WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF SIMPLICITY

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WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF SIMPLICITY

By

Benette Shepherd Robinson

AN ABSTRACT

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Michigan
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THESIS

BENETTE ROBINSON

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to illuminate one aspect of Wordsworth's thought-his theory of simplicity. But this idea was not new with Wordsworth and, since it underwent many changes before his time, I have studied the history of the idea to determine what arguments its exponents had to advance about it. My primary purposes are, however, (1) to show just how Wordsworth used the idea, (2) to find out why he used it and its effect, and (3) to evaluate Wordsworth's use of it.

The carrying out of these purposes led to a detailed study of "The Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads, "The Appendix" published in 1802, "The Preface" to the edition of 1815, and "The Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815." A careful examination was made of the poems which comprised the Lyrical Ballads and all of the other short poems to see if he actually carried out the theories which he stated in the prefaces. Since the study deals with the poetical theory which was the core of Wordsworth's thought, I have had to re-read very carefully The Prelude. Wordsworth called The Prelude an autobiographical poem. It conducts the history of his mind to the point when he felt that he was mature enough to enter upon the ardous work which he had proposed for himself. For a

text, I have used the Cambridge edition of Wordsworth's poetry edited by Andrew George which is a standard edition. Although all of my quotations come from the Cambridge edition, I have also had close at hand the excellent text edited by Mr. deSelincourt and have found the notes very illuminating. Works by Wordsworth scholars have been beneficial, and I have quoted from them freely. Professor Raymond D. Havens' The Mind of a Poet and his article in the January, 1953 Journal of the History of Ideas, "Simplicity a Changing Concept", have been especially helpful.

The major findings of this study are: (1) simplicity was not a new idea with Wordsworth; (2) much of Wordsworth's best poetry deals with simple people and simple incidents; (3) Wordsworth proved that poetry written about the humble is advantageous as it strikes down deeper into the soul; (4) his theory of poetic diction has been often misunderstood; (5) in a great number of his poems, his theory is in accord with his practice; (6) he proved that the real language of men could express imaginative truth and reality; (7) there are close similarities between Wordsworth's treatment of shepherds and peasants and the idea of primitivism; (8) although many of his poems dealt with savages, he did not show that he believed that this was the best life; (9) the chief sources of simplicity

and power in Wordsworth's poetry are solitude, silence, and loneliness; (10) Wordsworth's poetry has a firm basis in realism; (11) Wordsworth achieved simplicity in his treatment of the simple affections of human nature; and (12) Wordsworth gave to the idea of simplicity a new importance and significance.

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PREFACE

In an age so complex as the present, some justification of a study of Wordsworth's Theory of Simplicity may well be expected. Almost all of the arts, politics, economics, and science have become more and more complicated, less and less simple. The idea of simplicity, which has hitherto been neglected, formed a great part of Wordsworth's thought.

The present age resembles in many respects Wordsworth's. His was an age influenced by science and abstract psychology. At first Wordsworth welcomed science and psychology, but they soon became repulsive to him. In our age, science has gone much farther than Wordsworth could possibly have imagined. It would seem that Wordsworth could be a guiding light for this generation. Matthew Arnold very aptly described just what Wordsworth achieved:

> "In a wintry clime, in an iron time
> Wordsworth taught us to feel."

In nature, it was the simple, the abiding, and the changless for which Wordsworth cared most deeply, and he valued silence, solitude, and lonely places because they intensified his consciousness of the enduring in the external world.

The English language owes Wordsworth a debt of gratitude for the purity and abstience of his style and for encouraging others to take a delight in simple things.

Because the concept of simplicity was not a new idea with Wordsworth, I have devoted the first chapter of this study to show how the temperament and complexion of the idea changed through the course of a few generations.

The main part of the study shows Wordsworth's use of the idea. In many of his poems, simplicity directed the style, language, subjects, meaning, and incidents. Wordsworth believed that poetry should deal with the elementary feelings, humble persons, and plain lives, and should be easily understood.

