next major cycle of revisions was for the one-volume edition of 1845. Thus most of the alterations to the "Yarrow Revisited" text were made before 1835, or about 1836/7, or 1845: the activity is concentrated in these years, and there are few changes of any sort outside them.

One of the striking things about this volume, considering the age of the poet who wrote it, is the formal and technical variety which it shows. One might expect, in a man nearing old age, a tendency to use some kinds of poem repeatedly, and others not at all, and indeed Townsend has said that Wordsworth tends "to project his experience into a small number of simple, almost typological forms."(15) But this is not so: there is little variety in theme, and the poet's attitudes recur constantly, but the poems themselves are varied in length and form - they range from the sonnet of 14 lines to the verse-tale of nearly 400. Even works like the elaborate ode "On the Power of Sound", which made considerable technical demands, remained within the poet's competence, itself tested and extended by a life time's interest and experiment. And he clearly

can have had no misgiving about using whichever verse form he thought appropriate to the demands of his subject. The traditions of poetry and the techniques suited to the different genres have been thoroughly studied, so that form and content will harmonise and suit each other in this more "conventional" verse of "Yarrow Revisited". Style, metre, construction, even small matters like the common "address" motif, are chosen here in the traditional way, so as to interlock both with each other and with the theme. The result in many cases is a unified, harmonious and conventional treatment of a general topic, which is closely related to past models and the example of previous poets.

It follows from this that he different kinds of poems are clearly defined, and can easily be catalogued by reference to some of the poet's own critical comments. In his Preface of 1815 Wordsworth sets out six "Moulds" of poetry,(16) which have provided the convenient groupings used in this thesis. The moulds are: the narrative, the dramatic, the lyrical, the idyllium, the didactic, and "Philosophical Satire". These in turn are considerably subdivided; this analysis of the 1835 volume concentrates on seven of the subdivisions, the verse-tale, the idyllium of external nature, the idyllium of characters, manners and sentiments, the sonnet, the ode, the inscription, and the epistle. Odd examples of the hymn, the elegy and the epitaph also occur, but they are so slight and so few as not to repay study.

This classification of the poems in "Yarrow Revisited" shows how little of the book is given over to work in the elevated and often grandiose form of the elegy or hymn. The poet instead generally chooses

something more casual and spontaneous, almost more intimate: more and more he seems to see himself as a fallible man among men, rather than the prophet and mystic of his earlier work. By far the largest number of the poems are sonnets or short idyllia, throw-off or incidental, recording a chance perception or an odd thought. The poet does not attempt the large-scale synthesis of a major poem, though his verse-tales are thin versions of one, and the "On the Power of Sound" a heavy and extravagant attempt at sublimity.

The poems are arranged in no particular order within the volume, except that the series are of course kept together, the sonnets are generally grouped, and the other poems occur haphazardly between. Certainly no chronological order is followed, nor are poems on the same theme necessarily together.

A little has already been said about the dates of composition of the poems. Most were written between the years 1830 and 1834, though a few are from a much earlier period. (For example: "Incident at Bruges". "A Jewish Family" of 1828, and the "Ode, composed on May Morning" of 1826). Poems such as "The Armenian Lady's Love" (1830), "Elegiac Musings" (1830), and "Presentiments" (1830) were composed in time for the 1832 "Poetical Works" but were not published until three years later, along with other similar poems, since they were clearly unsatisfactory to the poet and had to be thoroughly revised. Two long sonnet sequences, the results of the tours of 1831 and 1833 and mainly written while actually travelling, account for a large proportion of the book. Few of the poems were written much later than 1833: from that time until publication the poet's main

energies were devoted to revising, not to the creation of new works.

The fruits of these labours seem to have been satisfactory and as has already been said the book was successful in its published form. Of course, by this time Wordsworth had it in his favour that he was an established poet showing what he could do: his popularity was secure, he had an attendant audience whose goodwill he could count on. And in 1835, too, as had not been the case in 1798, his poems were acceptable to the prevailing taste, and can have jarred on few sensibilities. The letters to Watson of 16th June and to Moxon of 2nd August, already quoted, are sufficient evidence to prove that this was the case - such popularity could only show esteem on behalf of the verse-reading public.

But the volume was evidently popular with the critics as well. Some of the reviews - especially Wilson's in "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine" - were most laudatory, and even the poet himself could say that his book was "generally liked".(17) Perceptiveness was shown as well as adulation, an enormous change from Wordsworth's early maulings at the hands of the critics. The attention paid was both intelligent and well intentioned: by this time Wordsworth was able to command respect, and was treated seriously by everyone. Two important reviews in particular show this: both are long and thorough, and both make no bones about their subject's evident value and established claim to discussion. The first is an article in "The Quarterly Review" of July 1835,(18) which remains even to-day the best introduction to the "Yarrow Revisited" volume and the later work in general. It is an analysis, not simply a celebration, and it describes the spirit of the poems very clearly, and relates them to the

poet's circumstances: "the work of the autumn day of a great poet's honoured life."[19] It will be referred to frequently in the following pages, since its emphasis on elegance, pensiveness, repose, personal brooding and technical smoothness, pinpoint very accurately the major qualities of the 1835 volume. The other review, by the poet's fanatical admirer John Wilson, in "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine" for May 1835, is quite different.[20] Extreme and often wrongheaded, hagiography rather than criticism, it mentions few of the poems and less of their characteristics, concentrating on the poet's "spiritualism" and moral "revelations".[21] But, though it has little that is critically valuable to say, it takes for granted Wordsworth's position among the greatest poets, and lends its considerable influence to spreading this viewpoint among literary people.

It is clear, then, that with this volume, and with those immediately preceding it, Wordsworth gained the praise of the reading public, and the extensive sales, which he had long expected and believed to be his due. It is thus useful, and will be enlightening, to examine the book and to describe its literary features, since these are both representative of the later work of this poet, and must also have appealed to his public and the prevailing taste of the time.

This thesis sets out to do this by examining the results of Wordsworth's frequent and often extensive revisions. By their nature, and obviously because of their function, these indicate the qualities the writer thought much of in poetry, and the directions in which he wished his work to move.

The process of revision was continuous from the moment of a

poem's conception to the moment of the poet's death. Almost none of the poems were reprinted without at least tinkerings with the style, and many underwent substantial recasting over the years. Two of the best examples here are the inscription "Intended for a Stone in the Grounds of Rydal Mount", which is nine lines long and includes seven large emendations, and the sonnet "Tranquility", which has ten major changes in fourteen lines. Most of the revisions, however, are "technical refitting",(22) modifying style and tone, and sometimes the arrangement of effects and the construction: it is very rare indeed for the ideas to be seriously affected. The value of these revisions is still considerable, though-they may concern themselves principally with style, but, as Wordsworth says in a letter to his friend William Rowan Hamilton, "Style is, in poetry, of incalculable importance."(23) And it is clear, too, that though some of the changes were minute, the poet himself laid great store by them, since they helped make his work at once clearer in meaning and more appealing in form. That he paid attention to the revisions of other writers - Gray and Collins, for example - is shown by his letters.(24) The subject also frequently recurs with reference to his own work. Three separate letters in October, 1836 - to T.J. Judkin, James Stephens, and Moxon - deal with his concern for the alteration of some of his poems.(25) No less than five letters, written to the painter Haydon in 1840, discuss suggested emendations to a late sonnet.(26) That his use of revision was considered and thoughtful is further shown by his own statements in his letters. Writing to his friend Gillies in late 1814, he says: "My first expression I often find detestable; and it is frequently true of second words as of second thoughts, that they

are the best."[27] Another letter to Barron Field of October 1828 gives extensive and thoroughly argued reasons for revisions to particular poems, paying especial attention to logic of development and correctness and appropriateness of style.[28]

One thus has the justification both of the poet's statements, and of their own frequency and purposiveness, for taking the revisions seriously. Many critics have already done so, though "The Prelude" has so far received the lion's share of attention, and there can be few books on Wordsworth which do not make some critical use of the revisions. Little has yet been said about the use of revision to homogenize the much more conventional later poems and relate them more neatly and clearly to their genres, and it is to this that the present thesis applies itself.

The causes of the revisions, and their immediate results, will be studied in detail in separate chapters, but some general comments also seem relevant here.

Some of the revisions are obviously incidental, a chance preference of taste, a whim of the moment. But most can be traced to two constant and inter-related facets of the poet's experience and outlook. The first is his increasing conservatism of style and deliberate and sometimes mannered connoisseurship of effects. This produces an often immaculate, pretty and rather contrived verbal texture, where an Augustan elegance and harmony are the keynotes. The best example of this is in the changes made to the "Ode: composed on May Morning", in which the impetus is all towards a carefully considered and eclectic richness of style. The second, which also derives from conservatism

of mentality, is a growing reliance upon, and willingness to be influenced by, traditional models: the poems are now divisible into "kinds", and for each kind there are past exemplars whose pattern Wordsworth values and generally follows. He is far, here, from the revolutionary iconoclasm of his youth and the innovation of his early work, defended in the famous "Preface" to the second edition of the "Lyrical Ballads". Thus in much of the later verse the poems are founded upon the continuous example of earlier writers, in style and arrangement especially, and the revisions - which usually harmonise, above all - move the poems still closer to their predecessors in the same genre. It is, of course, only logical: the point of many of the revisions is to ensure that the poems are consistent within themselves, and if the poems are initially traditional, then the revisions will tend to make them more so. So the fundamental reason for almost all of the revisions can be stated as a marked conservatism of outlook, showing itself in two ways: a new preference for a popularly acceptable pretty stylishness related to the verse of the 18th century, and a new dependence in formal matters on poets of the past using the same well-defined genres as Wordsworth himself.

The aim of this thesis, then, is to relate the poems of the 1835 volume, and the direction of their revisions, to the influence of previous poets and to Wordsworth's individual intentions. Also, by following the direction which the revisions imply, and examining what they accept, or reject, one will be able to arrive at a statement of the type of verse Wordsworth was trying to write, and to describe it in the light both of his intentions and of the result.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

(1) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford; p.583.

(2) ibid. p.594.

(3) "The Mind of a Poet"; R.D. Havens; 1941; Baltimore; p.569.

(4) "Wordsworth's Anti-Climax"; W.L. Sperry; 1935; Cambridge, Mass.; p.189.

(5) "The Quest for Permanence"; D. Perkins; 1959; Cambridge, Mass.; p.99.

(6) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford; p.708.

(7) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford; p.723.

(8) Ibid.

(9) Ibid.; pp.738/9.

(10) Ibid.; p.745.

(11) Ibid.; pp.754/5.

(12) Ibid.; p.826.

(13) Ibid.; p.831.

(14) Ibid.; p.909.

(15) "The Evolution of Wordsworth's Later Art"; R.C. Townsend; unpub. diss.; Yale, 1962; p.224.

(16) "The Prose Works of William Wordsworth", Vol.II; ed. A.B. Grosart; 1876; London; pp.132/3.

(17) "The Letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford; pp.754/5.

(18) "The Quarterly Review", No.107; 1835; London; p.181/85.

(19) Ibid; p.184.

(20) "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine", No.235, vol.37; May, 1835, Edinburgh; pp.699/722.

(21) Ibid; p.702.

(22) '"The Excursion" - A Study'; J.S. Lyon; 1950; New Haven; p.25.

(23) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1936; Oxford; p.355.

(24) Ibid.; p.1271.

(25) Ibid.; pp.808/810.

(26) Ibid.; pp.1036/1040.

(27) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1937; Oxford; pp.613/15.

(28) "The Letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford; pp.307/313.

THE VERSE-TALES

Throughout his career Wordsworth wrote long poems which he called "verse-tales". The "Yarrow Revisited" volume contains four poems of this kind, "The Egyptian Maid", "The Armenian Lady's Love", and "The Russian Fugitive", all written during 1830, and "The Somnambulist", which may date from as early as 1807 or 1808. The three 1830 poems cohere in many ways, and develop among themselves, and will thus form the basis for discussion in this chapter.

These poems are mythological romances which make extensive use of the exotic trappings of the genre, but which are also given depth and seriousness by the strong moral and religious elements the poet takes care to emphasize. All of them, for instance, are set in the past or in a foreign country, or both, so that the poet can give rein to his bent for elaborate description and the creation of a fanciful setting, and at the same time perhaps attract the evident audience for this sort of verse - after all, Coleridge's "Christabel" and the adventurous tales of Byron and Shelley had a ready public, and Wordsworth was not averse to good sales. This providing for the tastes of the time, as well as the delight of virtuoso exercise, account for many other features of these poems. With the typically Romantic settings of far-off Russia and Arthurian Britain, less eerie and mysterious than the settings of earlier poems like "Resolution and Independence", but closer to the desires of his readers, goes a new more forthright attitude to action. Previously, the action in Wordsworth's verse had taken place almost entirely in the mind

(as indeed most of it continued to do), but here for once he seems to wish to tell an exciting story of which the strangeness and rapidity of movement will complement the atmosphere he is at such pains to create. Of course, he is not very successful in this, since his plots are inevitably tangled in disucssion and qualification, he can never let an event simply speak for itself, but the attempt is still an honourable one. Thus, in these two respects of exotic setting and exciting action, the poet sets out to follow where Byron and Shelley, and before them particularly Chaucer, had led, and to produce works which provoked excitement as well as thought.

But in other ways too these poems are close to, say, Byron's (although Wordsworth in fact disapproved of his influence, as his letters show). The local colour and the strenuous physical movement call for a different style, something more sensuously appealing, more flexible, closer to ordinary existence and conventional "literary" psychology. His revisions of "The Egyptian Maid", even more than the often rather uncertain way in which he writes, show the poet moving in this direction, towards suiting the different elements of the poems to one another, and at the same time, of course, moving closer to the main stream of the English verse-tale as exemplified by Scott or Crabbe. The initial richness of the style is levelled down, becomes more relevant to the action and the characters; there is a paring off of the simply decorative, of material which does not help along the plot or develop the characters or the atmosphere.

It is in the meaning of the actions he deals with here that

Wordsworth is most original and most uneven. The clash of right and wrong conceived in the simplest terms, the code of noble and chivalric behaviour, are found in his contemporaries as well as here, and are fundamental to the genre. But Wordsworth does not stop here with the only slightly disguised paganism of "Lara", where remoteness in time or place seems to put Christianity subtly at one remove. His religious bent is clear, often too clear, and is often allowed to halt the action or disrupt the tone while a short homily is delivered to explain an event that has taken the poet's fancy. The result is that the delicate romance structure, where the code of behaviour is set, and carefully followed, but rarely set out, and never quite harmonised with Christianity, is disrupted by ugly and inopportune moralising. The attempt to include in the fairy-tale, and basically unserious, fabric of the conventional verse-tale a somewhat staid and unimaginative religious didacticism can thus hardly be said to be a success, though Wordsworth tries hard to set the balance to rights in his revisions.

This general description of these poems has already emphasised their dependence in many respects on their predecessors in the same genre, and it now remains to point out some of the closest and most obvious links. These poems are very rich in verbal reminiscences of other writers, as the notes in de Selincourt's edition show, and many possible models are also suggested in Wordsworth's letters, which reveal a voracious appetite for the verse-tales which were being written in his own day as well as in the past. Only a few of the most important influences can be discussed here, and in any case the poet presumably had little to learn from minor authors like Rogers.

In England it was Chaucer, following at some distance in the footsteps of Ovid, who provides the first and greatest of Wordsworth's models for his verse-tales. Wordsworth translated some of "The Canterbury Tales" into contemporary English and towards the end of his life was involved for a time in a scheme to translate Chaucer in toto; in his letters, too, he speaks of him often and with respect - "I reverence and admire him above measure".(1) One can thus easily account for the marked Chaucerian style of some of these verse-tales. The splendour of language and formalised action of "The Knight's Tale", for example, is close to "The Armenian Lady's Love", with its exotic diction of "gilded dome" (l.41) and "cobwebbed shield"(l.52), and symmetical plot leading from physical to spiritual love. The austere style and intense religious sentiment of "The Man of Law's Tale", on the other hand, gave to Wordsworth a successful and coherent example of the kind of story of action and spiritual growth he was attempting. But Chaucer was more adept at handling this difficult kind of tale than Wordsworth, and makes the moral dimension paramount from the start, instead of trying to mingle it with adventure and naturalistic details that could not be anything but incongruous.

After Chaucer and 15th-century writers like Lydgate the verse-tale fell into disfavour until the Elizabethan period, when poems like Marlowe's "Hero and Leander" and Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" brought the genre into a new popularity. The letters and the notes to the poems do not mention any of the appropriate poems of this period, but it seems certain that Wordsworth knew them well, and must have been influenced by their sensuous diction and firm handling of action when he came to write similar pieces of his own.

From the sixteenth century to the eighteenth there were few verse-tales of any importance, and there are certainly no references to any in the letters. During the early Romantic period, however, stimulated by the taste for mystery and exoticism, the verse-tale began to reappear. An early example was Glover's fast-moving and vivacious "Leonidas" of 1737, Shenstone published his "The Judgement of Hercules" in 1741, and Collins' "Oriental Eclogues" came out in 1742; by the latter part of the century the exotic, didactic, and picturesque opportunities of the verse-tale had been fully realised, and the popular success of the form was assured. The most skilful practitioners, and those most often mentioned in Wordsworth's letters, are Scott, Crabbe, Campbell and Reynolds. Scott's verse-tales on mediaeval and chivalric themes were published from 1802 onwards. These provided an excellent example of exciting action, accurate local colour, considerable narrative briskness, and, as in Wordsworth, a marked ability at conveying the quaint and picturesque. Though Wordsworth thought Scott's style both vulgar and crude,(2) he must have been impressed by his friend's popularity and there are signs, especially in the elaborate mediaevalism of "The Egyptian Maid", that he used the same techniques. (He was, after all, aiming at the same audience). The verse-tales of Crabbe are humbler and more homely than Scott's, but, as Wordsworth wrote in 1834, are also more substantial and "will last from their combined merits as Poetry and Truth".(3) Their main use to Wordsworth lay probably in the model they gave of seriousness and measure: they are altogether less trivial, less simply entertaining, than, say, Scott's, and possess the solidity and purposiveness for which "The Russian Fugitive" strives. Campbell's

"Gertrude of Wyoming", a tale of terror set in desolate America which appeared in 1809, is another work which may well have given Wordsworth hints for his own verse-tales, especially in the development of a detailed and mysterious atmosphere. The minor writer J.H. Reynolds, who was a friend of both Keats and Wordsworth, provides the last of the obvious influences on the latter's verse-tales. In 1821 Reynolds had published "The Garden of Florence", imitated from Boccaccio and an exciting story full of romantic charm, which gave Wordsworth a clear model of the kind of exaggerated and melodramatic emotion he was to portray in "The Armenian Lady's Love".

Almost all of the writers who used the verse-tale before Wordsworth made it a simple and well-defined tale of adventure, which followed a set pattern: the same plots, the same styles, the same characters recur constantly. It was only Chaucer, in "The Man of Law's Tale", who pointed away from this towards the more moral and serious and overtly Christian heroic poem that Wordsworth was trying to write. So it was with Chaucer in mind, clearly, that the later poet attempted to change the ethos of the verse-tale. Poems of this kind had always had a serious meaning and generally an edifying moral, but they were essentially rather limited adventure-stories; it was Wordsworth who, while retaining the appealing elements of fast action and lavish settings, tried at the same time to reinforce a solid and often overriding Christian morality, to deepen his stories by a more evident burden of import and explanation. In the end, thus, his verse-tales are traceable more clearly to Chaucer than to anyone else, though as has been shown, he also

learned a number of techniques from other poets on the way.

It is now time to examine these three poems in more detail, and to support some of the general critical comments that have already been made. The order in which the poems are printed in "Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems" is (i) "The Egyptian Maid", (ii) "The Armenian Lady's Love" and (iii) "The Russian Fugitive", and since they were all written in 1830 and there is some development from poem to poem, this is the order in which they will be discussed here. "The Somnambulist" is largely omitted from mention since it is altogether thinner in texture and more awkward in construction than the others, and stands aside from the movement towards a greater sensuous pleasure that they show.

"The Egyptian Maid" is a rich, operatic poem, full of strange and baroque effects and written, as Mrs. Moorman observes, "to show how romance, history and spiritual seriousness could be blended in a narrative poem".(4) It is set in the Arthurian period, and tells of how the magician Merlin maliciously wrecks a boat which he sees approaching England's shores. He is visited by Nina, the benign sorceress, who tells him the boat was on a Christian mission, despite the heathen lotus it had as its crest, and carried a beautiful girl who was to be the bride of one of King Arthur's knights. She goes off to recover her body from the sea-shore, and forces Merlin to carry it to the court of Arthur in his magic vessel. There all the knights pass by the corpse, each touching its hand in the hope that it might be restored to life by human love. When Sir Galahad does this the girl recovers, and the two are shortly married. The epilogue points the moral: the lotus emblem brought the girl no luck,

since it was pagan, and she was brought back to life only by the power of Christian love shown jointly by Nina and Sir Galahad.

One of the most striking features of the poem, and one that distinguishes it from Wordsworth's early poetry, is the constant and traditionally Christian emphasis on the lowliness and sinfulness of man. In l.60 men are described as "the fools of nature; ll.231-234-

"A Lady added to my court
So fair, of such divine report
And worship, seemed a recompense
For fifty kingdoms by sword recovered", -

give short shrift to ideas of mere earthly power; and ll.217-218 point to the impermanence of things of this world -

"Rich robes are fretted by the moth;
Towers, temples fall by stroke of thunder" -

and many other lines reinforce the point. There are, too, strangely few references to the earth, and most of the poem moves in a background of light and water that cuts it off from human life: Nina's boat, for instance, is a "shining light" (l.103) moving "from wave to wave" (l.105), and Galahad is beside a "murmuring stream" (l.301) when Nina spreads "a light" (l.304) around him to tell him of the maid. This feeling of alienation from common humanity is also reinforced by the archaism of style and the use of mythology. Even the plot is largely a matter of the movements of supernatural creatures in this fairy-tale setting: the "occult and perilous lore" (l.22) of Merlin sets off the action; Nina uses a Christian magic to restore the Egyptian Maid; and her powers

again bring about the happy ending. The texture of the poem is enriched by its use of mythology and local colour, and the mechanics of the story are consistent and coherent, but these factors also move the work away from any reality the earlier Wordsworth would have recognized. Of course reality is not realism: I am not criticizing the poem for not being naturalistic (which it is only in minor ways - details of landscape or custom), but rather objecting that the world it describes is too remote and ethereal to enforce any obviously human moral.

Nor does the narrative enable one to get a very coherent picture of the rather lifeless plot and its immaterial setting. In the unemended poem the jerkiness of rhythm and the unbalanced stanza-form (which Wordsworth himself admitted was unsuited to telling a story)[5] seem to set off stanzas from one another, and produce a discontinuity of action which is very marked. The poet tries through emblems such as the water-lily and the barge, which become more important after revision, to give the poem a unity that the mere plot cannot. Nor can characterization play a unifying part, for the people here are mere stock figures, little more than objects. The heroine and the other characters, for example, are oddly associated with things: the maid is a water-lily, complete with an image of flowering; Nina is closely related to her car; even Merlin has his cave.

What has been said so far points to the major problem in the poem: the lack of any very convincing narrative. "The Egyptian Maid" is not of course naturalistic, and the demands of the "real" largely do not apply, but even a fairy-tale must move in a fluent and unified manner. This the poem does not do, and even after extensive revision the difficulty

is far from completely resolved. The naked manipulation of events, the slow and halting movement and the needless elaboration still remain, if in modified form.

The language does little to help the progress of the action, since it tends to be orotund and slow-moving. Archaism - "forth-looking" in 1.2, the verb "boots" in 1.97 - is frequent, with its attendant awkwardness of word-order. So is a vague language of religious generality - "pure affection", 1.78, "rapture", 1.331. There are many rich pictorial effects which help to counteract the poem's coldness and abstraction, but not at all to aid the easy development of the plot.

The strength and seriousness of the poem's Christian morality have already been commented on, and are further emphasized in the revisions. Wordsworth certainly takes no chances of allowing anything else to claim the limelight. In 1.277, for example, with "Ye Saints", and in 1.154 ("pure in spirit"), Christian references are introduced where there were none before, but the best instance is in 11.379-382. Here the power of destiny is emphasized, a new mention of angels harks back to the central idea of the force of Christian feelings, and another image of sight connects with the visual references running throughout the poem.

It seems odd that Wordsworth should change his poem in this respect so as to move it further from the immediate and easily enjoyable, while in narrative he does a great deal to pander to the cruder tastes of his public for movement and vivacity. (Despite this concession brought about in revision, the poet still does not alter the predominance of instruction over enjoyment, meaning over pleasure.)

In his emendations he places the emphasis firmly upon meaning and narrative, not upon mere rhythmic delight. He forces his readers to see (the visual imagery) and to think (the moral tone): he refuses to allow beauty of sound, since in a poem whose narrative was weak it might have distracted attention from the meaning. This is clear in 11.100-101, where the change from -

"Our art shall fetch the Egyptian Maid
Who may to Arthur's court be borne" -

to -

"Fetched by our art, the Egyptian Maid
May yet to Arthur's court be borne" -

removes a pleasing, fluent rhythm to replace it with something more hesitant and qualified (the new emphatic placing of "may", the "yet" suggestive of doubt). The effect of this is to force the reader to look carefully at each individual word, not to be carried on by mere prettiness of sound.

The language becomes correspondingly more direct and clearer; there is less irrelevance, and meaning is tightened up and clarified. In 11.171-4, for example, mere repetition -

"Sweet heaven, how fair the Slumberer is, how fair!" -

and obvious padding -

".... my way
Is clear before me through this day" -

are removed, a new reference to "barge" (one of the emblems which help to hold the poem together) is introduced, and the emended version is a model of coherence and clarity.

This concern for directness and force of meaning is also shown, on a larger scale, by the poet's care for narrative poise and continuity. At its simplest this is seen in the punctuation, where almost all the changes are from severe stops, with an air of finality, to colons, which imply a surer connection of cause and effect - they are used conventionally in catalogues, or in action/result phrases - and thus help maintain the cohesion of the narrative. This is obviously germane to Wordsworth's purpose: though the ear must not be permitted to respond to the superficially pleasing sound of words, yet he must try to produce a fluent and unified impression - what happens must be seen as a whole, connectedly, so that the force of linked experience behind the conclusion can attain its full effect.

Revision helps the continuity of the poem in many other ways. Unnecessary details are cut out to clarify a simple meaning: in 1.17 the awkward order and irrelevance of sense of -

"In patience built with subtle care" -

is altered to the more apt and concentrated -

"Was ever built with subtle care".

Once, the narrative balance of a whole section of the poem is reorganized, with the transposition of 11.271-276 and 11.277-282. In the later version of this the generalization and setting of atmosphere more logically follow the first part of the catalogue of knights, and provide an interlude before the trials of Gawaine, Tristram, Launcelot and Galahad; in the original version the section is lopsided and ungainly. The lucidity and completeness of the poem's meaning are also improved. Probably the best instance of all

of the clearing up of narrative is in 11.290-293. The manuscript version is -

"Came one endeared to thousands as a brother,
His vain attempt Sir Tristram nothing rued
The fair Izonda he had sued
In love too true, with pangs too sharp" -

and is changed by 1835 into -

"Sir Tristram, dear to thousands as a brother,
Came to the proof, nor grieved that there ensued
No change; the fair Izonda he had wooed
With love too true, a love with pangs too sharp".

The improved clarity and order in the presentation of the later version, achieved by a closer logic of cause and effect, are undeniable. The placing of the crucial "No change" also illustrates the more skilled control of emphasis which these emendations often produce.

Under the necessity of a severer harmony and consistency of language to supplement the intended coherence and vigour of the narrative there are many changes of diction as well. The language is clarified and made more uniform in style, and the visual imagery of light and water is emphasized and used to bolster up both meaning and action.

Punctuation is altered to clear up sense and to remedy any ambiguities of language. For example, the change in 1.198 from -

"All pride by which all happiness is blighted" -

to -

"All pride; by which all happiness is blighted" -

removes obvious possibilities of misunderstanding.

The levelling of language to the standard of gravity and weight demanded of a small epic on a serious theme is also very evident. In 11.202-3 the manuscript reading of -

"Ye heard a shutting marvellous
of door and window, and a clash of swords" -

is changed to -

"Ye heard, a rocking marvellous
Of turrets, and a clash of swords".

This removes a reference far too domestic for such a context and replaces it with something more graphic and elevated, as the style of the poem requires. There is a similar revision in 1.212, where the bald "King Arthur said" becomes the splendid "Exclaimed the King".

While keeping well within the limits imposed by the genre and the emphatically moral nature of the poem, the revisions also try to give a stronger, more physical force to many insubstantial phrases. In 1.56 "a living Creature" replaces "a visionary Creature", and in 1.118 "cloud-like" is changed to "bird-like". In 11.19-20, too, the diffuse and vague -

".... of skill
Whose least effect might startle modern science" -

becomes, in a more concentrated and graphic image -

".... whose skill
Shames the degenerate grasp of modern science".

One of the most interesting of the revisions of language is the alteration of imagery and emblems to give a greater consistency and a more picturesque effect. Images of light and seeing occur constantly in the

poem, and play a large part in creating its incorporeal atmosphere. This system of images, which obviously helps the unity of the poem, is strengthened in revision. In 1.176 "inmost chamber" becomes "dimmest chamber", in 1.180 "Liquid amber" becomes "lucid amber", and in 1.268 "clay-cold hand" becomes "pallid hand"; in each case the visual appeal is heightened and a richer image is produced. Even more important as a means of obtaining unity and continuity is the emblem of the water-lily, which combines the elements of water, light and growth found throughout the poem. Emendation introduces this emblem in 1.126 ("a flower in marble graven") and it occurs again in 11.255-6, which are altered from the colourless -

"So, in the favoured one's behoof
Will truth be known, perhaps by vital proof" -

to the richer and more closely integrated -

"So, for the favoured One, the Flower may bloom
Once more...."

A further effect of many of these revisions has already been suggested: as in 11.255-6, the new images and phrases are often more incisive and picturesque than the old. Wordsworth was always alive to the rich and evocative in language, and improves the texture of his poem whenever he can.

The emendations to "The Egyptian Maid" have been discussed in detail, and a few general observations can now be made. The Christian emphasis is increased, so that the moral will be firmly prepared for and well supported. Rhythm is deliberately made abrupt so as to concentrate attention on the meaning and on visual details. Narrative continuity,

as a means of securing assent to, and coherence of, the poem's meaning, is repeatedly improved. Emphasis is more carefully controlled. The language is made more direct and explanatory, so that the meaning comes across more clearly and forcefully. Words are toughened and given a physical stiffening to prevent them from evaporating into mere high-sounding generality. Diction and imagery are harmonised so as to give the poem an added depth and a more efficient structure. The language, finally, is made richer and more evocative to improve the texture.

"The Armenian Lady's Love" is the next poem which will be discussed. Mrs. Moorman says about it: "unenlivened by a single glimpse of imaginative power, Wordsworth rambled on, enslaved to an idiom that was foreign to him - that of the mediaeval romance".(6) This disparaging comment needs modifying by an emphasis on the more sophisticated handling of the narrative here, which represents a considerable advance on "The Egyptian Maid". The poem tells how a beautiful Armenian girl, a daughter of the Sultan, falls in love with a Christian slave and, despite the fact of his being already, and indissolubly, married to a Christian woman, flees with him. After many trials they reach his home, where both are joyfully greeted by his wife, and the three settle down to live happily together for the rest of their lives.

The message of this poem, the holy power of love and a Christian marriage, is more subtly conveyed than before, in a more fluent and unified way. The integration of the adventurous and moral elements in particular is skilfully achieved by means of a well-handled plot and carefully arranged transitions from romantic to Christian love.

