

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S KINESTHETIC EXPERIENCES

(1776-1798)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF
ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY

BETTY JEAN BLEEKER, B. A.

Denton, Texas

July, 1966

Texas Woman's University

Denton, Texas

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under
our supervision by Betty Jean Bleeker
entitled William Wordsworth's Kinesthetic
Experiences (1776-1798)

be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Committee:

Aubrey Nell Wiley
Chairman
Edna James
Jessie M. Craig

Accepted: Wallace Worksey
Dean of Graduate Studies

JUN 13 1968

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PREFACE

The genesis for my thesis was Mary Moorman's statement that it seemed as though Wordsworth's moments of insight were generally apprehended in moments following upon excitement often produced by rapid motion or physical effort or after a sudden relaxation of nervous tension. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Autrey Nell Wiley for pointing out this statement to me and for suggesting that I might look for Wordsworth's kinesthetic experiences. My search has been a rewarding one. The purpose was to find Wordsworth's kinesthetic experiences that occasioned moments of insight or vision and thus affected his creativity.

To discuss these experiences I divided them into three periods of Wordsworth's life--childhood, youth, and early manhood--beginning with an experience of childhood on Penrith Beacon in 1776 and ending with an experience of maturity in the Wye valley in 1798. My discussions of Wordsworth's personal kinesthetic experiences during the periods of childhood and youth were based on Wordsworth's recollections recorded in The Prelude. During the third period, early manhood, Wordsworth became a writer and treated his experiences after 1793 both subjectively and objectively; therefore I presented his kinesthetic experiences from 1793 to 1798 accordingly, using both The Prelude and other selected works. For this

study I used extensively the journals of Dorothy Wordsworth and the letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth as well as the work of many scholars, including Mary Moorman, Helen Darbishire, Ernest de Selincourt, Raymond D. Havens, and John Jones.

To Dr. Autrey Nell Wiley I owe a special debt of gratitude not only for the subject of my thesis but also for her graciousness and patient guidance throughout my work. I am deeply grateful to Miss Julia M. Crisp for the many hours of individual attention she gave to my writing at the beginning when I needed advice so much. I wish to thank Dr. Eleanor James for giving her valuable time to reading this thesis and serving on my committee. I also wish to express my appreciation to Mrs. Alleen Wright Bounds, secretary of the English Department, for her many courtesies. A very special pleasure comes in thanking my family and many friends whose constant interest was a source of encouragement for me.

July 18, 1966

Betty Jean Bleeker

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INTRODUCTION

Early in William Wordsworth's life Nature began to teach him the truths about herself, about God, and about man. These "lessons," or visitations, often let him "enter another world, one wherein every object was strengthened and clarified with strange intensity, so that he never forgot it."¹ Nor did he wish to forget because these visionary experiences set him apart and educated him for what he was to become--a poet. Through such moments of insight as these Wordsworth was able to see with intense delight that which would have no particular significance to the ordinary observer.

These intense moments of insight or vision, according to Mary Moorman and others, followed the excitement or tension produced by rapid motion or physical effort; often the most intense ones came at the moments of sudden relaxation of nervous tension. In these experiences kinesthesia, the muscle sense, is all important; therefore, I refer to these experiences as kinesthetic experiences. My belief that the more intense

¹Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth: A Biography: The Early Years, 1770-1803 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 12.

ones came at moments of sudden relaxation of nervous tension is supported by a story told by Thomas DeQuincey.² Towards midnight, anxiously eager for news from Spain about the Peninsular War, Wordsworth and DeQuincey would walk four or five miles up the Keswick road to meet the carrier's cart which brought the Courier. One night as they waited on Dunmail Raise, Wordsworth several times stretched himself on the high road with his ear to the ground to catch any sound of wheels. Once, when he was slowly rising from this effort, his eye was caught by a bright star that was glittering between the brow of Seat Sandal and of Helvellyn. After gazing upon it for a minute or so, he made the following statement:

I have remarked, from my earliest days, that if the attention is energetically braced up to an act of steady observation, or of steady expectation, then if this intense condition of vigilance should suddenly relax, at that moment any beautiful, any impressive visual object falling upon the eye, is carried to the heart with a power not known under other circumstances. Just now my ear was placed upon the stretch, in order to catch any sound of wheels that might come down from the Keswick road; at the very instant when I raised my head from the ground in final abandonment of hope for this night, when the organs of attention were all at once relaxing, the bright star hanging in the air above those outlines of massy blackness fell suddenly upon my eye, and penetrated my capacity of apprehension with a pathos and a sense of the infinite that would not have arrested me under other circumstances.³

The attention is entirely focused upon one object; then as relaxation sets in, there is a moment of surprising perception.⁴

²Helen Darbishire, The Poet Wordsworth (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1950), p. 110.

³Ibid., pp. 110-111.

⁴John Jones, The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination (London: Chatto and Windus, Ltd., 1954), p. 92.

Many of these memorable experiences are described in The Prelude. One of them happened while he was skating one winter evening on Windermere. Although evening had come, Wordsworth and his friends did not turn aside from their merry sport. Young Wordsworth was skating on after it was time to go in, waiting hopefully, as it were, to have an experience beyond the ordinary experience of just skating.⁵

The village clock tolled six,--I wheeled about,
Proud and exulting like an untired horse
That cares not for his home (I, 431-433)⁶

The tolling of the village clock, the hissing of the skates, the shouting of the children, the echoing of their shouts from the cliffs, and the tinkling of every icy crag--all add to the reader's feeling of being a part of the activity. Then as the poet, alone, skated rapidly away, he suddenly halted himself; and in that sudden pause, as his inner senses took over, he seemed to feel the motion of the earth and stars:

Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short; yet the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me--even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal around!
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep. (I, 457-463)

⁵Kenneth MacLean, "Levels of Imagination in Wordsworth's Prelude (1805)," Philological Quarterly, XXXVIII (October, 1959), 385-400.

⁶William Wordsworth, The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (2d ed. rev. by Ernest de Selincourt; London: Oxford University Press, 1936). All quotations from Wordsworth's works come from this source unless noted otherwise.

Skating was, as Mary Moorman says, the one form of athletic exercise in which Wordsworth excelled and to which he remained devoted all his life.⁷ But there were also many other similar events and pastimes which gave him pleasure or aroused in him feelings of delight or wonder, such as walking, hunting, climbing, and boating, in which Nature singled him out and educated him to the beautiful and the powerful. Wordsworth said as much in Book I of The Prelude:

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
And on the earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
And Souls of lonely places! can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
Such ministry, when ye through many a year
Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
Impressed upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire; and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
Work like a sea?
Not uselessly employed,
Might I pursue this theme through every change
Of exercise and play, to which the year
Did summon us in his delightful round.
(I, 464-478)

As I have said, through these kinesthetic experiences Wordsworth learned what he thought to be the truths about God, Nature, and man. Although these moments transcended sense, they were always occasioned by some natural sight or sound;⁸ the revelations came primarily through the senses of sight and

⁷ P. 40.

⁸ J. C. Smith, A Study of Wordsworth (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, Ltd., 1955), p. 43.

sound. His eye could see the mountains, the water, and the sky at sunrise, at sunset, or in moonlight. His ear could hear wind, revelers, and movement; or it could "hear" absolute silence. According to Raymond D. Havens, solitude, silence, and loneliness are the ministering spirits in Wordsworth's temple of Nature.⁹ These "spirits" greatly influenced Wordsworth in his kinesthetic experiences. He was also affected by the movement or motion of things around him in these experiences.

Although he might have had kinesthetic experiences all his life, Wordsworth seemed to have the most intense ones, the visionary experiences, before 1799. For this study I divided these experiences into three groups. Two groups--kinesthesia of childhood, 1776-1786, and kinesthesia of youth, 1787-1792--consist of personal experiences which Wordsworth recorded in The Prelude.¹⁰ The third group--kinesthesia of early manhood, 1792-1798--contains not only Wordsworth's personal kinesthetic experiences but also Wordsworth's objective viewing of the kinesthetic experiences of other people--real or imagined. For the study of this group of experiences quotations are used from The Prelude (1850) as well as selections from Wordsworth's other poems.

⁹The Mind of a Poet (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1941), p. 54.

¹⁰All the quotations used in the study of these two groups of experiences are from The Prelude (1850).

CHAPTER II
KINESTHESIA OF CHILDHOOD
(1766-1786)

Perhaps the earliest kinesthetic experience that Wordsworth remembered and recorded in The Prelude is his adventure on Penrith Beacon. Although the original experience happened, as he said, "in the twilight of rememberable life" sometime before he went to Hawkshead,¹¹ it was, in his eighteenth or nineteenth year, recalled by an experience shared with his sweetheart¹² and recorded even later in Book XII of The Prelude.¹³ Wordsworth learned to ride at Penrith, the home of his mother's parents; and with James, their groom, he often rode out on the moorlands of Penrith Beacon. On one such occasion, after the vigorous exercise of the ride, the young boy Wordsworth somehow was separated from his "encourager and guide" (XII, 230). With tension growing out of wonder and fear, the child, leading his horse, came to a hollow where there stood a gibbet-post, the scene of a murder committed some ten years before. On this

¹¹Moorman, p. 11.

¹²Herbert Lindenberger, On Wordsworth's Prelude (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 153.

¹³I shall refer to this experience in Chapter III.

spot the murderer had been gibbeted, as the custom was, where he had committed the crime. "The gibbet-mast had mouldered down, the bones/ And iron case were gone" (XII, 237-238); but, as a lasting reminder, someone had carved in the turf the murderer's name--actually the initials which some think were T. P. M., standing for "Thomas Parker murdered."¹⁴ Although with only "A casual glance" he saw the initials (XII, 246), and perhaps remembered having heard the story, the boy fled from the scene, "Faltering and faint, and ignorant of the road" (XII, 247). As he walked up out of the hollow, he seemed to enter another world, one in which he saw even the most ordinary objects with a strange intensity:

Then, reascending the bare common, I saw
 A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
 The beacon on the summit, and, more near,
 A girl, who bore a pitcher on her head,
 And seemed with difficult steps to force
 her way
 Against the blowing wind. It was, in
 truth
 An ordinary sight; but I should need
 Colours and words that are unknown to
 man
 To paint the visionary dreariness
 Which, while I looked all round for my
 lost guide,
 Invested moorland waste, and naked pool,
 The beacon crowning the lone eminence,
 The female and her garments vexed and
 tossed
 By the strong wind. (XII, 248-261)

¹⁴William Wordsworth, The Prelude, Or Growth of a Poet's Mind, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (2d ed. rev.; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 614.

The "visionary dreariness" came not in the moment of terror as he stood by the gibbet, but at the moment that his muscles relaxed after he had reascended the bare common and after he had seen three ordinary objects--a pool, a beacon, and a girl with a pitcher on her head--yet objects which at this time took on a special significance that no colors and words known to him could picture. Throughout this experience the child Wordsworth was affected by isolated objects, wind, water, heights, and motion.

In this instance, I think the sense of sight was dominant. The setting was not an attractive one; on the contrary, it was barren, dreary, and colorless. The child was alone as he walked "down the rough and stony moor." Since the visionary experience occurred on higher ground, two of the objects impress the reader with height--"the beacon on the summit" and "A girl, who bore a pitcher on her head" (XII, 250-251). All three objects--pool, beacon, and girl--are solitary or isolated. The "naked pool,/ The beacon crowning the lone eminence, / The female with her garments vexed and tossed / By the strong wind"--each stands alone on the moorland waste. Although water was not so important in this experience as in others, I think it is significant that one of the objects was a pool. Perhaps the pool caught Wordsworth's eye because the water was "vexed" by the same wind that blew the girl's garments; or perhaps the wind was not disturbing the water, and his eye was caught by the water's unusual stillness. The girl moved with difficulty against "the blowing wind," her "garments vexed and tossed." To me, she is

the central figure in the vision, revealing not the beauty of Nature, but the power of it as she struggled against the wind, able in spite of it to keep the pitcher balanced on her head. Thus the child's inner eye recorded what his outer eye saw, and years later the man could put the experience of the boy into poetry.

In another incident, related in Book V of The Prelude, the beautiful and the awesome are linked. Wordsworth had this experience in the first week after he had gone to Hawkshead to school. The strangeness of the new place might have added to the intensity of the experience. Again he was alone and engaged in physical activity:

While I was roving up and down alone,
Seeking I knew not what, (V, 431-432)

Twilight was coming on as he walked along the shore of Esthwaite's Lake. Looking through the gloom to the opposite shore of the lake, he saw "a heap of garments, as if left by one / Who might have there been bathing" (V, 437-438). He watched the pile of clothing a long time, waiting for someone to claim them. But no one came. The sense of mystery is heightened as Wordsworth relates how

. . . meanwhile the calm lake
Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast,
And, now and then, a fish up-leaping snapped
The breathless stillness. . . . (V, 439-442)

This incident differs from the others in that Wordsworth's reaction did not come immediately; instead it came the next day

as the drowned body was recovered--a sight which should have greatly frightened a nine-year-old boy but did not, as the following lines reveal:

At last, the dead man, 'mid that beauteous
 scene
 Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
 Rose, with his ghastly face, a spectre
 shape
 Of terror; yet no soul-debasing fear,
 Young as I was, a child not nine years old,
 Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
 Such sights before, among the shining
 streams
 Of faery land, the forest of romance.
 Their spirit hallowed the sad spectacle
 With decoration of ideal grace;
 A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
 Of Grecian art, and purest poesy. (V, 448-459)

He maintained that ever after this experience such works of literature as he was acquainted with as a child kept him from being afraid of what might have caused panic otherwise. This revelation came as he contrasted the beautiful and the terrible --the "beauteous scene of trees and hills and water" with "his ghastly face, a spectre shape of terror."