This attitude brought to Wordsworth a storm of criticism but not always unfavorable. To show in what esteem his work was held during his lifetime and after his death, I have made some estimate of his reputation in an effort to establish his place among the English poets.

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The author wishes to express her sincere thanks to Dr. David V. Erdman, visiting professor at Michigan State College during the 1953 summer term, for suggesting the subject to her and telling her that it would be of value.

She is greatly indebted to Dr. Herbert Weisinger and Dr. Branford P. Millar for advice, guidance, interest, and instructions during this study.

Grateful acknowledgments is also due to Dr. C. C. Hamilton for suggestions, guidance, and encouragement.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to illuminate one aspect of Wordsworth's thought-his theory of simplicity. But this idea was not new with Wordsworth; and since it underwent many changes before him, I have studied the history of the idea to determine what arguments its various exponents had to advance about it. My primary purposes are, however, to: (1) show just how Wordsworth used this idea; (2) to find out why he used it and to what effect; and (3) to evaluate Wordsworth's use of it.

Since, as I have stated, the idea has changed so much, I shall state briefly Wordsworth's interpretation of it. The clearest statement of Wordsworth's theory of simplicity is in the preface to the "Lyrical Ballads". In these poems, Wordsworth explains;

> Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil... and speak a plainer...language; because ... our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity...because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and...are more easily comprehended.[1]

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[1] William Wordsworth, Preface to the Lyrical Ballads in Complete Poetical Work, ed. Andrew W. George (Cambridge,1904), p. 791. Hereafter quotations from the text will be cited as Works.

Wordsworth's concern was that every feature of these "ballads" should be simple: that they should deal with elementary feelings, humble persons, and plain lives and that they should be easily understood. The incidents and situations were likewise to be simple since they were chosen from common life and since "the feeling ... developed in the poems was intended to give importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling." For to Wordsworth, the imagination, the prime requisite in poetry, was "the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements" and which "may be called forth ..imperiously ... by incidents ... in the humblest departments of daily life." The language and style were also intentionally simple, "Gaudiness and inane phraseology...personifications....(and) poetic diction" being avoided in favor of "the very language of men," that is of "humble and rustic men," who convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. The meter too-the ballad stanza and similar simple verse forms and a generally uncomplicated prosody-was of a piece with the language and subject matter.[2]

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[2] Raymond Havens, Simplicity a Changing Concept, JHI, Vol. XIV (1953) p. 27.

Wordsworth considered the poet, in addition to the feeling which he claimed for him, to be a philosophical thinker, as well as one who recollects, reflects, and selects, and although the poet's work may be described as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," and though his immediate aim is to give pleasure, he is directly concerned with seeking for truth. The Common, therefore, is the nearest manifestation of the Divine; the purest emotion is tranquillity.

Wordsworth stated that the poet had a high office, yet he remains a man speaking to men. He is a man endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness; and is one who has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among men. He brings to poetry the image of man in nature. His only restraint is to give an overbalance of pleasure.

If the poet is to feel, think, and write only as a specially intense, ordinary person, and to express himself in language which is essentially the same as the language of prose,he should not make his expression specifically different from prose. Wordsworth gave two reasons for this: first, verse is a restraint on the possible excesses of passion. Passionate feeling and the excitement which are inseparable from the design of poetry are kept within bounds by the

regularity of meter. Second, meter not only gives regularity to language but divests language from a certain degree of its reality and throws a sort of half-consciousness or unsubstantial existence over the whole composition. This touch of artificiality enables us to bear pathos, which would be otherwise intolerable in the hard, every-day truthfulness of prose.

It is evident that Wordsworth believed sincerely in simplicity. He expounded this belief directly or indirectly in his poetry; and he embodied it in the lowly characters that people his verse: children, beggars, peddlars, leech-gatherers, Michaels, Peter Bells.[3] What is more, Wordsworth lived his belief and lived it willingly, choosing for his home a region that was "the assured domain of calm simplicity."[4]

Imagination is another quality which Wordsworth discussed at length. To him imagination, should be required of all poetry. It produced impressive effects out of simple elements and could be called forth by incidents in the humblest departments of daily life. An interesting feature of this

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[3] Ibid., p. 28.