As Wordsworth says in a footnote,[7] the ballad form he uses in this poem is well-suited to narrative, and from the beginning the plot is a main sustaining element. The story moves more rapidly than in "The Egyptian Maid", and the tale is less remotely and abstractly handled. The concentration on dialogue and the concise narrative style (as in the transitional thirteenth stanza) greatly improve the pace and interest of the poem, and genuinely catch the reader's attention. This rapidity of movement also helps to make the local colour less glaring than in the other poem, less lingered over and heavily emphasized. Here long exotic descriptions are replaced by short phrases, strictly relevant to the plot: "yon minarets" (1.42) is a good example. The well integrated moral feeling and less obtrusive local colour mean that the poem can move more freely, with fewer static interludes, than before. The plot, too, has a shape which supports the development of the poem at every point. Beginning in a setting of paganism and a language of romance (the "rose", the "veil", the words of captivity metaphorically meant, the "tears and sighs" of 1.20), the poem gradually progresses towards the fulfilment of a Christian home and the strength of a properly religious language (11.133-6, 141-2, etc.). The whole structure is aptly completed in a formal picture (st.XXVI), an emblem combining, like the water-lily, many of the themes of the work. The easy evolution of the plot illustrates another aspect of Wordsworth's improved narrative skill: the fluency with which he effects transitions. In fact, one of the ways the poem is kept alive and unified is its fluid movement from action to reflection (st.XIII-XIV), from direct to oblique presentation (st.XX-XXI), so that

the meaning and action never "stick" harmfully at one point but move together to their conclusion. For this reason too the rhythm is flowing, rapid and easy, since here the meaning of the poem is too firmly invested in the action to need the halting, intensifying technique used in "The Egyptian Maid". The action, in addition, is governed by a romance psychology which further holds the poem together, for people here are far more than just objects: "The Armenian Lady's Love" turns on a psychological and physical (NOT a supernatural) movement, and there is a real personal tension which keeps that attention and interest of the reader.

The language of the poem also contributes to its comparative success. Even before revision it is consistent, fluent, and recognisably contemporary, with just sufficient displacement from the everyday to suit its theme and setting. Thus the emendations concentrate not on harmonising the vocabulary, as in "The Egyptian Maid", but on enriching the texture and the clearer definition of meaning. The firmness and cohesion of this style ensure the unity of impression Wordsworth wants in the verse-tales and throughout the whole 1835 volume. The romantic suggestions in "rose" (1.7), "pointed thorn" (1.46) and "base implements" (1.50), for example, are at the same time deeply rooted in the earth, and much of the poem's depth and richness of effect is achieved by words like these simultaneously literal (the rose as a flower in a garden) and figurative (the rose as a symbol of love).

Despite the greater subtlety of this poem, when Wordsworth comes to revise it he again places greater emphasis on its Christian elements. That he manages this without disrupting the balance of the work is praise-

worthy. In 1.35, for instance, the original -

"If with your good help thy chains I may unbind" -

is altered to the expressly Christian -

"If Almighty Grace through me thy chains unbind" -

with its deliberate depression of man's importance and new confident, smooth rhythm. There is a more oblique change in 1.42, where "these minarets" becomes "yon minarets", an alteration of perspective which cunningly suggests the distance there already is between the Lady and the trappings of her faith.

If the insistence of Christianity is the same in "The Armenian Lady's Love" as in the earlier poem, at least the control of narrative has changed and improved. Thus the revisions in this respect are less extensive than before, and generally represent only slight alterations of emphasis, small improvements in balance and movement.

Continuity, which was such a problem in "The Egyptian Maid", presents few difficulties here. In a couple of cases punctuation is altered to ensure a clearer sense of relationship, but this is all: the fluency of the poem's movement is already ample. But what Wordsworth does take care to improve are the pace and proportions of the narrative. Between 11.48-9, for example, one manuscript interpolates -

""Weak I am and inexperienced
Yet my reason shrinks from trust
In a law to Man remorseless
And to Womanhood unjust:
Shape for me a fairer course, which thou canst do
How readily if to thyself, thyself be true.

Embryo of celestial promise

Heaven that opened out this rose

By his breath will in due season

Gently thy sweet bud unclose

Or by miracle will work.""And is it none
(a Princess thus should please(?) be won?
That I (
(such boldness have put on, nor thou be won?""

These two stanzas are later removed on grounds of harmony and conciseness, for they make the theme too explicit in too pointed a place, hold up the train of thought and action, introduce elements incompatible with the Lady's romance psychology elsewhere, and, finally, say much the same as st.XIV. The use of this material in st.XIV also improves the proportions of the poem, for it is surely after the action of st.XIII that these sentiments should come, since they form a stated comment after adventure more suitably than a direct speech before it.

The narrative is similarly emended to improve the emphasis and sense of drama. The dramatic point of several lines is increased, twice by the crude introduction of an exclamation mark, and much more importance is given to the situation of words and their probable effect on the reader. The best instance of this occurs in 11.127-32, altered from -

"Fancy (while, to banners floating
High on Stolberg's castle walls,
Deafening noise of welcome mounted,
Trumpets, Drums and Atabals,)
The devout embraces still, while such tears fell
As made a meeting seem most like a dear farewell" -

to -

"And how blest the Reunited,
While beneath their castle-walls
Runs a deafening noise of welcome! -
Blest, though every tear that falls
Doth in its silence of past sorrow tell,
And makes a meeting seem most like a dear farewell."

Here the rhythm too is improved, and more dramatic directness and clarity are obtained by the removal of the long parenthesis and the easier and simpler language.

With regard to language, only small details are altered in revision.

But the effects of this revision, minor though it is, are marked. In precision and richness of diction, for instance, the later versions are noticeably superior to the earlier, and what is meant is said more exactly and evocatively than before. In 1.86 "Those unperverted days" is changed to "those old romantic days": this improves the sense, for "those .. days" were clearly perverted in some respects, this is what the poet has just been saying, and also re-emphasizes the fairy-tale atmosphere on which the poem depends. In 1.94, too, the revision of "mingled hands" to "social hands" conveys a finer and more decorous meaning: the incongruous hint of close physical contact is removed.

The language also becomes subtler in implication, and denser. In 1.149 the old metaphor of the "path of life", for example, is given an added physical dimension by being "smoothed" instead of "soothed" by "Christian meekness".

There is an improvement, too, in the clarity and compactness of

the language. The best instance is in 11.96-101, altered from -

"Hills they crossed - then broad seas measured
Steadily as ships could steer,
And while in the port of Venice
They were landing on the pier,
One, who there for tidings watched" -

to -

"On a friendly deck reposing
They at length for Venice steer;
There, when they had closed their voyage
One, who daily on the pier
Watched for tidings from the East, beheld his Lord".

Here a good deal of irrelevant matter is removed, the most important points are more clearly made, and the sense and continuity are improved as well.

Thus the general direction of Wordsworth's revisions in this poem is clear, and is very similar to that in "The Egyptian Maid". The Christian tone is again, but less clumsily, reinforced. Relationships and continuity are clarified. The pace and proportions of the narrative are improved, and so is the control of emphasis and drama. In language greater precision and richness are combined with compactness and directness. In outline these are roughly the same emendations as were noticed in the earlier poem, but there is also a much finer care for details of style, and a movement towards a more balanced use of the verse-tale as a form. This poem makes more concessions to the reader's pleasure, and

its meaning is conveyed more successfully because of the more convincing world it portrays. Revision is employed above all to make the poem more enjoyable, to correct the poet's characteristic but aesthetically harmful fondness for preaching at people rather than trying to catch their interest.

The last and best of the verse-tales is "The Russian Fugitive". Admittedly, Mrs. Moorman dismisses it as "not a very interesting poem",(8) but the comment of "The Quarterly Review", though also exaggerated, is more perceptive:"the most elegant poem that ever came from the pen of this poet."(9) Like the other verse-tales "The Russian Fugitive" is close to "opera or musical drama"(10: the phrase is Wordsworth's) but here at last the two primary elements of adventurous plot and moral didacticism are brought into some kind of balance, instead of pulling awkwardly in different directions as had happened before. The story concerns the high-born lady, Ina, who is forced to flee from her home in Moscow to escape unwelcome attentions. She goes to her foster-parents in the country, who set her up in a retreat on a lonely island where for a year she lives alone, meditating on the Virgin. But one day a huntsman stumbles across her, and agrees to intercede for her with the Czar; he is successful, and he and Ina are shortly married, to the satisfaction of everyone.

The theme of the poem is the justness of God's Providence; it can be stated quite simply, and it remains constant in much of Wordsworth's later, more serious work. But here the conjunction of Nature and God is closer than in the other verse-tales. This is achieved mainly by means of the heroine, who is associated with Nature through the imagery (especially of the fawn), and with God through speech and comment, and who

thus associates the two elements with herself and relates one to the other more satisfactorily than in the previous poems. So Nature here is treated more seriously than in, say, "The Egyptian Maid", plays a greater part in the action, and provides the occasion for a bravura display of Wordsworth's later descriptive manner. And here, too, but more emphatically than before, the fairy-tale style of the story is supported and enriched by fact, by a convincing texture of physical detail. The poem, therefore, moves towards a more authentic and plausible tone and manner; romance is tempered by a more direct kind of realism. There is also a stronger sense of ritual, especially in the association of the girl with the fawn, which adds to the depth and emotional appeal of the poem. "The Russian Fugitive" thus stands as the most successful of these verse-tales because of its depth of linked description and feeling, which supports and lends conviction to the bizarre experiences which form the plot.

A new emphasis on characterization adds greatly to the poem's plausibility. The people here are more than mere lay-figures, and show a power of psychological creation rare in Wordsworth, and not often employed to produce such interesting tensions of feeling. One is given, for example, the intriguing unresolved relationship of the girl and her parents, or the conventional but moving fondness of the Woodman and his wife, where warmer and more recognisable emotions are called into play than in either of the other verse-tales. Thus, though the emblematic habit of associating people with things does persist, it is softened by the new sympathy that the characters arouse.

The unity of the characters and settings is amply preserved by

the narrative. The most obvious point to notice here is the closer integration of description and action, the building up of a solid and detailed physical world which lends credence to the romantic and unlikely plot. This joining of plot and setting is the culmination of a trend evident from "The Egyptian Maid" onwards. The better sense of pace and continuity, too, reflect the poet's growing realisation of the best way of tackling this kind of verse. Here there are few of the halts which sometimes mar the other poems - the narrative flows easily, as in the girl's vivid and dramatic discovery by the hunter, or the account of her flight from Moscow "at dead of night" (1.10). The poem also has a structural simplicity and strong story-line very different from the rather rambling arrangement of "The Egyptian Maid", for instance: the plot is uncomplicated, a series of linked flights ending in safety, and has plenty of emotional and dramatic appeal as well. The spiritual progress is counterpointed with the highly atmospheric setting, so that the one is given actuality and the other seriousness and direction. (A good example of this is in 11.32-40, where the homely and restful physical setting complements what happens - the narrative and its context are harmonised so that each reinforces the other). The close association of these two elements of the poem enriches it in every way, and cohesion is easily maintained by the plot, the imagery, a habit of personification which moves the participants to the same level (11.232-40), power in the creation of an apt atmosphere, and a practice of filtering the events through natural description, so that they are more closely integrated still. The less oblique nature of the story, too, prevents the poem

from seeming merely inconsequential. The net result of all this is a most convincing and satisfactory poem where the demands of instruction and amusement, the spiritual and physical, are brought into admirable balance.

The same appropriateness and harmony are noticable in the diction of the poem. Hazlitt described Wordsworth's later work as "classical and courtly .... polished in style, without being gaudy; dignified in subject, without affectation".(11) "The Russian Fugitive" is one of the best examples of this. At first its style may appear highly-coloured and ornate, but it has a backbone of action and feeling to prevent it from becoming too extravagant, and it is very successful in producing the required atmospheric effects. Compared with the two poems preceding it "The Russian Fugitive" has an extra brilliance of vocabulary. Not only are the words chosen with great taste and style, but they have a richer meaning and a wider appeal: they allude not only to literature and legend, but also to details of "real life" and the life of Nature. Even the metaphorical plants of the first stanza point to the importance of the physical world, and the same emphasis is often repeated in the rest of the poem.

This illustrates,too, the marked movement here from the exotic to the homely (as in the importance placed on the affectionate Woodcutter and his wife), from the remote and strange towards the more understandable and human. This is largely achieved through the stabilizing use of the natural background, described in solid and desoriptive, but also firmly-rooted, language. This does not mean that the treatment of Nature is heavy or merely factual. Crabb Robinson's comment on the "light and elegant painting"(12) of "The Excursion" could equally well be applied

here. Nature here has only a little of the importance it has for man in, say, "The Prelude": it is reduced in scale, intimate and picturesque rather than sublime. The "murmuring brook" (1.120), "shady boughs" (1.104) and "ancestral stream" (1.254) are light and graceful, not grand: Nature in this poem, as in most of Wordsworth's late work, is a Silver Age Nature, emblematic and analogical, heraldic rather than animate, though still precisely observed and accurate as ever. Nature provides scenes, prospects which embody carefully-worked meanings (though this is less crude than elsewhere among the verse-tales): Wordsworth talks of "the moral importance of the pictures. ... the employment they give to the imagination, and to the higher faculties",(13) and illustrates what he means in "The Russian Fugitive". The use of Nature in this way also relates to the poet's fondness for formal emblems, such as the fawn or the icon, which are deliberately contrived to be "speaking pictures".

Despite his greater awareness of the need for pleasing his readers in this poem, Wordsworth again goes out of his way to put more emphasis on the already evident Christian dimension: in this at least he has not changed. The clearest example is in 11.209-216, interpolated by the time of the volume's publication -

"To one mute Presence, above all,
Her soothed affections clung,
A picture on the cabin wall,
By Russian usage hung -
The Mother maid, whose countenance bright
With love abridged the day;

And, communed with by taper light,

Chased spectral fears away".

This importation of an actual icon, besides reinforcing the local colour of the poem, also gives to the girl's retreat much more of a Christian flavour than before, and makes her rescue seem more a result of her devotions than the chance it might otherwise appear.

Fortunately this stronger Christian emphasis does not disrupt the psychology of the characters, to which the poet pays a great deal of attention both in the original version and during revision. What he tries to achieve most of all is a stringent consistency and clarity in the handling of the characters. In 11.317-20, for instance, at a moment of drama and tension, it is the necessity of simple, fluent and terse direct speech which clearly dictates the change from the lumbering -

""You, Lady, in those humble weeds

Disguised, and here so long

Hovel'd under heath and reeds

The barren trees among?"" -

to the more open and forthright -

""Who foiled an Emperor's eager quest?

You, Lady, forced to wear

These rude habiliments, and rest

Your head in this dark lair!""

The emendations also show a clarifying of the development of character. In 11.73-88, for example, omitted in the manuscript but introduced later, conventional but significant details of personality are filled in (the love

of the Woodsman for the girl, her courage and will-power), and there is an extra emphasis on the Christian concept of Providence which forms a basis for the poem. In 11.167-8, too, the change from -

"And smiles, the sunshine of distress,
That hide, yet more betry!" -

to -

"And smiles, fond efforts of distress,
To hide what they betray!" -

removes an awkward sentimentality of phrasing in favour of clear psychological explanation.

The continuity and fluency of the narrative are secure even in the manuscript version, and the changes which are necessary are confined to small details.

In 1850 the disrupting numbering of the stanzas is discontinued, and in 1.30 (semi-colon to comma) and 1.201 (the omission of a comma between "Votaress a") the punctuation is made more fluent. The rhythm too is improved: in 11.337-8 there is an obviously easier flow of sound from -

"Her will I seek - along my course
In confidence I go" -

to -

"Leave open to my wish the course,
And I to her will go".

By this time, of course, the dissonance Wordsworth had to employ in "The Egyptian Maid" is no longer necessary, and since the meaning is secure the rhythm can be used to produce pleasant effects of sound which suit the poem's style and add to the reader's enjoyment.

There is also a tendency to remove parentheses so as to improve the flow of sense: the emendation of 11.45-8 from -

"Upon herlids with travel spent
Sleep dropped, and gently stole
(While o'er her head the Matron bent)
Into her dreamless soul" -

to -

"While over her the Matron bent
Sleep sealed her eyes, and stole
Feelings from limbs with travel spent,
And trouble from the soul" -

and of 11.137-9 from -

"Approaching, you might guess an hour
So nice the builder's care
Whether it were a house or bower" -

to -

"Advancing, you might guess an hour,
The front with such nice care is masked,
If house it be or bower" -

removes awkward interpolations and clarifies the sequence of events.

The distaste for unnecessary obliqueness shown by the removel of these parentheses also results in the removal of the repetitious and obvious. The title, for instance, is cut down from "The Russian Fugitive; Ina, or The Lodge in the Forest, A Russian Tale", which is clumsy and prolix, to the more incisive and simpler "The Russian Fugitive". Even in

very minor details Wordsworth avoids irrelevance. In 11.109-110 the revision from -

"That no one ventured to the spot
Belike from age to age" -

to -

"A sanctuary seemed the spot
From all intrusion free" -

gets rid of a cumbersome construction and a needless repetition of sense, and in 11.111 and 112 banal words are replaced by others which add something to the meaning ("sylvan" becomes "artful", "A lurking Hermitage", "For perfect secrecy").

With these alterations also goes a considerable redistribution of emphasis, more subtly used to convey just the tone and nuance required.

As with the narrative, so with the language, Wordsworth's first thoughts were so good that few changes are necessary.

Neologisms and awkward words are removed since they break up the smooth flow of the verse: in 1.245 "tow'rd" becomes "toward" and in 1.355 the ugly "over-joy" is replaced by "joy's excess". In some places the style is made richer and more elegant: the replacement in 11.204-5, for example, of -

"Nor were it labour vain
To tell what company she found" -

by -

"And words, not breathed in vain,
Might tell what intercourse she found" -

moves towards an aptly neoclassical use of language and integrates the passage more closely into the rest of the poem.

In revision the control of nuance too is more precise: the change in 1.245 from "groves" to "fields" conveys a suggestion of freedom instead of enclosedness, which is what the context requires, and in 1.280 the replacement of "evil destiny" by "destiny" prevents the obscuring of one of the main points of the poem - that destiny is NOT evil.

Another effect of the revisions of language is an enriching of the emblems: Nature, and flowers in particular, receive a stronger emphasis than before. The best instance is in 11.369-372, changed from -

"Faith rules the song, nor deem it care
Too humble to relate
That at the Spousal Feast the Pair
Of rustic Guardians sate" -

to -

"Flowers strewed the ground; the nuptial feast
Was held, with costly state;
And there mid many a noble guest,
The Foster-parents sate".

Here the nature-emblems, the suggestion of fertility apt at a wedding, and the clinching use of flowers in this last, as in the first, stanza, all combine to end the poem on a rich and evocative note.

The direction of the revisions in this poem fits in well with that in the other verse-tales discussed. Christian references are increased. There is a new care for consistency and convincingness of characterization.

The continuity of the narrative is ensured by the removal of parentheses and a greater cogency of style. Emphasis is more equably arranged. There is a finer tact in the use of language: awkward words are removed, the handling of the vocabulary is more consciously stylish, nuance is controlled more accurately and emblems and images are more effectively used.

The same general tendencies are thus discernible in the revisions of all of the verse-tales. The poet wishes to emphasize morality, and especially Christian morality, as firmly as he can. He wishes to provide other interests apart from simply sententious ones. Continuity and ease of narrative, the mechanics of telling a story, always receive painstaking attention. The diction, finally, is harmonised and enriched. All these varieties of revision are to a certain extent correlated for a single purpose: more enjoyment for the reader. The increase in sensuous material and human appeal, the swifter action and more convincing handling of materials, which are produced by emendation, all lead to an increase in pleasure (and hence of involvement, and hence of susceptibility to instruction) for the reader: the result is that after revision these poems, in varying degrees, not only give more amusement, they give more food for thought too.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

(1) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ex. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford: p.993.

(2) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1937; Oxford; p.611.

(3) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford; p.1377.

(4) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M. Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.110.

(5) In a note dictated to the poet's friend Isabella Fenwick and reprinted in most editions.

(6) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M. Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.461.

(7) Reprinted in all editions of the poem.

(8) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M. Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.454.

(9) "The Quarterly Review", No.107; July, 1835; London; p.182.

(10) In a note on "The Russian Fugitive" dictated to Isabella Fenwick and reprinted in most editions.

(11) "The Complete Works of William Hazlitt", Vol.11; ed. P.P.Howe; 1932; London; p.90.

(12) "Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers", Vol.I: ed. E.J.Morley; London; 1938; p.155.

(13) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1937; Oxford; p.473.

THE IDYLLIA OF EXTERNAL NATURE

The "Yarrow Revisited" volume includes a loosely linked series of nine "Evening Voluntaries". Most seem to have been written in the period 1832 to 1834, after a long fallow period when Wordsworth wrote very little. Dorothy, the poet's sister, had been very ill during 1832, and again in January 1833; there had been public anxiety about the Reform Bill and the religious commotion caused by the Oxford Movement. Apart from a few lines, public and private worries together silenced Wordsworth for almost the whole of 1832 and much of 1833. In February 1833 he wrote to Quillinan: "A year has elapsed since I wrote any poetry but a few lines, and I have rarely even read anything in verse till within the last week, when I have begun to accustom my ear to blank verse in other authors with a hope they may put me in tune for my own".(1) As Mrs. Moorman suggests(2) the "few lines" may be the first of the "Evening Voluntaries", for the poems composed in 1832 are very sparse - eight, all short, by Knight's count. In 1833, however, under the influence of a tour of the West of England and Scotland in the summer, Wordsworth resumed his normal rate of composition. The "Evening Voluntaries", "The Sun, that seemed so mildly to retire" and "The sun is couched, the sea-fowl gone to rest" both belong to the April of this year. In 1834 four more poems were added to the series. In the 1835 volume Wordsworth added to these, under the same descriptive heading, in spite of their many differences, the impromptu "The sun has long been set", which he had written in 1807, and the composite "Throned in the Sun's descending car", which "is simply a fine stanza of Akenside, connected with a still finer from Beattie, by a couplet from Thomson".(3) For the

"Poetical Works" of 1849-50 Wordsworth changed the order of some of the poems so that they followed a chronolgical pattern, omitted the composite work, and added seven more to the series, widely different in form and style (three were written in 1846, one as early as 1817) but including the splendid "Composed upon an Evening of extraordinary Splendour and Beauty" - "lines unequalled in their pathos and in the intensity of their self-revelation".(4)

The first seven poems in the "Yarrow Revisited" sequence are similar in style and mood and form a convenient group. Despite his habit of oral composition, Wordsworth's description seems oddly chosen, since the "New English Dictionary" defines "voluntary" as "an extempore, optional .... piece of writing or composition", and the outstanding quality of these works is their artfulness and generality of effects. Only the poem on "The Author's Sixty-Third Birthday" has any personal reference or immediate application such as one might expect from a spontaneous piece of work. The others are serious and carefully thought-out, and discuss ideas of human responsibility and natural behaviour with a calmness and authority that can only be the result of deliberation. Even the style "quiet, grave, limpid, and very delicately hued,(5) is perfectly controlled, and enriched by a tradition of literary reference which provides phrases such as "rosy garland" and "Mammon's cave" ("Not in the lucid intervals of life", 11.4 and 6).

There is thus little if anything in these poems to justify Wordsworth's description of them, and it is proposed instead to discuss them as examples of the "idyllium", following Wordsworth's own classification. The idyllium is subdivided into three further groups, of works "descriptive chiefly either of the processes and appearances of external Nature .... or

of characters, manners and sentiments"[6] or of the latter in conjunction with the appearances of Nature.

For the first of these groups Wordsworth gives Thomson's "Seasons" as an example. This is a descriptive poem, closely related to merely topographical works like John Scott's "Amwell" or Tickell's "Oxford". But in spite of the large amount of fact which it contains - one learns for example about "the succession of the Seasons" and "fogs, frequent in the later part of Autumn" ("Argument" to "Summer" and to "Autumn") - the poem has many moments of generality. "Summer", for instance, ends with a frenzied metaphoric "praise of philosophy" (11.1730-1805), and includes a section "A solemn grove: how it affects a contemplative mind" (11.516-584) which is close in technique to the best of the "Evening Voluntaries". This part of the poem begins with a description of -

" .... the midnight depth
Of yonder grove of wildest, largest wood" (11.516-7) -

which is followed by a number of exaggerated general reflections on "moral wisdom" (1.573), suggested by the scene. In just the same way the "Evening Voluntary" "Soft as a Cloud is yon blue ridge" develops its evocation of twilight calm into "an emblem" (1.12) of the rest which good thoughts can impose on -

"The petty pleasures of the garish day" (1.15).

"The Seasons" is thus quite closely related to these poems, and is equally far from being the mere picture of "external Nature" which Wordsworth suggests. In fact all descriptive poems must, as the poet recognizes in his third subdivision of the idyllium, mingle general feelings with particular detail. Several of the poems in "Yarrow Revisited" belong

to the second subdivision of poems of "characters, manners and sentiments", which includes genre pieces like Burns' "The Twa Dogs" and "The Cotter's Saturday Night" (the examples are the poet's), which will be discussed in a separate chapter. The third subdivision consists of poems such as "most of the pieces of Theocritus", Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso", Beattie's "Minstrel" and Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village", which join "characters, manners and sentiments" to the more particular "appearances of external Nature". It would seem from what has been said that the "Evening Voluntaries", and perhaps all of Wordsworth's idyllia, should be placed among this group. But this is not so. Consider for instance the use of Nature in "Il Penseroso". Milton is not a landscape poet in the manner of Wordsworth; he does not draw meditative capital out of natural sights and sounds. Instead these are used to establish a mood of melancholy - "civil-suited morn" and "monumental Oake" (11.120,135) - and call into play a very wide range of traditional reference -

"Thee bright hair'd Vesta long of yore,
To solitary Saturn bore;
His daughter she (in Saturn's raign,
Such mixture was not held a stain)
Oft in glimmering Bowres, and glades
He met her, and in secret shades
Of woody Ida's inmost grove,
While yet there was no fear of Jove" (11.23-30).

In "Il Penseroso" Nature is of a piece with the other elements of the poem - and this holds good for "The Minstrel" and "The Deserted Village" too -

whereas even in the late Wordsworth it has a special function in suggesting proper thoughts to man, and its importance in the "Evening Voluntaries" is a primary one. This separation of attitudes between the two poets does not extend to style, where there is, as will be shown, a great deal of common ground. There are thus good reasons for removing these poems from the third division of the idyllium, to which they might theoretically seem to belong, and putting them instead in the first, with "The Seasons" which they so resemble in manner and tone and, to a lesser extent, style.

This decision seems even more justified when one considers the poems Wordsworth must have had in mind when writing the "Evening Voluntaries". These idyllia are firstly very similar in style to "Il Penseroso" and Lady Winchilsea's "Nocturnal Reverie", which Wordsworth particularly praised for presenting new images of "external Nature".(7) Mrs. Moorman sees too that "they are akin to the landscape poetry of the previous century - to Gray's "Elegy" and Collins's "Ode to Evening"".(8) The poems themselves are very literary and hint at a number of possible influences. Young's "Night Thoughts", ii, 1.95, provides 1.39 of "The sun is couched, the sea-fowl gone to rest" with its crucial ".... our thoughts are heard in heaven". De Selincourt(9) detects a reminiscence of Burns in 11.17-23 of the poem "Not in the lucid intervals of life", and the impromptu "The sun has long been set" quotes a few words from "The Twa Dogs". A letter to Peter Cunningham, written in 1833, praises the "elegant" poems of Drummond of Hawthornden,(10) and Burns himself is enthusiastically discussed in a letter of 14th June, 1834.(11) The last of the "Evening Voluntaries" in the 1835 volume, "Throned in the Sun's descending car", lifts passages from Akenside's

ode "Against Suspicion", Thomson's "Hymn on Solitude" and Beattie's "Retirement". All of these authors were familiar to Wordsworth, and in March 1835, as "Yarrow Revisited" was going to press, he received new editions of Akenside and Beattie from Alexander Dyce and of Burns from Alan Cunningham.(12)

In "Il Penseroso" and the "Nocturnal Reverie" Wordsworth could find the meditative calm and thoughtfulness of his "voluntaries", the clear setting of mood and even the necessary distinction and eclecticism of style. Lady Winchilsea's famous " .... unmolested kine rechew the cud" (1.34), for instance, or Milton's " .... gay motes that people the Sun Beames" (1.8), are little different from the style of Wordsworth's -

"The busy dor-hawk chases the white moth" ("Calm is the fragrant air...." 1.22) -

or -

"A dawn she has both beautiful and bright,
When the East kindles with the full Moon's light" ("The linnet's warble ...." 1.22-1.23) -

in spite of the more solid and authoritative tone of his verses. From the rhymed iambic pentameters of both poems, carefully varied with trochees and spondees (as in 1.1 of "Il Penseroso"), and with the occasional use of run-on lines, Wordsworth probably also gathered a good deal of help when he was writing the "Evening Voluntaries", which use metre with almost equal skill. And in the "Nocturnal Reverie" Wordsworth could find the movement from particular details of Nature, through quiet meditation, to a general philosophic insight - exactly the technique of his own poems here, especially the first, "Calm is the fragrant air ... "

In Gray and Collins too Wordsworth could find much that would be

helpful and point directions which the "Evening Voluntaries" might fruitfully follow.

In the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" one notices clearly an air of consideration and forethought: a theme is treated with near perfect relevance and clarity, there are no awkward loose ends to clear up. The same can be said of some of the "Evening Voluntaries": the stylised uses of Nature, the logic of development from emblem to interpretation, the authoritative statement of general truths, even the eighteenth-century neatness of phrasing and eloquent rhythm, all create an impression of sober justice, of the uncommitted manipulation of means to an end. This can be illustrated simply from the poem "Soft as a cloud is yon blue ridge". Here -

" .... the Mere
Seems firm as solid crystal .... " (11.2-3) -

and is surrounded by -

" .... vague mountains and unreal sky" (1.5).

In just the same manner Gray has a solemn, meticulously arranged "prospect" at the beginning of his elegy, and the hardly naturalistic " .... incense-breathing Morn" (1.17) and -

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear" (11.53-4) -

in the body of the poem. The grouping of the Wordsworth poem into clearly marked divisions of natural description (11.1-11), a general statement of its emblematic significance (11.12-19), and a more considered qualifying conclusion (11.20-26), with oblique transitions between each division, parallels Gray's even smoother development from landscape to -

"The bosom of his Father and his God" (1.126).

The fondness of both poets for solid generalities can easily be shown: one has only to compare, say, Wordsworth's -

" .... By grace divine,
Not otherwise, O Nature! we are thine" ("Not in the lucid intervals", 11.16-17) -

with Gray's -

"Lean Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?" (11.43-4) -

to see how close the resemblance is. The authority of phrasing, too, is shared: Wordsworth's -

"With genuine rapture and with fervent love" ("Not in the lucid intervals", 1.11) -

and -

"Vain is the pleasure, a false calm the peace" (ibid., 1.26) -

are close enough to Gray's -

" .... nor circumscrib'd alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd" (11.65-6) -

to show how he depends in these poems on the Augustan habits of antithesis and generality.

The "Evening Voluntaries" are thus very like Gray's "Elegy", but in their attitude to Nature they are even more like Collins' "Ode to Evening". This poem "In Imitation of Milton" resembles the "Evening Voluntaries" in many ways. They share a taste for a minute and pretty selection of natural objects, described with an intricacy close to preciosity. Collins' poem, for example, provides the elaborate and mannered -

"Many a nymph who sheds her brows

With sedge-leaves dipt in freshening dews" (11.19-20) -

and -

" ... the dapper elves

That slept in rose-buds all day long" (11.16-17).

Wordsworth, with a similar taste for adjectival description, has -

"Calm is the fragrant air, and loth to lose

Day's grateful warmth, tho' moist with falling dews" ("Calm is the fragrant air", 11.1-2) -

and -

"Observe how dewy Twilight has withdrawn

The crowd of daisies from the shaven lawn" ("Soft as a cloud", 11.8-9).

The close resemblance between the "Evening Voluntaries" and the Augustan landscape poetry represented here by Gray and Collins is thus clear: even the properties, styles and themes are similar - "Calm is the fragrant air", for example, can be seen as a variation on Gray's elegy, sharing the same subject and technique, and with a few verbal reminiscences as well.

A reading of Young's "Night Thoughts" probably reinforced the elegiac and twilight world of the "Evening Voluntaries", progressing as it does from despair to consolation, and using Nature as an object from which knowledge and meaning can profitably be drawn, as it is in Wordsworth. Its meditations, too, are on subjects as sober as Wordsworth's, though Young's treatment of them is not so incisive or authoritative.