Evidently, at Hawkshead neither the school officials nor Ann Tyson, with whom Wordsworth lodged, set restrictions on his activities after school hours. Often alone or sometimes with friends, the boy would roam late at night in some pastime or adventure. Three very similar night-time adventures are recorded in Book I of The Prelude. The accounts of the first two--trapping woodcocks and hunting for bird's eggs--are not preceded by passages emphasizing their significance; yet I believe that lines

340-356 which precede and give significance to the third experience--stealing a rowboat--may also refer to the first two. Also lines 301 and 302 could refer to all three:

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear. . . .

All three incidents center around physical activity and tension which lead to a climactic moment of intense insight which the poet remembers and finally records as a part of that which made him a poet. Each of the experiences which the poet chose to record occurred in a different season and was chosen, perhaps, to show the boy in his favorite pastime for that season or to reveal the typical or popular pastime or sport for that season.

Winter was the season for trapping woodcocks that migrated in large numbers to the uplands. "With store of springes" over his shoulder, the young Wordsworth, before his tenth birthday, spent many a night wandering over "the open heights where woodcocks run/ Among the smooth green turf" (I, 311-312). Alone in the moonlight and on the open heights, surely he would be physically exhausted, or near exhaustion as "through half the night,/ Scudding away from snare to snare, I plied / That anxious visitation" (I, 312-314). There must have been mounting tension as he went from trap to trap looking for woodcocks. His physical activity was in direct contrast with the peacefulness of the scene; so he "seemed to be a trouble" (I, 316). As he found what he had been searching for--a trapped woodcock--even though it was in another boy's trap, one can imagine his momentary sense

of relief, accompanied, however, by a sense of guilt as he truly "seemed to be a trouble" to Nature by taking what was not his. At that moment, he said,

I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and
 sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod. (I, 322-325)

Here we see that the solitary hills, the low breathings, the undistinguishable motion worked together to impress Nature's lesson upon the boy. The power of Nature was again recognized and stored as a source of creativity.

In spring the boys of Hawkshead climbed on Raven's Crag in Yewdale hunting for eggs in a raven's nest. As when he was trapping woodcocks, physical activity and tension were building up in the boy Wordsworth until the very instant that he found the raven's nest. It was then that he knew a moment of intense delight and insight which would remain in his mind's eye--and ear--forever.

. . . Oh! when I have hung
Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
And half-inch fissures in the slippery
 rock
But ill sustained, and almost (so it
 seemed)
Suspended by the blast that blew amain,
Shouldering the naked crag, oh, at that
 time
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud
 dry wind
Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not
 a sky
Of earth--and with what motion moved
 the clouds! (I, 330-339)

Alone and suspended on the mountainside, he was thrilled by the strange sound of the loud, dry wind and by the sight of the unreal sky around him and the rapid movement of the clouds.

The passage which emphasizes the significance of the row-boat experience can also refer to Wordsworth's reactions to the two experiences just discussed. In all three experiences there were unpleasant and even dangerous elements which served to add beauty and depth to the poet's life:

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit
grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling
together
In one society. How strange that all
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne
a part,
And that a needful part, in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end! (I, 340-350)

Nature used various means to teach the child Wordsworth in these experiences:

Thanks to the means which Nature
deigned to employ;
Whether her fearless visitings, or those
That came with soft alarm, like hurtless
light
Opening the peaceful clouds; or she may
use
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable, as best might suit her aim.
(I, 351-356)

She used "severer interventions" when Wordsworth stole the little rowboat. The setting for this incident was probably Ullswater, Stybarrow Crag being the "craggy steep" and Black Crag being the "huge peak."¹⁵ In this act of stealth, as he unloosed the chain and pushed the boat from shore, Wordsworth felt "troubled pleasure" in doing something which he knew was wrong as if he were being warned by his guilty conscience in the form of "the voice of mountain-echoes" that he could hear as the boat moved on. Nevertheless, he could enjoy to the full the effects on the water of the boat's movement across its surface:

Leaving behind her [the boat] still, on either side,
 Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
 Until they melted all into one track
 Of sparkling light. . . . (I, 364-367)

In fact, fixing his eye upon the top of a single mountain, he gave himself completely to the joy of one of his favorite physical activities--boating. In these lines from The Prelude he described his experience so vividly that even one totally unfamiliar with rowing can almost feel his own muscles pulling at the oars and his body rocking with the motion of the boat:

. . . But now, like one who rows,
 Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
 With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
 Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
 The horizon's utmost boundary; for
 above

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 506-507.

Was nothing but the stars and the grey
 sky.
 She was an elfin pinnance; lustily
 I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
 And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
 Went heaving through the water like a
 swan. (I, 367-376)

At that moment Wordsworth's whole being was given to the muscular activity of rowing the boat; then suddenly his eye was aware of something other than just the mountain peak:

When, from behind that craggy steep till
 then
 The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black
 and huge,
 As if with voluntary power instinct
 Upreared its head. I struck and struck
 again,
 And growing still in stature the grim
 shape
 Towered up between me and the stars,
 and still,
 For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
 And measured motion like a living thing,
 Strode after me. . . . (I, 376-384)

Now, in contrast, he was no longer the proud, lusty rower that he was in the beginning of the account; but, meek and subdued, he turned and through "the silent water" rowed back to the spot from which he had taken the boat. He had taken it in a devil-may-care mood, but he left it "and through the meadows homeward went in grave/ And serious mood" (I, 389-390). Not only was he affected at that moment, but for days afterwards his brain

Worked with a dim and undetermined
 sense
 Of unknown modes of being; o'er my
 thoughts
 There hung a darkness, call it solitude

Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not
live
Like living men, moved slowly through
the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.
(I. 392-400)

In this experience Wordsworth was affected by the same things that had affected him in other experiences--the movement of the water as he rowed the boat lustily over it; the "movement" of the mountain as it seemed to come after him; the stars and grey sky above him; the two mountains, the first being the only one against the horizon for a while, then the second, "black and huge," that seemed to come between him and the stars. The experience might have frightened any young boy, but it did much more than that to Wordsworth. Because his whole being was so busy with the physical activity that he was neither looking for nor thinking about anything but the ordinary, the unexpected brought a much more intense reaction. His mind was filled with unfamiliar things--the opposite of all that he knew and loved in Nature--as if Nature were punishing him by taking away all the natural, familiar things.

Thus through all the seasons, at all times of day and night, by various means Nature taught the boy Wordsworth while he was busily engaged in the ordinary sports and pastimes of boyhood. Skating was the one athletic exercise in which he excelled, and he relates one incident which occurred while he was skating on Windermere. In the rowboat incident the unexpected happened. In this incident it seems almost as if he

were waiting for the unexpected to happen. He and his friends were having too happy a time to heed the summons to come in. The setting sun, the blazing cottage windows, the tolling village clock--each summoned them to come indoors; but they were too greatly excited to heed these summons. Wordsworth says that he "wheeled about, / Proud and exulting like an untired horse / That cares not for his home" (I, 431-433). They played a game "imitative of the chase" (I, 435) with "the resounding horn, / The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare" (I, 436-437). As they "flew" through the darkness and the cold

. . . not a voice was idle; with the din
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron; while far distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the
stars
Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the
west
The orange sky of evening died away. (I, 425-446)

In contrast to the noise of the tolling of the village clock, the hissing of the skates, the shouting of the children, the echoing of their shouts from the cliffs, and the tinkling of every icy crag, the far distant hills "sent" a melancholy sound. Leaving the "tumultuous throng," Wordsworth skated off alone. His eye was on a star which seemed to be flying before him. As he gave himself to the wind, skating faster and faster, almost as if he were trying to catch the star, "all the shadowy banks on either side / Came sweeping through the darkness" (I, 454-455). When the sense of motion was at its highest peak, Wordsworth stopped abruptly and, as the earth seemed to continue to roll, a moment of insight came:

Work like a sea?

Not uselessly employed,
Might I pursue this theme through every
change

Of exercise and play, to which the year
Did summon us in his delightful round.

(I, 464-478)

In "pursuing this theme through every change / Of exercise and play," Wordsworth mentioned only a few of his activities together with his reactions without giving many details. I shall quote some of the lines which show him engaged in such physical activities as nutting, fishing, flying kites, playing games, and walking and which show his reactions. Wordsworth and his friends were a "noisy crew." As they roamed their beautiful vales, the "sun in heaven" saw not "a band in happiness and joy / Richer, or worthier of the ground they trod" (I, 481-482). In autumn the noise of their voices mingled with the crash of the hazel bowers as the boys gathered nuts:

I [Wordsworth] could record with no reluctant
voice

The woods of autumn, and their hazel
bowers

With milk-white clusters hung. . . .

(I, 483-485)

In summer Wordsworth and his friends fished in the many secluded mountain brooks:

. . . the rod and line,
True symbol of hope's foolishness, whose
strong

And unreprieved enchantment led us on
By rocks and pools shut out from every
star,

All the green summer, to forlorn cascades
Among the windings hid of mountain
brooks. (I, 485-490)

Flying kites was another pastime which Wordsworth vividly remembered with pleasure:

--Unfading recollections! at this hour
 The heart is almost mine with which I
 felt,
 From some hill-top on sunny afternoons,
 The paper kite high among fleecy clouds
 Pull at her rein like an impetuous courser;
 Or, from the meadows sent on gusty
 days,
 Beheld her breast the wind, then suddenly
 Dashed headlong, and rejected by the
 storm. (I, 491-498)

Thus through all the seasons "those fits of vulgar joy"
 (I, 581) and "that giddy bliss/ Which, like a tempest, works
 along the blood" (I, 583-584) were with the child Wordsworth
 as he engaged in his childish sports. Thus, too, Nature gave
 him a special kind of knowledge as he felt

Gleams like the flashing of a shield;--the
 earth
 And common face of Nature spake to me
 Rememberable things. . . . (I, 586-588)

This special knowledge "came unsought" (II, 7) as "From week
 to week, from month to month, we lived / A round of tumult"
 (II, 8-9). For instance, on a summer day they would stay out-
 doors playing their games long after night had come and many
 were asleep. The reader can almost "feel" the silence as after
 the revelry and loud uproar had died out at last

When all the ground was dark, and
 twinkling stars
 Edged the black clouds, home and to bed
 we went,
 Feverish with weary joints and beating
 minds. (II, 16-18)

From human dwelling, or the vernal thrush / Was audible" (II, 340-342). He would sit "alone upon some jutting eminence" (II, 343) and watch the dawn break. His feelings at these times were almost beyond description:

. . . where find
Faith in the marvellous things which then
I felt?
Oft in these moments such a holy calm
Would overspread my soul, that bodily
eyes
Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
Appeared like something in myself, a
dream,
A prospect in the mind. (II, 346-352)

Thus did he "drink the visionary power" (II, 311). It is at such times

. . . that the soul,
Remembering how she felt, but what she
felt
Remembering not, retains no obscure
sense
Of possible sublimity, whereto
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still
That whatsoever point they gain, they
yet
Have something to pursue. (II, 315-322)

This last passage is truly a key passage which reveals Wordsworth's reaction in everyone of his kinesthetic experiences.

All of these experiences which I have just discussed occurred while Wordsworth was in school at Hawkshead; but before he left Hawkshead at seventeen to go to Cambridge, he had three other experiences. In the first one he and his friends

were riding ponies; in the second they were rowing; in the third Wordsworth was walking and climbing, waiting for the horses to be brought before a holiday. In all three, physical activity and tension are very important.

Wordsworth and his friends at Hawkshead often took wild rides on ponies which they rented from an innkeeper. They were able to do this usually only after they had just returned to school from a half-yearly holiday with their purses full. These wild rides took them sometimes to Conishead Priory. There they dismounted and walked where once "Druids worshipped." On other rides, they went to the ruins of Furness Abbey, which was twenty-one miles from Hawkshead.¹⁷ Wordsworth describes the ruins of the abbey as "a holy scene," completely in contrast to the boisterous ride:

A holy scene!--Along the smooth green
turf
Our horses grazed. To more than inland
peace,
Left by the west wind sweeping overhead
From a tumultuous ocean, trees and
towers
In that sequestered valley may be seen,
Both silent and both motionless alike;
Such the deep shelter that is there, and
such
The safeguard for repose and quietness.

(II, 107-114)

As he stopped in this quiet place after the physical exertion of the ride, he was completely captivated by the voice of a

¹⁷Wordsworth, p. 510.

single wren singing to herself in the ruined nave of the abbey.

. . .and that single
 wren
 Which one day sang so sweetly in the
 nave
 Of the old church, that--though from
 recent showers
 The earth was comfortless, and, touched
 by faint
 Internal breezes, sobbings of the place
 And respirations, from the roofless walls
 The shuddering ivy dripped large drops--
 yet still
 So sweetly 'mid the gloom the invisible
 bird
 Sang to herself, that there I could have
 made
 My dwelling-place, and lived for ever
 there
 To hear such music. . . . (II, 118-128)

The "presence" which he felt as he heard the wren's song he continued to feel as he and his friends "in wantonness of heart" (II, 130) "scampered homewards" (II, 131):

. . .Oh, ye rocks and streams,
 And that still spirit shed from evening
 air!
 Even in this joyous time I sometimes felt
 Your presence, when with slackened step
 we breathed
 Along the sides of the steep hills, or when
 Lighted by gleams of moonlight from the
 sea
 We beat with thundering hoofs the level
 sand. (II, 131-137)

Such moments of insight came as Wordsworth relaxed in the quietness of the ruins or slowed down so that tension eased on his ride home. In these quiet moments he was affected by the solitary wren, the steep hills, and the moonlight on the sea.