[4] Ibid., p. 31.

conception is that the imagination is by no means limited to poets and artists. It is universal because it enters into all perception and is therefore employed by the everyday world of concrete objects, commonplace or wonderful. The imagination, he said, does not require for its exercise the intervention of a supernatural agency, but may be called forth "imperiously ...by incidents within the compass of poetic probability, in the humblest departments of daily life." Professor Beatty states that Wordsworth was influenced by associationistic philosophy.[5]

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[5] Arthur Beatty, William Wordsworth, His Doctrine and Art in Their Historical Relations (Madison, 1927), p. 287.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THE IDEA

Like most ideas that have passed through a succession of human minds, the concept of simplicity has changed so frequently that exponents of the idea during one period would hardly recognize it during another period. This concept had a common origin with the glorification of reason in the philosophy of the enlightenment. The philosophy of the Enlightenment in regards to the laws of nature were: (1) the laws of nature are immutable; (2) they are eternal; (3) they are universal and uniform; (4) they are simple and easy of comprehension; and (5) they are knowable by all men.[1] These five principles, stated not very differently, were fundamental to the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists. The strength of these ideas lay in their dependence upon each other. If there were such a thing as uniform and immutable truths, they had to be simple, fundamental, and broadly applicable. If they were binding on all nations at all times, they had to be readily discoverable and recognizable, and man had to be able

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[1]Lois Whitney, Primitivism and Progress in Popular Eighteenth Century Poetry (Baltimore, 1934), p. 7.

to discover and recognize them without the necessity for any special revelation. Professor Walter Bate has stated that the earlier portion of the Enlightenment marked the final subsiding of the European Renaissance. Much of its inheritance consisted of a collective system of values to which the broad and chameleon-like word "humanism" has often been applied. He defines the humanistic contention by saying that "man possesses an end of his own; that his distinctive privilege consists in his ability to conceive the character of this ideal end, and that for man to be natural does not mean for him to live in accordance with what he judges the phenomenal world to be - as both romantic primitivism and empirical science were, in their varying ways, to encourage him to do - but rather to manifest the absolute and centrally unified 'nature', the joint ethical and rational fruition, which is at once his obligation and prerogative to encourage him to do."[2]

Professor Whitney gives us five corollaries to the above laws which form a starting point for many diverse lines of reasoning, some of which eventuated in radical primitivism. (1) There is a natural tendency towards goodness among men and a light of nature by which even the most ignorant man may

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[2]Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic (Cambridge, 1946), p. 1.

know natural law. The laws of nature may often be more graciously followed among peasants and simple men than among learned people. (2) Civilized men have so degenerated that they no longer readily recognize or follow the laws of nature. (3) There are some souls who are so good by nature that they follow the laws of nature unconsciously. (4) What is natural is to be preferred by what is acquired by art. And (5) there is a natural tendency to benevolence and a recognition of benevolence as one of the primary laws of nature.[3]

The most widely accepted fundamentals of these laws are clearness and simplicity of eternal and immutable truths and their self-evidence. If truth could be recognized without reasoning, then primitive man could follow the laws of nature as well as civilized man. All men are provided with a faculty for finding out the laws of Nature for themselves. For this reason, there is a universal recognition of identical laws of nature.