The possible debts of Wordsworth to Burns are much less evident; only slightly, in their picturesque treatment of Nature, do the two poems

specifically associated with the "Evening Voluntaries", "The Twa Dogs" and "To William Simpson", bear much likeness to the Wordsworth poems. "The Twa Dogs" consists mainly of a humorous dialogue between two dogs showing how well off they are in comparison with mankind, but there is a little natural description too, though of a more social kind than Wordsworth's. It is only in "To William Simpson", a personal verse-letter on contemporary topics, that the description approaches Wordsworth's rather remote delicacy -

"O,sweet are Coila's haughs an' woods
When lintwhites chant among the buds,
And jinkin hares in amorous whids,
Their loves enjoy,
While thro' the braes the cushat croods
Wi' wailfu' cry!" (11.67-72).

A theme from this poem, too -

"O Nature! a' thy shows an' forms
To feeling, pensive hearts hae charms!" (11.79-80) -

is taken over by Wordsworth to form the kingpin of his "Evening Voluntary" "Not in the lucid intervals of life".

Akenside's rhetorical and repetitious "Ode Against Suspicion", which does just what its title implies, can have had little impact on the "Evening Voluntaries". There are a few similarities, but the traditional vocabulary -

"Throned in the sun's descending car" (1.41) -

and the abstract general terms -

"O thou, whate'er thy awful name,

Whose wisdom our untoward frame
With social love restrains" -

which both poets use were standard practice anyway. Only Akenside's rather crude habit of sudden, excited address, seen best in -

"But come, forsake the scene unblessed" (1.37) -

may have been helpful to Wordsworth. Many of the "Evening Voluntaries" hinge upon an exclamation like this, and though the device is hardly a new one, the fact that Wordsworth must have been reading Akenside at the time these poems were written suggests that it may have been stimulated by his example.

Wordsworth's debt to Thomson has already been discussed with regard to "The Seasons"; here on need only point out the themes of solitude and fancy shared by his "Hymn on Solitude" and the "Evening Voluntaries", and, even more, the stylistic closeness of both to "Il Penseroso".

Beattie's "Retirement", the last of the poems which seem to have influenced the "Evening Voluntaries", is a stately dramatic monologue on the consolation to be gained from contact with Nature and solitude. It is full of elaborate beauty and baroque effects -

"Ye cliffs, in hoary grandeur piled
High o'er the glimmering dale" (11.9-10) -

and -

" ... the scared owl on pinions grey
Breaks from the rustling boughs,
And down the lone vale sails away
To more profound repose" (11.53-6) -

and has a good deal of gloomy atmospheric description and many personifications. Its appeal to Wordsworth is clear: it is the strange romantic beauty of the last few lines quoted that he borrows in his poem "Throned in the Sun's descending car", and there is something very similar even stylistically in -

"The throng of Rooks, that now, from twig or nest
(After a steady flight on home-bound wings,
And a last game of mazy hoverings
Around their ancient grove) with cawing noise
Disturb the liquid music's equipoise" ("The linnet's warble", 11.8-12).

Wordsworth's dependence on a tradition of self-conscious and highly "romantic" landscape poetry, especially of the eighteenth century, is thus marked, and has clearly provided a great deal in the way of example to, and influence upon, the idyllia of external Nature discussed in this chapter.

It remains now to analyse some of the "Evening Voluntaries" in detail, to show what problems they raise and what effects the revisions of them produce. This discussion will show how conventional these poems are, and how well this approach suits the style of Nature they describe and the themes of "art and symbolic action and eternity precious and unbreathing"(13) which Jones has found typical of Wordsworth's later art.

The first of the "Evening Voluntaries" is "Calm is the fragrant air, and loth to lose". Mrs. Moorman very perceptively calls it a "beautiful nocturne"(14) a description which equally fits the other poems in the sequence. It is a precise and muted catalogue of the sights and

sounds of Nature, in which "the various presences .... are heard or felt rather than distinctly seen",[15] arranged so as to lead to a final triplet expressing the need to "give to serious thought a moment's sway" (1.31).

What immediately strikes one about the poem is its seriousness and responsibility: the moral, and the austere way it is expressed, seem more like Gray than Wordsworth. The constant control of which one is aware - it is especially evident in the regular rhythm and clinching rhymes - adds to the feeling of sobriety: here Wordsworth is very much the "spectator ab extra", using his intelligence, his moral sensibility, and his poetic skill, rather than his imagination or emotions. David Perkins has put the point very well: "the tone, approaching that of a descriptive monograph, lends force to the statement. It gives to religious or moral reminders something of the authority always granted to what seems a totally impersonal utterance".[16] This poem shows, in fact, "the calm of all passion spent": it is a retreat from personal involvement into the peace and safety of traditional art. This has a number of odd results. Everything has a kind of immobility: the bat and dor-hawk, for example, seem frozen definitively into a single position: the rhymes and the end-stopped lines cut off each sample of Nature from all the rest and hold it, as it were, for good. This is a very far cry from the free intercourse of man and Nature one finds in Wordsworth's early poems. The elements of Nature too are different: here they are almost miniature, either domestic or very small and weak. The birds, for instance, sing "with faint and fainter powers" (1.8); the bat moves along "the close arcade" (1.21); a stream is not seen, but heard by its "soft music" (1.26). The whole poem,

like many of the others in this sequence, seems to be moving quite away from the notion of the grandeur of Nature which was important in "The Prelude". In some of the rest of the idyllia of external Nature this goes even further and becomes a virtual rejection of Nature altogether, a preference for ideas over facts, things thought over things seen.

The restriction of Nature is emphasized by the construction of the poem. It is basically a catalogue, held together by a twilight mood which makes up only partly for the oblique transitions necessitated by the gradual unfolding of the scene. There is no action or progression of thought; each couplet merely expresses in different terms the mood of the couplet before. This statuesque displaying of the properties of Nature - the best example is the description of the birds, "silent as the dim-seen flowers" (1.9) - evokes mood very effectively and prettily. What it does not do is convince one that the experience so fully but discretely presented really leads up to the moral at the end.

The language of the poem, however, is admirable, whatever its deficiencies of structure. It is formal and eclectic in the best sense: the vocabulary and syntax are consistently traditional in a way that recalls Gray's "Elegy". The first two lines, for example, -

"Calm is the fragrant air, and loth to lose
Day's grateful warmth, tho' moist with falling dews" -

with their finely chosen adjectives, eighteenth-century beauty of phrasing, and melancholy falling rhythm, seem as typical of Augustan poetry as of the "Evening Voluntaries". They also point very clearly the tone of these poems: the easy educated voice, low-toned and responsive, a subtle but narrow vehicle for meditation and picturesque description. Though

the language is muted, like the properties -

"Wheels and the tread of hoofs are heard no more" (1.27) -

it is also clear and simple. The words are not as remote and set-off as the things they describe, and leave a pleasing effect of lucidity and grace, seen best in the beautifully elegant -

"The busy dor-hawk chases the white moth
With burning note ..." (11.22-3).

As is usual in Wordsworth, most of the more successful tendencies that have been discussed are re-emphasized in revision.

Firstly, the feeling for mood and atmospheric detail, both of which are important in holding the poem together and making its moral convincing, is improved. There is a considerable expansion in all these poems between the manuscript and printed versions, and most of the details enhance the restricted, minor tone which the poems set out to achieve.

In 11.1-2, for example, the first manuscript has the grand, bare -

"A twofold (slumber the huge hills / sleep the mountain tops) partake

High in the air and (in the still / deep within the) lake".

By 1835 this has been changed to -

"Calm is the fragrant air, and loth to lose
Day's grateful warmth, tho' moist with falling dews".

The new opening to the poem is more atmospheric, slower and more melancholy in rhythm, and more qualified. It is, too, much smaller in scale: this ensures that the quietness of tone suitable to a "nocturne" is not disturbed, and that the restriction of Nature which is necessary to the theme is

immediately emphasized. Two more emendations seem to have a similar end in view. In 11.7-9 the manuscript's -

"The birds, of late so noisy in their bowers,
Are hushed and silent as the dim-seen flowers" -

is replaced by -

"The birds, of late so noisy in their bowers,
Warbled a while with faint and fainter powers
But now are silent as the dim-seen flowers".

This certainly increases the poem's mutedness, and also helps to set up the atmosphere of immobility and solitude on which it depends. The same reasons explain the inclusion of 11.25-6 after 1835 -

"A stream is heard - I see it not, but know
By its soft music whence the waters flow" -

which at the same time usefully interrupts the impersonality of the sequence. The comment of "The Quarterly Review" on the "Yarrow Revisited" volume as a whole: "It is the work of the autumn day of a great poet's honoured life .... a deep repose brood(s) over all and attemper(s) all"(17) is amply borne out by these corrections, and it is evident that Wordsworth wants this "deep repose" to be the dominant tone of the poem.

The revisions that have been discussed so far all involve an expansion of the original text, and this is continued throughout the "Evening Voluntaries". The first manuscript of this poem, for instance, omits the whole of 11.10-27, and the second manuscript's -

"The shepherd, bent on rising with the sun,
Has closed his door, the bat her flight begun

Its grateful warmth, though moist with falling dews" -

is enlarged to -

"The shepherd, bent on rising with the sun,
Had closed his door before the day was done
And now with thankful heart to bed doth creep,
And joins his little children in their sleep.
The bat, lured forth where trees the lane o'ershade,
Flits and reflits along the close arcade".

The reasons for this are plain. Without the expanded detail of the later version of this the poem must have been a rather unconvincing affair: the revisions set up a mood to provide it with cohesion, and include enough well-matched details for the conclusion not to seem unsupported - the expansion, in fact, gives the poem conviction. This is largely achieved, as has been suggested, by the building up of details so as to give a sense of balance, and a feeling of physical richness, to the moralistic triplet which ends the poem.

Most of the revisions also improve the style: the language becomes more compact, and the rhythm and rhetorical effects are better suited to the meaning. The Augustan neatness of phrasing, measured rhythm and habits of balance and repetition, which are typical of these poems, are especially emphasized. In 1.11 -

"The night-calm's soothing influence disown" -

becomes -

"The time's and season's influence disown" -

which has the heavier, more authoritative rhythm that the context requires. Similarly, the change in 11.21-22 from -

"The flitting Bat there thrids a close arcade
Of pollard oaks forth tempted by the shade" -
to -
"The bat, lured forth where trees the lane o'ershade,
Flits and reflits along the close arcade" -
clears up some ambiguity as well as putting its meaning more evocatively and incisively. The repetition which these two revisions share need not be pointed further.

The revisions thus make the poem simultaneously more convincing and more pleasing: the atmosphere becomes more pervasive and its unifying force is improved; the details of Nature are expanded to give a firmer support to the moral; and the language and rhythm are harmonised and enriched.

The second poem to be discussed in detail is "Not in the lucid intervals of life". This is different from the first, especially in its greater generality and portentousness. It is a straightforward piece of work praising seriousness and sobriety, and explaining once again man's need of the grace of God if he is to be protected from temptation.

Both by example and by statement the poem inculcates the virtues of moderation, balance and seriousness: like the other "Evening Voluntaries" it searches for quiet and repose and, above all, thoughtfulness. "The Quarterly Review" puts it like this: "It would be most inappropriate criticism to say that a spirit of melancholy pervades these poems; not so - but a profound pensiveness, nevertheless .... is the foundation of every one of them".(18) As in the other poems, this "pensiveness" is clear from the immobility of the properties, though here these are ideas rather than natural

objects. For even in this poem, which moves almost entirely on a plane, of abstract thought, the paragraphs seem to break up into small independent units, and the transitions from thought to thought are oblique and slight. This is most clearly seen in the parallel "not/nor" clauses of 11.1-15, and in the rhetorical question of 1.16, which crudely changes the theme from Nature to grace, with very little preparation, and an abruptness which does nothing to make the poem more convincing. Even the approach to Nature in this poem is very different from that in the early Wordsworth. Here, although Nature is an important topic, there are no physical objects, no actual examples of natural life: instead there is a great deal of vague talk of "her gentle beauty" (1.10) and unspecified spiritual effect. The crucial -

" .... By grace divine,
Not otherwise, O Nature! we are thine" (11.16-17) -

similarly limits and qualifies the power of Nature in a way Wordsworth would at one time certainly have doubted. Yet although Nature is suppressed here, man is not elevated, for there is as little of one as of the other in the poem, and an impression one is clearly left with is that man is weak and constantly liable to fall. One's conclusion, then, must be that the poem discusses man and Nature in such large terms, and with so little concrete detail, that its assertions can command little conviction.

This is despite the poem's structure, which shows a considerable improvement over that of the first of the "Evening Voluntaries". For a cautionary tale which inculcates a conventional Christian moral the poem is developed with some finesse. Thematically, it proposes that all things

should be regulated by the grace of God, and its construction shows a parallel taste for order and propriety. First there is the sequence of parallel clauses on the search for Nature (11.1-15), then the turning-point of 1.16 (a rhetorical question, as very often in these poems), and then a balancing discussion of the finding of grace. One must admire the symmetry of the plan. But, unfortunately, not only are the transitions mismanaged, also the evidence to support the plan is missing. As a result, neither Nature nor grace ever becomes more than just another big word, and the conclusion -

"Vain is the pleasure, a false calm the peace,
If He, through whom alone our conflicts cease,
Our virtuous hopes without relapse advance,
Come not to speed the Soul's deliverance" (11.26-9) -

simply fails to convince.

A poem whose language is so general and abstract is new to Wordsworth. John Wilson may be exaggerating when he says: "We love his poetry best when it deals with the common on-goings of life, and its ordinary affections. For it beautifies all dearest realities"[19] - but he has a point. One is used to Nature and particular detail in Wordsworth, and even in the later work one usually gets it, though generally in the form described by Jones: "in natural things there is a new bright meaning: beak and plume and paw are the elements of a living heraldry, closely related to Wordsworth's jewellery and architecture, and adding to these the more urgent quality of ceremonious action".[20] But here there are no individual details or physical facts at all; even the "bounded field" (1.25) is intended meta-

phorically, like the traditional properties of the "rosy garland" (1.4) and "Mammon's cave" (1.6). Personification, with a fondness for capitalized abstractions like "Pleasure", "Genius", "Nature", "Soul" and "Intellect" (11.3, 12, 17, 29, 30), merely adds to the air of pretentious vagueness. It is thus the language of the poem, its "lofty strains"[21] which finally spoils the effects by its almost total alienation from anything physical or first-hand - it is the most extreme example in the "Evening Voluntaries" of the movement away from Nature and fact, and into thought, which is characteristic of many of the late poems.

In his revisions Wordsworth attempts to adjust the balance of general and particular, but the poem is intrinsically so abstract that these can have little effect.

Capitals are removed from the words "Party-strife", "Slave", "Talent", "Great" and "Innocent" (11.2, 5, 8, 15), but enough remain to make the lightening fruitless. In 1.5, however, the replacement of -

"Not in the respite of Ambition's slave" -

by -

"Not in the breathing-times of that poor slave" -

removes a heavy personification and imports a hint of the physical in the not wholly metaphoric reference to "breathing". But in 11.7-11 the expansion of -

"Do lonely Nature's finer issues move
The soul to rapture or the heart to love" -

to -

"Is Nature felt, or can be; nor do words,

Which practised talent readily affords,

Prove that her hand has touched responsive chords;

Nor has her gentle beauty power to move

With genuine rapture and with fervent love" -

merely increases the vagueness it seems intended to disperse. In one case, however, the enlarging of -

"Alas, for them who crave impassioned strife

How few the lucid intervals of life;

When lonely Nature's finer issues hit

The brain's perceptions, for the heart are fit;

With meekness sensibilities abide

That do but rarely visit stony pride,

Full oft the powers of genius are confined

By chains which round herself she dares to wind" -

to -

"Not in the lucid intervals of life

That come but as a curse to party-strife;

Not in some hour when Pleasure with a sigh

Of languour puts his rosy garland by;

Not in the breathing-times of that poor slave

Who daily piles up wealth in Mammon's cave -

Is Nature felt, or can be; nor do words,

Which practised talent readily affords,

Prove that her hand has touched responsive chords;

Nor has her gentle beauty power to move

With genuine rapture and with fervent love
The soul of Genius, if he dare to take
Life's rule from passion craved for passion's sake;
Untaught that meakness is the cherished bent
Of all the truly great and all the innocent.
But who is innocent? By grace divine,
Not otherwise, O Nature! we are thine,
Through good and evil thine, in just degree
Of rational and manly sympathy" (11.1-19) -

does bring about a definite improvement. Here an obliqueness and haphazardness which are close to unintelligible are reduced to order by expansion and the filling-in of additional material, and the abstract thoughts become a little more appealing because of the clearer and more artful way they are expressed.

Wordsworth also tries to improve the eloquence and authority of his style. This he does mainly by adjustments to rhythm and phrasing. The revision of 1.24, for example, from -

"A respite only can those medicines yield" -

to -

"Care may be respited, but not repealed" -

replaces an awkward shambling movement by a bright and incisive antithetical rhythm which exactly suits the sense. In 1.15, too, the change from -

"Of minds unselfish and benevolent" -

to the smoother and weightier -

"Of all the truly great and all the innocent" -

provides a new authority suitable to the line's emphatic position at the end of a paragraph.

There are thus three general directions in the revision of the poem. Firstly, the poet tries, with little success, to adjust the balance of general and particular. Secondly, he expands one important passage in an attempt to convince his readers more successfully of what he is saying. Thirdly, he improves the phrasing and rhythm of a few lines. Taken collectively, these revisions hardly succeed: they try too ineffectually to save a poem whose conception and style from the start must have forced it to fail.

The third poem is "The Sun, that seemed so mildly to retire". It is a short and simple piece of work which begins with an evocation of "the still hour of thinking, feeling, loving" (1.6) and passes by means of the usual rhetorical address into a direct request for God's grace and, apparently, also his "admonitions" (1.20).

This poem shows very clearly a movement, typical of the "Evening Voluntaries", from physical smallness to metaphysical largeness, from external Nature to the spirit within. In both cases the poem moves away from facts and the real world into a kind of external, more general position from which the meaning of things can be seen more easily; as Jones expresses it, "there is convention/and the comprehension at remove peculiar to art".(22) Now Wordsworth seems to be receding from an even emblematic Nature into a world purely of the mind: the point of the poem

lies in the moral message that concludes it, not the pleasant pictures of Nature from which it is ostensibly, and often indirectly, derived. The poet here pays only lip-service to his own idea of the moral power of natural sights. Mrs. Moorman's comment, that Wordsworth "sought .... in sights and sounds, 'emblems' of moral and religious insights"(23) does not go far enough: here he tried to eliminate Nature altogether.

Another element of the poem, its silence and singlemindedness, contributes to this. Here, at "the still hour" (1.6), where even "the mighty sea" (1.11) is -

"Whispering how meek and gentle he can be" -

external things are so muted, and the emphasis given them so even, that one is forced to concentrate on the more lively (and longer) second section, which is of course the section dealing with general thoughts.

Perkins has explained the transition very well: "what one finds, often, is a quietly intimate manner that changes and becomes impersonal when Wordsworth states a moral message".(24) One need make only a couple of qualifications: the "intimate" manner is so quiet that any impression of a personality is absent, and the impersonality generally has a sober air of authority and importance.

As in the rest of the "Evening Voluntaries", the transition between these two tones has a significant effect upon construction. Generally, what happens at the same time as the move from quietness to impersonality is that the initial visual metaphor, the landscape, is translated into a meditative insight. Here, the sea which can be both calm and fierce is intended to parallel the kind but justly indignant God of the second paragraph.

As in the other poems in the sequence, a scene is set (with varying degrees of elaboration) and the poet then ponders its meaning; the technique is simply one of elucidation, with the major emphasis of course on what is discovered of general significance. As Perkins has said, again "description is much more objective: the love is aesthetic and detached";[25] Wordsworth's old obsessive delight in natural sights and sounds has gone, to be replaced by a quieter and more artistic and selective interest. This is clear even from small details in the verse: in the first paragraph, which sets the natural scene, there are references to "seem" (11.1, 8) and "dreams" (1.4), and it is only when dealing with general thoughts that the poetry reaches its full authority.

This lack of personal feeling and lessening of the value of physical fact, however, seem to stimulate some of the most elegant of the later verse: here the poet's control of the devices of style is surer than ever. The polish and grace of the poetry are immediately obvious, and the power of phrase-making is striking. It would be difficult, for example, to parallel the ease and traditional beauty of language of -

"Comes that low sound from breezes rustling o'er
The grass-crowned headland that conceals the shore?" (11.9-10) -

from Wordsworth's earlier work. The rich full rhythm, too, which perfectly suits the meditative style of the verse, is handled with extreme care -

"Silent, and stedfast as the vaulted sky,
The boundless plain of waters seems to lie" (11.7-8).

For almost the first time Wordsworth uses words of temporal power, like "vaulted" (1.7) and "crowned" (1.10) to describe Nature. This reinforces

what has already been said about the themes of these poems by seeming to imply that Nature needs this kind of external, conventional support. There is also a great deal of abstract language, used to convey the general ideas the poet is discussing.

The revisions again reinforce the style of the poem: Perkins has said, "it is the voice of a tradition, and will be enjoyed for the grace with which it assumes the appropriate habits".(26)

As in the other poems, Wordsworth adjusts the balance of the general and particular in an attempt to secure what Josephine Miles has called "the explicit association of natural particularity with general truth in a meditative pentameter and a vocabulary of pleasure".(27) Firstly, the poem is set at a particular time and in a particular place: the 1835 version has no title, but by 1850 its physical setting is fully described as "On a High Part of the Coast of Cumberland, Easter Sunday, April 7th. The Author's Sixty-Third Birthday". Moving in the opposite direction, as if to balance the title, the fairly intimate and physical -

"Father, who when thy justice must rebuke
The sinner, dost put off thy gracious look,
And execute thy purpose like the flood" (11.13-15) -

becomes the more metaphysical and generalized -

"Thou Power supreme! who, arming to rebuke
Offenders, dost put off the gracious look,
And clothe thyself with terrors like the flood".

Just the right blend of abstraction and the feeling of solidity and support sometimes given by metaphor is achieved by the inclusion of -

"Whate'er the path these mortal feet may trace,
Breathe through my soul the blessing of thy grace,
Glad, through a perfect love, a faith sincere,
Drawn from the wisdom that begins with fear" (11.21-24).

There have also been improvements in style in all of these revisions. As is usual in Wordsworth, the language becomes more poetically distinguished and richer in metaphor and traditional content; as Jones says, "the ... conventional can thus approach the command of style proper to divinity".(28) In 1.7, for example, the pedantic "concave sky" becomes the more evocative and clearer "vaulted sky". In 1.8 the mediocre "illimitable ocean" becomes the resounding and reminiscent "boundless plain of waters". In 1.10, the best example of all, the dull and heavy -
"The Cliff high raised above the unseen shore?" -
is changed to the brilliant -
"The grass-crowned headland that conceals the shore?"

Wordsworth's emendations to these poems, in concentrating on balancing the general and the particular, providing detail to support moralistic conclusions, harmonising mood, and increasing the Augustan full rhythm and neat phrasing of the style, seem to draw him closer to the influences discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and go a long way to justify Harper's comment that some of his works "represent the fine flower of English literary culture in the eighteenth century".(29)

NOTES AND REFERENCES

(1) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford; p.649.

(2) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M. Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.494.

(3) Reprinted in the notes to the poems.

(4) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M. Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.306.

(5) "Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity"; D.Perkins; 1964; Cambridge, Mass.; p.260.

(6) "The Prose Works of William Wordsworth", vol.II; ed. A.B.Grosart; 1876; London; pp.132/3.

(7) Ibid.; p.118.

(8) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M. Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.496.

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(10) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford; p.668.

(11) Ibid.; p.708.

(12) Ibid.; pp.732, 733.

(13) "The Egotistical Sublime"; J. Jones; 1954; London; p.173.

(14) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M. Moorman; 1965; Oxford; 494.

(15) Ibid.; p.494.

(16) "Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity"; D. Perkins; 1964; Cambridge, Mas.; pp.236-7.

(17) "The Quarterly Review", no.107; July, 1835; London; p.184.

(18) Ibid.; p.184.

(19) "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine", no.235, vol.37; May, 1835; Edinburgh; p.718.

(20) "The Egotistical Sublime"; J. Jones; 1954; London; p.178.

(21) "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine", no.235, vol.37; May, 1835; Edinburgh; p.712.

(22) "The Egotistical Sublime"; J. Jones; 1954; London; p.181.

(23) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M. Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.496.

(24) "Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity"; D.Perkins; 1964; Cambridge, Mass.; p.236.

(25) Ibid.; p.231.

(26) Ibid.; p.230.

(27) "Eras and Modes in English Poetry"; J. Miles; 1957; Cambridge; p.141.

(28) "The Egotistical Sublime"; J. Jones; 1954; London; p.179.

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THE IDYLLIA OF CHARACTERS, MANNERS AND SENTIMENTS

Wordsworth's fourth mould of poetry, the idyllium, is divided into two main sections. The first, "descriptive chiefly of the processes and appearances of external nature",(1) has already been discussed. This chapter concerns the second, dealing with "characters, manners and sentiments".(2) There are eleven poems of this type in the "Yarrow Revisited" volume, and though they are varied in form, they have many similarities of subject and approach.

In length, they range from the extreme shortness of "If this great world of Joy and Pain" to the elaborate "St.Bees", which has seventeen stanzas of nine lines apiece. In style too the poems vary a great deal, from the direct simplicity of "The Labourer's Noon-Day Hymn" to the complex traditional rhetoric of "Humanity".

But Wordsworth placed many of these poems finally in his category of "Poems of Sentiment and Reflection", and their generality and moral concern group them firmly together and far outweigh their differences of form. Most arise from some incident in the poet's life - the sight of a "Highland Broach", perhaps, or "a Portrait from the Pencil of F.Stone" - but the incident is used only as a means of leading to general reflection. In "A Jewish Family", for instance, the opening invocation of the "Genius of Raphael" (1.1) and the abstract idealized description -

"Refined, as with intent to show
The holiness within .... " (11.27-8) -

prevent one's paying much attention to what actually happened: it is the

quality of God's "mysterious safeguard" (1.41) which is defined instead, Even the themes of these poems are remote. Nature, and its effect of leading man to God, is almost totally absent, and there is none of the description of natural sights and sounds one finds everywhere else in Wordsworth. Instead art and buildings and history provide the focal points, and produce a kind of verse more public and intellectual than the rest of the later work. A broach, a work of art, is used to describe a historical change and hold a poem together. The college and church of St.Bees provide the starting-points for a defence of tradition and an attack on the deficiencies of contemporary society.

These poems are thus more social than before; unlike most of the idyllia of external Nature, other people and historical events are introduced; the range is much wider and freer. The poet is no longer so impersonal, but often speaks, teaches, and appeals directly, as in some of the early poems. "Loving and Liking", for instance, is a particularly easy and unselfconscious conversational poem addressed to a small child. Even emotion, so muted in the rest of the "Yarrow Revisited" volume, becomes open and unashamed. Here, when he is dealing with contemporary topics, Wordsworth is committed, and he does not mind making this clear to his readers.

The style, too, is often agitated and declamatory - as in "The Warning" - very far removed from the sedate apathetic Wordsworth of convention. But this latter picture does have a certain amount of truth, for the lessons Wordsworth is teaching so emphatically are conservative and ardently Christian. It is in these poems that he shows most clearly

the problems that obsessed him in his old age. "The Highland Broach" shows his reverence for tradition and for a kind of Utopia which he sees always in the past. The "Incident at Bruges" reveals the obverse of his admiration for the High Church: a narrow pseudo-patriotic distaste for Catholicism. "The Warning" tells another typical late-Wordsworthian tale of man's frailty and utter dependence on the goodness and grace of God.

What all of these poems do, in fact, is to define and illustrate correct moral attitudes by reference to the twin standards of social conservatism and religious orthodoxy. Wordsworth still believes in the freedom of man, but here he sees restraint and submission as its most suitable guides. In all of these poems, what the poet recommends is Christian doctrine, presented so soberly and authoritatively that the loss of personal initiative it involves - moments of ecstasy, "spots of time" - goes almost unnoticed. The strength of Wordsworth's conviction, and the rhetorical tactics he uses, force us to believe in the staid and commonplace truths he is telling; as Brooks has said, in a different context, "All the tricks of rhetoric are skilfully employed to enforce very successfully a point which a modern reader is disposed to resist and resent".(3)

The poets who seem to have influenced Wordsworth when he was writing these poems are all notable for the "moral ardour"(4) of their work: they discuss general themes, and the state of society, with an excited seriousness which is shared by, say, "St.Bees" or "Humanity". The examples of the idyllium of characters, manners and sentiments which the poet himself gives are Shenstone's "The Schoolmistress" and Burns' "The Cotter's Saturday Night" and "The Twa Dogs".(5)

"The Schoolmistress" is one of Shenstone's "Moral Pieces" and presents an amusing, whimsical picture of village life from the viewpoint of its "dame". It is not a deeply serious poem, as its hyperbole and circumlocution make clear; the schoolchildren, for example -

"Their books of stature small they take in hand,
Which with pellucid horn secured are,
To save from fingers wet the letters fair" (11.156-8).

But the generality of the description, and the emphasis on customs and habits, show that it is not merely humorous either. Shenstone's more abstract purpose comes out through the opposition of the schoolchildren gambolling on their "patch so green" (1.37) to "Learning's little tenement" (1.43) where the schoolmistress sits -

"Who boasts unruly brats with birch to tame" (1.14).

The idea behind the work is, in fact, the submission of Nature to Reason, and the same idea lies at the bottom of these Wordsworth poems. In "Humanity" Wordsworth sees man's soberest faculties, "the Power ... which thinks and feels" (1.94), endangered by the lawless grasping of the power struggle, and recommends that -

" .... impetuous minds
By discipline endeavour to grow meek" (11.52-3).

In other words, he recommends the same self-restraint and "strict obedience" (1.38) that the schoolmistress represents. From Shenstone, then, Wordsworth probably drew support for what Perkins calls his "fancy guided, controlled, corrected and sometimes blocked by a prior acceptance of Christian doctrine".(6)

From Burns Wordsworth learned something very different. Of his poetry generally, he said: "in all this, though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect",(7) and it is in this considered and thoughtful approach, to contemporary problems especially, that the two poets are most alike. "The Twa Dogs", for instance, treats the social scene very vividly, but in a wide moral context: here a humorous dialogue on the deficiencies of mankind from a dog's point of view also shows the poet as a conscience for society. It is a poem about people together - "What man has made of man"(8) - and much of its power comes from its general perspective and attempt at a balanced justice. "Balance" cannot fairly be claimed for these poems of Wordsworth, but at least the wideness of viewpoint, enriched by a sense of history, is always there. "The Highland Broach", for example, retells the history of Scotland in general terms, emphasizing the constant movements of growth and decay -

"Lo! busy towns spring up, on coasts
Thronged yesterday by airy ghosts" (11.73-4) -

and paying more attention to customs and social habits than is usual in Wordsworth. "The Cotter's Saturday Night", too, presents a picture of society and its codes: religious and national references, and apostrophes on economic matters, ensure that this simple story of a Saturday night gathering is interpreted in a universal way. Like "Loving and Liking, it shows the reader the right path to take in life: like all these poems, it praises the principles on which goodness (and, incidentally, happiness) is based. The similarities between these two poems of Burns and Wordsworth's

idyllia of characters, manners and sentiments are thus clear: the moral concern, the width of approach, the social themes, even at times the exhortatory style, are common to both groups. That Burns was an important influence on Wordsworth cannot, of course, be doubted: the latter's many references in his letters, as well as the use of "The Twa Dogs" and "The Cotter's Saturday Night" in his essay "Of Poetry as Observation and Description" (1815), prove this conclusively.

Cowper too is a writer to whom Wordsworth owes a good deal. In a letter of December 1814 Burns and Cowper are especially praised,(9) and in "Humanity" a line from "The Task"(10) is quoted as the kingpin of the poet's argument. Even the titles of Cowper's poems - "Charity", "Tirocinium, or A Review of Schools" - show how attracted he was to general themes. This is emphasized still more when one considers their subjects and aims. "The Task", for instance, is described by Allan Cunningham: "it treats, in a masterly way, of all that affects us here, or influences us hereafter; ... it pleads the cause of the poor and the desolate in the presence of the rich; admonishes the rich of their duty to their country, their cotters, and their God; takes the senate to task; shakes the scourge of undying verse over the pulpit; holds a mirror before the profligacy of cities till they shudder at their own shadow, and exhibits to the hills and dales of the country an image of the follies of their sons and daughters."(11) This is a comprehensive specification, and it is completed in "Tirocinium" by an attack on "the want of discipline, and the scandalous inattention to morals, that obtain in public schools."(12)

The concern for education, in the broadest sense, and for the moral well-being of society, is found everywhere in these poems of

Wordsworth as well as in Cowper. "A Jewish Family", for example, hints at Cowper's class inequality, and "The Labourer's Noon-day Hymn" demands recognition of God's goodness:

"Help with thy grace, through life's short day,
Our upward and our downward way;
And glorify for us the west,
Where we shall sink to final rest" (11.29-32).