The bad weather, the isolated objects--wall, sheep, bush--and his own solitude helped to create the intense impression which was made at this time on his mind. He was unconscious of it at the moment; but, after his father's death, as he reflected upon his experience of watching full of hope for the horses that would take him and his brothers to a season of pleasure, he became intensely conscious of the significance of the incident for him, as he would not have earlier. He felt as though he were being punished for presumptuous hopes and selfish wishes. However, years later, memories of all that happened before and during this holiday brought him delight and not pain:

That dreary time,--ere we had been ten
 days
 Sojourners in my father's house, he died,
 . . . The event,
 With all the sorrow that it brought,
 appeared
 A chastisement; and when I called to
 mind
 That day so lately past, when from the
 crag
 I looked in such anxiety of hope;
 With trite reflections of morality,
 Yet in the deepest passion, I bowed low
 To God, Who thus corrected my desires;
 And, afterwards, the wind and sleety rain,
 And all the business of the elements,
 The single sheep, and the one blasted
 tree,
 And the bleak music from that old stone
 wall,
 The noise of wood and water, and the mist
 That on the line of each of those two roads
 Advanced in such indisputable shapes;
 All these were kindred spectacles and
 sounds
 To which I oft repaired, and thence would
 drink,
 As at a fountain. . . . (XII, 306-307; 309-326)

As he "drank" in this special insight, his impressions were so strong that they remained with him to be recalled at various times throughout his life

. . . on winter nights,
 . . . when storm and rain
 Beat on my roof, or, haply, at noon
 day
 While in a grove I walk, whose lofty trees,
 Laden with summer's thickest foliage,
 rock
 In a strong wind, some working of the
 spirit,
 Some inward agitations thence are
 brought,
 Whate'er their office, whether to beguile
 Thoughts over busy in the course they
 took,
 Or animate an hour of vacant ease.
 (XII, 362-335)

By the time Wordsworth was in his seventeenth year, he was fully aware of the power that was his to see things clearly with the inner as well as the outer eye. He walked with Nature in a "spirit of religious love." At this time he was both receptive and creative, feeling that a "plastic power" was with him. Indeed, his was a very special kind of insight for one so young:

. . . My seventeenth year was come;
 And, whether from this habit rooted now
 So deeply in my mind, or from excess
 In the great social principle of life
 Coercing all things into sympathy,
 To unorganic natures were transferred
 My own enjoyments; or the power of truth
 Coming in revelation, did converse
 With things that really are; I, at this time
 Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.
 Thus while the days flew by, and years
 passed on,

From Nature and her overflowing soul
I had received so much, that all my
thoughts
Were steeped in feeling; I was only then
Contented, when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth
still;
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of
thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;
O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts
and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air; o'er all that
glides
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,
And mighty depth of waters. . . . (II, 386-409)

Thus was Wordsworth thinking as he prepared to leave the familiar surroundings of Hawkshead, where through his childhood and adolescence he had held communion with Nature. As he prepared to leave had he many questioning thoughts about what was in store for him in his new surroundings at Cambridge?

CHAPTER III
KINESTHESIA OF YOUTH
(1787-1792)

Wordsworth's kinesthetic experiences continued to be influential in his visions or moments of insight during the period of his youth. These moments of insight came most frequently as he was relaxed and calm after a period of physical activity. Thus he felt hope for all things both great and ordinary becoming possible for him as he sat in a moment of calm after a walk around a lake; and the moment that he felt himself to be "a dedicated Spirit" came as he relaxed on his way home after a night of physical revelry.

At first the seventeen-year-old Wordsworth was dazzled by life at St. John's College, Cambridge, seeing everything as more exciting and probably much more pleasant than he expected. He was soon settled into his new life, and because in the years before he had been "endowed with holy powers / And faculties, whether to work or feel" (III, 88-89), he began an even more intense communion with Nature, realizing that he did not have to depend on his old surroundings for his inspiration:

Oft when the dazzling show no longer new
Had ceased to dazzle, ofttimes did I quit
My comrades, leave the crowd, buildings
 and groves,
And as I paced alone the level fields

Far from those lovely sights and sounds
 sublime
 With which I had been conversant, the
 mind
 Drooped not; but there into herself return-
 ing,
 With prompt rebound seemed fresh as
 heretofore.
 At least I more distinctly recognised
 Her native instincts: let me dare to speak
 A high language, say that now I felt
 What independent solaces were mine,
 To mitigate the injurious sway of place
 Or circumstance, how far soever changed
 In youth, or to be changed in after years.
(III, 90-104)

He no longer looked only on outward things but searched more within himself.

Or turning the mind in upon herself,
 Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread
 my thoughts
 And spread them with a wider creeping. . . .
(III, 113-115)

Although he had discovered that he did not have to depend on any particular surroundings, he turned back to Hawkshead for his first long vacation after his first academic year at Cambridge. His physical activities were just as important to his inspired moments in his young manhood as they had been to him in childhood. On his first vacation in Hawkshead, as he set out to walk the "circuit of our little lake" (IV, 138), he had a feeling of complete happiness. "A rough terrier of the hills" (IV, 95)--the companion of many of his childhood walks--accompanied him on this walk. The sun was setting, and the air was cold and raw as he left Ann Tyson's cottage for his walk. It was not, however, the outward view that captured

his thoughts but rather the inward view, or what was happening within himself. He was receiving comfort, strength, and restoration, although he had not known he needed them:

. . .Gently did my
soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted,
stood
Naked, as in the presence of her God.
While on I walked, a comfort seemed to
touch
A heart that had not been disconsolate:
Strength came where weakness was not
known to be,
At least not felt; and restoration came
Like an intruder knocking at the door
Of unacknowledged weariness. . . .
(IV, 150-158)

Because he was in an "abstraction," he saw little of the external scene; but within himself he felt hope that all things both great and ordinary were becoming possible for him. He realized

How life pervades the undecaying mind;
How the immortal soul with God-like
 power
Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest
 sleep
That time can lay upon her; how on
 earth
Man, if he do but live within the light
Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad
His being armed with strength that cannot
 fail. (IV, 165-171)

Thus he thought after his walk around the lake. In this moment of calm he was affected by his own solitude, by the darkness that descended slowly over the mountains, by the breeze-rippled water of the lake, and by the sound of the wind blowing through the hazel leaves:

Thus musing, in a wood I sate me down
 Alone, continuing there to muse: the
 slopes
 And heights meanwhile were slowly over-
 spread
 With darkness, and before a rippling
 breeze
 The long lake lengthened out its hoary
 line,
 And in the sheltered coppice where I
 sate,
 Around me from among the hazel leaves,
 Now here, now there, moved by the
 straggling wind,
 Came ever and anon a breath-like sound,
 Quick as the pantings of the faithful dog,
 The off and on companion of my walk;
 And such, at times, believing them to
 be,
 I turned my head to look if he were there;
 Then into solemn thought I passed once
 more. (IV, 177-190)

When he looked and found the dog not there, he was left to wonder whether the "breath-like sound" might have been the breathing of Nature herself.²¹

Now that he was a young man, he showed a new interest in the lighter pleasures; but some of these required as much physical exertion as had any of his childhood pleasures. One of the new lighter pleasures was dancing; and on this same long vacation, Wordsworth attended at least two dances, probably many more. The first of these which he mentioned in The Prelude was probably at some farm two or three miles from Hawkshead. He said that he had "passed the night in dancing, gaiety, and mirth." The reader can feel the exhilaration and exhaustion of the dance in the "din of instruments

²¹Moorman, p. 107.

and shuffling feet" and "unaimed prattle flying up and down" (IV, 313, 315) and can envision the "glancing forms, and tapers glittering" (IV, 314). Wordsworth emphasizes the spirit of youth as he tells of the

Slight shocks of young love-liking inter-
 spersed,
 Whose transient pleasure mounted to the
 head,
 And tingled through the veins. . . . (IV, 317-319)

The cock had crowed before Wordsworth left the dance. As he relaxed on his way home after this night of physical revelry, the sudden solitude let him drink in the beauty that was all around him. It became for him a moment of dedication. His walk homeward was through an open field. The sun was just rising. As he reached a high point in the road, the morning came upon him in all its glory:

The morning rose, in memorable pomp,
 Glorious as e'er I had beheld--in front
 The sea lay laughing at a distance; near,
 The solid mountains shone, bright as the
 clouds,
 Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean
 light;
 And in the meadows and the lower
 grounds
 Was all the sweetness of a common
 dawn--
 Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
 And labourers going forth to till the
 fields. (IV, 324-332)

The solitude, the sunrise, the mountains, and the sea affected him so that his "heart was full." Although he did not knowingly dedicate himself at this moment to poetry or anything else, it would seem that he was destined from that moment on to be a "dedicated Spirit."

Ah! need I say, dear Friend! that to
 the brim
 My heart was full; I made no vows, but
 vows
 Were then made for me; bond unknown
 to me
 Was given, that I should be, else sinning
 greatly,
 A dedicated Spirit. On I walked
 In thankful blessedness, which yet sur-
 vives. (IV, 333-338)

Before Wordsworth went to Cambridge, he had nothing with which to compare his life in Hawkshead. Now as he returned to Hawkshead after having been in St. John's a year, the familiar things of his childhood seemed very dear. He was more aware of his love for and interest in people. This is shown in the account of another memorable incident which happened after he had been to a dance. The other features of this incident are, however, quite different from those of the previous experience. The time was October; the place, probably a gentleman's house on the shore of Windermere. Since it was the regatta season, Wordsworth was probably very tired from a day spent in "strenuous idleness" (IV, 378) even before the dance began. Again, as he walked home--this time by moonlight and alone--between the two Sawreys, the reflection of the moon on the road made the road look like a stream of water running to meet the brook that he could hear in the vale. There was no sound except in the "peaceful voice" (IV, 386) of this brook. The noise and movement of the physical activity of the day and evening were all but forgotten as he stood in this peaceful moment. Relaxed, with his senses given to the solitude and silence, he suddenly saw an "uncouth shape" (IV, 387) in the road ahead. It proved

to be a discharged soldier from the American Revolution. There were many such men roaming the countryside at that time. At first Wordsworth just watched him from behind a hawthorn bush, fascinated by the isolated figure in the moonlight. The man obviously needed help, for he was muttering sounds to himself. Summoning courage, Wordsworth spoke to him. The man answered with dignity in a quiet, uncomplaining voice. Feeling pity for the soldier, Wordsworth led him to a cottage where he would be taken in for the night. As Wordsworth left him at the cottage, he suggested that the man seek help instead of lingering in the public ways. The soldier answered

With the same ghastly mildness in his
look,
. . . . 'My trust is in the God of Heaven,
And in the eye of him who passes me!'
(IV, 457-459)

As Wordsworth left the soldier and went on his way, he was much more impressed by the effect that a chance passer-by had on him than he realized as

. . . Back I cast a look,
And lingered near the door a little space,
Then sought with quiet heart my distant
home.
(IV, 467-469)

The meeting with the pitiful man was so different from the trivial, frivolous happenings of the day and evening that for Wordsworth the experience was much more memorable. It affected his treatment of his fellow men in the years to come, both in his dealings with them and in his writings about them.

Also, during this first long vacation from Cambridge, Wordsworth visited his guardian-uncles at Penrith. His sister

and Mary Hutchinson were also at Penrith, and the three of them enjoyed roaming the countryside. It was on one of his walks with Mary that Wordsworth came upon the spot where he remembered seeing the gibbet post when he had ridden to Penrith Beacon, as a child, an incident which I discussed earlier in this thesis pointing out that in the childhood experience the moorland waste, naked pool, solitary beacon, and struggling female were invested with a visionary dreariness; but they seemed quite different to the eighteen-year-old Wordsworth as he walked in the same place with his "loved one" (XII, 262):

Upon the naked pool and dreary crags,
And on the melancholy beacon, fell
A spirit of pleasure and youth's golden
gleam. . . . (XII, 264-266)

Wordsworth realized as he remembered his childhood experience what had been gained from it:

And think ye not with radiance more sublime
For these remembrances, and for the
power
They had left behind? . . . (XII, 267-269)

After his long vacation, Wordsworth returned to Cambridge. There, when he was free to do whatever he wished, he took long walks. On these walks he was most fascinated by a huge ash tree, its branches covered with ivy. He often stood "Foot-bound uplooking at this lovely tree / Beneath a frosty moon" (IV, 86-87), thinking that although he might never gain fame for his verse, none of the famous poets--not even Spenser--

Could have more tranquil visions in his
youth,
Or could more bright appearances create

Of human forms with superhuman
 powers,
 Than I beheld loitering on calm clear
 nights
 Alone, beneath this fairy work of earth.
 (VI, 90-94)

During the Christmas vacation of his third year at Cambridge, Wordsworth went to London for the first time. He approached the city on top of a swaying coach, all his muscles tense with excitement and anticipation. Suddenly realizing he was in London, he felt "a weight of ages" (VIII, 552) descend upon his heart:

 . . . no thought embodied,
 no
 Distinct remembrances, but weight and
 power,--
 Power growing under weight. . . . (VIII, 553-555)

He had this intense experience not surrounded by the usual objects of nature--mountains, water, trees--but

With vulgar men about me, trivial forms
 Of houses, pavement, streets, of men and
 things,--
 Mean shapes on every side. . . . (VIII, 545-547)

Although all that took place inside him "came and went / As in a moment" (VIII, 557-558), this inner experience remained in his memory "a thing divine" (VIII, 559).