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many thinkers were agreed that there are only a few simple, self evident, and immutable truths easily knowable by even the humblest intellect. Ethan Allan argued that a gradual

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[3]Lois Whitney, Op. Cit., p. 11.

perfection of reason would bring about a progressive knowledge of natural law and hence a general progress in society.[4]

The extraordinary regard in which simplicity was held during the eighteenth century came in part from the support it received from science. Kepler, Galileo, Torricelli, Descartes, Pascal, Huygens, Boyle, and Newton through their epoch-making discoveries had given unprecedented authority to science and the mathematical interpretation of nature. Science, in its turn, threw the full weight of this authority behind simplicity.[5] The principle likewise received from Newton its supreme illustration in the laws of gravity.[6] All generalization is simplification, and the law of gravity, the greatest of scientific generalizations, simplified a confusing mass of phenomena by showing it to be the manifestation of a single simple law.[7] Many eighteenth century thinkers sought to apply the physico-mathematical method of science to all spects of life.

Common to all of these believers in the simple life was the notion that something was wrong with society, that what

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[4] Ibid., p. 17.

[5] Raymond Havens, Op. Cit., p. 4.

[6] Ibid., p. 5.

[7] Ibid., p. 5.

was wrong with it was the abnormal complexity and sophistication in the life of civilized man, the multiplicity and emulativeness of his desires, and factitiousness and want of inner spontaneity of his emotions. Miss Fitzgerald has pointed out that "the Golden Age of antiquity had been a sunshiny era wherein war was not, nor trade, nor commerce, nor wealth-a halycon period that had degenerated all too soon into an iron age of avarice, cruelty, and conflict."[8] These believers in the simple life thought that "art," the work of man, had corrupted nature, that is man's own nature. The model of the normal individual life and the normal social order, or at least a nearer approximation to it, was to be found among savage peoples, and it possibly may have been realized also in the life of primeval men. There were many very different reasons why men turned to simplicity. Some turned to it because they loved indolence and ease, others because they loved hardship and austerity; some would escape from the restraints of accepted moral codes and some deplored the corruptness of luxurious society; Christian moralists sometimes pointed to the noble savage as a better exemplar of the evangelical virtues than was often to be found among those who had been reared

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[8]Margaret M. Fitzgerald, First Follow Nature(New York, 1947), p. 9.

under the Christian teaching and had supernatural means of grace at their disposal. Throughout Western history, cultural primitivism has been the form oftenest taken by communism and equalitarianism; the argument went that man's lapse from the natural order took place when private property in land was introduced and inequalities of economic conditions.[9]

In the eighteenth century, especially in its second half, the idea of simplicity reached a climax. Never before had expressions of the idea of simplicity in literature been so abundant. Nearly all of the writers of the eighteenth century used "nature" to sanction whatever they had to advance. The writings of Rousseau and the accounts of voyages to America, Africa, and especially the South Sea Islands, stirred up unusual enthusiasm for the simple, idyllic life close to nature.[10] Such a life had a strong appeal even in the days of Addison and Pope because of the Indian chintzes, Chinese embroideries, lacquer and porcelain, Italian and French silks, and other luxuries which the rapid expansion of commerce and the improvements in agriculture, transportation, and industry

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[9] A. O. Lovejoy, "Forward," Lois Whitney, Primitivism and Progress, p. XIV.

[10] Havens, Op. Cit., p. 9.

were pouring upon the English people.[11] Mandeville defended these luxuries in his "Fable of the Bees." The supreme value of simplicity was asserted in the field of ethics as it had already been in the very different fields of science and esthetics.[12]

Political philosophers like William Godwin, Thomas Paine, and Mary Wollstonecraft had much to say about the idea of simplicity. Godwin stated in Political Justice that: "The road to the improvement of mankind is in the utmost degree simple, to speak and act the truth."[13] Although Godwin started out with the conception that a sound political institution was necessary to promote the individual good, he later simplified government almost to the point of elimination. He transferred the seat of government from thrones and parliaments to the reason in the breast of every man. On the power of reason, working freely to convince all the armed unreason of the world and to subdue all its teeming passion, he rested his boundless confidence in the "perfectibility" of man-or, at least, according to the more cautious phrase in his capacity of "indefinite progress towards perfection."[14]

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[11]Havens, Loc. Cit., p. 9.

[12]Havens, Loc. Cit., p. 9.

[13]William Godwin, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, ed. Raymond A. Preston, London, 1793, p. 494.