Even in style Wordsworth seems indebted to Cowper: both the simplicity and charm of, say, the "Incident at Bruges" and the complex oratory of "Humanity" can be found in "The Task". The ease and grace of -

"There is in souls a sympathy with sounds,
And as the mind is pitch'd the ear is pleas'd,
With melting airs or martial, brisk or grave;
Some chord in unison with what we hear
Is touch'd within us, and the heart replies" (11.1-5, part vi) -

is very like Wordsworth's idyllic moods, just as -

"Strange! that a creature rational, and cast
In human mould, should brutalize by choice
His nature; and, though capable of arts,
By which the world might profit, and himself,
Self banish'd from society, prefer
Such squalid sloth to honourable toil!" (11.574-9, part i) -

parallels his indignant social tone.

Wordsworth's letters suggest four more writers who probably influenced him in these poems. In a letter to Lady Beaumont written on

20th November, 1811, Daniel's epistle "To Lady Margaret, Countess of Cumberland" is praised for its "strain of meditative morality more dignified and affecting than anything of the kind".(13) It is exactly this "affecting ... morality", without the slowness and remoteness of meditation, that Wordsworth tries to achieve in these poems. Few have anything of Daniel's medium style, which can be both direct and solemn, as in -

"Knowing the heart of man is set to be
The centre of this world, about the which
These revolutions of disturbances
Still roule" (11.92-5) -

but at least the serious care for man's ethical and religious wellbeing, and the gravity and responsibility, are often shared.

Another letter, of 1828, refers to Collins' "On the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland", and pays a great deal of attention to its variant readings.(14) This is an elegant and earnest poem in the classical manner, bearing no obvious relation to any of the idyllia on general social themes.

In 1829 Wordsworth praised Southey's "moral ardour" in a letter to George Huntly Gordon.(15) This is clearest in his epics, which have a great deal of noble sentiment and thundering rhetoric, duly reproduced, in a minor key, in lines like the following from "Humanity" -

"Shall man assume a property in man?
Lay on the moral will a withering ban?" (11.79-80).

One of Wordsworth's models for whom there is no documentary evidence, though his influence is pervasive, is Coleridge. In 1794,

1796 and 1798 respectively he had written "Religious Musings", "The Destiny of Nations" and "France: an Ode", which are stylistically and thematically very close to, say, "St.Bees", "Humanity" and "Lines suggested by a Portrait from the Pencil of F. Stone". "France", for example, begins with a passionate apostrophe -

"Ye Clouds! that far above me float and pause,
Whose pathless march no mortal may control!
Ye Ocean-Waves! that, wheresoe'er ye roll,
Yield homage only to eternal laws!" (11.1-4) -

and continues with an extensive appraisal of liberty and the forces menacing it. Coleridge's conclusion, like Wordsworth's in "Humanity", is that man can only be truly free when he is "pure, and inflamed with the love and adoration of God".(16) The style of the two poems is similar, too: the invocations, the alliteration, the sonorous rhythm, the language charged with religious and emotional overtones, even the profuse and emphatic punctuation are alike. Only the more muted tone and greater emphasis on control and reason in "Humanity" show the effect of Wordsworth's age against Coleridge's youth.

These influences on Wordsworth illustrate, in spite of their diversity, a couple of comments which critics have made.

The first is from Mrs. Moorman: "Nothing could kill his love of liberty or his compassion for humanity, but he would express them only within the framework of a Conservative social order from which he came to think it both dangerous and wrong to depart".(17) All of the poems I have discussed, with the possible exception only of Coleridge's, have been attacking contemporary abuses from a standpoint of past excellence: all

are essentially conservative, even reactionary, and all emphasize the "Minimizing of the present"[18] Perkins has found in the later poems of Wordsworth. They all share, too, his love of a liberty qualified and enriched by strict Christian orthodoxy (and here Coleridge is not an exception).

The second is from Harper: "There came to him with passing years a deepening of conviction, which gave him increasing authority on many subjects."[19] The poems he was reading or thinking about when writing his own idyllia of characters, manners and sentiments can only have reinforced his feelings, by repeated effect of example, and shown him the styles and techniques that could convey his ideas most emphatically.

The first of the poems to be discussed in detail is "A Jewish Family". This is an apparently simple short travel-piece in which Wordsworth records his impressions of a "poor family" (1.8) whose members are handsome despite the hardships they have to undergo. It was written in 1828, during a tour of the Rhine with Coleridge and Dora Wordsworth, and was the result of seeing the actual family described in the poem.

The theme is conventional and can be described simply as -

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform".[20]

But if the meaning is simple, the technique is not: here Wordsworth's subtlety and rhetorical skill are displayed to the full.

For what this poem does is to form a picture, something of mainly aesthetic appeal, out of a personal experience. Of course, all art must do this anyway, but one is used to Wordsworth's being more covert

about it: most of his poems, even, say, "The Egyptian Maid", are less arranged and formulated than this. Here the details drawn from experience are quickly blotted out by the generality of the language and the idealization of the material. There is much talk of "spirit" (l.10) "inspiration" (l.14) and "image" (l.13); the boy is -

"Refined, as with intent to show
The holiness within" (11.27-8) -

the girls, -

" .... still and sweet
As flowers, stand side by side" (11.33-4).

The effect is of a religious picture as described by a nineteenth-century critic like John Wilson, who often makes works of art sound like philosophical commentaries.

As in some of the "Evening Voluntaries", too, everything is motionless, remote and full of meaning. There is a movement away from life into art and generality. Place and time, in spite of the subtitle, are unimportant. Wordsworth treats circumstances very roughly to get to what interests him: the general theme, the order and perfection that can be achieved in the idealized world created by his art. It is a good example of what Perkins has described as his "quest for permanence"(21) through the transformation of reality into art. This poem, in fact, which superficially seems to be about social abuses, is instead turned by the poet's technique into a work of largely aesthetic, as against moral, appeal.

But this is done very carefully and gradually. For one thing, both the title of the poem and its situation in the "Yarrow Revisited"

volume lead one to expect a simple travel-poem, ended perhaps by a few general reflections. This makes the abstraction and artfulness of the poem less obvious than they would otherwise have been. For another thing, the arrangement of the sections, and the control of transitions, is extremely skilful. The initial reference to Raphael, which already hints at the idealization to follow, is immediately countered by a clear description of the setting and characters. Then these characters are elaborated into an icon, conveyed in remote and spiritual terms. Finally, the significance of the icon is explained in the last stanza, slightly set off from the others by its air of synopsis. This type of structure is found everywhere in the later Wordsworth: it makes an important contribution to the remoteness and the gradual retreat from reality one finds there. For, of course, no matter how subtle the construction and brilliant the language, the overall direction of the poems must always be fairly clear.

And the language is brilliant: clear, simple and direct -

"Two lovely sisters, still and sweet
As flowers, stand side by side;
Their soul-subduing looks might cheat
The Christian of his pride" (11.33-6) -

it deliberately puts the reader off his guard. Its extreme tact and inconspicuousness bely the elaborate process it is charting: only its insubstantiality betrays its true direction and purpose.

Finally, in spite of context, and skill of construction and style, it is this generality and idealization which cut away its social message and local relevance. Here Wordsworth's reason, and desire for the absolute

control of reality, have spoiled both the meaning and the balance of the poem: the situation does not convince, it has been thought about too much and felt too little - exegesis has taken the place of description. Direct sensuous or emotional appeal is simply missing.

Yet, judging from the revisions to the poem, Wordsworth seems not to have noticed the danger. Most of the changes move away from simplicity and immediacy of impact in the direction of the static and oblique. In the first versions of the poem the material is rarefied enough, and already too remote to have much moral or emotional force: by 1850 persistent abstraction hss become its most obvious quality. Here, for once, is an example of Wordsworth's revisions marring, rather than improving, a poem.

One of the best instances is 11.13-14, altered from -

"A dawning, too, of this sweet Boy
Might dream or vision give" -

to -

"An image,too, of that sweet Boy
Thy inspirations give".

The perspective here is subtly changed by the use of the distancing "that" instead of "this"; the language too becomes more abstract and spiritual - "image", for example, replaces the admittedly slight physical suggestion of "dawning". The same movement from actual to spiritual, the same distancing of effect, can be seen even better in 11.33-5.

These are revised from -

"Two elder Innocents, as sweet
Stand gazing side by side,

Fair creatures in this lone retreat
By happy chance espied" -
to -
"Two lovely Sisters, still and sweet
As flowers, stand side by side;
Their soul-subduing looks might cheat
The Christian of his pride".

Here a simple direct statement is turned into something more figurative and abstract, a little tableau complete with its explanation of moral significance.

The revisions of this poem, then, can be said only to worsen Wordsworth's initial mistake of taste. In the other poems, fortunately, his judgement is surer, and his emendations are generally improvements over his first thoughts.

The next poem, "Humanity", is very different from "A Jewish Family", It was written in 1829, during a tour of Ireland, where the parlous condition of the people may well have given Wordsworth the impetus for composition. It originally formed a single poem with "Liberty", which is similar in theme and style.

A feeling of strong personal involvement is clear throughout the poem, from the urgent rhetoric of the first section to the more epigrammatic and calmer conclusion. The theme of liberty, of man's cruel slavery to external forces, calls into play at its most forceful all of Wordsworth's "magnanimous idealism".(22) The passivity of many of the "Evening Voluntaries" is replaced by an eager concern, a dramatic involvement, as

Wordsworth makes his highly personal attack on the "weight of slavish toil" (1.86) -

"Shall man assume a property in man?
Lay on the moral will a withering ban?" (11.79-80).

The effect of this kind of involvement is to make Wordsworth rather lose his head. The complex traditional style and mythological references ensure a suitable richness of texture, as always, but here they are exaggerated into lurid melodrama -

""Slaves cannot breathe in England" - yet that boast
Is but a mockery! when from coast to coast
Though fettered slave be none, her floors and soil
Groan underneath a weight of slavish toil" (11.83-6).

Wordsworth's "sincerity", the strength of his personal feeling, is undeniable here, but unfortunately his passion is imperfectly controlled and only sketchily ordered into an objective form.

The construction of the poem illustrates this very clearly. There is repetition rather than development: illustration and moral, particular and general, are hopelessly confused. The whole of the first paragraph, for instance, presents a morass of examples, illogically arranged and with no evident focal point, to show how -

" .... Glorious is the blending
Of right affections climbing or descending
Along a scale of light and life, with cares
Alternate .... " (11.27-30).

The structure of the poem, as a result, lacks balance and clarity. The

illustrations are too long and complicated; the tone is so fervent that there can be few variations of emphasis: even the paragraphing merely adds to the confusion. Wordsworth's feelings get the better of him to such an extent that his efforts seem largely unconsidered, the requirements of form and communication are disregarded, and the adaptation of means to an end is nominal.

Even in style, about which he was always most careful, Wordsworth's impatience makes itself felt. Mrs. Moorman talks of "the graceful classical manner of "Humanity""[23] but except in the third paragraph ease and grace are notably absent. Coleridge's "Verulamian power and majesty"[24] is a far juster description. The emphatic personifications of "Art" (1.19), "People" (1.90), "Labour" (1.93), the Latinate language, the complex syntax of -

"What though the Accused, upon his own appeal
To righteous Gods when man has ceased to feel,
Or at a doubting Judge's stern command,
Before the STONE OF POWER no longer stand" (11.1-4) -

and the use of traditional literary properties all support Coleridge's comment as against Mrs. Moorman's. The style, then, is elaborate and highly-wrought, apparently the objective style of poetic convention. But in Wordsworth's hands it becomes something very different. The pressure of his personal feelings pushes it into "rhetoric": without the support of a firm and logical structure it becomes startling and intensely personal. As Lyon has said of "The Excursion": "rhetoric replaces poetry, the result of which is diffuseness and sonorous prolixity".[25]

However, unsuccessful though it is, the poem at least proves Perkins' point that, for Wordsworth in his later years, "some committments must be put before art",[26] and here his human sympathy is felt, and at times more or less conveyed in passionate detail, rather than thought away into vague abstraction as in "A Jewish Family".

The revisions try to make the poem more intelligible and easier to follow, but since it is the structure and style as a whole which are at fault, anything less than a total recasting could hardly hope to succeed. But at least Wordsworth sees his mistake here, and does something to correct it.

The insertion of 11.19-20, for example -

"Enraptured Art draws from those sacred springs
Streams that reflect the poetry of things!" -

connects more closely the first and second halves of the first paragraph, and clarifies the interpretative relationship between them. The same thing happens in 11.47-8 -

"But fixing by immutable decrees
Seedtime and harvest for his purposes!".

Here a transition is made clearer and more explicit than before, and, as in 11.19-20, the texture of the passage is also enriched by traditional metaphor. A similar process of simplification accounts for the moving of -

"Not from his fellows only man may learn
Rights to compare and duties to discern!
All creatures and all objects, in degree,
Are friends and patrons of humanity" -

from the beginning of the poem, where it formed a motto, to 11.101-4. In this position they are far more convincing: they are backed up even by the sheer physical length of what has gone before, and in any case they fit in very well with the calmer, more generalized air of this last paragraph.

This smoothing out of transitions and greater explicitness in arrangement is paralleled in the language. Meaning is expressed more simply and composedly, and many small obscurities are removed. The awkwardness of 11.16-7, for instance -

"Their voice ascends symbolical of praise -
Of hymns which blessed spirits make and hear" -

is replaced by the more intelligible -

"their voices mount symbolical of praise -
To mix with hymns that spirits make and hear".

This clarification is even more evident in 11.40-1, altered from -

"They) with untired humility forbore
The ready service of the wings they wore" -

to -

"(They) with untired humility forbore
To speed their errand by the wings they wore".

In these lines, implication is removed in favour of direct statement, and the sense flows more easily as a result.

Yet this greater explicitness does not involve any impoverishing of the style. Lines 1-8, for example, are expanded from -

"What though dislodged by purer faith, no more

White-vested Priests the hallowed Oak adore
Nor Seer nor Judge consult the Stone of Power!" -

to -

"What though the Accused, upon his own appeal
To righteous Gods when man has ceased to feel,
Or at a doubting Judge's stern command,
Before the STONE OF POWER no longer stand -
To take his sentence from the balanced Block,
As, at his touch, it rocks, or seems to rock;
Though, in the depths of sunless groves, no more
The Druid-priest the hallowed Oak adore".

The fuller detail, the increased historical colouring, the finer phrasing ("sunless groves"), and the more assured rhythm all improve the style of the passage, and the same can be said for a number of the other revisions that have been discussed.

These revisions show that Wordsworth did realize the deficiencies of "Humanity", and tried to make the poem clearer and more explicit by means of many small adjustments. But what he did not do, unfortunately, was to make any of the large-scale changes which could have reduced the incoherence of this work to a decent orderliness and control.

"St.Bees", the last poem to be discussed here, is better arranged than either "A Jewish Family" or "Humanity". It is a meditation on religious history and tradition, strengthened by a feeling for social abuses, and carefully balancing the subjective and objective elements in its makeup. It was written during a tour in 1833, off the coast of

Cumberland, in response to the sight of St.Bees' Heads, which has a long association with religious fervour.

This poem provides convincing evidence for a comment by Myers: "these later poems of Wordsworth's embody .... rather the stately tradition of a great Church than the pangs and aspirations of a holy soul".(27) F.W.Faber, who supported the Oxford Movement, praised the poem's "affectionate reverence for the catholic past, ... humble consciousness of a loss sustained to ourselves" (i.e. the Reformation).(28) Clearly, no matter how he may have disliked Roman Catholic customs, Wordsworth felt a certain sympathy for the development of their church. He may, of course, have felt too that only with a more rigid discipline could the Church survive. That this was vital to him is obvious from everything he wrote: as Harper has said, "Religion ... was from the beginning, and continued to be always, the subject of his song".(29)

Connected with the Christianity of the poem is a theme of social protest, more quietly and effectively expressed than in "Humanity". Economic history, a description of life happily centred on the Church, is given contemporary relevance:

" .... Around those Churches, gathered Towns
Safe from the feudal Castle's haughty frowns;
Peaceful abodes, where Justice might uphold
Her scales with even hand .... " (11.127-8).

The application of this to -

"Alas! The Genius of our age, from Schools
Less humble, draws her lessons, aims and rules" (11.154-5) -

is evident, though the comparison is only implicit in the poem. The fineness of these connections is, however, far from obscure: a firm and well controlled structure sees to that.

The richness of effect derives partly from the style, but the air of authority, the power of general statement and conviction, come from the design of the poem as a whole. This is centred securely on the place St.Bees and the movement of religious history: it combines stability with movement in a skilful and efficient way. The poem also gains a good deal from its well organized progression: here the subject Wordsworth is treating is inherently arranged, so that his sense of construction, which is often weak in his longer poems, is not overstrained. There is, too, a proper narrative: the properties can be naturalistic and not so generalized and emblematic as before - a pilgrim or an architect can really be what he seems. Meaning is thus held down more firmly to the physical and actual, and the balance of general and particular can be adjusted precisely.

This new balance is also clear from the style. It is old-style rhetoric like that of "Humanity", using personification, complex syntax, the usual neat phrasing and conventional metaphor. But its tone is different. Instead of the stately, measured tone one might expect, traditional and objective, one finds all the old formulae revivified by personal feeling. The style of the last two stanzas, for instance, could hardly be more conventional, yet the poet's own feelings of loss and sorrow are expressed very clearly too. This is done partly through rhythm and partly through a masterfully emphatic handling of the couplet, but most of all through the subtle andbrilliant choice of words (and even the use of capitals).

In this poem, then, one finds a resolution of the imbalances which marred "A Jewish Family" and "Humanity": the objectivity of the one is fused with the subjectivity of the other to produce an unforced relationship of personal feeling and public form.

Most of the many revisions of this poem are of comparatively small details of style: the form is improved in tiny ways, but the adjustments do not generally have an important effect.

One large exception to this are the emendations which put extra emphasis on Christianity and the poem's spiritual tone. In 11.56-61, for example, the manuscript's -

"When her sweet Voice, that instrument of love,
Had long held concord in the Quires above
Her altars sank, crushed by an impious hand,
And pagan rites once more defiled the land,
But might not kill her memory: her good deeds
Flourished no longer, but had scattered seeds
That in the ground lay patient .... " -

becomes -

"When her sweet Voice, that instrument of love,
Was glorified, and took its place above
The silent stars, among the angelic quire,
Her chantry blazed with sacrilegious fire,
And perished utterly; but her good deeds
Had sown the spot, that witnessed them, with seeds
Which lay in earth expectant .... ".

The early version forcefully conveys the power of paganism and the feeling of sacrilege, the later has more Christian imagery, and places the emphasis more firmly on "her sweet Voice" than before. The same spirituality and idealistic aspiration are reinforced by the emendation of -

"Uplift our hearts for blissful destinies" (1.125) -

to -

"Aspire to more than earthly destinies."

The reasons for this greater emphasis on Christianity are clear: since religion means so much to Wordsworth, he wants to insist on its power and remove any doubts as to its importance.

These revisions also generally improve the style of the poem, and this of course too Wordsworth does constantly. The language, for example, becomes more supple and suggestive: the clumsy and undistinguished -

"How did the mountain echoes with glad choice
Of syllables, take up the Brethren's voice" (11.100-1) -

is changed to -

"How did the cliffs and echoing hills rejoice
What time the Benedictine Brethren's voice".

The word-order becomes clearer and more natural, and the occasional obscurity and abruptness of the early versions are removed. This is especially so in the emendation of the contorted -

"She sinks, Idolatress of formal skill,
In her own systems God's eternal will" (11.158-9) -

to the simpler and more incisive -

"Boastful Idolatress of formal skill,

She in her own would merge the eternal will".

Sometimes, too, Wordsworth improves the dramatic point of his lines. In 1.34 a simple, direct statement -

"Kneeling in prayer that storm she did appease" -

becomes the more emphatic -

"She knelt in prayer - the waves their wrath appease".

Similarly, the alteration of 11.136-9 from -

"Mountains of Caupland what delight was yours
When plough invaded at your feet the moors.
When hatchets thinned the forests, and the grange
Appeared where wolf and bear were used to range?" -

to -

"Who with the ploughshare clove the barren moors,
And to green meadows changed the swampy shores?
Thinned the rank woods; and for the cheerful grange
Made room where wolf and bear were used to range?" -

varies the length of the sentence-units and gives a feeling of oratory and emotion, as well as improving the style.

Finally, as is usual in all these later poems, the transitions are clarified. In 11.6-7, for example, the rather incoherent and abrupt -

"That mid smooth pathway in a garden blows
For easy-minded men itself at ease" -

is revised to -

"Whose proffered beauty in safe shelter blows
'Mid a trim garden's summer luxuries" -

and this certainly provides an easier movement to the last two lines of the stanza.

The revisions in this poem are thus mainly of details: the style and transitions are improved, and the technique becomes clearer and more varied. The conception of the poem is left unchanged, and only small faults of execution are removed.

The poems that have been discussed, and the revisions of them, throw light on a number of remarks by Wordsworth and his critics.

Firstly, there is the comment by "The Quarterly Review" on the "Yarrow Revisited" volume: "There will be no sermons printed in England this year so soul-subduing as many of these poems".(30) That is very apt for these poems, for writing about characters, manners and sentiments seems to make Wordsworth both serious and melancholy. Here, in several ways, he feels religion to be menaced, and this stimulates deeply-felt denunciations; the state of society, too, which he judges harshly and from the standpoint of the past, is a cause for profound concern. These poems, then, show the poet at his most committed, if not always at his best poetically: they also show what he felt moved about, and for what reasons.

But they also throw light on his poetic practice. In the "Essay on Epitaphs", he wrote that he believed "that the excellence of writing, whether in prose or verse, consists in a conjunction of Reason and Passion, a conjunction which must be of necessity benign",(31) and in a letter of May 1833, to Mrs. Rawson, that "Poetry, if good for anything, must appeal forcibly to the imagination and the feelings; but what, at this period, we want above everything, is patient examination and sober

judgement."[32] These poems show Wordsworth struggling to secure the proper balance between Reason and Passion, public form and private feeling. In "A Jewish Family" the judgement and reason are overexerted, and the result is bloodless abstraction. In "Humanity" strong personal emotions prevent the poem from becoming either coherent or considered. It is only in "St.Bees" that an equipoise is reached, and judgement and feeling are fused into a poem whose Passion appeals at the same time that its Reason convinces.

At first sight, the part of revision in all this appears slight. But, with the exception of "A Jewish Family", the revisions improve the poems, adjust their movement and extend their subtlety and power of communication, so as to help secure the balance of elements the poet is aiming for. In "Humanity", for instance, most of the revisions improve the objective qualities of the poem, though they do not go far enough. In "St.Bees", since the construction already ensures a fair arrangement of the objective and subjective elements, the revisions concentrate merely on improving the poem's texture. So one can say that the revisions do, in fact, assist in the movement towards balance that the poems are making, and that they do this partly by compensating for deficiencies or excesses of spirit, and partly simply by making the poems better - improving the style, clearing up obscurity and weak transitions, and generally making rhetoric more pointed and meaning more intelligible.

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(4) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 2939; Oxford; p.380.

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(6) "Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity"; D.Perkins; 1964; Cambridge, Mass.; ch.IX.

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(8) W. Wordsworth: "Lines Written in Early Spring", 1.24.

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(10) "The Task", part ii.1.40.

(11) Quoted in "Alibone's Dictionary of English Literature"; S.A. Allibone; 1892; London; p.440.

(12) Quoted in the "Life of Cowper" in "The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper"; Chalmers; 1810; London; p.593.

(13) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1937; Oxford; p.477.

(14) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; pp.313-6.

(15) Ibid.; p.380.

(16) Coleridge, S.T.: "France: an Ode"; "Argument" for fifth stanza.

(17) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M.Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.292.

(18) "The Quest for Permanence"; D.Perkins; 1959; Cambridge, Mass.; p.98.

(19) "William Wordsworth: his Life, Works and Influence"; G.M.Harper; 1929; London; p.457.

(20) Cowper, W.: "Olney Hymns", 33.

(21) "The Quest for Permanence"; D.Perkins; 1959; Cambridge, Mass.; passim.

(22) "Wordsworth: Centenary Studies Presented at Cornell and Princeton Universities"; ed. G.T. Dunklin; 1951; Princeton; p.21.

(23) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M.Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.459.

(24) Quoted in "William Wordsworth: his Life, Works and Influence"; G.M.Harper; 1929; London; p.385.

(25) "" The Excursion" - A Study"; J.S.Lyon; 1950; New Haven; p.122.

(26) "Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity"; D.Perkins; 1964; Cambridge, Mass.; p.25.

(27) "Wordsworth"; F.W.H.Myers; 1929; London; p.157.

(28) In a note on the poem in "The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth" vol.V; ed. E. de Selincourt and H.Darbishire; 1958; Oxford; p.403.

(29) "William Wordsworth: his Life, Works and Influence"; G.M.Harper; 1929; London; 455.

(30) "The Quarterly Review", no.107; July, 1835; London; p.184.

(31) "The Prose Works of William Wordsworth", vol.II; ed. A.B.Grosart; 1876; London; p.65.

(32) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: the Later Years";
ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford; pp.650-1.

THE ODES

Wordsworth wrote many poems which he called "odes", though they have few formal similarities and vary greatly in length and style. What he seems to wish the term to imply is solemnity and authority of approach: he does not adopt a uniform technique. The "Immortality" ode, for example, is grandiose and Pindaric, obviously a vehicle for some very important message; "Presentiments" is much lighter and more intimate, closer to the lyric than the magnificence of the traditional ode. The word "ode", in fact, is used by Wordsworth, as by most modern critics, to mean simply a poem of address on a theme of universal interest, and usually exalted in language and feeling. But the implication of grandeur is always there, and the demands of a general topic often bring out the poet's technical expertise. One has only to think of Dryden's "Ode on St.Cecilia's Day", with its brilliant self-conscious control of rhythm, and Wordsworth's "On the Power of Sound", which "swings along in some magnificence of diction and style",(1) to see how true this is.

However, the Wordsworth odes to be discussed here - "On May Morning", "To May" and "Presentiments" - are not much like these poems. They maintain the wide scope and emphatic style of the conventional ode, but they innovate too. There is a new intimacy and candour, and the massive elaboration of, say, Gray's "The Progress of Poesy", is replaced by a subtle and delicate adjustment of simple forms and rhythms. The old techniques are quietly transformed by a fresh new touch. Here the ode is lighter, freer and more graceful than before. The authoritiative handling

of general themes, and the relation to a tradition of passionate formal verse, are retained, but the effect is less impersonal: there is private feeling as well as public sentiment.

Clearly, the management of balance and tone has to be skilful, and in Wordsworth's hands it almost always is. The art is calm, assured, and ingenious, it does not call attention to itself, but it achieves its aims. These poems thus show both Wordsworth's skill in the handling of traditional forms and his taste for experiment, for here the balance between convention on the one hand, and small personal modifications of it on the other, is very carefully held.

Wordsworth's letters reveal his wide reading in poetry of all periods, and the great attention he always paid to literary decorum. Harper comments on "his extreme care to preserve the lineaments of truth in every detail, and to harmonize the form of his poems to the particular mode they were intended to express".(2) As one might expect, then, and as has been shown in the other chapters, the example of other writers and their solutions to the problems they faced were very important to him. This is particularly true of the odes, for which the poet himself, and his editors de Selincourt and Darbishire, cite many parallels and sources.

In the notes to these poems in the Oxford edition, the names of two traditional poets, Milton and Gray, frequently recur. From both Wordsworth seems above all else to have quarried language, the proper ways of looking at, and describing, conventional features of the poetic landscape.

The first four lines of Milton's "Song: On May Morning", for example -

"Now the bright morning Star, Dayes harbinger,
Comes dancing from the East, and leads with her
The flowry May, who from her green lap throws
The yellow Cowslip, and the pale Primrose" -

are similar in technique and rhythm to the "Ode: Composed on May Morning" -

"While from the purpling East departs
The star that led the dawn,
Blithe Flora from her couch upstarts,
For May is on the lawn" (11.1-4).

The shared references to flowers and greenery, the star which heralds day, and the introductory "now" and "while", are no doubt traditional in this kind of seasonal celebration, and the light trochaic rhythm simply suits the sense. But Wordsworth can hardly have been unaware of the earlier poem, and the parallels cited surely show a close relationship.

However, it is not from this poem, with its vigorous simple style, or even from the more elaborate "L'Allegro", that Wordsworth borrows most of his language in these odes. It is from Gray. Most of Gray's odes, like "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard", are magnificent pieces of public rhetoric and very far from, say, "Presentiments" or "To May". But in the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" and the "Ode on the Spring" one finds already something of the quiet intimacy, and much of the precise, refined vocabulary, of these Wordsworth poems. The tone of the "Elegy", and its confident balanced statement of general truths, must have influenced Wordsworth a good deal. Its plan, too, of describing a scene, interspersed with comments on its significance and general reflections, is analogous to

the plan Wordsworth uses in his May poems. Apart from the joy and calmness of the viewpoint, however, Gray's greatest influence was on language, and for this the "Ode on the Spring" is a more valuable document than the "Elegy". The atmosphere of this poem, and the level of the style, are more fanciful and complicated than in "To May" -

"The Insect youth are on the wing,
Eager to taste the honied spring,
And float amid the liquid noon" (11.25-7) -

but in essentials the vocabulary and techniques are the same. There is the same slight archaism - the use of "thy" ("To May", 1.4) and "wert" (ibid. 1.2) - the fondness for neat and beautiful phrases made up of adjective and noun ("vernal fruitions", ibid. 1.61, "rushy brink", "Ode on the Spring", 1.15), the constant personification, even the same range of language (as in the use of "purple") and the same recherché grace (as in -

"Such gentle mists as glide,
Curling with unconfirmed intent,
On that green mountain's side" ("To May", 11.78-80) -

and -

"Cool Zephyrs through the clear blue sky
Their gather'd fragrance fling" ("Ode on the Spring", 11.9-10)).

Milton and Gray are probably the most important influences of all on Wordsworth's later poetry, the two writers who make accessible the most in the way of tradition and technique, but the letters suggest many more debts.

A letter of 1806 to Lady Beaumont praises "Some beautiful lines"

in James Thomson's "Ode on Solitude".[3] This is a conventional enough pre-Romantic comment on the virtues which solitude may bring, but it also forecasts the direction taken by "To May" and "Presentiments". The three poems have a common strain of subdued morality, but what relates them more closely is the language they use. It is simpler and more solid than the pretty phrases of the "Ode: Composed on May Morning": the similarity between, say, -

"Tis said that warnings ye dispense,
Emboldened by a keener sense;
That men have lived for whom,
With dread precision, ye made clear
The hour that in a distant year
Should knell them to the tomb" ("Presentiments", 11.61-66) -

and -

"Oh! how I love with thee to walk,
And listen to thy whisper'd talk,
Which innocence and truth imparts,
And melts the most obdurate hearts" ("Ode on Solitude", 11.37-40) -

seems close, and certainly the more general parts of the poems are alike in their barer, less qualified style.

Dryden's "political pieces" are praised in a letter of 1808,[4] but they can have had little effect on these pieces by Wordsworth, and Dryden's odes are much nearer in diction and technique to "On the Power of Sound" than to "Presentiments" or the May poems. Perhaps the only point of contact between the two groups is the metrical flexibility and control of rhythm which they share.