Wordsworth and a college friend Robert Jones made a walking tour of France, Switzerland, and Italy during Wordsworth's third long vacation from Cambridge. Leaving London on July 11, 1790, they started on their journey. In The Prelude Wordsworth recorded five incidents from this trip--the first, in France; the second, at the Convent of Chartreuse; the third

in Simplon Pass; the fourth, by Lake Como; and the fifth, near Gravedona. Crossing from Dover on July 13, they found themselves in the festivities of the French Federation Day.

Everywhere the celebrating Frenchmen warmly received the two young Englishmen. For part of their journey they sailed down the Saône with a group of the returning fédérés:

Like bees they swarmed, gaudy and gay
 as bees;
 Some vapoured in the unruliness of joy,
 And with their swords flourished as if to
 fight
 The saucy air. . . . (IV, 391-394)

Wordsworth and Jones readily took part in the wild excitement:

. . . . The supper done,
 With flowing cups elate and happy
 thoughts
 We rose at signal given, and formed a
 ring
 And, hand in hand, danced round and
 round the board;
 All hearts were open, every tongue was
 loud
 With amity and glee; . . .
 And round and round the board we
 danced again. (VI 397-402; 406)

After this night passed in boisterous physical exercise, Wordsworth and Jones with their "blithe friends" resumed their journey. Dawn was breaking as they rowed away. Wordsworth heard the sweet jingling of the monastery bells and noticed the "rapid river flowing without noise" (IV, 410). His heart was touched even amid the noisy crew as "each uprising or receding spire / Spake with a sense of peace" (IV, 411-412). His insight was more intense because it came after the physical

'Your impious work forbear: perish what
may,
Let this one temple last, be this one spot
Of earth devoted to eternity!' (VI, 433-435)

"While St. Bruno's pines / Waved their dark tops" (VI, 436-437)
noisily and "the sister streams of Life and Death" (VI, 439)
murmured, Wordsworth's heart answered:

'Honour to the patriot's zeal!
Glory and hope to new-born Liberty!
Hail to the mighty projects of the time!'
(VI, 441-443)

He wanted the convent to be left untouched:

'But oh! Of Past and Future be the wings
On whose support harmoniously con-
joined
Moves the great spirit of human know-
ledge, spare
These courts of mystery, where a step
advanced
Between the portals of the shadow rocks
Leaves far behind life's treacherous vani-
ties,
For penitential tears and trembling hopes
Exchanged--to equalise in God's pure
sight
Monarch and peasant. . . .' (VI, 448-456)

The convent should be redeemed "for the sake / Of conquest
over sense" (VI, 457-458) and

' . . . for humbler claim
Of that imaginative impulse sent
From these majestic floods, yon shining
cliffs,
The untransmuted shapes of many worlds,
Cerulean ether's pure inhabitants,
These forests unapproachable by death,
That shall endure as long as man endures,
To think, to hope, to worship, and to feel,
To struggle, to be lost within himself

In trepidation, from the blank abyss
 To look with bodily eyes, and be consoled.'
 (VI, 461-471)

This incident was the second of the five experiences from the walking tour recorded by Wordsworth in The Prelude.

The third memorable incident of this tour happened as Wordsworth and Jones were in Simplon Pass being guided to the point where they would cross the Alps. A band of muleteers had guided them "along Simplon's steep and rugged road" (VI, 563), but after lunch the muleteers walked on leaving Wordsworth and Jones eating. Later, as Wordsworth and Jones tried to follow, they found that the road "broke off" at the edge of a rough stream. The only trail that they could see went up the side of a lofty mountain. Eagerly they climbed steadily upward, hoping to catch their guides. Their muscles were tense not only from their climbing but also from their looking steadily for the guides. As they were thus intensely engaged, they met a peasant who told them that they must descend to find the right trail which ran beside the stream they had crossed. Although this peasant did not say so in so many words, Wordsworth and Jones realized from his conversation that they had crossed the Alps. At that moment Wordsworth could not have described his feelings. It was as if his mind were shrouded in mist:

Imagination--here the Power so called
 Through sad incompetence of human
 speech,
 That awful Power rose from the mind's
 abyss
 Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,

At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;
 Halted without an effort to break through
 (VI, 592-597)

Fourteen years later as Wordsworth thought about this experience, he suddenly saw its meaning in one of his intense moments of vision

. . . when the light of sense
 Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
 The invisible world, doth greatness make
 abode,
 There harbours; whether we be young or
 old,
 Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
 Is with infinitude, and only there. . . .
 (VI, 600-605)

He knew that the "melancholy slackening" (VI, 617) which he felt as he heard that they had crossed the Alps came because the news left him without the hope that is "our being's heart and home" (VI, 604), "hope that can never die" (VI, 606). At the time of the experience, however, "the melancholy slackening that ensued / Upon those tidings by the peasant given / Was soon dislodged" (VI, 617-619), and Wordsworth and Jones hurried on their way. The path they had missed the first time ran beside a stream. Wordsworth was greatly impressed by the dreariness and decay of the setting:

. . . The immeasurable height
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
 And in the narrow rent at every turn
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and
 forlorn,
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue
 sky,
 The rocks that muttered close upon our
 ears,

Black drizzling crags that spake by the
 way-side
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfettered clouds and region of the
 Heavens,
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the
 light-- . . . (VI, 624-635)

To him all these gloomy features "were all like workings of one
 mind, the features / Of the same face" (VI, 636-637),

Characters of the great Apocalypse,
 The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without
 end. . . . (VI, 638-640)

That night they lodged in a "dreary mansion" (VI, 645); weary
 as they were from the day's activities, they were unable to
 sleep. The noise of the roaring stream which they had walked
 beside filled the house "making innocent sleep / Lie melancholy
 among weary bones" (VI, 647-648).

The next morning Wordsworth and Jones, their muscles tired
 and tense from the night of sleeplessness as well as from all
 the wandering of the day before, renewed their journey. In-
 stead of the melancholy and gloom of Simplon Pass, the setting
 of this day's journey was one of peace and beauty. Their walk
 led them to Lake Como, set between huge mountains, "confined
 as in a depth / Of Abyssinian privacy" (VI, 661-662). Perhaps
 Wordsworth was reminded of his beloved lake country as he drank
 in the beauty of the "chestnut woods, and garden plots", "lofty
 steeps, and pathways roofed with vines" (VI, 662, 665). Although
 he tried, he felt that he could not properly praise in verse
 this beautiful place which gave him so much:

. . . Like a breeze
Or sunbeam over your domain I passed
In motion without pause; but ye have left
Your beauty with me, a serene accord
Of forms and colours, passive, yet en-
dowed
In their submissiveness with power as
sweet
And gracious, almost might I dare to say,
As virtue is, or goodness; sweet as love,
Or the remembrance of a generous deed,
Or mildest visitations of pure thought,
When God, the giver of all joy, is thanked
Religiously, in silent blessedness;
Sweet as this last herself, for such it is.
(VI, 675-687)

Thus he learned from both the fearful gloom of Simplon Pass and the serene beauty of Lake Como. His experience at Lake Como was the fourth of the five incidents of the walking tour described in The Prelude. The fifth incident occurred a few days later.

For two days they continued walking "in presence of the Lake [Como], / That, stretching far among the Alps, seemed / a character more stern" (VI, 689-691). They spent the second night in Gravedona where they were awakened in the middle of the night by the striking of the church clock. Misled because of the clock's "telling the hours with strokes / Whose import then we have not learned" (VI, 693-694) into thinking that dawn was near and wanting to view its coming, they rose by moonlight and left the town. They walked "by no uncertain path, / Along the winding margin of the lake" (VI, 696-697) by moonlight. Soon they were lost, "bewildered among woods immense, / And on a rock sate down, to wait for day" (VI, 701-702). The spot they chose to wait in was an open place which overlooked the lake.

The reflection of the moon on the water was red and ever-changing "like an uneasy snake" (VI, 707). Thus they sat and sat, anxiously awaiting the dawn, "wondering as if the night / Had been ensnared by witchcraft" (VI, 708-709). Completely overcome by weariness, they stretched out on a rock to try to sleep. There was to be no rest for them, however, for they were tormented by all sorts of things seen, heard, and felt:

. . . tormented by the stings
Of insects, which with noise like that of
noon
Filled all the woods: the cry of unknown
birds;
The mountains more by blackness visible
And their own size, than any outward
light;
The breathless wilderness of clouds; the
clock
That told, with unintelligible voice,
The widely parted hours; the noise of
streams,
And sometimes rustling motions nigh at
hand,
That did not leave us free from personal
fear;
And, lastly, the withdrawing moon, that
set
Before us, while she still was high in
heaven. . . . (VI, 711-722)

Wordsworth and Jones had gone out expecting to see the lake in all its splendor at dawn and instead had met all the horrors of the night. Yet to Wordsworth it was a fitting conclusion that added to "that pair of golden days that shed / On Como's Lake, and all that round it lay, / Their fairest, softest, happiest influence" (VI, 724-726).

During much of this journey Wordsworth and Jones found themselves among people, such as "the Brabant armies on the fret/

There was a fog, "low-hung and thick" (XIV, 13). Not discouraged by the fog, the three of them began to climb, and soon the mist was all around them. After talking for a while, they became silent, each one busy with "his private thoughts" (XIV, 18). In fact, Wordsworth was so completely occupied with his climbing and thinking that only once was his mind diverted--when the shepherd's dog unearthed a hedgehog. After this "small adventure" (XIV, 25) they climbed on "in silence as before" (XIV, 28). Wordsworth vividly pictures his climb:

. . . With forehead bent
Earthward, as if in opposition set
Against any enemy, I panted up
With eager pace, and no less eager
thoughts. . . . (XIV, 28-31)

The three men were climbing apart with Wordsworth in front of the others. As he ascended with his eyes looking down, he suddenly noticed the "ground appeared to brighten" (XIV, 35). With each step it seemed brighter. Almost immediately he knew the cause,

For instantly a light upon the turf
Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up
The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean; (XIV, 38-44)

As he stood looking at the starless sky and what seemed to be a "billowy ocean" (XIV, 55) all around him, he called the place where they stood "a fixed, abysmal, gloomy, breathing-place" (XIV, 58). He heard

. . . the roar of waters, torrents,
 streams
 Innumerable, roaring with one voice!
 (XIV, 59-60)

The roar was so mighty that it was

Heard over earth and sea, and, in that
 hour,
 For so it seemed, felt by the starry
 heavens. (XIV, 61-62)

For Wordsworth this was a moment of vision. When the vision
 "into air had partially dissolved" (XIV, 63), it appeared to
 him "the type / Of a majestic intellect" (XIV, 66-67). With
 his inner eye he "saw" the mountains and the mist as

. . . the emblem of a mind
 That feeds upon infinity, that broods
 Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
 Its voices issuing forth to silent light
 In one continuous stream. . . . (XIV, 70-74)

He "saw" it further as

. . . a mind sustained
 By recognitions of transcendent power,
 In sense conducting to ideal form,
 In soul of more than mortal privilege. . . .
 (XIV, 70-74)

The power of Nature he again felt and realized to be that
 which produced the "higher minds."

One function, above all, of such a mind
 Had Nature shadowed there, by putting
 forth,
 'Mid circumstances awful and sublime,
 That mutual domination which she loves
 To exert upon the face of outward things,
 So moulded, joined, abstracted, so en-
 dowed

With interchangeable supremacy,
 That men, least sensitive, see, hear, per-
 ceive,
 And cannot choose but feel. The power,
 which all
 Acknowledge when thus moved, which
 Nature thus
 To bodily sense exhibits, is the express
 Resemblance of that glorious faculty
 That higher minds bear with them as
 their own. . . . (XIV, 78-90)

Once again seeing the mountains, the mist, the ocean, hearing the
 roar of waters, and feeling alone, Wordsworth experienced a moment
 of deep insight as he realized the sources of creative power--

. . . The power, which all
 Acknowledge when thus moved, which
 Nature thus
 To bodily sense exhibits, is the express
 Resemblance of that glorious faculty
 That higher minds bear with them as
 their own.
 This is the very spirit in which they deal
 With the whole compass of the universe:
 They from their native selves can send
 abroad
 Kindred mutations; for themselves create
 A like existence; and, whene'er it dawns
 Created for them, catch it, or are caught
 By its inevitable mastery,
 Like angels stopped upon the wing by
 sound
 Of harmony from Heaven's remotest
 spheres. (XIV, 86-99)

Wordsworth returned from Wales and began a period of
 idleness in London.

Free as a colt at pasture on the hill,
 I ranged at large, through London's wide
 domain,
 Month after month. . . . (IX, 23-25)

Finally he obtained his guardians' permission to spend some
 time in France, intending to perfect his knowledge of French

with the hope of getting a job on his return as a traveling tutor to some wealthy youth.²⁴

When he landed in France in November, 1791, Wordsworth was little more affected by the country's turmoil than he had been the year before when he and Jones passed through. As I said when I was discussing that journey, Wordsworth was more aware of Nature and himself than of causes and the people involved in them.