[14]Charles Herford, The Age of Wordsworth (London, 1889) p.7.

Thomas Paine, who called government "a necessary evil, said in Common Sense: "Government like dress is the badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of Paradise."[15] Paine believed that there should be a return to nature, that man should be studied in the earliest stages of his existence, and that the laws of nature should be found out. He said in the "Rights of Man" that if we really studied primitive society, we would find that men were created and driven into a society and with social affections that made society his greatest source of happiness. "The more perfect Civilization is, the less occasion has it for government, because the more does it regulate its own affairs and government itself.... All the great laws of society are laws of nature."[16] Paine praised the settling and organizing of the government in America. "Contact with nature", he said, "enlarges the mind."[17] The central principle that nature has to teach is simplicity."[18] He wrote in Common Sense that he drew his idea of the form of government from a

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[15]Thomas Paine, Common Sense, The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, ed. Wm. Vander Veyde (New York, 1925) II, p. 98.

[16]Thomas Paine, Works, Op. Cit., VI, p. 66.

[17]Ibid., p. 66.

[18]Ibid., p. 66.

principle in nature which no one can overturn: that the more simple a thing, the less liable it is to be disordered, and the easier repaired when disordered.[19]

Mary Wollstonecraft had much to say about the necessity of simplification. To her, also, modern governments were corrupt. In An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution", she praised primitive man; "Let us examine the catalogue of the vices of men in a savage state, and contrast them with those of men civilized; we shall find that a barbarian considered as a moral being, is an angel compared with the refined villain of artificial life.[20] The reasons for this, she argued, were those unjust forms of government which have been formed by peculiar circumstances in every part of the globe. Like Godwin and Paine, she believed that simplification was the cure for political ills. "But when courts and primogeniture are done away with an simple equal laws are established what is to prevent each generation from retaining the vigor of youth?... The French Revolution is a strong proof how things will governmen when simple principles begin to act with one powerful spring against the complicated wheels of ignorance."[21]

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[19]Thomas Paine, Works, Op. Cit., p. 99.

[20]This statement was teken directly from Lois Whitney's Primitivism and Progress, p. 233.

[21]Ibid., p. 100.

In England, the idea of simplicity came in opposition to the new economic developments of the period. It was a time in which trade engaged the attention of mankind and commercial gain was sought with general emulation. There was a shift of economic and potitical power from agriculture to the great industrial areas. The doctrine of simplicity was in opposition to the interests of those people who had become rich because of the Industrial Revolution. More than any time previously, poets used trade and commerce as a theme. Yet literature gave ground slowly because the industrial revolution with its ugliness and its further heightening of economic inequalities lent a greater appeal to the primitivist's picture of the ideal life close to nature. In the first half of the eighteenth century, there began to dawn, both in the popular drama of sensibility and in academic philosophy, a greater faith in man's instinctive and emotional nature. Mark Akenside versified the theory that the response to beauty and truth was a natural impulse. There were writers like Thompson who pointed out the value of the humble life in his Seasons. Thomas Gray expressed democratic sentiments in his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", and an interest in the ruder and simple ages of mankind in "The Bard"and "The Descent of Odin."

In the latter half of the century, Goldsmith's Deserted Village deplored the decline of country villages with their lovable inhabitants, a decline attributed to the growth of luxurious cities. Robert Burns proved that the best poetry ought to spring from life close to nature and to the heart of common people. The Ossian poems of McPherson seemed to justify the theory that the earlier periods were nobler than civilized modern times and more conducive to genuine poetry.