In 1828 Wordsworth received a new edition of Collins, who is an important influence on his later work as a whole.(5) What one finds in most of Collins' odes, apart from the more public and large-scale works like "The Manners" or "The Passions", is a slightness and elegance like Gray's, but even less robust, and rather similar to the style of the "Ode: Composed on May Morning". The elements shared by this poem and, say, Collins' "Ode on the Death of Mr.Thomson", are several: there is the rather rarefied, thin tone of -

"Yet lives there one whose heedless eye
Shall scorn thy pale shrine glimmering near?
With him, sweet bard, may fancy die,
And joy desert the blooming year" ("Ode on the Death of Mr.Thomson", ll.25-9) -

and -

"While mellow warble, sprightly trill,
The tremulous heart excite;
And hums the balmy air to still
The balance of delight" ("Ode: Composed on May Morning", ll.13-16) -

the easy fusion of natural detail with general reflection; and, above all, the rococo prettiness of phrasing and the traditional associations and properties - "pearly shower" and "feeble lyre" ("Ode: Composed on May Morning", ll.8 and 57), "sylvan grave", "the woodland pilgrim's knell", and "sedge-crowned sisters" ("Ode on the Death of Mr.Thomson", ll.4,12,30).

In a letter to Dyce of January 1829,(6) Wordsworth praises the poems of Dyer and Chatterton, but little trace of this enthusiasm is reflected in his odes.

Much more evident is Wordsworth's admiration for the Countess of Winchilsea, which he explains at great length in a letter to Dyce in 1830.(7) The poems which he singles out, "A Nocturnal Reverie" and "The Petition for an Absolute Retreat", share the style of his own "To May" and "Presentiments". This style is modulated so as to encompass both natural description and general reflection: the movement between -

"The waning Moon and trembling Leaves are seen;
... freshen'd Grass now bears itself upright
And makes cool Banks to pleasing Rest invite" ("Nocturnal Reverie", 11.10-12) -

and -

"Our Cares, our Toils, our Clamours are renew'd,
Our Pleasures, seldom reach'd, again pursu'd" (ibid., 11.49-50) -

or, in Wordsworth, between -

"Where cities fanned by thy brisk airs
Behold a smokeless eye" ("Ode: Composed on May Morning", 11.37-8) -

and -

"Yes, where Love nestles thou canst teach
The soul to love the more" (ibid., 11.49-50) -

is fluent and unobtrusive, though carefully organised. Above all, in both poets the flexible dainty style, which could easily seem facile, has an assurance and accomplishment given by their awareness of the minor mode in which they are writing. Another important link between Lady Winchilsea and Wordsworth is their considered enjoyment of the quiet, sedate aspects of Nature and human life, the "dim-lit cave" ("Ode: Composed on May Morning", 1.35) and "softest shadows" ("Nocturnal Reverie", 1.23).

A letter of 1823[8] draws attention to Tickell, whom Wordsworth was later to call "one of the best of our minor poets".[9] This letter praises the "chastity" of Tickell's style, which remains plain and open even in his odes. In style Wordsworth probably gained little from the example of Tickell. But one of the noticeable characteristics of, say, the latter's "Ode: Inscribed to the Earl of Sutherland at Windsor", is its lightness and fluency of movement. This fluency, and the impression of expertise, are precisely what Wordsworth wants in his own odes, and probably owe something to Tickell's example.

In the 1815 "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" of the "Lyrical Ballads" Wordsworth draws attention to the works of Abraham Cowley. Cowley's reputation rests on his "Pindarique Odes", which must have given Wordsworth a perfect cautionary example of how his own quieter, subtler poems should not be written. All that is obvious in Cowley's "Ode of Wit" or the "Ode: to Mr.Hobbes" - the raucous tone, the grandiose classical modelling, the pointless elaboration and slack rhythm - Wordsworth avoids. This is partly because Cowley is simply not a very good writer of odes, but partly, too, because his works are in the grand manner of the mainstream of the ode, and thus different in intent from Wordsworth's own small-scale, quiet odes like "Presentiments".

In the "Preface to the Edition of 1815" Wordsworth calls Cotton's "Ode Upon Winter" "an admirable composition",[10] and from its "delicately simple artistry"[11] he may well have drawn an example for his own light touch in the "Ode: Composed on May Morning".

This discussion of the writers who probably influenced Wordsworth

in these later odes leaves one with two main impressions. The first is a feeling of the aptness of Ferry's description of Wordsworth as "a poet ... sophisticated ... learned in the traditions of poetry ... deeply cognizant of the proprieties":(12) a man thoroughly aware of the practice of those before him, and one who constantly learned from their example. The second is the sense of a secondary style of the ode, less magniloquent than, say, "The Progress of Poesy", and much used by writers like Gray and Collins, whom Wordsworth liked and who are major influences on all of the later poems. It is this style of the ode that he generally chooses in the 1835 volume - not the brashness and splendour of "On the Power of Sound" but the mellow, minor artistry of "Presentiments" or "Devotional Incitements".

The first of these poems is the "Ode: Composed on May Morning", which is admirably described by Groom: "cheerful in tone, nimble in step, with light felicities of phrase and fancy, and marked by freshness of metrical effect".(13) It was written in May, 1826, during a tour of the Lake District with Dora Wordsworth and Mr. and Mrs. Carr, the poet's friends. In the vale of Newlands the poet was "struck with the appearance of the little Chapel gleaming through the veil of half-opened leaves" and this poem (originally combined with the other May ode) was the result. In meaning it is direct and optimistic, unshadowed by the gloom of much of Wordsworth's late work.

Throughout, and unusually at this late date in Wordsworth's career, the poem convincingly implies the close and fruitful contact of man and Nature -

"Yes! Where Love nestles thou canst teach
The soul to love the more;

Hearts also shall thy lessons reach
That never loved before" (11.49-52) -
and treats May as exemplar of the refreshing, teaching and healing powers of Nature for those who love her (for even -
"Cloud-piercing peak, and trackless heath
Instinctive homage pay" (11.33-4)).
Nature here, though, despite its powers which are not often so emphasized at this stage of the poet's life, is still far from the great and threatening force of his youth and maturity: it is pretty and conventional, if unusually instructive, a matter of "dewy gleams" (1.12) and "slim wild deer" (1.30).

However, this simply suits the kind of poem that this is. What Lyon calls "conscious artifice and elaborate pictorial effects"[14] in the treatment of the landscape produce a consistency and "compact allusiveness"[15] which fuse style with setting, and create very rich and pleasing effects. The art is impersonal and virtuoso, then, and its value thus lies in its skilful manipulation of traditional elements. But this kind of poem can easily become merely statuesque. Wordsworth avoids this danger in several ways, notably by sprightliness of rhythm and an easy flow of sense. One notices, too, that the traditional properties of "deer" (1.30) and "feathered Leiges" (1.25) seem very animated; the scenery moves - even the "peak" and "heath" (1.33) pay homage. The poem is not simply a description of motionless objects, but a fast-moving show (all the elements of Nature awaken one by one in sequence at May's touch). So the traditional celebratory and formal character of a poem like this is softened and quickened, and the poet's careful planning and fluent touch are directed towards an appropriate vivacity and grace.

The same qualities underlie the construction of the poem. "The Quarterly Review" remarks on the "almost sculptural precision of outline"[16] of some of the 1835 poems, and the comment is apt here. The structure of the "Ode: Composed on May Morning" is particularly clear, easy and well-defined, and moves lucidly through a single day, from dawn to dusk, carefully presenting the sights of Nature (and, to a lesser extent, human life) as May affects them. The use of May as a focal-point is clear, and helps make the movement of the poem both harmonious and easy to follow. May is the animating force, and is shown in action; it is left to the other May ode to define the season more explicitly and draw out its human implications. The clarity and elegance of the poem's structure thus give the reader the feeling of a theme well handled within narrow but fruitful limits. As Townsend says, though in a more unfavourable tone, "there are .... examples of (Wordsworth's) ability to handle clichés themselves so consistently that we can not but be pleased with the shape they take".[17]

The reliance on traditional techniques is equally evident in the style. It is here that Wordsworth's indebtedness to the poets of the eighteenth century, especially Gray and Collins, and to Milton, is clearest, and the poem's lightness and charm -

"Time was, blest Power! When youths and maids
At peep of dawn would rise,
And wander forth, in forest glades
Thy birth to solemnize" (11.17-20) -

perfectly accord with its models. The descriptiveness and graceful attenuation of the language give elegance and depth to the strong frame-

work. The fluency of rhythm also adds a special smoothness to the poem's movement, and provides useful evidence for Wilson's description of Wordsworth as a "charming harmonist and melodist".(18)

The final impression is thus of the harmony, assurance and attractiveness of the elements of the poem, traditional as they are: "The Quarterly Review" puts it neatly when it talks of "Completeness and totality of impression".(19)

In its minor way this pleasant poem is one of the most successful in the whole 1835 volume, and therefore needs little in the way of revision: only small details of style and emphasis are altered.

In a mellifluous, smooth work like this, the balance and continuity of the development are obviously important, and by and large are satisfactorily achieved. However, in the early part of the poem a good deal of revision takes place between the manuscript and the published version. These lines after 1.8, which are too static and disrupt the flow of sense, are removed -

"Earth, sea, thy presence feel - nor less,
If yon ethereal blue
With its soft smile the truth express,
The heavens have felt it too.
The inmost heart of man, if glad
Partakes a livelier cheer;
And eyes that cannot but be sad
Let fall a brightened tear".

Similarly, in 11.9-11, the manuscript's -

"What month can rival thee, sweet May,
Tempering the year's extremes
And scattering lustres o'er noon-day" -

which is ambiguous and slack, is replaced by the more direct -

"All Nature welcomes Her whose sway
Tempers the year's extremes;
Who scattereth lustres o'er noon-day" -

which also fits better into the general flow of the passage. The result of these revisions is an easing of the movement of the poem which adds to the unity and impact of the effects.

Wordsworth's care for style was paramount in his late poems, perhaps to make up for the thinness of the feelings he is often expressing. As Lyon says: "Spontaneity is largely replaced by careful, painstaking artistry".(20) This care for consistency and richness of language is clear in the many small revisions here, all of which move towards a smooth, entertaining, even level of style.

Firstly, the language is made subtler and richer, so that the meaning becomes both more precise and more evocative. In 1.15, for example, the change from -

"And a soothing hum prevails to still" -

to -

"And hums the balmy air to still" -

removes an awkward rhythm and at the same time concentrates the effect. Also the replacement of "desart heath" (1.33) by "trackless heath", and of "tribute" (1.34) by "homage" provides a clearer and more suitable

meaning in the context. (In 1.33 "desart" is too desolate, and in 1.34 "tribute" too enforced, for Wordsworth's intention.)

These revisions also illustrate Wordsworth's harmonising of the style of the poems, so that no rough, unassimilated elements are left to mar the smooth and apparently effortless surface of the verse. One of the best instances of this is the replacement of the early, bare, bathetic 11.37-40 -

"But most some little favourite nook
That our own hands have drest
Upon thy train delights to look
And seems to love thee best" -

by the more stylish and evocative -

"Where Cities fanned by thy brisk airs
Behold a smokeless sky,
Their puniest flower-pot-nursling dares
To open a bright eye" -

which also suits the mood of the poem better. Another example is 1.4, which is changed from -

"And what if on thy birthday" -

to -

"And if, on this thy natal morn" -

whose calmer, more oblique language suits the general style of the poem far better.

The aim of these revisions has been to ensure smoothness and consistency of style and movement - the development is eased, and the

language is both enriched and carefully fitted to its context. As Wordsworth says in the Fenwick note to this poem, his wish is "to produce a consistent and appropriate whole",(21) and he is certainly successful.

The second ode to be discussed, "To May", originally formed part of the first, and was prompted by the same occasion, Both were initially responses to the ugliness of the industrial landscape - a letter to Hamilton gives the situation precisely: "As I passed through the tame and manufacture-disfigured county of Lancashire I was reminded by the faded leaves of Spring, and threw off a few stanzas of an ode to May".(22)

The original identity of the two poems to May has produced a close similarity of style and technique, though when he separated one from the other Wordsworth was skilful enough to ensure a certain distinction between them.

Both poems are celebratory in the old sense: they display a traditional subject, and attempt a knowledgeable and orderly treatment of it. There, however, the similarity of theme ends. The second poem deals more with humanity than the first, with "Wanderers" (1.31), "the tender Infant" (1.35), the "Mother" (1.39) and the "Shepherd" (1.84): the two are thus complementary, a concentration on Nature matched by a concentration on mankind.

In this poem, too, properties like the -

"Delicious odours! Music sweet" (1.9) -

are used more distinctively: the effects are more clear-cut, and despite the high proportion of atmospheric evocation to development of argument the final impression is more incisive.

This shapper perspective also comes from the poem's more inclusive viewpoint. In the first ode, everything was pretty and gay, but here, though the feeling is optimistic, the alternative is not excluded -

"Vernal fruitions and desires" (1.61) -

are balanced against -

"Mishap by worm and blight" (1.65).

The hopeful predominates, of course, but the possibility of failure gives an added depth to the poem, as well as setting out its elements in a more dramatic and varied way.

The appreciation of the month is different, too, not so spirited as in the first poem, more languid and subdued -

"Such gentle mists as glide,
Curling with unconfirmed intent,
On that green mountain's side" (11.78-80).

The variety of life, the chances of evil as well as good, send the poet for safety to tender and reverential feelings unlike the buoyant certainty of the "Ode: Composed on May Morning".

"The inmost heart of man if glad
Partakes a livelier cheer" (11.21-2) -

replaces the briskness of -

"A quickening hope, a freshening glee,
Foreran the expectant Power,
Whose first-drawn breath, from bush and tree,
Shakes off that pearly shower" (11.5-8).

Here, too, the dainty small effects, the "pretty paganism",[23] are put at the service of a broader range than before (as has already been shown). But this involves no strain. The tone remains almost youthful, and the handling, though more sober, is still free from stuffy moralising (which is far from always the case: "the wish now is to comment and pass sentence".[24]

The construction of the poem is similar to that of the other May poem, despite the differences in approach that have just been described. In both poems the focal point is May, and the month provides the means of progressing and giving a sense of development to the whole. The structure of this poem is more clearly marked than that of its predecessor, a simple traditional arrangement of address, followed by illustration and expansion, and concluded by a summary. What this finally leads to is a definition of May's quality more direct and open than in the first poem -

"This modest charm of not too much,
Part seen, imagined part" (11.95-6).

The style too is more solid, the language plainer, and the effect more substantial. This is obvious in the robust but pleasing -

"Since they return, through days and weeks
Of hope that grew by stealth,
How many wan and faded cheeks
Have kindled into health!" (11.25-8).

The whole poem is closer to humanity than before, more deeply-rooted in genuine human life. This new solidity does not mean that the poem is slow: the vivacity of metre here moves things along as easily as one could wish, and bears out Groom's remark on "The rhythmical originality

with which some familiar metres are handled".(25)

Despite the many differences of emphasis that have been noticed, one's final impression is that again here one has a traditional style and subject, and that it is again handled with skill and circumspection, and an understanding of the techniques and themes conventionally appropriate to the form employed.

Most of the revisions are minor, and often serve to differentiate the poem further from its predecessor.

The language of the first May poem was often fanciful (1.12 - "morning's dewy gleams") and sometimes a little vague. The revisions of language in this poem, as suits its sturdier tone, move away from all this towards a greater precision and explicitness, the fancy held down by clear, particular detail. In 1.1 for example, the generalized and rhetorical "many suns" is changed to "twelve bright suns", and in 1.5 the literary "natal strain" becomes the more familiar "birthday".

The syntax of the "Ode: Composed on May Morning" tended to a fluent rhythmical monotony: the "while", "till" and "where" phrases were overused in the service of an effortless regularity of movement. Here, however, where serious matters of human life are being discussed, something more varied and dramatic is required, so that the reader cannot sit back and enjoy the facility, without attending to the meaning. It is for this reason that the poem has so many imperatives and direct approaches. Naturally this variation and liveliness are emphasized in revision. In 11.51-2, for example, the change from the stolid and regular -

"In every bower of virgin earth
Is built a happy home" -
to the more direct and emphatic -
"Choose from the bowers of virgin earth
The happiest for your home" -
creates an appropriate feeling of tension. In 1.72, too, the staid -
"The doom of all the fair" -
becomes -
"However bright and fair" -
which sounds more dramatic and also completes the sense of the stanza more satisfactorily.

Thus the effect of the revisions in this poem is clear despite its slightness. The language becomes more precise and solid, and variety replaces repetition in sound. The result of this is a poem which is livelier than before, more varied in technique, and more closely related to human life.

The third poem is "Presentiments", which was written in 1830. It is a more abstract poem than the others, and closer to the odes of Cowley in its style and subject matter. Essentially, it is a discussion of the deeper spiritual knowledge which God conveys to man through the experience of man and Nature, and which thus goes beyond his merely physical senses to the spirit behind them.

As in the earlier poems, but more dogmatically, Wordsworth expresses his belief in something more profound - and also more authoritative - than mere reason, or the senses -

"God, who instructs the brutes to scent
All changes of the element,
Whose wisdom fixed the scale
Of natures, for our wants provides
By higher, sometimes humbler, guides,
When lights of reason fail" (11.73-8).

Campbell makes the point clearly when he says that the later poems "embark(s) upon a quest for a new aesthetic experience, one that will be less involved in mutability than his earlier naturalistic view and more free from the tyranny of the senses."(26) Religious feelings now take precedence over the reason and the senses -

"And now, unforced by time to part
With fancy, I obey my heart" (11.10-11).

This moral earnestness and closeness to the poet's own sentiments result in a new intimacy here, a stronger personal feeling which lifts the poem beyond the impersonal literary grace of the May odes: a current of involvement is added to the correct usage of a style. This adds conviction and particularity to the authoritative statement of general truths presented here. The lessons the poet has learned in his own life are expanded into moral pleading: Potts comments of the later poems that they are "contemplative and mature .... (and) betoken judgement and long experience".(27) Here Wordsworth, moving beyond sense, comes not to mystic "spots of time", as before, but to the security of a conventional Christian faith. In the end, then, this poem achieves a balance: the personal tone and the physical setting are presented along with the spirituality, and each

supports and qualifies the other.

This well balanced approach is fittingly expressed through the satisfying completeness of form of the poem, the shapely way in which its different elements - statement and illustration, for example - are arranged. The poem develops clearly and easily from its initial statement of the theme (11.1-6), through widely ranging illustrations and examples (11.7-72), to the final summary of the argument, in general and now authoritative terms. The technique, as often in the later poems, is elucidatory. The poet, by means of many examples, draws out the full meaning of a premise. The gradual drawing in of wide areas of experience which the process of illustration involves(here from -

"The deep sigh that seemed fatherless" (1.8) -

to -

"The naked Indian of the wild" (1.34))

gives the poem both depth and breadth of appeal. Its unity is secured by the single theme (or focal point, as in the May poems), which underlies all the separate elements of the poem and relates them to each other.

Of the style of the poem one need say little: the simplicity and grace, and the confident and sprightly rhythm, are typical of a number of poems in the 1835 volume. The directness of the style, which is not so common in the later Wordsworth, here gives a convincing parallel to a clear speaking voice in its brevity and forthrightness. The effect is almost conversational, and the rhetoric is never obtrustive and rarely noticeably "literary". On a subject so serious as this the style acts as a humaniser: it gives a note of candour and personal committment which

adds to the poem's conviction.

Many of the revisions increase this directness of impact, and the expression generally becomes simpler and more straightforward. For example, in 11.49-50 the awkward suspended grammar of -

"When public change in transport spreads
That maddens even experienced heads" -

is changed to the easy and incisive -

"When some great change gives boundless scope
To an exulting Nation's hope".

The same movement is even clearer in 11.31-3, where the clumsy and almost incoherent -

"The sage whose contemplations move
Starguided, breathes not raised above
The province where ye rule" -

becomes the clear and ample -

"Star-guided contemplations move
Through space, through calm, not raised above
Prognostics that ye rule".

This wish to write directly and to be understood easily is also shown in another series of revisions. These seem to be aimed at giving an additional solidity and force to the ideas expressed, and making them stand out in greater relief against the main body of the poem. This is very clear in the revision of 11.2-6. In the manuscript these are -

"Who deem that all which shrinks from light
Is false or merits shame

If that poor Pleader, Common Sense
Fail you, go deeper for defence
Remembering your good name".

This is decent verse, but it is lax and unclear in several respects: the last line especially is vague and adds little to the meaning of the stanza. By 1835, however, these lines have become -

"Who deem that ye from open light
Retire in fear of Shame;
All heaven-born Instincts shun the touch
Of vulgar sense, - and, being such,
Such privilege ye claim".

That this is an altogether richer, clearer and more forceful exposition of the situation is obvious, and even the rhythm is more confident and easy.

This openness extends to the language as well, many of the revisions of which move towards plainness and homeliness. In 1.13, for example, "subtle foes", and in 1.17 "the thoughtful Muse", are changed to "busy foes" and "the moral Muse" respectively: both these alterations remove an unnecessary elevation from the style and give a greater clarity of effect.

Thus the revisions in this poem all move in the direction of a greater concentration and directness of effect and solidity of impression. The result is that the moral tone of the poem is reinforced and given a deeper conviction.

These three poems studied in detail here stand as evidence of a statement by Townsend: "Wordsworth carried on his "moral pleading" most successfully when he did it indirectly, by musing to himself, by constructing

a world that could stand as the embodiment of points he wished to make, or by allowing his reader to share and test his conclusions with him, but there were times when he could practice enough self-restraint to make poetry, and not mere eloquence, even out of direct statements."(28) "Presentiments" presents us with the poet "musing to himself", conveying a general idea by example and proof, and doing it with a moving nobility and simplicity of effect. The two May poems, on the other hand, exemplify another part of Townsend's comment, for the world they describe, lightly and with traditional grace, indirectly and subtly tells us a good deal about the strength of the later Wordsworth's aesthetic and moral approach to Nature.

But these poems, though they fairly represent the odes in the 1835 volume, obviously use different means to achieve their ends: the intimacy of "Presentiments", with its personal overtones, would not suit the May poems, nor their elaboration and rather literary charm, it

Though clearly Wordsworth's intentions were settled when he wrote the poems, feelings may change, and often execution does not live up to intention. This is where the revisions come in. As always their effect is to homogenize the poems, to settle and balance the different styles and themes.

In the May poems the smoothing of movement and enriching of style move the poems towards the literary ancestors that have been noted: a process of harmonization goes on which makes the poems more consistent, and more consistently like their models.

With "Presentiments", which is rather further from the secondary style of the ode than the others, the revisions are different. The result

of harmonisation is the same, of course - the poem holds together much better, and is more convincing - but the simpler arrangement, the more forceful statement of ideas, and the homelier language move the poem further from the conventional ode.

The handling of traditional materials in all these poems, and the elements emphasized in revision, are thus enough to prove Wordsworth's skill, and to bear out, by their shaping and reshaping of convention to suit both thematic and personal needs, Groom's comment: "an experimental interest in poetic technique characterizes Wordsworth's later years".(29)

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THE SONNETS

Most of the poems in the "Yarrow Revisited" volume of 1835 are sonnets. There are eighty in all, arranged both singly and in series, of which the largest are the "Sonnets, 1833, composed during a tour" and the earlier Scottish sequence which begins the volume.

That Wordsworth should still turn for self-expression to the sonnet, even in old age, is hardly surprising. Some of his earliest poems are in this form, and he continued to use it, with growing mastery and fluency, throughout his long life. The poem "Scorn not the sonnet", published in 1827, with its glittering list of the great and varied poets who found in the sonnet a fitting expression of their feelings, fairly shows his estimation of it. In his long practice of the writing of sonnets, through changing moods of gloom ("The world is too much with us") and sober joy ("Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802"), much of the technical skill, and all of the models - Milton and Shakespeare, above all - as well as many small details of style, remain constant. The sonnet "Admonition", for example, published in 1807, is very similar in theme and construction, apart from an extra vigour and abruptness of language, to "The Trosachs", written at least twenty-five years later.

However, despite their frequent closeness to the poems of Wordsworth's most intense and creative period, and their great variety (from the mere topographical nicety of "Nun's Well, Brigham", to the general and philosophic "Fancy and Tradition", and from the ugly bareness of "St.Catherine of Ledbury" to the rich and elegant ease of "Adieu, Rydalian Laurels") one can also notice clear and well defined directions

in which these poems move. They are often grouped, so that their effect, though more leisurely than before, is cumulative - each poem supports and adds to the next. The mood and style are quieter and slower, the pace more languid - but also, often, more assured and circumspect: a good example is from the poem "Adieu, Rydalian Laurels" -

"Farewell! no Minstrels now with harp new-strung
For summer wandering quit their household bowers;
Yet not for this wants Poesy a tongue
To cheer the Itinerant on whom she pours
Her spirit, while he crosses lonely moors,
Or musing sits forsaken halls among" (11.9-14).

There is more reliance on purely conventional methods of expression: the invocations, the moralizing conclusions, and many of the techniques, can be found little changed in Wordsworth's models and contemporaries. The movement, finally, is away from passion and life, a graceful retreat into the realms of art, of a world at one remove: as Perkins says, there is "a minimizing of the present"(1) and Leavis too notes "the withdrawn, contemplative collectedness of his poetry".(2)

One of the most obvious things about these poems is their relation to the poet's own life. This is not in the more mystical manner of the early poems, but almost as personal jottings - meditations, at particular times and places, on scenes and events which summon up the concentrated feelings of a lifetime. These poems express very clearly what is going on and how the poet is. His own emotions, his situation, are more evident than before, perhaps even because of the impersonal and

traditional style he often uses - they shine by contrast. Thus their appeal is personal as well as artistic: as "The Quarterly Review" puts it, "there is no volume of Mr. Wordsworth's works in which so much of himself, as a man, comes forth for the delight and the instruction of his readers".(3) But in many of the sonnets there is little direct teaching. This is a lesser mode, more intimate even than the odes, and a good deal of the "instruction", and all of the poet's revelation of himself, is done quite subtly, by suggestion and reference (as in the pining for the joys of the past, and the force of the poet's personal involvement in "Bothwell Castle"). So it is mainly by implication that these poems move beyond the particular and come to distill the lessons Wordsworth has learnt in the course of his life. That these lessons seem conventional - they centre on feelings of nostalgia, the need for security, care, order and control - does not detract from their personal or poetic interest, or the weight of literary and human authority which Wordsworth gives them.

The coherence and harmony of the sonnets is thus marked, though of course there are many poems individually quite distinct - the "serial" habit supports the weaker poems (of which there are many, like the intolerably staid "Tynwald Hill", with its dull pompous moralizing) but does not noticeably detract from the force of those which are outstanding. The variety of styles and forms is wide, but the coherence of impact speaks for consideration and skill.

Something of this same unity in diversity can be seen in Wordsworth's attitudes to previous users of the sonnet form. In his letters he mentions many names, and even several poems in particular, but in importance far

beyond Mrs. Hemans[4] or Russell,[5] and a continuous example throughout his career, lies the practice of his great predecessors, Shakespeare and Milton. It is these two who taught him most, and whose influence can be most often detected. The others he mentions in passing - Helen Maria Williams, Charlotte Smith, Miss Seward and Miss Barbauld, Sir Egerton Brydges and Miss Hope[6] - seem to have left little mark: they were minor poets, sometimes friends who influenced Wordsworth less than he did them.

There is much evidence for Wordsworth's reading of Shakespeare: the plays are often quoted, and in a letter to Dyce of 22nd November, 1831, he discusses some of the technical features of the sonnets.[7] Mrs. Moorman, speaking of the middle sonnets, also detects the influence: "the voices of Shakespeare .... and the Elizabethans generally can be heard echoing through them all".[8]

The importance of Shakespeare however, was not stylistic here - for that Wordsworth went to Milton. The resemblances are mainly thematic, and the same ideas and moods, at times the same emotional atmosphere, are found in the sonnets of both poets. The use of the sequence, with its strengthening effect, is also shared. But the most important similarity of all lies in the attitude to the power of time: mutability, ideas of permanence and change, run through most of the sonnets. The desire is for something to remain - finally, it is a desire for art as a way of preserving precious memories from the ravages of time. This is clearest of all in Shakespeare's -

"Yet, do thy worst, old Time, despite thy wrong
My love shall in my verse live ever young" (Sonnet 19, 11.13-4) -

and -

"Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?" (Sonnet 55, 11.1-4).

The same emotions, though less passionate and complex, form the basis of much of Wordsworth's later poetry. A simple example, gracefully put, is this -

"Desponding Father! mark this altered bough,
So beautiful of late with sunshine warmed,
Or moist with dews; what more unsightly now,
Its blossoms, shrivelled, and its fruit, if formed,
Invisible? .... " ("Desponding Father", 11.1-5).

With this sense of time passing there is in both poets a rich and mature awareness of the need for experience, care, consideration, and a refusal to adopt the simple, thoughtless attitudes of youth. This leads to the quiet meditativeness which is such a feature of the 1835 poems, and which is seen most clearly of all in the Shakespeare sonnet no.30, with its slow contemplative opening -

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past" (11.1-2) -

and moving close -

"But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored, and sorrows end" (11.13-4).

These feelings, and even the movement of the verse, can be paralleled in

almost any of the 1835 sonnets: Wordsworth speaks, for example, of "a soul-subduing shade" ("At Bala-Sala", 1.6), and says through a persona -

"Yet I at last a resting-place have found,
With just enough life's comforts to procure,
In a snug Cove on this our favoured Isle,
A peaceful spot where Nature's gifts abound" ("By a Retired Mariner", 11.9-12).

It will be obvious from the examples discussed that it is only in themes, and general attitudes to experience, that Wordsworth is here related to Shakespeare: he lacks the older poet's verbal complexity, concentration of meaning and intensity of effect.

In his connets, as elsewhere, Wordsworth goes to Milton for ways of presenting his feelings. Throughout, even before his great sonnet - "Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour" - Wordsworth obviously compared himself with his great predecessor, and deliberately chose to model himself on him. In a letter to Landor of 20th April, 1822, for instance, he wrote: "Many years ago my sister happened to read me the sonnets of Milton, ... and I was singularly struck with the style of harmony .... of these compositions".(9) In 1833, in a Spring letter to Landor, he speaks of Milton's sonnets as prime examples of "that pervading sense of intense unity in which the excellence of the Sonnet has always seemed to me mainly to consist".(10) By 15th May, 1835 he is saying openly that his sonnets are "after the model of Milton".(11)

In these sonnets the most obvious debt is to the grace and traditional richness, and the stylistic assurance, of Milton's verse. Milton's sonnets, however, provide a direct and simple style, free from

elaboration, which Wordsworth also uses when the occasion warrants it. Milton's more complex style, with its classical allusion and careful elegance, can be seen at its best in the lines -

" .... till Favonius re-inspire
The frozen earth, and clothe in fresh attire
The lily and rose, that neither sow'd nor spun" ("To Mr.Lawrence", 11.6-8) -

and in the oblique and more austere -

"Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
Than his Casella, whom he woo'd to sing
Met in the milder shades of Purgatory" ("To Mr.H.Lawes", 11.12-4).

The range of allusion here, and the firm steady movement of the verse, as well as the smooth and delicately precise language, reveal a relation to this by Wordsworth, writing as often in a similar vein -

"Adieu, Rydalian Laurels! that have grown
And spread as if ye knew that days might come
When ye would shelter in a happy home,
On this fair mount, a Poet of your own,
One who ne'er ventured for a Delphic Crown
To sue the God; but, chaunting your green shade
All seasons through, is humbly pleased to braid
Ground-flowers beneath your guardianship, self-sown" ("Adieu, Rydalian Laurels", 11.1-8).

However, Wordsworth turns to this richer and more traditional style only when he intends to secure topographical or antiquarian effects, and often prefers the simple, direct, more personal style of, say, the

quiet and moving "On His Blindness". The language here is direct and lucid -

"They also serve who only stand and wait" (1.14) -

and admirably suits the freshness of the impression conveyed, the desire to state a harrowing truth with as little elaboration and as much concentration as possible. One can see the same style, and for the same reasons, in many of the more serious sonnets in the 1835 volume, though few are as successful as Milton's. For example, there is this from "Roman Antiquities", though it is barer and more sententious than Milton:

"To have not seat for thought were better doom" (1.6).

Closely connected with this intended directness of language is a fondness for teaching and pointing morals which is common to both poets. There are many examples in Milton: the succinct -

"Licence they mean when they cry Liberty" ("I did but prompt the age",l.11) -

or the solemn and slightly sinister -

"All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Task-master's eye" ("On his Being Arrived at the Age of 23", 11.13-14).