I stood, 'mid those concussions, uncon-
cerned,
Tranquil almost, and careless as a flower
Glassed in a greenhouse, or a parlour
shrub
That spreads its leaves in unmolested
peace,
While every bush and tree, the country
through,
Is shaking to the roots. . . . (IX, 86-91)

At first his activities were in the aristocratic circles, but eventually he became tired of these and withdrew

Into a noisier world, and thus ere long
Became a patriot; and my heart was all
Given to the people, and my love was
theirs. (IX, 122-124)

The main reason for his change of attitude was the influence of Michel Beaupuy, one of the four individuals Wordsworth mentioned in The Prelude as having influenced his life for good.²⁵ At Blois during the summer of 1792 Beaupuy and Wordsworth walked and talked together. His experiences with Beaupuy were moments of exaltation which remained forever clear in Wordsworth's memory.

²⁴Moorman, p. 170.

²⁵The other three were William Taylor, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Coleridge. This is noted by Mary Moorman, p. 193.

Oh, sweet it is, in academic groves,
To ruminate, with interchange of talk,
On rational liberty, and hope in man,
Justice and peace. But far more sweet
such toil--
Toil, say I, for it leads to thoughts ab-
struse--
If nature then be standing on the brink
Of some great trial, and we hear the voice
Of one devoted,--one whom circumstance
Hath called upon to embody his deep
sense
In action, give it outwardly a shape,
And that of benediction, to the world.
Then doubt is not, and truth is more than
truth,--
A hope it is, and a desire; a creed
Of zeal, by an authority Divine
Sanctioned, of danger, difficulty, or death.
(IX, 390, 394-407)

Their walks covered great distances out from Blois and furnished Wordsworth many moments of deep feeling as he viewed solitary objects, such as a convent, "a roofless pile / And not by reverential touch of Time / Dismantled, but by violence abrupt" (IX, 466-468); Romorentin, "home of ancient kings" (IX, 481); a rural castle, "where a lady lodged / By the first Francis wooed" (IX, 484-485). Wordsworth noted these objects with

Imagination, potent to inflame
At times with virtuous wrath and noble
 scorn,
Did also often mitigate the force
Of civic prejudice, the bigotry,
So call it, of a youthful patriot's mind. . . .
 (IX, 495-499)

He also felt "hatred of absolute rule" and "love for the abject multitude." During one of their walks he and Beaupuy met a "hunger-bitten girl," creeping along, as her heifer, tied to her arm by a cord, ate in the lane. The girl "was busy knitting in a heartless mood / Of solitude" (IX, 515-516). Beaupuy

exclaimed, "'Tis against that / That we are fighting'" (IX, 517-518). With him Wordsworth believed that a time was surely coming when poverty and "sensual state and cruel power" would be abolished:

And finally, as sum and crown of all,
Should see the people having a strong
 hand
In framing their own laws; whence better
 days
To all mankind. . . . (IX, 529-532)

Thus Wordsworth became concerned with causes and the people involved in them. His experiences during this period in France affected his creativity for many years as man took first place in his thoughts. Raymond D. Havens said that it was the French Revolution that made Wordsworth a great poet. Havens did not mean that Wordsworth's stay in France put into him something that was not already there but rather that this stay gave him the fresh vigor that different food and exertion required for adaptation to a new environment bring to men as well as to plants. It was in reacting against the Revolution and the theorizing engendered by it that he became a man and a poet.²⁶

Throughout this period of youth Wordsworth paced, walked, danced, pursued, and climbed in his kinesthetic experiences. In each experience his physical activity occasioned a moment of vision or insight as he relaxed, often with his eye on a solitary object. This was a period of feeling for Wordsworth, and in many

²⁶The Mind of a Poet, pp. 493, 494.

of these moments of insight he "felt." In his walks at Cambridge he "pored, watched, expected, listened, spread" (III, 114), his thoughts within himself as he "felt what independent solaces were his" (III, 101). During his vacation at Hawkshead after he had walked along the shore of Esthwaite, Wordsworth felt hope that all things both great and ordinary were becoming possible for him. After an evening of dancing, as he walked home in a relaxed mood, Wordsworth had one of his greatest moments of insight as he felt himself to be a dedicated spirit. Out of two experiences--meeting the discharged soldier and seeing the hungry girl in France--his feeling for man was developed. In most of these moments of insight his imagination grew as he observed the power of Nature. She filled him with special glories and delights which he realized were sources of creative power.

CHAPTER IV

KINESTHESIA OF EARLY MANHOOD

(1792-1798)

Wordsworth's experiences before 1793 which I discussed in the second and third chapters of this thesis were his personal experiences. My discussions of them were based on Wordsworth's recollections recorded in The Prelude. Most of the experiences discussed in this fourth chapter came after 1793 and are not all Wordsworth's personal experiences. Wordsworth became a writer in the period covered by Chapter IV; and, as a writer, he was both subjective and objective in his experiences after 1793. I used the chronological order to present his personal experiences in Chapters II and III. In Chapter IV, however, only part of the material can be presented chronologically, for in it I am no longer narrating Wordsworth's life in relation to his personal experiences. I am also concerned in Chapter IV with Wordsworth, the writer of poetry that grew out of his experiences--both real and imaginary--sometimes months or even years after the event that occasioned a story or lyric had occurred.

Wordsworth returned to England from France in the latter part of 1792. He went first to London instead of to his native hills or to Dorothy at Forncett possibly because he was still

in a state of excited tension because of his experiences in France:

A patriot of the world, how could I glide
 Into communion with her sylvan shades,
 Erewhile my tuneful haunt? It pleased
 me more
 To abide in the great City. . . . (X, 242-245)

Since man held first place with him now, he sought company such as he had in France--"ingenuous youth" who felt as he did. To understand his feelings, we have to realize that for him the French Revolution was the cause, not simply of a people struggling to be free, but of mankind, and that his vision of man was something deeply precious to him.²⁷

A greater shock came to Wordsworth in February, 1793, when France declared war on England. For him the order of things seemed reversed as

. . . What had been a pride,
 Was now a shame; my likings and my
 loves
 Ran in new channels, leaving old ones
 dry. . . . (XI, 183-185)

Not only was he bitter because of the actions of England, but he was also perplexed by events in France where a despotic government had been exchanged for a tyranny yet more cruel. Thrown into a state of torturing self-conflict, in which his intellect, his heart, and his spiritual ideals were all involved, Wordsworth looked to Nature for excitement and distraction

²⁷Moorman, p. 220.

instead of peace and power.²⁸ Had he stayed in London at this time, Wordsworth might have given up things creative for things political, but in June, 1793, he left London for a tour in the west of England. He began the trip with and at the expense of William Calvert, who had been a schoolmate at Hawkshead. After spending a month in the Isle of Wight, they separated. For the first time in two years Wordsworth was alone with Nature as he roamed the waste of Salisbury Plain. Thus wandering alone for three days, he had a visionary experience which can be divided into three parts. First, he saw

Our dim ancestral Past in vision clear;
Saw multitudes of men, and, here and
there,
A single Briton clothed in wolf-skin vest,
With shield and stone-axe, stride across
the wold;
The voice of spears was heard, the rattling
spear
Shaken by arms of mighty bone, in
strength,
Long mouldered, of barbaric majesty. (XIII, 330-326)

Frightened, he called for darkness to hide the scene from him--
"but before the word / Was uttered, midnight darkness seemed
to take / All objects from my sight" (XIII, 327-329). Next he
saw in the light of dismal flames the sacrificial altar fed
with living men. He heard the deep groans--

. . . the voice
Of those that crowd the giant wicker
thrills

²⁸William Wordsworth, Poems in Two Volumes, ed. Helen Darbishire (2d ed.; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952), I, xiv.

The monumental hillocks, and the pomp
 Is for both worlds, the living and the dead.
 (XIII, 332-335)

With memories of terrors he had seen in France and thoughts full of horror of the present war, he brought together the past and present in these visitations, dark and foreboding. The third part of his visionary experience was of the gentler kind: ". . . gently was I charmed / Into a waking dream, a reverie" (XIII, 342-343). Long-bearded teachers seemed to bring heaven and earth together as they pointed with white wands alternately to sky and plain. As they swayed to a "breath of music" (XIII, 347-348), even the wasteland "rejoiced with them and me in those sweet sounds" (XIII, 349). The complete visionary experience brought to Wordsworth a hope that he possessed the insight of a poet capable of work creative and enduring--

An insight that in some sort he possesses,
 A privilege whereby a work of his,
 Proceeding from a source of untaught
 things,
 Creative and enduring, may become
 A power like one of Nature's. . . . (XIII, 308-312)

H. W. Garrod has observed that Wordsworth felt here for the first time that he possessed the insight essential to a poet.²⁹

Having thus far traced Wordsworth's personal experiences that gave him material for future poetic work, I have now to

²⁹Wordsworth: Lectures and Essays (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 76.

consider Wordsworth's two types of poetic treatment: that which is still personal but also that which is objective; Wordsworth's subjective treatment of his personal kinesthetic experiences, but also his objective treatment of the kinesthetic experiences of other people.

At least four of his poems--"Guilt and Sorrow," "Peter Bell," "We Are Seven," and "Tintern Abbey"--had their origins in Wordsworth's walking tour of 1793. The beginning lines of "Guilt and Sorrow" picture a man in movement--

A Traveller on the skirt of Sarum's
Plain
Pursued his vagrant way, with feet half
bare. . . . ("Guilt and Sorrow," ll. 1, 2)

The man was alone and without shelter, and neither the sights of nature nor thoughts of man brought him relief.³⁰ He paced on wherever the dreary roads led.

Perplexed and comfortless he gazed
around,
And scarce could any trace of man descry,
Save cornfields stretched and stretching
without bound. . . . ("Guilt and Sorrow," ll. 24-26)

He continued his solitary wanderings until he met a vagrant woman; then they walked together, telling their stories of misery and woe. Finally they found a place of refuge--a place of natural beauty and peace in a valley

³⁰Geoffrey H. Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 119.

Where wreaths of vapour tracked a wind-
 ing brook,
 That babbled on through groves and
 meadows green;
 A low-roofed house peeped out the trees
 between;
 The dripping groves resound with cheer-
 ful lays,
 And melancholy lowings intervene
 Of scattered herds, that in the meadow
 graze,
 Some amid lingering shade, some touched
 by the sun's rays.

("Guilt and Sorrow," ll. 516-522)

The remainder of the poem is full of emotional tension--the discovery of the sailor's dying wife; the wife's peaceful death; the sailor's fearless confession and consequent death. Wordsworth began writing this poem immediately after his tour while he was resting at the home of Robert Jones. H. W. Garrod quotes Wordsworth's remarks of fifty years later: "My ramble over Salisbury Plain, put me . . . upon writing 'Guilt and Sorrow,' and left upon my mind imaginative impressions the force of which I have felt to this day."³¹

The idea for "We Are Seven" also came in this tour of 1793 after Wordsworth had been wandering in what was probably new country for him. Near Goodrich Castle he met and talked with the little girl who became the heroine of the poem. The kinesthesia of the child is pictured in the first stanza:

--A simple Child,
 That lightly draws its breath,
 And feels its life in every limb,
 What should it know of death?

("We Are Seven," ll. 1-4)

³¹ Wordsworth: Lectures and Essays, p. 77.

Before going to Goodrich Castle, Wordsworth had walked from Bristol, across the Severn to the Wye valley. Five years later he returned to this place which became the setting of his "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798." Although "Tintern Abbey," as the poem is usually called, reflects Wordsworth's mood of 1793 more than his mood of 1798, I shall discuss the poem when I refer to the 1798 tour.

The hero of "Peter Bell," the last of the four poems that had their origins in the tour of 1793, was probably a traveling tinker whom Wordsworth met in the neighborhood of Builth. An unpublished stanza of the poem describes how they "were fellow travellers many a mile / Near Builth on the banks of Wye."³² As they walked together as far as Hay, Peter told Wordsworth stories. Wordsworth did not write the poem, however, until 1798. An entry in Dorothy's Journal for April 20, 1798, states, "'Peter Bell' begun."³³ Every entry just before and after this one tells of their walking--"in the wood in the morning; in the evening upon the hill; to Stowey; up the hill dividing the Coombes; by the thorn; in the wood; on the top of the hill."³⁴ William Hazlitt observed after meeting Wordsworth

³²The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1944), II, 530.

³³Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), I, 16.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 15, 16.

that his gait was similar to Wordsworth's description of Peter's gait--35

He had a dark and sidelong walk,
And long and slouching was his gait. . . .
("Peter Bell," ll. 306-307)

In the poem Peter is pictured trudging alone, caring nothing for Nature.

He trudged along through copse and
brake
He trudged along o'er hill and dale;
Nor for the moon cared he a tittle,
And for the stars he cared as little. . . .
("Peter Bell," ll. 331-334)

After Peter realizes what kind of man he has been, he mounts the donkey, letting it take charge. Peter rides on with a feeling of expectation such as Wordsworth often had in his childhood experiences.

And so he sits in expectation!
The strenuous Animal hath clomb
With the green path; and now he wends
Where, shining like the smoothest sea,
In undisturbed immensity
A level plain extends.
("Peter Bell," ll. 695-700)

Wordsworth's reaction in his experience of stealing the row-boat is similar to Peter's reaction in this experience as his sense of guilt becomes so strong that he feels the accusing presence of Nature--

³⁵William Hazlitt, "My First Acquaintance with Poets," in The Best of Hazlitt, comp. by P. P. Howe (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), p. 18.

A withered leaf is close behind,
 Light plaything for the sportive wind
 Upon that solitary waste.
 When Peter spied the moving thing,
 It only doubled his distress;
 'Where there is not a bush or tree,
 The very leaves they follow me--
 So huge hath been my wickedness!'

(Peter Bell," ll. 704-710)

Throughout the poem the movements of Peter, the animal, and things of Nature such as the leaf, as well as others, are important. Emotional tension is also an important element. Although Wordsworth did not directly relate his experiences in "Peter Bell," he recorded many of his kinesthetic experiences in the poem objectively.

In the summer of 1794 Wordsworth had a significant experience at Whitehaven where he and his sister Dorothy were visiting their cousin John's wife. This experience seemed to be the opposite of his more strenuous ones, the active part happening in a dream. The incident happened "in the stillness of a summer's noon" (The Prelude, V, 57) as Wordsworth sat listlessly reading Cervantes in a rocky cave by the sea. He closed the book and looked "toward the wide sea" (The Prelude, V, 64). As he sat thus in a pensive mood, he mused

On poetry and geometric truth,
 And their high privilege of lasting life,
 From all internal injury exempt. . . .
 (The Prelude, V, 65-67)

His senses yielded to the sultry air; and as sleep seized him, he began to dream. The setting of the dream was a boundless sandy plain, "all black and void" (V, 72). Wordsworth was

filled with fear when close to his side appeared "an uncouth shape" (V, 75), an Arab mounted upon a camel. Underneath one arm he had a stone and in the opposite hand, a shell. Then Wordsworth rejoiced

. . . not doubting but a
guide
Was present, one who with unerring skill
Would through the desert lead me. . . .
(V. 81-83)

He learned that the stone symbolized geometry and the shell, poetry. The guide wanted to save them from a destruction, prophesied by the shell:

Destruction to the children of the earth
By deluge, now at hand. . . . (V, 97-98)

Wordsworth felt a desire to go with this guide, but the guide hurried on

Reckless of me: I followed, not unseen,
For oftentimes he cast a backward look,
Grasping his twofold treasure.--Lance in
rest,
He rode, I keeping pace with him. . . .
(V, 117-121)

The guide at once seemed to be both the knight of Cervantes' tale and an Arab of the desert but neither of these. As the look on the guide's face became more disturbed, Wordsworth, looking back, saw "a bed of glittering light" (V, 129). He asked the cause and was told it was "the waters of the deep / Gathering upon us" (V, 130-131). The quiet of Wordsworth's awaking contrasted sharply with the exciting activity in the last part of the dream to intensify the experience.

Sad opposites out of the inner heart,
 As even their pensive influence drew from
 mine.
 How could it otherwise. . . . (X, 525-531)

His grief soon turned to a kind of pleasure, however, as he walked across the plain thinking of the lines from Gray's elegy that were engraved on the tombstone. He whispered to himself:

He loved the Poets, and, if now alive,
 Would have loved me, as one not destitute
 Of promise, nor belying the kind hope
 That he had formed, when I, at his com-
 mand,
 Began to spin, with toil, my earliest
 songs. (X, 548-552)

The setting seemed different now. As he walked with his new thoughts, all that he saw or felt "was gentleness and peace" (X, 554). Upon a small, rocky island he noticed the ruins of a Romish chapel. Contrasted with the quiet churchyard and still ruin, his eye now noted a busy scene:

Not far from that still ruin all the plain
 Lay spotted with a variegated crowd
 Of vehicles and travellers, horse and
 foot,
 Wading beneath the conduct of their
 guide
 In loose procession through the shallow
 stream
 Of inland waters. . . . (X, 562-567)

Wordsworth stood "longing for skill to paint a scene so bright / And cheerful" (X, 569-570) when one of the band approached and shouted, "Robespierre is dead!" (X, 573). Filled with overwhelming relief and deep gratitude by this news, Wordsworth

poured forth a hymn of triumph on those open sands. His dream of "better times" as a result of the revolution could be realized:

Elsewhere will safety now be sought, and
 earth
 March firmly towards righteousness and
 peace. . . . (X, 588-589)

The experiences of this day were linked to those of his youth as he pursued his way

Along that very shore which I had
 skimmed
 In former days, when--spurring from the
 Vale
 Of Nightshade, and St. Mary's moulder-
 ing fane,
 And the stone abbot, after circuit made
 In wantonness of heart, a joyous band
 Of schoolboys hastening to their distant
 home
 Along the margin of the moonlight sea--
 We beat with thundering hoofs the level
 sand. (X, 596-603)

Many scholars disagree about the time and place of the origin of the beginning of The Prelude. I agree with those who believe that these beginning lines were at least mentally composed in Bristol in August or September, 1795.³⁶ Wordsworth had been in London from February to August before coming to Bristol to visit the Pinneys.³⁷ Therefore one day very soon

³⁶Some of these scholars are Mary Moorman, Ernest de Selincourt, Raymond Havens, and H. W. Garrod.

³⁷Letter from Dorothy Wordsworth to Jane Marshall, Mill House, September 2, 1795, in The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 139.

after his arrival from the city, Wordsworth walked in the open fields near Bristol and chanted aloud "something akin to the opening lines of The Prelude."³⁸ He was grateful to be blessed by the gentle breeze and to be freed from the city:

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze,
 A visitant that while it fans my cheek
 Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it
 brings
 From the green fields, and from yon
 azure sky.
 Whate'er its mission, the soft breeze can
 come
 To none more grateful than to me;
 escaped
 From the vast city, where I long had
 pined
 A discontented sojourner: now free,
 Free as a bird to settle where I will.
(I, 1-9)

He felt "the sweet breath of heaven" blowing on his body; then from within there seemed to be an answering breeze--

A correspondent breeze, that gently
 moved
 With quickening virtue, but is now
 become
 A tempest, a redundant energy,
 Vexing its own creation. . . . (I, 35-338)

The two breezes offered him hope for creative activity:

. . . Thanks to both,
 And their congenial powers, that, while
 they join
 In breaking up a long-continued frost,
 Bring with them vernal promises, the
 hope
 Of active days urged on by flying hours. . . .
(I, 38-42)

³⁸Moorman, p. 273.

few lines of Book I of The Prelude, Garrod and others think it possible that he described an inspection trip which he impulsively decided to make to Racedown.⁴⁰ It seems natural that he would be curious about the place since he was considering living there. The sun "had almost touched the horizon" (I, 87) before he rose from his place in the grove. Casting "a backward glance upon the curling cloud / Of city smoke" (I, 86-87), he decided to take

Even with the chance equipment of that hour,
The road that pointed toward the chosen Vale.
(I, 92-93)

The journey of fifty miles was a 'pleasant loitering' (I, 106) one. His mood during the walk seemed to echo the mood of the beginning of the day when he had spoken aloud his feelings in the field:

It was a splendid evening, and my soul
Once more made trial of her strength,
 nor lacked
Aeolian visitations; but the harp
Was soon defrauded, and the banded
 host
Of harmony dispersed in straggling sounds,
And lastly utter silence! 'Be it so;
Why think of anything but present
 good?'
So, like a home-bound labourer, I pursued
My way beneath the mellowing sun, that
 shed
Mild influence; nor left in me one wish
Again to bend the Sabbath of that time
To a servile yoke. What need of many
 words? (I, 94-105)

⁴⁰ Wordsworth, The Prelude, p. 502.

Wordsworth moved from a description of this inspection tour to a description of his feelings after he had moved to Racedown,⁴¹ picturing the total effect of his life there rather than his early days at Racedown when he was filled with skepticism and despair.⁴² In the early months of 1798 he could say of that time:

I spare to tell of what ensued, the life
In common things--the endless store of
things,
Rare, or at least so seeming, every day
Found all about me in one neighbour-
hood--
The self-congratulation, and, from morn
To night, unbroken cheerfulness serene.
(I, 107-113)

The two years at Racedown were decisive for Wordsworth. Mary Moorman says that the story of Wordsworth at Racedown is the story of his reconciliation with Man--partly through a return to Nature, and partly through two human agents--Dorothy and Coleridge.⁴³ Wordsworth paid tribute to Dorothy and Nature in a record of this time in The Prelude:

. . . Then it was--
Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all
good!--
That the beloved Sister in whose sight
Those days were passed, now speaking in
a voice

⁴¹Wordsworth and Dorothy were settled in Racedown Lodge by November, 1795.

⁴²Wordsworth, The Prelude, p. 502.

⁴³Wordsworth had met Coleridge at Bristol in the autumn of 1795. See Early Letters, p. 149, and Moorman, p. 280.

Of sudden admonition--like a brook
That did but cross a lonely road, and now
Is seen, heard, felt, and caught at every
turn,
Companion never lost through many a
league--
Maintained for me a saving intercourse
With my true self; for, though bedimmed
and changed
Much, as it seemed, I was no further
changed
Than as a clouded and a waning moon:
She whispered still that brightness would
return,
She, in the midst of all, preserved me still
A Poet, made me seek beneath that name,
And that alone, my office upon earth;
And, lastly, as hereafter will be shown,
If willing audience fail not, Nature's self,
By all varieties of human love
Assisted, led me back through opening
day
To those sweet counsels between head
and heart
Whence grew that genuine knowledge,
fraught with peace,
Which, through the later sinkings of this
cause,
Hath still upheld me, and upholds me now. . . .
(XI. 333-356)

Wordsworth's activities, which I believe reawakened the creative spirit within him, are pictured best in the letters he and Dorothy wrote. Dorothy's letters are especially full of descriptions of their walks. In her first letter to Jane Marshall written from Racedown on November 30, 1795, she said, "We walk about two hours every morning--we have many very pleasant walks about us and what is a great advantage, the roads are of a sandy kind and are almost always dry."⁴⁴ She further described the setting: "We can see the sea 150 or

⁴⁴Early Letters, p. 147.

200 yards from the door, and at a little distance have a very extensive view terminated by the sea seen through different openings of the unequal hills. We have not the warmth and luxuriance of Devonshire though there is no want either of wood or cultivation, but the trees appear to suffer from the sea blasts. We have hills which, seen from a distance almost take the character of mountains, some cultivated nearly to their summits, others in their wild state covered with furze and broom."⁴⁵ Their walks often covered considerable distances as this statement from the same letter would indicate: "With respect to letters we are however, more independent than most people as William is so good a walker, and I too have walked over twice to Crewkerne (the distance in 7 miles) to make purchases, and what is more we turned out of our way three miles, in one of our walks thither to see a house of Lord Powlett's and a very fine view."⁴⁶ In a later letter to Jane, written March 7, 1796, Dorothy described some of their activities other than walking. The Pinneys had been staying with them a month. Dorothy wrote, "When the weather was fine they were out generally all the morning, walking sometimes; then I went with them frequently--riding sometimes, hunting, coursing, cleaving wood; this is a very desirable employment, and what all house-keepers would do well to recommend to young men

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 148.

of their household in such a coal country as this, for it produces warmth both within and without doors."⁴⁷ As I said before, all these activities directly or indirectly contributed to the reawakening of the creative spirit in Wordsworth.

During the first few months at Racedown Wordsworth was revising "The Salisbury Plain." The inception of two other poems, "The Ruined Cottage" and "Incipient Madness," must belong to this same period of spiritual gloom and must refer to the same incident, a visit to a desolate ruined cottage.⁴⁸ In "Incipient Madness" he described how he crossed a dreary moor by moonlight until he reached a deserted hut. As he looked within

. . . all was still and dark
Only within the ruin I beheld
At a small distance on the dusky ground
A broken pane which glitter'd to the moon.⁴⁹

Night after night he returned to the scene of darkness and desolation to find

Still undisturbed and glittering in its place
That speck of glass more precious to my soul
Than was the moon in heaven.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

⁴⁸ Poetical Works, V, 377.

⁴⁹ Poetical Works, I, 314.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 315.

"The Ruined Cottage" was perhaps the best work that Wordsworth produced during this period. It later became the first book in "The Excursion." Wordsworth, in a note given to Isabella Fenwick in 1843, related himself to the Pedlar, the "old man" in "The Ruined Cottage." He began by saying that as books were Southey's passion, wandering was his. He continued, ". . . but this propensity in me was happily counteracted by inability from want of fortune to fulfil my wishes. But, had I been born in a class which would have deprived me of what is called a liberal education, it is not unlikely that, being strong in body, I should have taken to a way of life such as that in which my Pedlar passed the greater part of his days. At all events, I am here called upon freely to acknowledge that the character I have represented in his person is chiefly an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances."⁵¹ The setting of "The Ruined Cottage" was a summer day with the sun shining on the uplands "through a pale steam" (l. 3) and the clouds making shadows on the surfaces of the northern downs. The scene contrasted with the lot of the narrator:

Across a bare wide Common I had toiled
 With languid feet which by the slippery ground
 Were baffled still; and when I stretched myself
 On the brown earth, my limbs from very heat
 Could find no rest, nor my weak arm disperse
 The insect host which gathered around my face
 And joined their murmurs to the tedious noise
 Of seeds bursting gorse which crackled round.
 (ll. 19-26)

⁵¹Poetical Works, V, 373.