In Wordsworth examples abound - many poems provide a direct and stated moral, sometimes with considerable rhetorical effect -

"For things far off we toil, while many a good
Not sought, because too near, is never gained" ("The River Eden, Cumberland" 11.13-14) -

or -

"And own that Art, triumphant over strife
And pain, hath powers to Eternity endeared" ("Monument to Mrs.Howard", 22.14-14).

In both poets, this directness often goes with bluntness and moral fervour. The best instance of this in Milton is the superbly direct and vigorous -

"Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones
Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold" ("On the Late Massacre in Piedmont", 11.1-2).

In Wordsworth moral fervour is more usually prosy, and sometimes banal, but the feeling has the same force and personal directness -

"Tradition, be thou mute! Oblivion, throw
Thy veil in mercy o'er the records, hung
Round strath and mountain, stamped by the ancient tongue
On rock and ruin darkening as we go" ("In the Sound of Mull", 11.1-4) -

or -

"What change shall happen next to Nunnery Dell?
Canal, and Viaduct, and Railway, tell!" ("Nunnery", 11.13-14).

What has been said shows Wordsworth's important debt to Milton. Of course, this can be exaggerated, and there are many differences. Few of Wordsworth's sonnets are as unified, subtle and concentrated in emphasis as Milton's, and they are also more artful and narrower in feeling and range. However, it is obvious that Wordsworth learned a great deal from Milton - it is not too much to say, with Harper, that it was the study of Milton which gave Wordsworth his mastery of the sonnet form.(12)

Other literary influences are of little importance. Bowles alone, in poems like "To the River Itchin" (1789), with its sensitive pictorial description and profound melancholy -

"Itchin, when I behold thy banks again,
Thy crumbling margin, and thy silver breast,
On which the self-sake tints still seem to rest,
Why feels my heart the shiv'ring sense of pain?" (11.1-4) -

may have moved Wordsworth still further towards the "contemplative humility"[13] of his late sonnets.

It will be clear by now that the influences discussed are neither superficial nor overpowering: Wordsworth studied poets of the past, recognised that similar problems often faced him too, and accordingly learnt from their example. A good illustration of this comes from a letter of Spring, 1833, to Alexander Dyce, where the poet uses the examples of Milton, Southey, and many more, plus his own experience and tastes, to build up a general theory of the sonnet, which he talks of finally in the image of "an orbicular body".[14] Thus his generalizing cast of mind has produced a synthesis from a variety of sources. In his sonnets it is the same: one can detect many reminiscences and similarities, a wide range of literary experience, but the result is personal, unified and characteristic of the poet.

In order to show both the variety and the unity of these poems, the sonnets discussed here are divided into categories. The grouping is according to content, so as to reveal the range of Wordsworth's interests and approaches even at this late date, and the points of style which are common to them all. Some of the worst as well as the best of the later poems are discussed.

Even a quick glance through the "Yarrow Revisited" volume gives an overwhelming impression of Wordsworth's interest in places: almost every striking or thought-provoking scene must have led to a poem. The intention, in an ageing and querulous poet, is to fix his impressions, and ultimately himself: to use art to give stability and form to his own

quick passages and uncertain feelings. This is reinforced in the style of the poems: Potts notes that "his design and his imagery are both fluent and archietectonic",(15) and many of the sonnets bind together place, person and reflection in a very firm way, producing a solidly artistic, and therefore permanent, version of an existence. As Townsend says, "through the powers of art .... 'things by sorrow wrought' are objectified and controlled to a point where they become bearable, even "matter for a jocund thought'".(16)

This sense of art working in human experience, and of poetry using and adapting memory to give an impression of stability and well-founded moral conclusions, is especially clear in the sonnets of general topography. Of course, there is never simple description in Wordsworth: the past and memory, general reflections and moral purpose, are always there too - "in all these sonnets the external world is exquisitely fitted to the mind of the contemplative man."(17)

The first of these poems which will be discussed in detail is "Rest and be Thankful, at the Head of Glencoe". This is a product of Wordsworth's Scottish tour of 1831, and provides a good example of his methods in his more general poems of place.

The message of the poem is that struggle will lead one in the long term to something worthwhile. Just as a man can struggle "with laborious walk" (1.1) to a site of great beauty, so the Soul may, with a similar effort -

"Win rest, and ease, and peace, with bliss that angels share" (1.14).

But, in spite of the natural setting and local colour, what

strikes one most of all is that the poem has really very little sense of place at all. It conveys a general impression, an atmosphere of "clouds and sky-born streams" (1.6), but the moral is overwhelming from the beginning. There is the usual Wordsworthian progression - in clear cut analogical terms, not even closely linked syntactically - from the present and material to the general and spiritual (the "Soul", 1.13). Despite the pedagogic ease and deliberation, characteristic of the sonnets, the effect is to dilute the value of Nature and thus vitiate the analogy which forms the basis of the poem's argument. The Nature presented, too, is a matter of a few traditional properties - "the unseen hawk" (1.5) and "valley flowers" (1.9) - not the exact picture of a scene one is led to expect by the title. And it is only through an accurate and convincingly-felt presentation of the beauty of the natural scene that its analogical association with "bliss that Angels share" (1.14) can carry much force.

There is also an unfortunate effect of garrulity and repetitiveness in the poem: examples are duplicated and words needlessly repeated. The sentence structure is awkward, full of suspensions of meaning and poorly balanced effects such as -

"Who, that has gained at length the wished-for Height,
This brief this simple wayside Call can slight,
And rests not thankful?" (11.2-4).

The rhythm is slack, its long units only rarely coinciding with the sense, and the result is harshness or ineptness of emphasis.

This roughness of style is due partly to the ugly rhythm and partly to the abrupt and maladroit vocabulary - "the torrent's sweep" (1.12), "the sun's outbreak" (1.7).

There may be a poetic explanation for all this. Does the poet want to avoid giving any obvious pleasure, in case the easy and fluent progression of the poem should suggest a too easy moral progression to the reader? This is not borne out by Wordsworth's emendations, however, which move constantly in the direction of improving the poem's sensuous appeal.

In the first manuscript, for instance, 11.6-7 appear as -

"Or by the sight of sky-born brooks that shine
At the sun's bidding .... " -

but are changed by the time of publication to -

"Whistling to clouds and sky-born streams that shine
At the sun's outbreak .... ".

Apart from the unfortunate "outbreak", the language here is altogether more evocative and precisely descriptive ("whistling"), and the picture becomes sharper and more detailed, the meaning richer. A similar process can be seen in the alteration of 1.11 from -

"The stillness that she loves, self-poised in air" -

to -

"Absolute stillness, poised aloft in air".

Here the obscure term "self-poised" is removed, and the emended line both makes clearer sense and sounds more suitable, slow and quiet. But Wordsworth's intentions can be seen clearest of all in the alteration of 11.10-14 from -

" .... as the balanced fowl
Is quiet in mid-air, fish in the sweep

Of rapid floods, whales find in the great deep
Calm resting places, so the endeavour soul
May with due respite ere Life's journey close" -
to -
" .... as the fowl can keep
Absolute stillness, poised aloft in air,
And fishes front, unmoved, the torrent's sweep, -
So may the Soul, through powers that Faith bestows,
Win rest, and ease, and peace, with bliss that Angels share".

This revision secures the necessary precision and concentration by two means. The halting and unnecessary complication of the first version, which clouds the sense and dulls the effect, is removed. Then, too, the emphasis can be placed more directly and dramatically on the appropriate last two lines.

The result of this tinkering is appreciable. The meaning and structure of the poem are tightened. The style is improved. The tone and pace of the poem come to suit its meaning more neatly. Generally, the revisions show Wordsworth trying to rescue an ill-judged piece of work. He is only partly successful, "Rest and be Thankful" is still not a good poem, but at least one sees that he recognised his initial mistakes and tried to correct them by improving the poem's texture and increasing its sensuous appeal.

A much more successful poem, even before revision, and a second example of the sonnets of general topography, is "Homeward we turn", written of a visit to Iona in 1833.

This is a metaphoric and highly elaborate poem, a reflection on the spiritus loci and the imaginative impact of the two islands of St. Kitts and Iona, but generalised into a comment on man's attachment to place, even when it is only "To Fancy visible" (1.5).

As usual, the landscape is used here to make a point about the mind's retrospective powers and sense of affection, but though the actual physical description is sparse, it is clear and evocative too: "sun-bright waves" (1.11) and "sea-mark" (1.6), along with much else, convey an excellent impression of the scene. Also the meaning of the poem rests in the impressions it creates and the process it illustrates, and not in any direct statements of truth. Nature is not pushed aside in order to produce a general, perhaps abstract, moral. This is a poem about landscape and its effects, and it is on landscape alone that it concentrates: the sense is intrinsic, not crudely stated or harshly contrived. At the same time, though more subtly, the usual distancing, the movement from the external to the internal world, is clear: as Townsend says, "ultimately (Wordsworth) seeks to copy an ideal landscape that exists within the confines of his own mind".(18) Here, the sights of Iona and St.Kitts are made to express a general sympathy the poet feels for the manifestations of Nature: the particular scenes are chosen in so far as they can be invested with feelings of past enjoyment and human participation.

This is a complicated process, and much of its success rests on the great skill Wordsworth shows in the construction and writing of the poem. There is a pleasing fluidity of movement from the dramatic opening - "Homeward we turn" - through the precise evocation of the "feel" of the

islands, to the slow, regular conclusion, obliquely pointing out the powers of human memory and feeling. This structure is clarified by the rhythm of the three sentences in the poem: the first (l.1) is sharp, arresting; the second (ll.1-4), lively and throwaway, dealing with Iona; the third (ll.5-14), which talks of St.Kitts and the emotions it inspires, is slow, quiet, stately, emphasizing the careful reflectiveness of the process it illustrates.

The style is much more refined and unified here, and better suited to its subject, than in "Rest and be Thankful". The vocabulary is carefully controlled: serenity and sobriety are the key-notes -

"And out of sun-bright waves, a lucid veil" (l.11) -

and there are grace and poise in many of the phrases, as in the overall effect. At first one may be put off by the thin, rather banal quality of images such as "Christian piety's soul-cheering spark" (l.2), but the style is in general admirably held down and given strength by the preciseness of the description and the choiceness of the language. The final impression is of an effective plainness and clarity of description combined with the richness and complexity which come partly from the oblique, more general meaning to be drawn from the poem.

One's conclusion, then, is that this is in many respects a most successful poem, where for once Wordsworth is content simply to describe two areas as evocatively as he can, and to allow the meaning he draws from this remain implicit, a part of the description itself.

Thus the revisions of this poem need attempt none of the important changes of tone that were necessary in "Rest and be Thankful":

Wordsworth simply reinforces the poem as it stands, confirms and strengthens the means by which it already gets its effects.

In ll.5-6, for instance, the awkward and bathetic -

"Remote St.Kilda, art thou visible?
No - but farewell to thee, beloved sea-mark" -

is altered by 1837 to -

"And fare thee well, to Fancy visible,
Remote St.Kilda, lone and loved sea-mark".

Here the rhythm becomes more fluent and easy, less a case of short, sharp phrases than of units of meaning given an appropriate smoothness and emphasis. The words, too, provide more detail and are more evocative, especially the melancholy alliterative "lone and loved sea-mark".

However, the best example is the alteration of ll.5-10 from the manuscript's -

"Adieu, remote St.Kilda, visible
To Fancy only, a beloved sea-mark
For many a voyage made in her swift bark,
Adieu to thee, and all that with thee dwell
Simplest of human kind. Fair to behold
Thou art, extracting from clear skies serene" -

to the published version's fine -

"And fare thee well, to Fancy visible,
Remote St.Kilda, lone and loved sea-mark
For many a voyage made in her swift bark,
When with more hues than in the rainbow dwell
Thou a mysterious intercourse dost hold,

Extracting from clear skies and air serene".

In the second version there are many improvements, though no major changes. The movement of the verse is easier, without the awkwardness of the manuscript, and the flow of sense is quickened and the meaning clarified. There is greater balance of phrasing and assurance of rhythm, as in "clear skies and air serene", and the words are richer and more allusive ("mysterious intercourse"). There is also a closer connection of the parts in this section, a result of the increased depth and aptness of the style, and the more fluent rhythm. This care for ease and fluency is equally clear in the alteration of l.12 from -

"That spreads, and intermingling" -

to -

"That thickens, spreads, and, mingling".

The new line is a highly effective piece of onomatopoiea.

The revisions of this poem are thus of small details only: an original effect is enhanced, but not changed, as Wordsworth improves the texture of his work, concentrating on fluency of rhythm and richness of language.

The second category of poems is that of particular topography. These differ from the more general poems just discussed in a number of ways. The impression that they give, firstly, is that the details of Nature, a simple setting of the scene, are more important than the inevitable moral reflections: the "gay wild flowers" (l.1) and "limpid mountain-rill" (l.5) of "Highland Hut" carry more emphasis are more vigorously treated than the portentous -

"But love, as Nature loves, the lonely poor" (l.11).

What one notices next is the importance of the element of extreme picturesqueness and visual attractiveness. In "Rest and be Thankful", for example, a more abstract poem, Wordsworth writes of Nature in the elevated generalities of "light divine" (l.7); in "On Revisiting Dunnolly Castle" there is instead the precise and appealing grace of -

"An Eagle with stretched wings, but beamless eye" (l.7).

More than the general topographical sonnets, these poems also provide the proof of Mrs. Moorman's admiring comment: "These sonnets were much more than mere "guide-book poetry"; most of them are masterpieces of craftsmanship, and all are touched with the austere melancholy which the Scottish Highlands - their tragic history, and mountain magnificence - awoke in Wordsworth's heart".(19) This sets the sombre tone of the poems rather well, though it is hard to agree that "most" of them are masterpieces of any sort.

The first poem to be discussed in detail is "Highland Hut", which immediately follows "Rest and be Thankful" among the poems of the 1831 Scottish tour and is, as Wordsworth says, "a description of the exterior of a Highland Hut, as often seen under morning or evening sunshine".(20)

The general theme of the sonnet, rather harshly and unsubtly expressed in two direct statements (ll.11 and 14), is that one must not be deceived by mere appearances, but must engage deeply with "Humanity" (l.7) and "Nature" (l.11) so as to be able to see and judge with justice and insight. Here again it might seem that the description of a sight

of Nature has moved into moral generality because of its abstract treatment, and thus displaced Nature from major consideration. But this is not so. What remains with one most vividly is not the awkward sententiousness but the easy, clear and detailed setting of the natural scene -

"Undressed the pathway leading to the door" (l.10).

The structure of the poem, however, follows the usual pattern of description leading to moralising: the intended emphasis still falls heavily on the direct exhortations to the reader, though this is almost entirely counteracted by the poem's texture pulling in the opposite direction. The bare -

" .... Stand no more aloof!" (l.14) -

though placed with considerable rhetorical skill, stands little chance against the elegance and beauty of the melancholy -

"The walls are cracked, sunk is the flowery roof" (l.9).

Despite these two opposing forces within the poem, the construction is still relatively satisfactory: the result is not chaos, the divisions are clearly marked, and the development of the theme is cogent and clear.

One of the unfortunate results of Wordsworth's pedagogic intent, here as elsewhere, is the overfamiliar (though sure and direct) preacher-like tone. This does little, however, to mar the grace and beauty of the description of Nature on which the poem's success finally rests.

This emphasis on the beauties of Nature, and the pleasures of mere sensuous seeing, is given additional force by the revisions to the poem. Wordsworth works consistently, though as usual minutely, towards presenting a particular small scene as clearly and sharply as he can;

the revisions prove that this is where he wishes the poem's appeal to lie.

This is shown in the poet's tinkering with the first two lines. They are altered from -

"Scorn not the threshold of this ragged Cot,
See how its smoke forth breathing whence it may" -

to -

"See how the smoke forth breathing from this Cot,
From roof, door, window, is as promptly kissed" -

to the 1835 version -

"See what gay wild flowers deck this earth-built Cot,
Whose smoke, forth issuing whence and how it may".

The change here is from bare statement to full-scale description. The details of "gay wild flowers" and "earth-built" add to the visual appeal, and the scene is set in greater depth and with greater sensitivity than before. Detail and precision are combined to produce a picture which is both more attractive and more complete.

The same thing happens in the revision of ll.3-5 from -

"By the Sun newly risen, as mountain mist,
And glitters as if conscious of its lot;
The breeze, the babbling rill avoids it not" -

to -

"Shines in the greeting of the sun's first ray
Like wreaths of vapour without stain or blot.
The limpid mountain rill avoids it not".

This is more animated and vivid, and conveys a striking impression by its

better use of detail and finer control of atmosphere. The style, too, is neater, and gives a feeling of smoothness and elegance largely absent from the first version.

These small improvements of style are even better shown in the alteration of -

"The walls are crazy, shattered is the roof" -

to -

"The walls are cracked, sunk is the flowery roof".

Here there is more detail, and it is more enticingly used, the vocabulary is more precise and controlled, and the final effect is visually appealing and extremely smooth and pleasing in texture.

The results of these revisions as a whole, then, are both marked and consistent. There is a concentration on the accumulation of carefully phrased natural detail, a constant emphasis on visual pleasure. Thus one can safely say that here Wordsworth is trying mainly to describe a particular scene and to convey the impressions it gives him by small details and in atmosphere; the awkward moralizing is largely extraneous to the poem, and can be discounted.

The second of the poems of particular topography is "On Revisiting Dunnolly Castle", another of the itinerary poems of Wordsworth's 1833 tour of Scotland. The poem describes a visit to Dunnolly Castle where the poet sees not the famous eagle but instead its image in mosaic, which he salutes nevertheless as -

"Not undeserved, of the memorial rhymes
That animate my way where'er it leads" (ll.13-14)

One's first reaction to this is to notice how artful and meditative

it all is, how far from direct experience and simple description of Nature. What the poem seems to suggest most clearly is the replacement of life by art - of the real eagle by its mosaic image, with its associations of history ("the towering courage", l.11) and implications of remoteness and indirection. In the first versions, there is little to contradict this. Only later does Wordsworth's concern with the aura of particular places, extending broadly through present and past, and setting a scene both physically and atmospherically, become prominent.

However, even from the beginning the poem was kept from abstraction by its precise visual detail: there is talk of "cliff or moor" (l.1), the eagle's eating habits (l.3), "a tall tower" (l.4) - the physical setting is emphatic, and the poem revolves around things rather than the hollow generalities one often comes across in Wordsworth. The emblem of the eagle, also, is too closely linked with the setting of Dunnolly Castle and the personal experience of the poet to seem merely empty: the metaphorical and the physical are entwined, one growing easily out of the other. The thread of the poet's own experience also holds the various parts of the poem together: it is his expectations, and what he ponders, that help to relate the living eagle and the present scene to the changeless emblem of art and history deriving from them. This provides one good example, at least, to modify Townsend's comment: "some of the worst late poems fail because (Wordsworth) attempts to make a natural phenomenon the emblem of more than it can bear".(21)

But the easy thematic flow of the poem is not matched by its arrangement. The transitions especially are harsh and crude, as in -

"Or he had pined, and sunk to feed the worm:
Him found we not .... " (11.3-4) -
simple blocks of words which are related only obliquely.

Is this perhaps intentional, a device the poet uses to get across an otherwise impossible effect? There is evidence to support this in the style, which is extraordinarily banal sometimes for a poet of Wordsworth's skill and experience. The directness, even brashness of the language, for instance -
"Him found we not .... " (1.4) -
and the hesitation and awkwardness of the rhythm -
"Effigy of the Vanished - (shall I dare
To call thee so?) or symbol of fierce deeds" (11.9-10) -
can hardly be accidental, especially since they are little altered in revision. The only conclusion that one can come to, then, is that the clumsiness and harshness are intentional. Perhaps they are used here to counteract the poem's inherently prominent artfulness, as a device of deliberate primitivism, a means of showing the scene in all its roughness and immediacy - one will not be distracted by fine phrases or melliflousness, one will constantly be brought up sharply against some crude chunk of physical reality.

This is borne out by the revisions. They are few, and do not alter the poem's major effects: their principal result is a clarification of the sense of a few passages and a greater sense of drama. Unusually, there is little modification of the style as such.

In 11.5-6 the change from the self-conscious and rather incoherent -

"Espied in rude mosaic effigy
Set in a roofless Chamber's pavement floor" -
to -
"There saw, impaved with rude fidelity
Of art mosaic, in a roofless floor" -
represents a gain in clarity and in precision of emphasis. Similarly, in ll.10-12, the replacement of -
" .... past times
That towering courage, and the savage deeds
Those times were proud of, take Thou too a share" -
to -
" .... fierce deeds
And of the towering courage which past times
Rejoiced in - take, whate'er thou be, a share" -
clarifies the meaning and movement of the lines, does not alter the rather uncouth style, and injects more rhythm and variety.

The revisions here are all of very small matters. Their importance is principally that since they do not alter the awkward style, one assumes that Wordsworth did not wish to alter it, and that, therefore, the interpretation already put forward for the poem is probably the correct one.

Poems of place form by far the largest of the categories these sonnets can be put into, and have accordingly been discussed in detail. The other types of sonnet-artistic, antiquarian, moralistic and personal- are found more sparingly in the 1835 volume, and are thus discussed at

less length, and with only one main example apiece.

The next category covers the poems on artistic subjects: painting, architecture, sometimes the traditions of conventional art.

Apart from their subject, these poems are distinguished in several important ways. They embody most fully the Wordsworthian themes of the past and memory, and the power of art to include past and present, and defy the future: of the painted lions the poet says -

"Satiate are these; and stilled to eye and ear;
Hence, while we gaze, a more enduring fear!" ("Picture of Daniel in the Lions' Den", ll.9-10).

The movement away from contemporary affairs is equally marked, and obviously complementary.

These themes and attitudes of mind in turn produce a quiet, meditative verse: as "The Quarterly Review" says, "a profound pensiveness .... bursting occasionally into devotional rapture, is the foundation",(22) and this is shown in the satisfying, melancholy cadences of the poetry here:

" .... While he crosses lonely moors,
Or musing sits forsaken halls among" ("Adieu, Rydalian Laurels", ll.13-14).

This consideration and reflectiveness also help to produce verse of exquisite verbal texture. Each phrase and rhythm is immaculately chosen to convey just the required richness, allusiveness and delicate beauty. No other group of poems in the 1835 volume so well illustrates the contemporary description of Wordsworth as "a charming melodist and harmonist".(23) One of the finest examples of this graceful style is the beginning of the "Daniel" poem -

"Amid a fertile region green with wood
And fresh with rivers, well did it become

The ducal Owner, in his palace-home

To naturalize this tawny Lion brood" ("Picture of Daniel in the Lions' Den", ll.1-4).

In the end, then, this contemplation of themes of art and change, in a concentrated and elegant style, produces poems of outstanding grace and sophistication - perfect examples of an art where style, in life as well as literature, is conventional, but superbly consistent and attractive.

The poem which best represents the sonnets on artistic themes is the "Picture of Daniel in the Lions' Den, at Hamilton Palace". It is another of the poems of the 1831 Scottish tour, and was composed after seeing the well-known painting by Rubens. The theme of the poem, richly evoked and beautifully illustrated and worked out, is the power and value of art to subdue, as it expresses, the emotions: one of the most important ideas underlying the later poetry.

The poem is striking principally because, almost alone among the later work, it calls on Wordsworth's profound feeling for the sinister, unknown and magnificent, which produces such startling results in his mature poems (as in the French Revolution section of "The Prelude"). Despite the dampening effect of the last line -

"Man placed him here, and God, he knows, can save" -

the descriptions here have a dimension of fear and unrest that prevents the poem from settling into the same staid mould as many. There is, for instance, the evocative language, with its undertones of strangeness -

" .... those that roam at large

Over the burning wilderness .... " (ll.6-7) -

and the striking situations and reflections -

" .... well did it become

The Ducal Owner, in his palace-home
To naturalize this tawny Lion brood" (11.2-4).

The atmosphere of the poem is tense and acute: the unexpected is always just around the corner. The lions, for instance -

" .... charge
The wind with terror while they roar for food" (11.7-8).

The tone alone, the high-pitched emotion, prevents monotony. But liveliness and interest are also maintained by the piercing, evocative language and the careful, symmetrical construction. There are constant alternations of the ordered and the savage, art and life, real lions and painted lions. This whole picturesque and elaborate series of contrasts is fittingly framed and subdued by the orderly, rational concepts of the "palace-home" (1.3) and the all-ordering, all-saving powers of God.

Stylistically, too, the poem is both sustained and appropriate. The construction calls for a series of intense visual tableaux - the palace, the real lions at large, the picture itself and its "bedrowsed" (1.12) subjects - which the style matches in a rich and evocative manner. The effect is very properly pictorial, packed with compressed detail and full of emotional significance. Density and visual suggestiveness, as well as a certain assured elegance, are the keynotes. This can easily be illustrated. There is the grace, for instance, of -

" .... a fertile region green with wood
And fresh with rivers .... " (11.1-2) -

and the calm assurance of -

"Satiate are these; and stilled to eye and ear" (1.9).

Most evocative of all is the picture of the lions "outstretched and listless" (l.13), but able to be roused by hunger to fight and savagery. The force of the evocation of the strangeness and power of the natural lions, too, is almost in the old Wordsworthian manner, and the balance between them and the elements of order (the palace, art, God) is finely held. The rhythm of the poem is sprightly and nimble, as it should be: a heavy sonority does not, as often, dampen the flow of scenes and ideas. Thus, despite the firm settlement of the last line, the overall effect is of a nervousness and uncertainty which seems exhilarating compared with the stolidity of many of the rest of the sonnets.

The poem is therefore interesting because of its unusual tone and high literary qualities. In a way it is also the peak of Wordsworth's remote and emblematic method of working in his late poems, though it has many qualities of immediate aesthetic appeal too. It is not merely a moral drawn from Nature, but a moral drawn from a picture of Nature!

Since it is successful even in its early drafts, the poem needs little revision. The style is adapted and there are several verbal improvements, but overall Wordsworth simply reinforces, in every major respect, his excellent first thoughts.

That he is content to improve, and not to alter his work in its fundamentals, is clear from his treatment of ll.1-2. These are revised from -

"Bleak is the land, a land of tide and flood,
Of mist and snow, and well doth it become" -

to -

"Amid a fertile region, green with wood
And fresh with rivers, well did it become".

Both of these versions strive for an identical effect of mystery and grandeur, though the properties they use are different. In the first the poet has given a feeling of pomposity to his description, and the lines are rather too large in scale for the rest of the poem. In the second, however, a new freshness and simplicity, though with a freight of implication, have taken over to provide the quiet impressiveness that the situation requires. It is also more varied visually than the first version.

A similar growth in impressiveness and grandeur comes from the alteration of ll.9-10 from -

"But these are satiate, and a stillness drear
Calls into life a more enduring fear!" -

to -

"Satiate are these; and stilled to eye and ear;
Hence, while we gaze, a more enduring fear!"

Here the halting movement of the lines, and the heavy sombre rhythm, subtly and dramatically convey the dark emphasis the poet is looking for, and express both his calm assurance and his emotional dread, The effect he finally achieves is a very chilling one indeed.

A clearer placing of emphasis, and a sharper contrast, are also obtained by the revision of ll.11-13 from -

"Yet why? the Prophet quakes not in the cave
Mid his companions listless and bedrowsed,

Nor would he quake were they by hunger roused" -

to -

"Yet is the Prophet calm, nor would the cave
Daunt him - if his Companions, now be-drowsed
Outstretched and listless, were by hunger roused".

The overall effect of these revisions is an intensifying one. Their enlargement of the visual appeal and dramatic texture has immediate, heightening repercussions on the atmosphere of the poem, but does not change the basic premises behind its composition.

The poem also illustrates a comment by Townsend, which applies to few of the "Yarrow Revisited" poems as well as to this one: "what is primarily suggestive of the best of the later art ... is (the) ability to establish ... a poetic world in which the past can be accounted for and a present state of repose achieved without reference to any unassimilated philosophical or religious system".(24) For her, above all, Wordsworth uses a genuinely symbolic object to show that he feels he can, through the power of art, achieve a contentment which takes into account, at the same time that it subdues, the violent and alarming, and which is related to the poet's Christianity. What the poem shows in action, in fact, is an outlook of Christian aestheticism which can control the awkwardnesses of life by relation firstly to art, and secondly to God.

The next group of poems to be discussed deal with history and antiquity; there are a good number of these in the 1835 volume.

The thing that strikes one most about these poems is the justice of applying to them Mrs. Moorman's remark that "history and landscape were

inseparable in (Wordsworth's) mind".[25] Throughout his poetry, the scenes of history he represents - as in "The Borderers" - are carefully set in a context of Nature, and often the converse is also true. But, apart from mere physical association, why should this be? The reason seems to lie in Wordsworth's desire for absolutes in his later years, and for topics sanctified by tradition and promising or illustrating some kind of special permanence. Both history and Nature are of this kind - the one obviously proves, by its existence, that great events and feelings do not wholly die, and in the ceaseless self-renewal of the other one can discern a sort of immortality. The use of the two together acts as a bulwark against doubt, as well as providing the occasion for plenty of atmospheric local colour. The history and scenery often interlock with considerable descriptive effect. This is shown clearly in the first few lines (the only ones with any degree of success) in the very bad poem "St.Catherine of Ledbury" -

"When human touch (as monkish books attest)
Nor was applied nor could be, Ledbury bells
Broke forth in concert flung adown the dells,
And upward, high as Malvern's cloudy crest" (ll.1-4).

The joining of these two elements also gives an apt opportunity for the rich and solemn metaphoric style which Wordsworth manages so well (as in the two "Roman Antiquities" sonnets).

What is remarkable, secondly, is that the historical sonnets generally set out to tell stories, or at least describe incidents. This is obviously difficult within the confines of a sonnet, and impossible without a great deal of concentration and selection. Wordsworth attempts

to construct a "plot" in "St.Catherine of Ledbury", and the result is hollow and banal - there is simply not enough space for the story to operate in. Sometimes, too, Wordsworth rushes awkwardly through his historical exemplum to concentrate on the moral at the end, which therefore neither carries conviction nor follows adequately from the action. In a few poems, however, of which "Mary Queen of Scots" is the best, he manages to convey in the detailed evocation of a moment of time a whole mood, the implications of history and emotion: everything is relevant, everything builds up an atmosphere full of significance, where history, Nature and personality dramatically fuse. Here he has at last realised that the impact of history, in the short poem at least, can be conveyed best by concentrating on a small incident - the landing of a Queen - but in depth, so as to provide intensity instead of empty story-telling. If they are written in this way, the poems on history and antiquity are among the most evocative in the "Yarrow Revisited" volume.

"Mary Queen of Scots", for example, a poem of the 1833 tour through Cumberland and the West of Scotland, presents a rich and allusive picture of a single moment in history, complete with local colour and comment on "Time, the old Saturnian Seer" (l.9). The Queen is "Landing at the mouth of the Derwent, Workington", and the occasion is frozen, but the evocation is enriched by the ranging forwards in time to the "woes and degradations" (l.12) that lie ahead. Thus in the presentation of an instant lies the past, present and future of a historical character, and this is conveyed unifiedly and without strain. Nor is it done by mere overt statement. There is a feeling of genuine drama in this move-

ment of a person of note through historic events, from good fortune to inevitable doom. Despite its sometimes fanciful metaphor, this poem is thus more direct and active, less remote and aesthetic, than many of the poems of 1835. It describes an event and a life of more than minor interest, and since this public dimension provides significance, Wordsworth can feel secure in the value of his topic, and give it the striking and stylish treatment it deserves.

The construction of the poem reflects this confidence and ease. There is a smooth progression, helped by the use of connectives such as "and", "but" and "when", from the present moment of Mary's landing through a picture of her beauty and the harshness of time, to the future of - "Weeping captivity and shuddering fear" (l.13).

The ease of this development from present to future, from happiness to misery, is assisted by the language and rhythm. Here the movement is from charm and lightness -

"The Queen drew back the wimple that she wore" (l.2) -

to the sobriety and gloom of -

"With step prelusive to a long array
Of woes and degradations hand in hand" (ll.12-13) -

to the dramatic and vigorous last line -

"Stilled by the ensanguined block of Fotheringay!"

The words are arranged so as to place strong emphases, and the drama is increased by the frequent use of suspension and interpolation (ll.5-8).