Rising, he turned toward a group of trees standing alone.
Beneath a shade "of clustering elms that sprang from the same
root" (l. 30), he found a ruined cottage:

. . . 'twas a spot
The wandering gypsey in a stormy night
Would pass it with his moveables to house
On the open plain beneath the imperfect arch
Of a cold lime-kiln. . . . (ll. 32-36)

Inside he saw an old man, the Pedlar whom he knew and whom he
loved to hear tell of his former days. As a child the Pedlar
had attended a school that stood alone "sole building on a
mountain's dreary edge" (l. 57), and

From that bleak tenement
He many an evening to his distant home
In solitude returning saw the hills
Grow larger in the darkness, all alone
Beheld the stars come out above his head,
And travelled through the wood, no comrade near,
To whom he might confess the things he saw.
So the foundations of his mind were laid
In such communion, not from terror free.
(ll. 70-78)

He had received a precious gift:

He had perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness, and deep feelings had impressed
Great objects on his mind, with portraiture
And colour so distinct (that on his mind)
They lay like substances, and almost seemed
To haunt the bodily sense. . . . (ll. 80-85)

Even more, he did not fail

While yet a child, with a child's eagerness,
Incessantly to turn his ear and eye
On all things which the rolling seasons brought
To feed such appetite. . . . (ll. 95-98)

He felt the power of Nature and was prepared

By his intense conceptions to receive
 Deeply the lesson deep of love, which he
 Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught
 To feel intensely, cannot but receive.
 (ll. 115-118)

His mind began to search to know what to do. Finally he left his native hills and began his wanderings. Now many years had passed:

So was he framed. Now on the Bench he lay
 Stretched at his ease (length), and with
 that weary load
 Pillowed his head. I guess he had no thought
 Of his way-wandering life. (ll. 301-304)

Wordsworth introduced the Pedlar in the poem to be the narrator to tell the story of Margaret, proving that when he wrote "The Ruined Cottage" he had emerged from the state of depression he had been in when he first came to Racedown and could look objectively at the things which he desired to treat.⁵² The Pedlar became more and more the center of Wordsworth's interest, and eventually he made him the recipient of many of his own youthful experiences of communion with Nature. Whole sections of "The Ruined Cottage" are incorporated at length in The Prelude. In the following, for example, in "The Ruined Cottage" Wordsworth says the Pedlar had not reached his twentieth year before

Accumulated feelings press'd his heart
 With an encresing weight; he was o'er power'd
 By Nature, and his mind became disturbed. . . .
 (ll. 222-224)

⁵²Moorman, pp. 314-315.

He turned to science for a cure but all in vain. Only through Nature's working within him could he feel content:

From Nature and her overflowing soul
 He had received so much, that all his thoughts
 Were steeped in feeling. He was only then
 Contented, when, with bliss ineffable
 He felt the sentiment of being, spread
 O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
 O'er all which, lost beyond the reach of thought,
 And human Knowledge, to the human eye
 Invisible, yet liveth to the heart,
 O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
 Or beats the gladsome air, o'er all that glides
 Beneath the wave, yea in the wave itself
 And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
 If such his transports were; for in all things
 He saw one life, and felt that it was joy.
 One song they sang, and it was audible,
 Most audible then, when the fleshly ear
 O'ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
 Forgot its functions, and slept undisturbed.
 (ll. 238-256)

Wordsworth recorded similar feelings of his own in The Prelude.

At seventeen and in St. John's College, Cambridge, he felt

. . . A plastic power
 Abode with me; a forming hand, at times
 Rebellious, acting in a devious mood;
 A local spirit of his own, at war
 With general tendency, but, for the most,
 Subservient strictly to external things
 With which it communed. . . . (II, 361-367)

He, too, received contentment from feelings attained through Nature's teachings:

From Nature and her overflowing soul
 I had received so much, that all my
 thoughts
 Were steeped in feeling; I was only then
 Contented, when with bliss ineffable
 I felt the sentiment of Being spread

O'er all that moves and all that seemeth
 still;
 O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of
 thought
 And Human knowledge, to the human eye
 Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;
 O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts
 and sings,
 Or beats the gladsome air; o'er all that
 glides
 Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,
 And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
 If high the transport, great the joy I felt
 Communing in this sort through earth
 and heaven
 With every form of creature, as it looked
 Towards the Uncreated with a counten-
 ance
 Of adoration, with an eye of love.
 One song they sang, and it was audible,
 Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,
 O'ercome by humblest prelude of that
 strain,
 Forgot her functions, and slept undis-
 turbed. (II, 397-418)

Thus we see Wordsworth and the Pedlar having the same kind
 of communion with Nature. For this reason, I have referred
 only to parts of "The Ruined Cottage" which deal with the
 Pedlar.

As I have said, one of the human agents who were so
 important to Wordsworth during this decisive period at Racedown
 was Coleridge, who began to share many of Wordsworth and
 Dorothy's intense experiences. When they went to Nether Stowey
 to visit Coleridge in July, 1797, Wordsworth and Dorothy had
 no intention of staying; but Coleridge was eager to keep them
 near him. Nearby, Alfoxden House was empty and fully furnished;
 so in only a few days after their coming to Nether Stowey, they
 signed an agreement and moved in.

Dorothy pictured the place in a letter to Mary Hutchinson sent July 4, 1797, before they had moved in: "There is everything there; sea, woods wild as fancy ever painted, brooks clear and pebbly as in Cumberland, villages so romantic; and William and I, in a wander by ourselves, found out a sequestered waterfall in a dell formed by steep hills covered with full-grown timber trees. . . ." ⁵³ In a later letter written to Mary August 14, 1797, after they were in Alfoxden, Dorothy continued her description:

In a glen at the bottom of the wood is the waterfall of which I spoke, a quarter of a mile from the house. We are three miles from Stowey, and not two miles from the sea. Wherever we turn we have woods, smooth downs, and valleys with small brooks running down them through green meadows, hardly ever intersected with hedgerows, but scattered over with trees. The hills that cradle these valleys are either covered with fern and bilberries, or oak woods, which are cut for charcoal. . . . Walks extend for miles over the hill-tops; the great beauty of which is their wild simplicity: they are perfectly smooth, without rocks.

The Tor of Glastonbury is before our eyes during more than half of our walk to Stowey; and in the park wherever we go, keeping about fifteen yards above the house, it makes a part of our prospect. ⁵⁴

The year spent in residence at Alfoxden was very pleasant and productive for Wordsworth. Walking was an important everyday activity; in fact, at least two walking tours were made in the latter part of 1797. These tours are described in two letters written in November by Dorothy to Mary Hutchinson. In the first one she said: "From Porlock we kept close to the

⁵³ Early Letters, p. 170.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 171.

shore about four miles. Our road lay through wood, rising almost perpendicularly from the sea, with views of the opposite mountains of Wales: thence we came by twilight to Lynmouth, in Devonshire. The next morning we were guided to a valley at the top of one of those immense hills which open at each end to the sea, and is from its rocky appearance called the Valley of Stones. We mounted a cliff at the end of the valley, and looked from it immediately on to the sea."⁵⁵ Her description of the second tour, which probably took place about a week after the first, is important because it shows that many of the great works of Wordsworth and Coleridge had their origins in these expeditions. She wrote: "We have been on another tour: we set out last Monday evening at half past four. The evening was dark and cloudy: we went eight miles, William and Coleridge employing themselves in laying the plan of a ballad [The Ancient Mariner], to be published with some pieces of William's. . . ."⁵⁶ Here we have the origin of the idea of the Lyrical Ballads.

The importance to Wordsworth of these and other rambles with Coleridge can be observed in this reference to them in The Prelude:

. . . but, beloved Friend!
 When, looking back, thou seest, in clearer
 view
 Than any liveliest sight of yesterday,
 That summer, under whose indulgent
 skies,

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 174.

⁵⁶Ibid.

Upon smooth Quantock's airy ridge we
 roved
 Unchecked, or loitered 'mid her sylvan
 combs,
 Thou in bewitching words, with happy
 heart,
 Didst chaunt the vision of that Ancient
 Man,
 The bright-eyed Mariner, and rueful woes
 Didst utter of the Lady Christabel;
 And I, associate with such labour, steeped
 In soft forgetfulness the livelong hours,
 Murmuring of him who, joyous hap, was
 found,
 After the perils of his moonlight ride,
 Near the loud waterfall; or her who sate
 In misery near the miserable Thorn. . . .
(XIV, 392-407)

Dorothy kept a journal at Alfoxden with approximately one hundred entries from January 20, 1798, to May 22, 1798. Of these entries all except eight mention walking; in fact, many of the entries begin with the word walked. Wordsworth and his sister walked in all kinds of weather, by day and by moonlight. Among many of Wordsworth's shorter pieces which had their origins in these walks are "We Are Seven," "A Night-Piece," "A Whirl-Blast," "The Thorn," "Simon Lee," and "The Idiot Boy."

"We Are Seven" was referred to earlier in this chapter because Wordsworth met the little girl who became the heroine of the poem when he visited Goodrich Castle in 1793. I mention the poem again here, however, because it was composed while Wordsworth was "walking in the grove at Alfoxden," as he said: "My friends will not deem it too trifling to relate, that while walking to and fro I composed the last stanza first, having begun with the last line."⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Christopher Wordsworth, Memoirs of William Wordsworth (London: Edward Moxton, Dover Street, 1851), I, 108-109.

In her journal for January 25, 1798, the date of the composition of "A Night-Piece," Dorothy relates: "Went to Poole's after tea. The sky spread over with one continuous cloud, whitened by the light of the moon, which, though her dim shape was seen, did not throw forth so strong a light as to chequer the earth with shadows. At once the clouds seemed to cleave asunder, and left her in the centre of a black-blue vault. She sailed along, followed by multitudes of stars, small, and bright, and sharp. Their brightness seemed concentrated (half moon)."⁵⁸ Wordsworth recorded the same scene in the poem:

--The sky is overcast
With a continuous cloud of texture close,
Heavy and wan, all whitened by the
Moon,
Which through that veil is indistinctly
seen,
A dull, contracted circle, yielding light
So feebly spread that not a shadow falls,
Chequering the ground--from rock,
plant, tree, or tower.
At length a pleasant instantaneous gleam
Startles the pensive traveller while he
treads
His lonesome path, with unobserving eye
Bent earthwards; he looks up--the clouds
are split
Asunder,--and above his head he sees
The clear Moon, and the glory of the
heavens.
There in a black-blue vault she sails along,
Followed by multitudes of stars. . . .
(ll. 1-15)

The experience of the traveller thus related is similar to the experience of Wordsworth as he climbed to the summit of Snowdon in May, 1791. He pictured his climb in The Prelude:

⁵⁸Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, I, 4.

. . . With forehead bent
 Earthward, as if in opposition set
 Against an enemy, I panted up
 With eager pace, and no less eager
 thoughts.

When at my feet the ground appeared to
 brighten,
 And with a step or two seemed brighter
 still;
 Nor was time given to ask or learn the
 cause,
 For instantly a light upon the turf
 Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up,
 The Moon hung naked in a firmament
 Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
 Rested a silent sea of hoary mist.
 (XIV, 28-31, 35-42)

In both experiences--one remembered from his youth and one viewed objectively as it happened--the intense moment came at a point of relaxation after much activity. Of "The Night-Piece" Wordsworth said forty-five years later: "Composed on the road between Nether Stowey and Alfoxden, extempore. I distinctly recollect the very moment when I was struck, as described 'He looks up at the clouds, etc.'."⁵⁹ In the experience recorded in The Prelude Wordsworth heard "the roar of waters, torrents, streams / Innumerable, roaring with one voice!" (ll. 59-60). It was a roar so loud that it was

Heard over earth and sea, and, in that
 hour,
 For so it seemed, felt by the starry
 heavens. (ll. 61-62)

It was a moment when he knew Nature to be a source of creative power--"the power, which all / Acknowledge when thus moved"

⁵⁹Poetical Works, II, 503.

(ll. 86-87). The moment in "The Night-Piece" was one of silence--"the wind is in the tree, / But they are silent"

(ll. 18-19). The vault in which the moon was set seemed to get deeper and deeper:

. . . and the vault,
Built round by those white clouds, enor-
mous clouds,
Still deepens its unfathomable depth.
(ll. 20-22)

The mind, feeling both disturbed and delighted, slowly settled "into peaceful calm" (l. 25) as it was "left to muse upon the solemn scene" (l. 26).

On March 18, 1798, Dorothy wrote in her journal: "The Coleridges left us. A cold, windy morning. Walked with them half way. On our return, sheltered under the hollies, during a hail-shower. The withered leaves danced with the hailstones. William wrote a description of the storm."⁶⁰ This description is the poem "A Whirl-Blast," which begins:

A whirl-blast from behind the hill
Rushed o'er the wood with startling
sound;
Then--all at once the air was still,
And showers of hailstones pattered
round. (ll. 1-4)

The poet's attention was captured by the withered leaves which had fallen from the oak trees which towered above the undergrove of hollies where he had come for shelter from the hail.

⁶⁰Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, I, 12-13.