This poem is thus a particularly good example of how richly and incisively Wordsworth can work when a topic is both remote in time,

and therefore without disturbing personal echoes, and rich in implication and association. The sharpness and clarity of its effects seem to show Wordsworth moving towards a less inhibited treatment of his subjects, a greater willingness to call upon feelings rather than thoughts. But this is only "seem": in the end, the exoticism and the history produce an effect all the more remote for its vividness - the excellence of the poem merely emphasizes its distance from any kind of contemporary direct experience, or original perceptions about people. Townsend's comment is apt: "not ... imaginative discovery but ... sentiment and reflection".(26)

Wordsworth's revisions to the poem clear up the construction and improve the language, but this of course can have little effect without a change of manner too. His changes thus simply highlight the poem's vivid "pastness" and make it easier still for one to regard it just as a pretty, self-sufficient, enclosed little objet d'art, and not as a work which has any deep connection with human feelings or activities.

Firstly, the revisions clear away the few awkward constructions which retard the flow of the poem or cause ambiguity. In ll.3-4, for example, the clumsy -

"And to the throng, how touchingly she howed
That hailed herlanding on the Cumbrian shore" -

is replaced by the clearer -

"And to the throng, that on the Cumbrian shore
Her landing hailed, how touchingly she bowed!"

This improves the directness of the poem's movement, and also makes the meaning more immediately obvious. Something similar happens in l.6, altered from -

"High poised in air, of pine-tree foliage, darts" -

to -

"Of pine-tree foliage poised in air, forth darts" -

so as to ensure a more logical connection of the parts of the sentence. The best example of all is in ll.11-14, which are changed from -

"Thence forth he saw a long and long array
Of miserable seasons hand in hand,
Weeping captivity, and pallid fear
And last the ensanguined block of Fotheringay" -

to -

"With step prelusive to a long array
Of woes and degradations hand in hand, -
Weeping captivity, and shuddering fear
Stilled by the ensanguined block of Fotheringay!"

This ensures that the poem ends on a note of appropriate dramatic intensity. The rhythm is firmer too, and the feeling of climax sharper: the language has a strength and depth missing from the rather insipid Augustan polish of the first version.

The revisions which have been discussed clear up meaning and proportion, achieve an easier movement, and produce more dramatic effects without finally, changing the poem fundamentally or drawing it into contemporary or personal spheres.

The next group of poems deals with topics of general morality and belief, which always underpin even the slightest of Wordsworth's works. It is only sometimes, however, that these topics become, as in these poems the overt subject for discussion.

What one notices first about these poems is their calmness and certainty. Here the poet is indeed sure of his rightness - conservative, conventional, harsh - and allows no element of doubt to cloud his effects. As Harper says, "there came to him with passing years a deepening of conviction, which gave him increasing authority on many subjects".(27) This stronger conviction leaves Wordsworth little room for subtlety or flexibility of opinion, but at least it ensures a sober uniformity of mood and an impression of almost holy certainty -

"Thus everywhere to truth Tradition clings" ("Fancy and Tradition", l.7).

Though the form of these poems is public and objective, as their themes demand, there is something personal about them too. Their sureness comes not simply from experience in general, but from the experience of a particular man. The generality is underpinned by the moral conclusions of the lifetime of the poet himself, as the context of the poems, and the more personal recurrence of their themes elsewhere, make clear. As Potts notes, they "betoken judgement and long experience".(28)

However, despite the feeling one has of the poems' conclusions having been tested in life, the form and style they adopt are not reassuring. Austerity, remoteness and conventionality are the keynotes. The themes of "measure and artistic restraint, the self-sufficiency of truth, the confidence of reason"(29) are only too fittingly matched in language and rhythm. The abstraction and generality are uniform, from -

"To reinstate wild Fancy, would we hide
Truths whose thick veil Science has drawn aside?" ("Desire we past illusions to recall" ll.2-3)

to -

"From shadowy fountains of the Infinite" ("Tranquillity", l.11).
The poems are full of vague 18th century personifications, and move in a world of thought and misty poetic cliché-the physical and personal almost never impinge.

The best and most characteristic poem in this "morality" group is "Tranquillity", which appears as "Suggested by the Foregoing" after "Monument of Mrs. Howard" in the standard editions. It belongs to the summer tour of 1833, and follows on an idea lightly introduced in the parent poem, that -

" .... Art, triumphant over strife
And pain, hath powers to Eternity endeared" ("Monument of Mrs. Howard", ll.13-14).

In "Tranquillity" this is elaborated into a connection of Art with Religion as the prime comforters of humanity.

The poem thus celebrates both religion and art, two of the major topics which constantly recur throughout the later work. The treatment is generalized and philosophic. The processes of argument, and often the language, would suit a tract better than a poem, and personified abstractions play more of a part than individual persons or things -

"Then Arts, which still had drawn a softening grace
From shadowy fountains of the Infinite,
Communed with that Idea face to face" (ll.10-12).

It follows from this argumentative intention that a great deal of attention must be paid to construction. The continuity and unity of effect result not only from the homogeneous style, but also from a clear,

progressive structure in which transitions are carefully made and connectives ("and", "but", "then") are skilfully used. The movement from tranquillity, to art, to religion, and to both of these together, is easy and logical. This development from the (here only relatively) particular to the general is very characteristic of the poet. The introductory address, too, catches the reader's attention at once, so that the entry into the poem's generality is at least achieved sharply - the dramatic beginning is an inducement to follow on, an eye-catcher meant to make up for the dryness of what comes next.

This dryness is pronounced and constant. The language is stripped of qualitative detail, and abounds in personification -

"Heart-stricken by stern destiny of yore
The Tragic Muse thee served with thoughtful vow" (ll.3-4).

Yet the sparseness and lack of sensuous appeal does not result in a proper philosophic clarity and precision. Essentially, the sonnet still uses the language of poetry, but cut off from its physical and emotional roots it reveals only hollowness and vagueness. The attempt to use a modified poetic style for philosophic purposes has failed. The result is a tortured barrenness, lapsing sometimes into half-literal, half-metaphoric absurdity -

"From shadowy fountains of the Infinite,
Communed with that Idea face to face".

The primary concern in this poem is thus moral and "factual", and the aim is a kind of philosophic verse. The impulse is to communicate a rather ordinary idea, and not to amuse or carry away the reader

poetically. Beauty of phrase is firmly held down and the emphasis is even and solemn, so that it is the meaning which commands one's attention. A fitting comment might be that of Hutton, though it errs too much on the side of favour, and is too flatteringly phrased: "there is far less elasticity, far less exultant buoyancy here, and yet a grander and more stately movement".(30)

Wordsworth's desire to instruct is very clear. But, as his revisions show, he must also have noticed the attenuation of his first version, and realised that if it were to have any force at all it must be denser and richer, more appealing to the senses and more firmly grounded in concrete detail. Thus, the trend in revision is towards a playing down of abstraction and an increased richness of style.

In l.3, for example, the empty and slightly ridiculous -

"In quest of thee did Science dive and soar" -

is replaced by -

"Heart-stricken by stern destiny of yore".

The second version is more detailed, and the bare thoughts begin to take on vivacity and an air of reality. In l.9 -

"Brought doubted Immortality to light" -

is changed to -

"Warmed our sad being with celestial light".

This is more concentrated and powerful, its abstraction held down and supported by a new feeling for humanity.

Both of these revisions also point to the added depth of meaning that emendation brings. A good example is in ll.5-6, changed from -

"And Sculpture fondly laboured to endow
Man with lost rights and honour to restore" -

to -

"And what of hope Elysium could allow
Was fondly seized by Sculpture, to restore".

This removes an ugly plainness in favour of something more animated and allusive. The stolidity and vagueness are replaced by a more arresting and dramatic image which is both precise and concentrated.

The intention behind these revisions is clear, and the aridity of Wordsworth's first, uncompromising version is muted. The movement is away from abstraction, and the style is made more solid and attractive. The result is a poem better calculated to hold one's attention and to make its point - the moral is all the more effective for being presented in a poetically pleasing form. One cannot of course pretend that the revisions transform the poem - it is still heavier and vaguer than it should be - but at least they move in the right direction, and the change of emphasis they involve is not negligible.

The last group of sonnets to be discussed is that of personal address. Elements of epistolary style are common in Wordsworth, and many of his poems begin with invocations of people, but only a few of the "Yarrow Revisited" sonnets are openly addressed to friends or reveal the necessary sociability.

As one might expect in poems informally directed from one friend to another, the most obvious criteria set by the poet are sincerity and directness. More than any of the other late poems, these sonnets are

relaxed and free. They often give the impression of a personality which is genuinely involved, and not afraid of being seen so. This is especially evident in the easy, conversational "To Cordelia M---", which is almost as free and open as ordinary speech.

The style matches this unforced emotional directness. The rhythm is light and flowing -

" .... Be thou firm, - be true
To thy first hope, and this good work pursue,
Poor as thou art .... " ("To a Friend", ll.6-8) -

and the style uncomplicated and natural, avoiding much of the periphrasis and Latin diction one finds elsewhere.

However, it is easy to overemphasize the informal qualities of these poems and to present them as purely personal utterances amid a mass of public verse. This is obviously mistaken. The personal directness and freedom of technique strike one immediately, for they are unusual at this stage in Wordsworth's career, but they are still supported by the general themes which recur throughout the later work. The total effect is of a satisfying fusion of general concerns and personal feeling.

The best poem in this group is "To the Earl of Lonsdale", written in 1833 to vindicate Lonsdale's character after repeated attacks had been made on it by the press. Wordsworth is aroused here, and the result is, as Harper says, "passionately dogmatic".(31)

The theme is a characteristic one, the testing of work in action and the proof of virtue in practice, but its handling is far from merely abstract. It is shown here, and praised, as it is embodied in the life

of the Earl of Lonsdale. Thus even in its design the poem's blend of the personal and public is already apparent. There is a largeness and generality of impact guaranteed by the overall message, but at the same time a pleasing, human note derives from Wordsworth's own liking for Lonsdale. Thus the elevated praising of certain moral qualities becomes at the same time a lively and heartfelt encomium of a particular man who embodies these qualities -

"How in thy mind and moral frame agree
Fortitude, and that Christian Charity" (ll.6-7).

Yet despite this double appeal, the poem's structure shows no sign of strain. The central idea indicated in the epigraph ("Magistratus indicat virum") flows throughout the poem in smoothly turned connections and crisp examples, and an extreme continuity of syntax completes the impression of unity and directness.

These qualities are equally evident in the style. The simplicity and unobtrusiveness of the language, and its quiet dignity and ease -

"That searching test thy public course has stood;
As will beowned alike by bad and good,
Soon as the measuring of life's little span
Shall place thy virtues out of Envy's reach" (ll.11-14) -

form a marked contrast to the formality usual in Wordsworth at this time. The rhythm, too, is fluent, but has the firmness of conviction, and is not marred by heaviness.

The poem thus succeeds both in putting across a moral and in conveying personal feelings. The style is by and large well calculated

to produce the desired effects. However, the importance of the style is paramount here, for the association of the subjective and objective levels of the poem must be clear, but not too clear.

Although it is already very adequate, it is thus to the style that Wordsworth directs his attentions in revision. Especially important is the change in ll.2-7 from -

"One chiefly well aware how much he owes
To thy regard, to speak in verse or prose
Of types and signs harmoniously imprest
On thy Abode neglecting to attest
That in thy Mansions Lord as well agree
Meekness and strength and Christian charity" -

to -

"Whose heart with gratitude to thee inclines
If he should speak, by fancy touched, of signs
On thy Abode harmoniously imprest,
Yet be unmoved with wishes to attest
How in thy mind and moral frame agree
Fortitude, and that Christian Charity".

The second version is simpler and clearer, and more flowing in rhythm. Its urbanity and more refined control move towards a clarity of expression which attempts to convey both sincerity of emotion and personal conviction. An equal toning down and simplification of style for reasons of informality and emotional directness is shown in the revision of ll.9-11 from -

"And if, as thy armorial bearings teach,
"The Magistracy indicates the Man",
That test thy life triumphantly has stood" -
to -
"And if the Motto on thy 'scutcheon teach
With truth "THE MAGISTRACY SHOWS THE MAN",
That searching test thy public course has stood".

The revisions of this poem thus move towards the more open style which is conventionally thought to be sincere: everything is to be said precisely and directly, with as little ornamentation as possible, so as to create a feeling of personal involvement and at the same time to put across a theme in individual and general terms.

One of the things this chapter has tried to illustrate is that among the later works of Wordsworth there is a great variety of type and degree of excellence, and that these sonnets show up clearly the principal merits and defects of Wordsworth's whole way of writing at this period.

The merits of the poems have already been thoroughly discussed, so that only a brief recapitulation is necessary here. Throughout there is a considerable craftsmanship, an easy traditional control over the techniques available: the skill may be a conventional one, based on a "public" style and the example of previous writers, but it is great. The feeling for richness and aptness of style is unfailing and minute: no detail is too small for scrutiny. Thus, as a result, the unity and architecture of these poems is often neat and sure. The evenness of the

texture is grafted onto carefully planned structures to give just the required concentration of effect. These sonnets also reflect a pleasing quietness and meditativeness. Their composure is shown in the delicacy of style and ease of movement one often finds and admires. The direction is towards repose and thought, and an oblique and rather pathetic feeling of the poet himself often comes through to animate the pensiveness. The tone, indeed, is reminiscent of the best of 18th century meditative verse, and shares with it a humility and a sense of the divine presence. Herford has described it rather well: "rapturous vision is less prominent than will, spontaneous impulse than fortitude".(32)

The faults are many too. Many of the sonnets are unbearably dull and platitudinous, prosaically expressing tired old clichés, and in some the handling of conventional techniques and conservative attitudes is merely bookish and uninspired. Examples are not hard to find: "To the River Greta, Near Keswick" and "Steamboats, Viaducts and Railways" together illustrate almost everything that can go wrong with a Wordsworthian sonnet. At the root of all these faults lies a single mistaken idea: that truth should be put above poetry if the two seem to conflict. Hence the tendency to point a moral rather than tell a tale, the liking for a bare scene or slight incident followed by dreary and unconvincing moralizing. Sperry talks of "a hint of mental rigidity, a felt want of flexibility"(33) in Wordsworth's best poetry, and this is even clearer here, where the poet often just imposes a moral on a protesting scene or story. He seems unwilling to allow variation or simple poetic pleasure, or to let things simply BE. Thus he frequently cannot let well enough alone,

and often applies his "standard" responses heedlessly to whatever topic crosses his mind.

The revisions are especially important with regard to the sonnets since they bridge the good and bad qualities of the later Wordsworth as a poet. Their unremitting purpose is the improvement of style, not merely its homogenizing, though they do that too, but also the adaptation of the means to the end and the increase of purely poetic pleasure. The revisions generally improve texture, and at the same time move away from the prosaic and the deadeningly conventional. Almost nowhere do the revisions do anything but increase one's enjoyment and heighten individual poetic effects. The philosophical and intellectual groundwork of the poems is not changed - the themes are constant, but become much easier to enjoy. Thus, as Wordsworth must finally have realised, since one is more fully engaged with the poetry, one also has a greater chance of being moved or convinced by the moral points he is inculcating.

Finally, then, one can leave the sonnets with this just, but rather overstated comment of Harper: "Some of the sonnets are pompous, some are mechanical, but a certain number show the hand of a consummate artist moulding into sensuous form lofty and passionately conceived thoughts".(34)

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THE INSCRIPTIONS AND EPISTLES

Not all of Wordsworth's moulds of poetry are adequately represented in the "Yarrow Revisited" volume. There are so few hymns, elegies and epitaphs, and they are of such poor quality, that they hardly bear discussion. However, this still leaves the inscriptions and epistles to be dealt with.

In style and technique the inscriptions and epistles are different from each other, but they have one important feature in common. This feature is the criterion of "sincerity" applied to the feelings they express, and seems a sufficient justification for treating them together in one chapter.

This notion of an emotional truth which appeals directly to the reader is set out in the "Essay on Epitaphs".(1) Here Wordsworth makes clear the need for "a criterion of sincerity":(2) the expression of feelings in a poem must be "of that kind which carries conviction to the heart at once."(3) He is talking particularly of epitaphs, but what he says also applies to the two types of poem being discussed here. The inscription is intended to move one's feelings by stating some great truth of human experience, the epistle, to express a genuine contact between two people. Both try to secure conviction, and to assure one that the poet is really engaged, by means of simplicity of tone and directness of technique.

That what has been said on the subject of sincerity applies to the inscription is shown by a comment of Wordsworth in a letter to Beaumont of 16th November, 1811: "If the composition be natural, affecting or

beautiful, it is all that is required".[4] The words "natural" and "affecting" imply the same kind of emotional truth that Wordsworth thought necessary in epitaphs. The two kinds of poem are similar in other ways too - in their use of the concept of transience, for example, or their consolotary character - and it is often difficult to tell them apart when they are not explicitly labelled.

However, the inscriptions in "Yarrow Revisited" are uniform in style, content and technique, and are readily distinguishable from, say, the more sombre and passionate epitaph, "By a blest husband guided". What is most evident about the inscriptions is the directness and unobtrusiveness of their effects, so that feelings are presented very clearly and openly. The impression given is that things as they are, unsullied and uncomplicated, are put down without fuss and without distraction from their simple truth. There are many examples of this. One of the best is the quiet, plaintive question -

"How venture then to hope that Time will spare
This humble Walk? .... " ("The Massy Ways", ll.4-5)

These lines also show how the inscriptions are concerned with time, change and immortality. The poet's aim is to assure himself that some part of him will survive, even if it is only a poem cut into the rock and relating both to him personally and to humanity as a whole. It is a "search for stability",[5] for something to cling to in the midst of flux and the inner uncertainty of old age and approaching death.

The inscriptions follow the usual progression from personal to general feelings: Mrs. Moorman describes Wordsworth as "ever extracting

from human contingencies their universal essence".[6] In the "Inscription intended for a Stone in the Grounds of Rydal Mount", for instance, the poet starts off by referring to himself -

"In these fair vales hath many a Tree
At Wordsworth's suit been spared" (ll.1-2) -

but then moves gradually away from the individual to a final, sad view of "the departed" (l.9).

The clarity of this progression, and the openness and calm assurance of the emotions expressed, combine to produce the impression of control and consideration which is characteristic of the inscriptions. This is more than "metaphysical pathos",[7] and it is more than simple meditativeness. It results from the poet's intention, which is, as King says, "to find the factual world and, keeping it close as a child does, to find in its very plainness and immediacy the plenitude and order of God".[8] The poet is looking for this kind of assurance, and achieves it both by the development of the poems themselves, and by imposing it where this seems necessary. The certainty must be taken on trust before it can really be proven. Thus the measuredness of the poems is for intellectual and emotional reasons as well as aesthetic ones. It results from an effort to impose, as well as to "prove", the correctness of a number of general moral positions. Hence, too, the calmness and quiet monumentality of the style -

" .... the Exile would consign
This Walk, his loved possession, to the care
Of those pure Minds that reverence the Muse" (ll.20-22 of "The Massy Ways") -

is meant to complement the openness and purity of the feelings and the incontrovertibility of the conclusions.

As a result of this technical and emotional care, Wordsworth does finally achieve what he wants from the inscription: "through the powers of art... "things by sorrow wrought" are objectified and controlled to a point where they become bearable, even 'matter for a jocund thought'".(9) In other words, his pressing personal fear of death and impermanence is purged through its expression in verse. The final effect is that also expected of epitaphs: to "leave in quiet".(10)

Inscriptions were commonly written from Greek and Roman times, and Wordsworth himself wrote a good number. But he offers no clues in his letters or theoretical works, or the notes to his poems, as to any writers who particularly influenced him. However, in an essay, "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry",(11) G.H.Hartman gives a convincing explanation of the growth of the inscription as it is used by Wordsworth. Firstly, he derives it from the votive and commemorative epigrams of the Greek Anthology, which often sweeten a moral, as the inscriptions do, by human interest and immediacy of situation. Then he traces the development of this style of epigram into the 18th century, when its tone changed as it assimilated the elegiac and topographical modes of the period, and it became primarily simple in style and solemn and thoughtful in mood. His conclusion, which he carefully relates to the relevant poems by Wordsworth, is this: "through a reuniting .... of elegiac and loco-descriptive poetry, and through the strengthening influence of the radically Greek element in the Greek Anthology, a new lyrical kind emerges:

the nature-inscription".[12] The truth of Hartman's hypothesis is soon seen when one compares an epigram from the Greek Anthology with a Wordsworthian inscription, though this of course does not show the centuries of adaptation which have led from one to the other. A typical poem from the Greek Anthology is Mimnermos' "We all do fail as a Leaf".[13] It is very like, say, the "Inscription intended for a Stone in the Grounds of Rydal Mount". Both poems have the same openness of manner and directness of approach. The poet simply expresses what is on his mind, in general as well as personal terms. Thus one has Wordsworth's -

" .... here the tender-hearted
May heave a gentle sigh for him
As one of the departed" (ll.7-9) -

to match Mimnermos' -

"So joy we in our span of youth, unknowing
If God shall bring us good or evil days" (ll.3-4).

The purpose in both cases is consolotary: the poet must assuage and calm the melancholy uncertainty lying beneath the surface of his work. Wordsworth talks of others sadly remembering him when he is dead, and the Greek writer sets the present pleasure of youth against the inevitability of age and death -

"Two fates beside thee stand; the one hath sorrow,
Dull age's fruit, that other gives the boon
Of Death, for youth's fair flower hath no to-morrow,
And lives but as a sunlit afternoon" (ll.5-8).

The two poets thus share an obsession with the passing of time and the

movement towards death and oblivion.

The likenesses between Wordsworth's inscriptions and this epigram by Mimnermos are considerable, and although many changes have taken place in the hundreds of years separating the two, it seems clear that Hartman's tracing of the links between them will stand up to scrutiny. It may even be that Wordsworth had poems like Mimnermos' in mind when he was writing his inscription, for he clearly had a very thorough knowledge of the classics.

The first of the inscriptions to be discussed in detail is the "Inscription intended for a Stone in the Grounds of Rydal Mount". It was dictated by Wordsworth to his sister on 26th June, 1830, and was revised and recopied about two years later, on 2nd August, 1832.(14) Its theme is the hope for some remembrance, some continuance after death, expressed through the poet's concern for his poem engraved on a stone.

Ideas of impermanence and the powers of poetic consecration are prominent. In a tone "balanced between despondency and hope",(15) Wordsworth hopes that what he has created, even if it is only this inscription, may cause him to be remembered in the future.

But the poem is not only personal, for the particular situation of the writer is invested with wider associations, until the impression is of a plea for remembrance for everyone -

" .... and time will come
When here the tender-hearted
May heave a gentle sigh for him,
As one of the departed" (11.6-9).

As Wordsworth himself says, "the general sympathy ought to be quickened, provoked, and diversified, by particular thoughts, actions, images".(16) So, as often in Wordsworth, personal feelings are important, but are strengthened by the implied generality of their application. The poem's easy movement from past("was rescued", l.5) to future ("will come, l.6), from fact to supposition, also contributes to this.

The blending of past and present, individual and universal, is helped, too, by a style of deliberate fluency and simplicity. There is no elaboration here, no artfulness. What one has instead is the direct statement of facts, of assured thoughts and emotions. Admittedly, as the tone sometimes shows, there is a current of doubt, a personal unsureness running counter to the certainty, but the style does what it can to cover this up. Generally, the easy directness -

"In these fair vales hath many a Tree
At Wordsworth's suit been spared" (ll.1-2) -

presents a confident picture of things as they are, unalloyed by literary posturings, and thus gaining in power to move the reader. The solidity and amplitude of the rhythm add to this impression of a sincere and considered expression of irrefutable opinions of general relevance.

Finally, the poem leaves one with a remarkable impression of its wholeness, of the unity and unobtrusiveness of its effects, and of its success in producing - despite the doubts it carefully covers up - the desired impression of security, safety and consolation. It illustrates a comment of Mrs. Moorman: "who but Wordsworth could have spoken of "stillness" as a quality of style, or have said that one of the properties

of Language was to "leave in quiet"".[17]

However, as always, the level of the style must be sustained and the poem moved closer to the poet's austere intention.

One way of bringing this about is well shown in the revision of ll.3-5 from -

"The builder touched this old grey stone
'Twas rescued by the Bard" -

to -

"He sav'd this old grey stone that pleas'd
The grove-frequenting Bard" -

and finally to -

"And from the builder's hand this Stone,
For some rude beauty of its own,
Was rescued by the Bard".

The third version removes both the awkwardness ("'Twas", l.4) and the preciosity ("grove-frequenting", l.4) of the first attempts. The result is unobtrusive and fluent, devoid of inconsistencies and unnecessary elaborations, and well integrated into the rest of the poem. The simpler and more precise style easily achieves the "medial" effect at which Wordsworth is aiming. A similar intention, though a different method, is shown in the revision of ll.6-8 from -

"Long may it last! and here, perchance,
The good and tender-hearted
May heave a gentle sigh for him,
As one of the departed" -

to -

"Long may it rest in peace - and here
Perchance the tender-hearted
Will heave a gentle sigh for him,
As one of the departed" -

to -

"So let it rest in peace; and here
(Heaven knows how soon) the tender-hearted
May heave a gentle sigh for him
As one of the departed" -

to -

"So let it rest; and time will come
When here the tender-hearted
May heave a gentle sigh for him
As one of the departed".

The presentation of this final version is the most direct and compact. The rather empty rhetoric and awkward transitions of tone in the early drafts are avoided, and the effect is to hone down the crucial conclusion to the poem to a proper simplicity and concentration.

Thus the revisions of this short poem adapt it neatly to Wordsworth's intentions and harmonise the elements within it to achieve the necessary unobtrusiveness of effect.

The second inscription is "The Massy Ways", which was, as the manuscript tells us, "Intended to be placed on the door of the further Gravel Terrace if we had quitted Rydal Mount". It was written in 1826,

when Lady le Fleming had shown she wished to let Rydal Mount, Wordsworth's favourite home, and he was forced to consider moving. (Lady le Fleming later relented). It centres on the powers of time, and hopes of remembrance. The poet, considering how much that was great has been forgotten, hopes that his "Walk" will survive since "A Poet's hand first shaped it" (l.6). The theme is thus precisely the "quest for permanence",(18) though more overt, that Perkins finds throughout Wordsworth.

The subject of the poem is not, however, merely stated, for all its obviousness. The personal situation of one man is generalised until a universal aspect is revealed. The features of Nature and social life the poem includes, the "moonlight skies" (l.8) and "earnest converse with beloved Friends" (l.14), are alone enough to ensure an enlargement of the reader's sympathies, without the general terms "POET" (l.6) and "Bard" (l.7) that he uses of himself. The movement from a simple initial statement to a thorough expansion of it, and from past to future, is characteristic of Wordsworth and also of inscriptions as a class.

Characteristic, too, is the monumentality and slow calm emphasis of the style, assured in its manner and certain of obtaining its effects -

"How venture then to hope that Time will spare
This humble Walk? Yet on the mountain's side
a POET'S hand first shaped it .... " (ll.4-6).

The relative bareness of this is neither ugly nor unconsidered. Its austerity is richly evocative (of Shakespeare, for example:

"How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?" (Sonnet 65, ll.4-5)),

and aptly conveys the impression of sincere feeling that the poet wants. The idea is that simplicity will convince, and in the face of lines such as -

"Here will he gather stores of ready bliss,
As from the beds and borders of a garden
Choice flowers are gathered! .... " (11.15-17) -

one can only think it successful. The poem is leavened by lines of a melancholy slow cadence which give it a quiet grace and warmth -

" .... the Exile would consign
This walk, his loved possession, to the care
Of those pure minds that reverence the Muse" (11.20-22).

This rhythmic subtlety does not interrupt the texture of the poem. The variation rather reinforces the general impression, while also providing a little relief and change of tone.

As before, then, the control of movement in this poem is careful, the impression is of deeply-felt emotion, and the final effect is of a control and consideration which largely convey the intended security of mind and hope for the future.

The revisions move the poem in the same direction as the first inscription, and reveal the qualities Wordsworth is especially aiming at in these poems.

The best illustration of this is in the alteration of 11.4-5 from -

"How venture then to hope that private claims
Will from the injuries of time protect
This humble walk? .... " -

to -

"How venture then to hope that Time will spare
This humble Walk? .... ".

The second version is simpler and more direct. Unnecessary material is removed, and the lines are pared down to give a clear presentation of the unimpeded sense. That this is also more moving and creates the impression of a fuller personal involvement is not accidental. The same intention, though achieved this time by expansion instead of contraction, lies behind the revision of ll.11-20 from the halting -

"Murmuring his unambitious verse alone
Or in sweet converse with beloved Friends
No more must he frequent it. Yet might power
Follow the yearnings of the spirit, he
Reluctantly departing, would consign" -

to the easier and less forced -

"No longer scattering to the heedless winds
The vocal raptures of fresh poesy,
Shall he frequent these precincts; locked no more
In earnest converse with beloved Friends
Here will he gather stores of ready bliss,
As from the beds and borders of a garden
Choice flowers are gathered! But, if Power may spring
Out of a farewell yearning, favoured more
Than kindred wishes mated suitably
With vain regrets, the Exile would consign".

The enlargement here ensures that the sense is more clearly set out and awkwardness and strain are removed: too much matter is no longer crammed into too small a space. The direction of the revision is again towards the presentation of simple material so as to achieve the greatest possible emotional involvement for the reader.

As is clear, then, the point of these revisions is to ensure simplicity, clarity and directness, and to achieve a moving sincerity far removed from any kind of artfulness. This poem, like its predecessor, relies for its effects on the material itself, with as little mediation as possible.

The second part of this chapter will be devoted to a study of the epistles, of which Wordsworth wrote many in the later part of his life. These can be separated into two groups, only one of which will be dealt with here. The first consists of sonnets such as "To the Lady Mary Lowther" and "To a Friend", which were written to acquaintances, generally in a relaxed manner, but which are not formally related to verse-epistles based on the classical models of Horace and Ovid. It is these latter with which this section will be concerned, long informal letters in verse, loosely constructed, personal in tone and subject, and informed with the writer's individual social habits. Examples are the "Epistle to Sir George Howland Beaumont, Bart" (published in 1842) and "Lines Written in the Album of the Countess of Lonsdale" (published in 1835).

These two poems have much in common, and clearly belong to the well defined and popular genre of the epistle. The subject matter is the personal affairs of two individuals, treated freely and intimately,

and with an attempt to reproduce the sincerity of feeling already described in connection with the inscriptions. This is amply shown in the epistle to Beaumont, where the poet talks easily to his friend, passes on local news and anecdotes, and generally writes as if the medium were informal prose instead of verse -

"More could my pen report of grave or gay
That through our gipsy travel cheered the way;
But, bursting forth above the waves, the Sun
Laughs at my pains, and seems to say, "Be done""(ll.270-273).

Also, since the epistle deals with personal matters, general themes tend to be incidental. Here universal topics form the background, not the foreground, and the concentration is upon intercourse between two people and nothing more remote than that. The intended effect is intimacy, not authority. Often, indeed, as in the Beaumont poem, the epistle simply relates news and personal information just as an ordinary letter does. The result of this is informality of structure. The poet prefers ease and fluency, with transitions openly effected, and topics discussed in any order that seems convenient, to rigidity or an intensive patterning of his materials. Thus in the poem written in the Countess of Lonsdale's album there is no obvious intellectual direction at all: theme follows theme as the exigencies of the moment dictate. With this loose construction goes a free and easy style, informal and sometimes almost conversational -

"Thus gladdened from our own dear Vale we pass
And soon approach Diana's looking-glass!" (Epistle to Beaumont", ll.164-5).

The qualities of the epistle which have just been described seem

to have been characteristic from a fairly early time. The only epistle which Wordsworth mentions by name is by Daniel, but one may be sure that he was also familiar with those of Horace at least.

The epistles of Horace are informal, like Wordsworth's own, and bear the same "characteristic and circumstantial"[19] trademark of personal concern. Despite their greater stylistic correctness, epistles 3, 5 and 8, for example, are genuinely similar to those of the later poet.

The next important influence on Wordsworth was certainly Daniel, whose "Epistle to Margaret, Countess of Cumberland" he praises in a letter to Lady Beaumont of 8th November, 1811.[20] This is a more elevated and abstract poem than his own, informed by a "strain of meditative morality"[21] far removed from the light-hearted gossip of the epistle to Beaumont, but in some ways similar in language and imagery. In both cases the vocabulary is simple and unstudied -

"What a fair seat hath he from whence he may
The boundless wastes and wilds of man survey" ("Epistle to Margaret, Countess of Cumberland", ll.7-8) -

and -

"Rough is the time; and thoughts, that would be free
From heaviness, oft fly, dear friend, to thee" ("Epistle to Beaumont", ll.10-11) -

and the figurative language comes from the experiences of everyday life.

If the example for Wordsworth's style comes from Daniel, it is surely from the 18th century poets, whom he evidently knew well,[22] that he derived the tone of these poems. In the 18th century the epistle was a coterie art, used in literary and personal squabbles by the controversialists of the day, and hence acquiring a new intimacy and emotional

penetration. Since the purpose is to move and engage feelings, a greater personal involvement is permitted, though the style of expression remains comparatively formal. Two examples will be sufficient here: Pope's "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" and Collins' "Epistle: Address't to Sir Thomas Hahmer on his Edition of Shakespeare's Works", both of which Wordsworth can hardly fail to have known. The former provides an excellent example of vigour and colloquial energy, and above all of emotional directness - the conversational technique gives a convincing impression of a close relationship between the two participants. In the Collins poem too there is a quieter and more delicate feeling of two people communicating with each other in an easy, friendly way. From the poets of the 18th century Wordsworth thus seems to have gathered a sense of the intimacy and personal involvement proper to the epistle.

The Wordsworth epistle which will be discussed in detail is "Lines Written in the Album of the Countess of Lonsdale", which was written on 5th November, 1834, and published among some miscellaneous poems in the "Yarrow Revisited" volume in 1835. It is a rather ecstatic portrait of the Countess' personality and life, though full of respect and genuine friendship.

However, this personal relationship in the poem also has a social aspect. The participants are not alone, but members of a group, whose customs are reflected in the verse. This is not done obviously, but by means of the language and the movement of the lines, which approximate to the norms of polite conversation in good society. The style shows up the social context, and puts the personal affairs of Wordsworth and the Countess into an understandable perspective which gives body to their intimacy.

This style which is both social and literary can hardly be illustrated by quotation, since in small samples the poem's natural imagery tends to overwhelm its tone and cultural links, but some idea can be gathered from -

"Yet one word more - one farewell word - a wish
Which came, but it has passed into a prayer" (11.76-77).

Thus the ease and carefulness of manners of a group is imported into, and enlarges, even personal affairs.

The conversational approach also accounts for the poem's invertebrate development. Each section has its theme, of course, but one follows another by chance of association rather than because of formal considerations. It may be that the resultant air of disarray is intended to give an effect of sincerity: as in speech or thought disordered by feeling.

Another aspect of this informality of construction is that it encourages expansion, not the usual concentration. Points are made at length - twenty-two lines, for example, are given over to preliminaries and a long and rather forced analogy. But this seems to be typical of the epistolary style. One of the habits especially cultivated is that of leisurely elaboration, manner being more important than content or form.

It is partly because of this aristocratic ease and leisure that the language often seems deliberately choice, even rather fulsome -

"Like those self-solacing, those under, notes
Trilled by the redbreast, when autumnal leaves
Are thin upon the bough .... " (11.33-5) -

since it is a reflection of a high-born manner and upper-class cultivation. The informality of a language like this still seems relatively formal, though

here its level is easily kept, and it is obviously fluent and acceptable in an epistle such as this.

The style, technique and content of the poem thus celebrate equally courtesy towards a single person and courtesy as a style of life among a group.

However, as the revisions show, the primary emphasis remains on the personal situation.

This is clear in the change of ll.22-4 from -

" .... Towers, and Stately Groves
Bear witness for me; thou, too, Mountain-stream!" -

to -

" .... Witness, Towers and Groves!
And Thou, wild Stream, that giv'st the honoured name
Of Lowther to this ancient Land, bear witness".

Here the flow is easier and the rhythm more pleasing. But it is also more complimentary, and there is a greater sense of personal feeling. The effect is to re-emphasize the importance of the individual situation, and of individual feelings, in this part of the poem. Something similar also results from the change of ll.63-5 from -

" .... feelingly allied
With inborn courtesy; in every act
And habit utter disregard of self" -

to -

" .... with easy stream,
Illustrated with inborn courtesy;

And an habitual disregard of self".

The awkwardness here is replaced by a slower and more statuesque rhythm better suited to the mood of quiet humility. The lines are also easier to understand, and therefore more appropriate to the informality and slight superficiality of the epistle. A better example of the extra concentration on persoal affairs is the alteration of ll.79-83 from -

"God's favour still vouchsafed, so may it set -
And be the hour yet distant for our sakes -
To rise again in glory won by Faith" -

to -

"So - at an hour yet distant for their sakes
Whose tender love, here faltering on the way
Of a diviner love, will be forgiven -
So may it set in peace, to rise again
For everlasting glory won by faith".

This is easier and more mellifluous, but its importance lies in its placing of stress on people's feelings. The tone is more direct, so that one has a better idea of the emotions intended to be conveyed.

Thus the effect of revision in this poem is to smooth the flow of the language, and to put emphasis on intimacy: in fact, to draw the poem closer to the traditional model of the epistle, with its personal centre and fluent movement.

The element which the inscriptions and epistles have in common is simply the desire to give the reader a feeling of the poet's personal engagement with his subject. The aim is for feelings to "prove" - in

one case a general idea, in the other the validity of a relationship. But here their similarities end.

The inscriptions use order, regularity and distinctness of form to produce "spiritual strength"[23] from the flux of "remembered experience".[24] They are exercises in self-assurance both technically and conceptually: they impose a solution upon subtly nagging doubts. The revisions which the poet makes are directed towards forwarding this. The harmonizing and smoothing of style and texture emphasize even more the consideration and authority the poet wants, and thus of course also make his moral conclusions more convincing and acceptable.

The epistles, on the other hand, are social poems characterized by an easy tone and conversational grace. They are genuine communications between two individuals. The intention is to connect two people, and engage them with each other. The revisions here emphasize the freeness and intimacy of the poem, so as to make the intercourse even more direct and convincingly felt.

Thus the inscriptions and epistles are often very different in spite of their common desire for emotional conviction. In one case, where cosmic matters are at stake, Wordsworth uses a form which is stringent and highly patterned, in an attempt at once to impose and to prove important feelings about which he is not so sure as he both pretends, and would like, to be. It is a matter of containment as well as expression. In the other case, his assurance and informality give an effect of ease and intimacy. There are no awkward undercurrents or general topics to disturb the lightweight themes and techniques used here.

An interesting conclusion follows from the study of these two kinds of poems. In the inscriptions, where he is dealing with moral ideas and - ultimately - religious standpoints on life, he seems uncertain quite what to do. He is caught in a dilemma between thinking and feeling - thought might lead to unacceptable and dangerous conclusions (there are indications it already has, by the very nature of the questions posed, and the frequent subjunctives used), but feeling on its own can hardly convince either. Thus the poet produces works which make the relevant points, indeed, but at the same time often subtly contradict themselves. Faced with ultimate questions here, Wordsworth was, like Tennyson, simply afraid. On the other hand, when he is untroubled by general matters, and can unthinkingly enjoy the company of another person, and open his heart, his work is easy, unclouded and unambiguous. This contrast between the inscriptions and the epistles thus goes some way towards justifying Hazlitt's famous comment: "Wordsworth's mind is obtuse, except as it is the organ and the receptacle of accumulated feelings: it is not analytic, but synthetic; it is reflecting, rather than theoretical".(25) Tragically, therefore, and despite his great skill and "new nimbleness",(26) Wordsworth seems easier in dealing with people and their individual feelings than with the general notions of which he was so fond in later life. Even in the 1830's, and in these two types of poem particularly, abstract and intellectual approaches, or even the grinding of the universal out of the particular, did not find him at his best, though he worked at them unremittingly and occasionally with a degree of success (as in one or two of the sonnets - of general topography in particular).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

(1) "The Prose Works of William Wordsworth", vol.II; ed. A.B.Grosart; 1876; London; pp.44-58.

(2) Ibid.; p.48.

(3) Ibid.; p.44.

(4) "The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth"; ed. E. de Selincourt 1935; Oxford; p.473.

(5) "The Evolution of Wordsworth's Later Art"; R.C.Townsend; unpub. dis.; Yale; 1962; p.104.

(6) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M.Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.266.

(7) "The Mind of a Poet"; R.D.Havens; 1941; Baltimore; p.6.

(8) "Wordsworth and the Artist's Vision"; A.King; 1967; London; p.99.

(9) "The Evolution of Wordsworth's Later Art"; R.C. Townsend; unpub. diss.; Yale; 1962; p.23.

(10) "The Prose Works of William Wordsworth", vol.II; ed. A.B.Grosart; 1876; p.65.

(11) "From Sensibility to Romanticism"; ed. F.W.Hilles and H.Bloom; 1965; New York; pp.382-401.

(12) Ibid.; p.398.

(13) As translated by J.A.Pott in "The Oxford Book of Greek Verse in Translation"; ed. T.F.Higham and C.M.Bowra; 1938; Oxford; p.191.

(14) Information from a note to the poem reprinted in most editions.

(15) "The Unity of Wordsworth's Poetry"; B.Groom; 1966; New York; p.179.

(16) "The Prose Works of William Wordsworth", vol.II; ed. A.B.Grosart; 1876; London; pp.35-6.

(17) "William Wordsworth: The Later Years"; M.Moorman; 1965; Oxford; p.172.

(18) In "The Quest for Permanence"; D.Perkins; 1959; Cambridge, Mass.

(19) "The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1939; Oxford; p.762.

(20) "The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth"; ed. E. de Selincourt; 1935; Oxford; pp.477-8.

(21) Ibid.; p.477.

(22) This is especially clear from the style and form of his idyllia of external nature.

(23) "Wordsworth"; C.H.Herford; 1930; London; p.22.

(24) Ibid.

(25) "The Complete Works of William Hazlitt", vol.II; ed. P.P.Howe; 1932; London; p.91.

(26) "The Unity of Wordsworth's Poetry"; B.Groom; 1966; New York; p.182.

CONCLUSION

A considerable sample of the poems in the "Yarrow Revisited" volume has now been studied, and it is possible to state a few general conclusions as to the directions of Wordsworth's revisions, and the kind of poems he wrote, and wished to write, at this period. This last chapter will describe, firstly, the revisions which are found throughout the 1835 volume, in all types of poems, and secondly the revisions which are particular to specific types of poem. This will be followed by a general description of the poems in this volume, and some notes on the qualities evidently favoured by Wordsworth at this time.

Most of the revisions are textural and stylistic changes of small details. It is a matter of a subtler sense of language and a greater care for precision of meaning. The effect is mainly to convey the meaning more clearly than before, and to reinforce the rich and carefully-worked style that is characteristic of the 1835 volume. Wordsworth's craftsmanship and connoisseurship are if anything more delicate and continuous here than elsewhere, and are constantly shown in revision. This revision of details - perhaps the replacement of a word by another which is more evocative or apt - also shows up Wordsworth's reliance on previous writers, especially of the 18th century. Of course, the subdued, detailed and highly artistic style of the Augustan landscape and reflective poets is not found everywhere: but its influence is by far the most significant on the style of "Yarrow Revisited" as a whole. The impression is of a quiet, mellow grace and an easy elegance, a show

of craft and poetic learning which will delight sophisticated readers by treating traditional subjects in a traditional way, but with the refinement of a different sensibility. There is also a desire for easy, fluent movement and a supple development of meaning. The poems try to achieve a smoothness of development which will complement the harmony of their style and the (at least superficial) assurance of their moral positions. Uniformity within themselves, and conformity to a high standard of poetic craftsmanship and beauty, is the primary intention behind most of the revisions.

Some of the revisions seem minute and unimportant, but when they are carried out in many poems throughout a volume they obviously correspond to a general design of the poet and are thus worthy of being described and studied.

Some of the most frequent of these small revisions have to do with the updating of usage and the organization of the poems so that they are easier to read. Thus many capitals are removed, and the punctuation too becomes more fluent: colons are commonly replaced by commas, so that the flow of the lines is enhanced. The immediate aim here is a more attractive layout, and a greater sense of continuous, linked development to replace the earlier stolidity and halting awkwardness of movement. The punctuation, in fact, is more organically useful after revision than before it: it dictates rhythm, and emphasizes meaning, much more effectively.

This greater rhetorical control also extends to language. The vocabulary used becomes wider and more flexible, and is thus able to deal with subjects both more precisely and more compactly than before. With

this wider range of words also goes a more careful and thoughtful use of figurative language, and a greater sense of polish which is particularly noticeable in the phrase-making. The imagery is made more sensuously appealing and more striking, the use of metaphor especially becoming richer and more intensive. This compact force of metaphor issues in phrases which are original and often very rich in meaning and appeal to the senses. Indeed, the polished phrase-making is one of the outstanding features of this poetry, particularly after revision. The wider vocabulary and richer texture of the poems ensures that the bareness and harshness one frequently finds in the original versions is removed. The intention is for the verse to be smooth and full of meaning and sensuous appeal, and for this the sometimes banal simplicities and awkward statements of the worst of the poems must be removed. The stronger sensuous and visual appeal of the verse is related to the example of the 18th century poets, as is the new intense descriptiveness, which gives detailed scenic pictures of great atmospheric suggestiveness. Instead of the former tendency to state the components of a scene, the revisions emphasize the power of evocation, fluent visual development and the value of mood and tone as unifying elements. So, again as a result of the 18th century influence, the language becomes wider in appeal. The early versions often stated their meaning openly and crudely, in simple terms. The revisions are more sophisticated, more knowing in the usage of previous writers and the means of securing assent and belief from perhaps unwilling readers. They prefer to evoke, to allow a beautifully set scene, richly described, fluently developed and packed with sensuous appeal, to suggest a moral: they no

longer try to state truths in such bare and open terms as before. Even the words are chosen with a greater sense of harmony and a truer feeling for style than before. Thus the results of this considerable activity in the revisions of language are extensive and important. The qualities of language which the revisions emphasize are intensity, precision and evocativeness. Generality, padding and vague abstraction are removed. The overall result is clarity and richness: the arrangement is clearer, and the expression more concentrated and striking.

Similar intentions govern the revisions of construction and form in the poems. The principal care is for unity of effect and simplicity of construction, so that the meaning and atmosphere of the poems can be put across as directly and forcefully, and with as little ambiguity or disharmony, as possible. What Wordsworth wants is orderliness and clarity of shape; there must be a definite, carefully devised and logical pattern specifically designed to express what he wishes to express. There must be no mess, no awkward irrelevance or crude disorder or else the poem's intention will not be properly put across to the reader. An orderly arrangement of the poems is also favoured because the values they express are themselves neat, traditional and considered: the form is to complement the values as well as express them. But this care for the well-planned rarely deteriorates into mere dull symmetry for symmetry's sake. The presentation becomes more pointed and dramatic in revision, and the emphasis is arranged to fall on the most important or exciting parts of the poet's meaning. There is a greater vigour and point: many of the poems now make an apt use of climax, and in many, too, there is an 18th

century turn of antithetical phrasing and epigrammatic forcefulness. Neat construction therefore need not result in dullness. This is also avoided by a stronger sense of progression and a more fluent movement of the verse. The points are more clearly made, the transitions and development between them more easily and efficiently made, and the often moralistic conclusions that end the poems come to follow on more obviously from what has gone before. In many of the original versions of the poems, "development" was in the form of simple blocks of poetry settled down one after another with little to connect them, and frequently leading nowhere in particular, but ruthlessly concluded with some stated moral imposed on the recalcitrant material. In revision this is altered as there comes to be a sense of progression, of a form directed towards the expression of a particular insight. So, after revision, there often is a genuine form where little existed before, and almost always the mechanics of the poem's development are less starkly evident. It follows from this that, in many cases at least, the individual details of the poems are better subordinated to the general plan. The emphasis on uniformity of style and ease of movement means that it is no longer possible for unassimilated details to jut raggedly out of the surface of a poem and detract from its overall effect. Instead the elements of the poem are given prominence just as the general plan, and the poet's intention, dictate. Hence, in revision, the tendency to form the poem more clearly around a single emblem or image, which helps the unity and concentration of effect the poet clearly wants. Thus the purpose behind the revisions of construction in the poem are clear and coherent. The aim is to ensure clarity and

ease of development, unity and force of presentation, and an efficient and direct expression of meaning.

What has been written so far is very much a general picture of the overall direction of Wordsworth's revisions in these poems. There are many exceptions to this, as the chapters on the individual types of poem have shown, but throughout the volume there are tendencies in revision which recur too frequently to be simply accidental, or exclusively meant for one group of poems and no other. It is these which have just been described, and these which perhaps show up best Wordsworth's aims in this later work.

However, as well as these important general revisions, which are found throughout the 1835 volume in one form or another, there are also revisions specifically designed around the poems of one or other of Wordsworth's moulds of poetry. It is convenient to discuss these here by groups, so as to see what specific end these specific revisions have. Many of them, of course, are of the same type as those already discussed, but here their intentions are more particular, and they must therefore be recapitulated so as to give a clear picture of the different styles and purposes of the different genres.

The revisions in the verse-tales move in two generally opposing directions, as Wordsworth attempts to write both stirring adventure-stories like Byron's or Southey's, full of romance and exotic action, and also poems of a rigorous and often abstract Christian morality. The attempt to combine these two elements, which often contradict each other, was of course often unsuccessful. There is much in these poems that is

awkward and misconceived, and in their original shape they had little of the fluency and vivacity called for by the traditional poem of adventure, and less of the solid conviction demanded by the Christian moralizing. The desire to conflate the two elements, and to effect a balance by which the action and setting build up to, instead of detracting from, a well-prepared and plausible moral was bound to lead to difficulties. However, the revisions here help by drawing each poem together, and moving it more coherently towards, say, the verse-tales of Chaucer, who alone of Wordsworth's predecessors was able to tell a good story which could lead to a firmly emphasized Christian moral. The original versions of these poems are stolid as stories, and obvious in meaning. In revision, Wordsworth continues to press his Christian bias as much as ever, but the element of adventure is emphasized to compensate. Interest in character is stimulated; the texture is enriched and harmonised; the settings become more pervasive; story telling receives painstaking attention; transitions are smoothed; the pace is made faster and easier. Thus, by the time the inevitable moral is reached, the reader has been more successfully amused and interested - it comes not as a bolt out of the blue, but as a fair conclusion from the material presented. Pleasure and instruction are mated. So in the end - though less successfully than in, say, "The Man of Law's Tale" - a similar kind of morally committed adventure -poem is achieved by the modification of the early abstraction and obviousness and a fuller use of the models provided by Wordsworth's own day: writers who put amusement before sententiousness. Thus, by a resurgence of the primary tradition of the verse-tale, the poet was enabled to produce poems more successful

in every way after revision than before it. A subtler approach to the opposing demands of two different elements has resulted in an, at least partial, fusion, with results that give both more pleasure, and a truer moral feeling, than before.

The revisions of the successful Idyllia of external Nature move in the same general direction as those of the verse-tales, but this time the poet's intention is a balancing of general and particular rather than of entertainment and instruction. In this, however, the poet is also moving these quiet, beautiful, low-toned poems closer to the models which have been indicated for them. In the work of Gray and Collins and the early Milton, who are Wordsworth's obvious predecessors in this kind of poetry, and who embody the whole style of Augustan topographical verse, one is struck by the use of precise and picturesque natural details to produce an atmosphere of meditation from which some general conclusion can plausibly arise. This is exactly what Wordsworth needs, and is trying to achieve, here. In their first versions the idyllia of external Nature are rather abstract: the natural scene is too quickly treated in order to get to the moral, so that, as in the verse-tales, the balance of cause and effect is upset. However, the revisions largely adjust this: there is more detail, and it is more evocatively used; the natural sights become capable of supporting the conclusions which the contemplation of them is supposed to produce; it is not thought unstably built upon thought, but thought stably built upon fact and observation. The result of this is that the poems take on even more than before an 18th century air. The debt to Collins, in particular, becomes predominant. That this is a

deliberate harking back to previous models and an established style, and not simply a coincidence in the handling of technical matters, is shown by other details. Why other than to accept a model should the poet so carefully ensure that the mood of the poems is homogeneous, and quietly, plangently melancholy in the best tradition of Augustan topographical and reflective verse? Why other than to ensure a close connection with this kind of poetry should he move the style of his idyllia so emphatically towards the neat phrasing, pictorial prettiness and smoothly pointed rhythm of, say, Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard"? These poems are thus derived from the Silver-Age traditions of 18th century landscape verse, and the revisions can almost all be traced to the demands of this genre and to the deliberate use of its well-defined form and style.

The revisions of the Idyllia of characters, manners and sentiments move towards a resolution of opposites like that in the other groups of poems discussed, but this time the aim is a proper balance of reason and passion, public form and private feeling. These poems all suffer in various ways from an awkwardness in the conjunction of these two elements, both of which are necessarily involved by the demands of the genre and the opposing strengths of Wordsworth's personal and artistic instincts. These elements were also present in the poems on whose example Wordsworth depended when writing these idyllia, but even there the resolution was effected with difficulty, and imbalance almost always resulted: on the one hand, dull abstract social comment, on the other, shrill one-sided invective. On the whole, though, especially in Shenstone and Cowper, his principal models, the final emphasis is on generality: their poems are less full of individual

deep feeling, more intellectually "social". Now Wordsworth's own emotions were engaged in social matters, and this academic approach was more than he could bring himself to. Thus he moves from the abstraction of "A Jewish Family", whose tone is very close to that of Shenstone's "Moral Pieces", through the emotional redundance of "Humanity", where he disregards his primary models, to the balanced judgement and feeling of "St.Bees". That this is not a coincidence is again shown by the revisions. Those of "A Jewish Family" simply reinforce its imbalance: the whole intention seems misdirected, a rare example of Wordsworth's altering a poem to compound an initial mistake. But in "Humanity" the revisions move towards a greater clarity and control, to offset the poem's emotional exaggeration. In "St.Bees" there need be little alteration, and the original balance is fairly maintained. So, in the end, the intention of leavening general comment with personal involvement, which he had found imperfectly done in the (mainly 18th century) poems he took as models, he himself achieved, after many errors and mistaken emphases, in a poem like "St.Bees"; and it is his habit of afterthought and revision which helps him to this, and us to an understanding of his aim.

The odes discussed in chapter 5 are all of the quieter and more intimate type, rather than the imposing virtuoso-works often associated with the term. They belong to the line of Milton's "Song: On May Morning" or Collins' mellow and elegant "Ode on the Death of Mr. Thomson". Their intention is not large-scale celebration or pretentious artistry, but a gentle, subtle praising of minor forms and muted feelings. Their stylistic and technical resemblances to the minor odes of the 18th century, and

especially to those of Cowper and Collins, are considerable. Even in their original shape these odes are homogeneous and deeply literary, with many reminiscences of previous writers. In revision, which reinforces this conservatism and eclecticism of approach, the harmony and assurance of this style are re-emphasized. With few exceptions ("Presentiments" is one of them), the prettiness of language, obliqueness and quietness of impact, and easy rhythmic flow are everywhere enhanced in revision. The poems thus stand finally as excellent examples of an apt traditional form and style, deliberately held and carefully reinforced, and revealing clearly the great reserves of skill and taste still available to Wordsworth, and the conservative and traditional direction taken by these later odes of his.

Wordsworth's sonnets depend in many ways upon the example of Shakespeare and Milton, both of whom he recognized as his mentors. It was in Shakespeare that he found treated many of his themes, especially his obsession with the passing of time, and in Milton that he discovered a graceful, wide-ranging and well-balanced style which could cope easily with the demands of his subjects. These two influences remain paramount throughout the sonnets, and account for much of their formal and stylistic quality. But it is difficult to give reasons here for, or even clearly to discern, general movements in revision particular to the sonnet form. This is due to the sheer bulk of the material, and its variety of type and degree of excellence. However, one thing which does become clear after a comparison of the early and later versions of these poems is that the poet becomes more willing to engage and amuse the reader, instead of

just sermonising. The prosaic in thought and style, of which there is much, is gradually eroded and replaced by a more sensuously appealing language: the pleasure becomes more poetic and aesthetic than moral. Often this is revealed best in the tinkerings of style, where words and images are moved constantly closer to the grace and expressiveness of Milton. The clear-cut poetic technique and the incisive statement and development of themes, which one again finds emphasized after revision, hark back to the example of Shakespeare. So the practice of the poet in these sonnets is especially rewarding to a study of the influences at work within him. Wordsworth started out writing sonnets under the direct tutelage of both Shakespeare and Milton, in middle life tended to move off into stolidity and abstraction, and then by the period of the "Yarrow Revisited" volume had moved back to the style and method of his old masters. Thus the sonnets provide a good example, in spite of the difficulties posed by their number and variety, of the use of previous poets to influence a course of revision.

The inscriptions and epistles are treated here together, as in chapter 6, since their shared personal engagement sets them off from the rest of the volume. There, a predominant impression is of quiet contemplation, a remoteness from engagement with other people, though not with art or ideas or the past. What comes through is an impression of life at second hand, mediated through the consolatory skills of poetry. But in these poems Wordsworth moves back to Horace and the Greek Anthology, where the main concern is a convincing rendering of private and deeply-felt emotions, often simply and informally put. His revisions show him

trying, in the case of the inscriptions, for directness and moving openness of feeling and expression, and in the case of the epistles, for intimacy and personalness of effect. Thus, in both these kinds of poem, a complementary direction is followed in revision. This movement towards sincerity is occasioned both by the rather intimate nature of the subjects, and by the demands of tradition. Nevertheless, it is a tribute to the poet that he surprises one here by a show of feeling one had thought beyond him: here, as very rarely elsewhere in the 1835 volume, he manages simply and movingly to express feelings which refer to other people as well as himself. It is a solitary movement out towards people and personal involvement amidst the beautiful but esoteric world of his later art.

These revisions point the general directions in which Wordsworth evidently wished his later poems to move, and thus provide a good indication of what his intentions were. The study of them has made possible a general description of the styles, techniques and atmosphere of the 1835 volume and so, by inference, of the rest of the later work too. The general description, which follows takes account both of the aims behind the revisions, and the actual results in the poetry. Like the earlier section which dealt with the revisions common to all the poems, it is necessarily very general: many exceptions can be found to the overall picture which is attempted here, and which tries to pick out the large outlines rather than the small details.

One of the striking things about these poems is their strong Christian orthodoxy, which results in a feeling of settledness and often of certainty. The poet has accepted a fervent religious faith which

comes more and more to dominate what he says and the way he says it. The great effort, the interaction, the mystical power of his early poems are absent, and in their place one finds a bland religious assurance only occasionally shaken by doubt. One may feel that this emphatic Christianity is rather forced, and results from an overplayed desire for emotional security, and relief from doubts about endurance and worth in literature and life, but it is almost always brought to the fore by the poet, and obviously plays a paramount part in his thinking at this time.

With this growth in mature reasonableness (by the standards of the time, at least), this care for the neatly arranged and sanctified, and the frequent didacticism, goes a new more traditional concept of rhetoric. One no longer finds the simple words of simple men, or a "transpicuousness" of the truth, but instead traditional styles and set forms authorized by the usage of the past. The didactic Christianity and the studied rhetoric are closely linked. Instead of adopting revolutionary methods of expressing quite new sensations of "visionary gloom" and personal mysticism, these poems use a traditional framework, and deal in traditional settings and ideas. The conservatism of approach, the deep need for a security based on accepted styles and themes, produces both the pervasive Christianity and the skilful traditional style which is its complement.

This new conservatism sometimes tends to produce poems of dry didacticism, in which pleasure is sacrificed to instruction. But often the poet provides additional interest both factual and moral (to satisfy the need for instruction) and exaggerated and fanciful (to satisfy the taste for imagination and sensuous enjoyment). This is partly derived

from his style, which becomes progressively more appealing and richly detailed during revision, and his fondness for settings which combine the exotic attractions of geography and history (most of his early works were contemporary in time and place, and did not need this bolstering). The details of conventionally "romantic" scenery and the glamour of history also help make up for much that has been lost. They offer other interests in place of the extreme individuality, mystery and intensity, which had by this time almost completely disappeared. The movement away from the exploitation of the poet's personal uniqueness brings as substitutes more conventional pleasures like these.

The details of these settings in time and place are accurate, as they always are in Wordsworth, but their effect is far from naturalistic. The mode in these poems is traditional and punctiliously artistic (and sometimes, also, artful). The result is, as in the best poetry of the 18th century, elegant pictures, well arranged "prospects", and a careful patterning of language and form. This turning to the example of past writers also results from the fact that by this time Wordsworth could not often vitalize his personal feelings into good poems. Even in this more public and traditional verse of the thirties movement and force are quite often lacking; sometimes the effect is mechanical, of artistic lessons well enough learned and rather cursorily used when the occasion offers. Even to this public poetry a stronger personal commitment is necessary, and it is not often forthcoming.

Wordsworth's later Christian conformity, putatively "insincere", has often been blamed for the comparative weakness of these poems. This

shows a considerable lack of sympathy, as well as a misunderstanding of the kind of poems these are. Here, sentiments which are newly felt and newly expressed are not conveyed directly through the poet - "I" is omnipresent in the early verse. Here, feelings which are "proper" in a conventional way are conveyed in a style of conventional elegance and objectivity. The force previously expressed through the personality of the poet is now dissipated, and is replaced by the less intense delights of atmosphere, picturesqueness, grace, moral instruction and easy skill. The effects are less personal and more literary.

Many of the pleasures that these poems offer are thus the conventional ones, and are sometimes only adventitiously "poetic". The marvellously elegant style and the smooth construction one must admire but a good deal of the rest of the poems' appeal lies in fact rather than imagination or tastefulness. The attraction of historical and geographical settings, and the frequent sententiae, is to a sense of fact, not only of fancy: these things are thought to be interesting of and for themselves, independent of expression - in the context of a poem, their appeal is an impure one. (It is another of Wordsworth's ways of supplying new enjoyments in his verse to supplant those he no longer could command). This less organic approach to poetry also fits in well with several of the forms of traditional poetry he uses in his later work, and points again to his new dependence on the example of his predecessors. His care for the conventions is thus marked, and his emendations show him consistently harmonising the poems, bringing them closer to the genres they represent. The revisions of diction show this especially clearly,

for their direction is generally towards a classical, and traditional, ease, grace and beauty, and the removing of the strongly personal flavour of the early poems.

This conservatism, and its attendant impurity of appeal, has more harmful effects than the simple change of type of poem might indicate. Now, often, (though this tends to be altered in a satisfactory direction in revision) all Wordsworth's subtle techniques and great rhetorical control are subordinated to the necessity of conveying a moral. The poetry has frequently given up its attempt at literature, at the expression of meaning so as to give pleasure. Instead one has a heavy moral heavily put; one is told to believe, not persuaded to believe.

The construction of the poems quite often enforces this impression of sermonising. The tendency is for the moral to assume a disproportionate importance; the setting or incident intended to reveal the poet's point is hurriedly rushed through, so that the explanation of its significance can be full and direct. Also, since the "evidence", the incident from which the moral to be drawn, is skimped, themoral must frequently be unconvincing. One of Wordsworth's biggest faults in these poems is the hectoring tone with which he sometimes tries to make up for the lack of conviction his sententiae have. The highly logical structure the poems generally adopt, with careful transitions eased in revision, and a frequent smooth symmetry of shape, would often be quite adequate to make the poet's points without these crude tactics, especially since the development is always from a particular scene to a general reflection aroused by it. Even here the poet is getting away from things into ideas.

This new overpowering pleasure in "sentiment and reflection" produces a pleasing but rather remote tone in the poems. This is a gentle easy grace far from surprise or, indeed from physical movement or change of any kind. It has a Silver-Age melancholy and pensiveness, and a miniaturised, carefully arranged beauty which is very attractive. But the important element is not elegance or objectivity: it is thought. Several critics have remarked on the depths of meditation in "Light in August", and something similar can be said of these poems. Everything is considered and thought about; everything leads to a moral comment. Even the techniques are oblique, things are mediated at one remove from the personal or immediate. Tradition, and the poet's conservative and generalizing turn of mind, ensure that most of these poems become public and moralistic.

Thus, in the end, these poems can be summed up fairly accurately in a few words: conventional, conservative in style and meaning, pretty and elegant in effects, thoughtful in approach, skilful in execution. It is not a small achievement, though its difference from the great works of Wordsworth's early period has often seemed to make it so.