Even though there was no breeze, the withered leaves all skipped and hopped as the hailstones dropped. Wordsworth gaily described the dancing leaves:

Yet here, and there, and every where
 Along the floor, beneath the shade
 By those embowering hollies made,
 The leaves in myriads jump and spring,
 As if with pipes and music rare
 Some Robin Good-fellow were there,
 And all those leaves, in festive glee,
 Were dancing to the minstrelsy. (11. 15-22)

Wordsworth had the pleasure of seeing this holly grove again in June, 1841, and was able to say that its beauty was unimpaired.⁶¹

During this period a poem was the product of almost every day's walk. The next day after the composition of "A Whirl-Blast" Dorothy entered in her journal: "Wm. and Basil and I walked to the hill-tops, a very cold bleak day. We were met on our return by a severe hailstorm. William wrote some lines describing a stunted thorn."⁶² Wordsworth wrote about the composition of "The Thorn": "Alfoxden. 1798. Arose out of my observing, on the ridge of Quantock Hill, on a stormy day, a thorn which I had often passed in calm and bright weather without noticing it. I said to myself, 'Cannot I by some invention do as much to make this Thorn permanently

⁶¹Poetical Works, II, 489.

⁶²Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, I, 13.

an impressive object as the storm has made it to my eyes at this moment?' I began the poem accordingly, and composed it with great rapidity."⁶³ Because he wanted the reader to understand the character of the narrator of the poem, Wordsworth noted: "The character which I have here introduced speaking is sufficiently common. The Reader will perhaps have a general notion of it, if he has ever known a man, a Captain of a small trading vessel, for example, who being past the middle age of life, had retired upon an annuity or small independent income to some village or country town of which he was not a native, or in which he had not been accustomed to live. Such men, having so little to do, become credulous and talkative from indolence; and. . .they are prone to superstition."⁶⁴ In the poem the narrator described three solitary objects--an aged thorn, "a wretched thing forlorn" (l. 9); a little muddy pond, "of water--never dry" (l. 31); and a moss-covered hill, "just half a foot in height" (l. 37). The thorn stood erect "not higher than a two years' child" (l. 5). It had neither leaves nor prickly points but was a "mass of knotted joints" (l. 8). The thorn was covered with heavy tufts of moss which seemed to be trying to bury it. High on a mountain's highest ridge, just five yards from the mountain path, stood this thorn; and three yards beyond was the little muddy pond. The colorful hill of

⁶³Poetical Works, II, 511.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 512.

moss that was beside the thorn contrasted sharply with the drab thorn and pond. The narrator explained that if one wished to see these three objects, he must choose his time to cross the mountain with care because often between the hill "so like an infant's grave in size" (l. 61) and the pond a woman sat and cried to herself, 'Oh misery! oh misery! / Oh woe is me! oh misery!' (ll. 65-66). She came at all hours and in all kinds of weather, causing the speaker to ask this question:

'Now wherefore, thus, by day and night,
In rain, in tempest, and in snow,
Thus to the dreary mountain-top
Does this poor Woman go?'

(ll. 78-81)

Although her babe was dead and there was no cure for her misery, Nature seemed to sympathize with her.⁶⁵ Hence she haunted the spot. The narrator concluded:

'But plain it is the Thorn is bound
With heavy tufts of moss that strive
To drag it to the ground;
And this I know, full many a time,
When she was on the mountain high,
By day, and in the silent night,
When all the stars shone clear and bright,
That I have heard her cry,
"Oh misery! oh misery!
Oh woe is me! oh misery!" '

(ll. 233-242)

The old man in "Simon Lee," according to Wordsworth, had been huntsman to the squires of Alfoxden and had lived in a

⁶⁵Poems in Two Volumes, I, xxxiv.

cottage which stood on the Common, a little way from the entrance to the park. Forty-five years after he wrote the poem about him, Wordsworth said that the image of the old man was as fresh before his eyes as if he had seen him yesterday.⁶⁶ When Simon was a young huntsman,

He all the country could outrun,
 Could leave both man and horse behind;
 And often, ere the chase was done,
 He reeled, and was stone-blind.
 (ll. 17-20)

But now he had grown old, and he was lean and sick. His body rested upon "ankles swoln and thick" (l. 35). One can see him as Wordsworth saw him that summer day:

This old Man doing all he could
 To unearth the root of an old tree,
 A stump of rotten wood. (ll. 74-76)

He hacked and hacked, but he was not strong enough:

The mattock tottered in his hand;
 So vain was his endeavour,
 That at the root of the old tree
 He might have worked for ever. (ll. 77-80)

Wordsworth took his tool, and with a single blow severed the tangled root. Tears of gratitude came into Old Simon's eyes as

. . . thanks and praises seemed to run
 So fast out of his heart, I thought
 They never would have done. (ll. 90-92)

⁶⁶ Poetical Works, IV, 412-413.

In an intense moment of insight Wordsworth realized the worth of the virtue of gratitude:

--I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning;
Alas! the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning. (ll. 93-96)

Of the poems that had their origin in Wordsworth's walks at Alfoxden, "The Idiot Boy" is the last poem I shall discuss. In the notes given to Isabella Fenwick in 1843 Wordsworth commented upon "The Idiot Boy": "Alfoxden 1798. The last stanza-- 'The Cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo, And the sun did shine so cold'--was the foundation of the whole. The words were reported to me by my dear friend, Thomas Poole; but I have since heard the same repeated of other Idiots. Let me add that this long poem was composed in the groves of Alfoxden, almost extempore; not a word, I believe, being corrected, though one stanza was omitted. I mention this in gratitude to those happy moments, for, in truth, I never wrote anything with so much glee."⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that in the passage I quoted from The Prelude about his and Coleridge's rambles, Wordsworth mentioned only "The Thorn" and "The Idiot Boy" of his own poems.

The setting of "The Idiot Boy" is a clear March night. The poem is full of activity. Betty Foy must send for a doctor for her good neighbor Susan Gale, and there is no one to go but her idiot boy. Betty bustles about, in a mighty fret, as she

⁶⁷ Poetical Works, II, 478.

puts her boy on the pony. As her tension eases, the boy mounts:

But when the Pony moved his legs,
Oh! then for the poor Idiot Boy!
For joy he cannot hold the bridle,
For joy his head and heels are idle,
He's idle all for very joy. (ll. 72-76)

Betty is full of pride and joy as she watches him ride away, but her joy turns to fear when several hours pass and Johnny does not return. She cannot decide whether to stay with Susan or to go look for Johnny. Urged by Susan to go, she sets out:

So, through the moonlight lane she goes,
And far into the moonlight dale;
And how she ran, and how she walked,
And all that to herself she talked,
Would surely be a tedious tale. (ll. 202-206)

She searches everywhere until she has lost all hope. Her fears rise as she hears the roar of the waterfall. But then her fear turns to joy as she sees "him whom she loves, her Idiot Boy" (l. 366). She shows a mother's passionate love in its beauty and meaning as:

She kisses o'er and o'er again
Him whom she loves, her Idiot Boy;
She's happy here, is happy there,
She is uneasy everywhere;
Her limbs are all alive with joy. (ll. 387-391)

These six poems which had their origins in Wordsworth's walks at Alfoxden show Wordsworth influenced not only by his own kinesthesia but also by the kinesthesia of others.

From February until the middle of May, 1798, Wordsworth's output of poetry was rapid and voluminous. It was all poetry

highly original in language and feeling, possessing something which has come to be regarded as authentically "Wordsworthian."⁶⁸ In these three months he completed "The Ruined Cottage," wrote "Peter Bell," wrote all the poems published in Lyrical Ballads except "Tintern Abbey," and began what he intended to be "The Recluse." Much of this material was later incorporated into The Prelude. For this poetry he was looking at the landscape and people around him and looking back at his own youthful experiences, especially those of his school days at Hawkshead and his experiences there with the mystery of Nature.⁶⁹

In June, 1798, Wordsworth and Dorothy left Alfoxden. Dorothy in a letter begun in June and finished in July to Mrs. Rawson wrote: "The two pages you have just been reading were written about three weeks ago at Allfoxden. We have left that dear and beautiful place and are now at Bristol where we arrived last night, after having spent a week at Mr. Coleridge's after our departure from Allfoxden."⁷⁰ They with the Coleridges planned to go to Germany in two or three months. Dorothy wrote in this same letter of her regret at leaving Alfoxden: "I have not often felt more regret than when we quitted Allfoxden; I should however have felt much more if we were not likely in so short a time to have again the pleasure of Coleridge's society,

⁶⁸Moorman, p. 357.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 355.

⁷⁰Early Letters, p. 195.

an advantage which I prize the more, the more I know him."⁷¹ She wrote further of their plans: "We shall certainly not stay at Shirehampton more than three months; we talk of being on board the vessel in two months but I do not think this is very probable as I have no doubt many things will delay the Coleridges which they have no idea of at present."⁷² At this time Wordsworth felt a longing to see once more the valleys and hills of Wales through which he had wandered five years before in the summer of 1793 and where at least four of his poems--"Guilt and Sorrow," "Peter Bell," "We Are Seven," and "Tintern Abbey"--had their origins.

Christopher Wordsworth recorded this note of Wordsworth's about this return to the Wye in 1798: "We [Wordsworth and Dorothy] crossed the Severn Ferry, and walked ten miles further to Tintern Abbey, a very beautiful ruin on the Wye. The next morning we walked along the river through Monmouth to Goderich Castle, there slept, and returned the next day to Tintern, thence to Chepstow, and from Chepstow back again in a boat to Tintern, where we slept, and thence back in a small vessel to Bristol."⁷³ This tour was one of the most energetic ever undertaken by Wordsworth and Dorothy. In three days they walked over fifty miles. Upon leaving Tintern, Wordsworth began

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 195-196.

⁷²Ibid., p. 196.

⁷³Memoirs of William Wordsworth, I, 116-117.

"Tintern Abbey," a poem unusual in its composition for Wordsworth in that not a line of it was ever altered, and we have it today exactly as he composed it on the Wye's banks. In the Fenwick notes Wordsworth stated: "No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of 4 or 5 days, with my sister. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol. It was published almost immediately after in the little volume of which so much has been said in these notes."⁷⁴ An interesting reference to the poem was made by the Duke of Argyle in a letter written to the Rev. T. S. Howxon in September, 1848: "He told us he had written Tintern Abbey in 1798, taking four days to compose it, the last 20 lines or so being composed as he walked down the hill from Clifton to Bristol;--he read the introductory lines descriptive of the scenery in a low clear voice. But when he came to the thoughtful and reflective lines his tones deepened, and he poured them forth with a fervour and almost passion of delivery which was very striking and beautiful."⁷⁵ Coming at the end of an extraordinarily happy year in which Wordsworth had felt himself in full and articulate control of his genius, "Tintern Abbey" has the nature of a hymn

⁷⁴Poetical Works, II, 517.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 517.

The second blessing followed the first:

. . . feelings too
 Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
 As have no slight or trivial influence
 On that best portion of a good man's life,
 His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
 Of kindness and of love. (ll. 30-35)

The third blessing was the most important of the three:

To them I may have owed another gift,
 Of aspect more sublime; that blessed
 mood,
 In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world,
 Is lightened:--that serene and blessed
 mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,--
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the
 power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things. (ll. 37-49)

This description of his adult visionary experience is very
 like the description of his visionary experience as a young
 man of seventeen when

Communing in this sort through earth
 and heaven
 With every form of creature, as it looked
 Towards the Uncreated with a content-
 ance
 Of adoration, with an eye of love.
 One song they sang, and it was audible,
 Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,
 O'ercome by humblest prelude of that
 strain,
 Forgot her functions, and slept undis-
 turbed.

(The Prelude, II, 411-418)

This kind of experience which he had had as a child, a youth, and a young man perhaps had been strongest during this last happy year at Alfoxden. Yet as he stood on the banks of the Wye, Wordsworth had hope "that in this moment there is life and food / For future years" ("Tintern Abbey," ll. 64-65). He dared to hope thus even though he knew he was changed from what he had been when he first came to these hills:

. . . when like a roe
 I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
 Of the deep river, and the lonely streams,
 Wherever nature led: more like a man
 Flying from something that he dreads
 than one
 Who sought the thing he loved. For
 nature then
 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
 And their glad animal movements all gone
 by)
 To me was all in all. . . . (ll. 67-75)

He had been haunted then by things of Nature:

. . . The sounding cataract
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy
 wood,
 Their colours and their forms, were then
 to me
 An appetite; a feeling and a love,
 That had no need of a remoter charm
 By thought supplied, nor any interest
 Unborrowed from the eye. . . . (ll. 76-83)

Although the "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" of that time were no more, Wordsworth did not "faint, nor mourn nor murmur" (l. 86) because other gifts have followed:

Wordsworth's "exhortations" for Dorothy actually pictured his own experience. His "wild ecstasies" had matured "into a sober pleasure," as he knew hers would. He hoped that her mind would become a "mansion for all lovely forms" and that her memory would become a "dwelling-place for all sweet sounds and harmonies" as his had.

Nature had taught Wordsworth much through the years. Her great truths had come to him during periods of excitement or tension produced by rapid motion or physical effort or at the moment of sudden relaxation of nervous tension. Most of his kinesthetic experiences came to Wordsworth in childhood--the age of sensation--and in youth and young manhood--the age of feeling. When he wrote "Tintern Abbey," he had reached maturity--the age of thought.⁷⁹ His mind had stored up all "the lovely forms" and "sweet sounds and harmonies" of his past kinesthetic experiences, which he would recreate in his mature years as he recollected them in tranquillity.

⁷⁹ Arthur Beatty, William Wordsworth: His Doctrine and Art in Their Historical Relations (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 74.

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