Finally, the explosive possibilities in some of these ideas broke forth in the American Revolution, and even more violently in the French. These events indicated to the world that changes in the feelings of mere men of letters could ultimately destroy a long established social order and endeavor to establish one nearer to the heart's desires. It was in Wordsworth's twenty-second year (1792), when he was in Revolutionary France, that his heart was for the first time all given to human beings and that his love was theirs. This was the opening of an epoch in his spiritual history, for from thenceforth Man was coequal nature in his consciousness. Nature was ever an inspirer, a teacher, but his deepest thought and feeling were centered in humanity - "My theme no other than the very heart of man." (The Prelude, Book XIII, l. 241)

CHAPTER III

WORDSWORTH'S USE OF THE IDEA

Simple Life

In the Lyrical Ballads published in 1798, Wordsworth strove to make every feature simple-humble lives, plain persons, and simple incidents. The first section of this chapter deals with his idea of the simple life. Thirteen of the poems that Wordsworth contributed to the Lyrical Ballads deal with human characters and indicate the poet's spiritual attitude toward humanity.[1] The account of how he came to make so remarkable a selection is found in Book XIII of The Prelude, which was written only six years after the publication of the poems:

> Long time in search of knowledge did I range
> The field of human life, in heart and mind
> Benighted; but the dawn beginning now
> To re-appear, twas proved that not in vain
> I had been taught to reverence a power
> That is the visible quality and shape
> And image of right reason.[2]

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[1]Solomon Francis Gingerich, Essays in the Romantic Movement (New York, 1924), p. 120.

2. Works, p. 212.

For this Power taught him

> To look with feelings of fraternal love
> Upon the unassuming things that hold
> A silent station in this beauteous world.[3]

Thus he found in humble man "an object of delight, of pure imagination, and of love." He then began a search to find how much virtue and happiness those possess who labor by bodily toil, carrying on his observations:

> Among the natural abodes of men
> Fields with their rural works.[4]

He became convinced that the formalities which go under the name of Education have little to do with real feeling and just sense, and that such books as seek their reward from judgments of the wealthy few "are misleading and debasing." This conviction was confirmed by the fact that he himself had heard:

> From mouths of men obscure and lowly truths
> Replete with honor; sounds in unison
> With loftiest promises of good and fair.[5]

"The Old Cumberland Beggar" belongs to the time of the Lyrical Ballads and is important as illustrating Wordsworth's feelings for simple humanity. He described the old man as an

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[3]Works, p. 212.

[4]Works, p. 214.

[5]Works, p. 214.

infirm old beggar who went around begging alms. Wordsworth said to the statesmen or political economists who were trying to rid the world of these nuisances:

> Tis Nature's law
> That none, the meanest of created things,
> Of forms created the most vile and brute,
> Divorced from good-a spirit and pulse of good,
> A life and soul, to every mode of being
> Inseparably linked.[6]

The villagers would remember, as the old man went from door to door, "a record of past deeds and charity." This man should be left alone, the poet continued, as the young and prosperous would all behold in him a silent monitor. If he were allowed to live, the villagers would be inspired to tender offices and quiet reflection:

> Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!
> And while in that vast solitude to which
> The tide of things has borne him, he appears
> To breathe and live but for himself alone,
> Unblamed, uninjured, let him bear about
> The good which the benignant law of Heaven
> Has hung around him: and, while life is his,
> Still let him prompt the unlettered villagers
> To tender offices and pensive thoughts.
> --Then let him pass a blessing on his head![7]

There will be happiness for the old man if he is allowed to breathe the freshness of the valleys and listen to the singing of the woodland birds.

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[6] Works, p. 95.

[7] Works, p. 95.

> And long as he can wander, let him breathe
> The freshness of the valleys; let his blood
> Struggle with frosty air and winter snows;
> And let the chartered wind that sweeps the heath
> Reverence the hope whose vital anxiousness
> Gives the last human interest to his heart.[8]

In Wordsworth's shepherds we see an exaltation of the simple life. Michael in the story of "Michael" found pleasure in the fields and hills around his home. He felt that only gain could come from the little acts which he performed, such as, feeding, and sheltering dumb animals. This pleasurable feeling of "blind love" which Michael has for simple living is the pleasure which there is in life itself. In a note, the poet tells us that "the domestic affections are always strongest amongst men who live in a country not crowded with population, if these men are placed above poverty." These men are free; though they work and endure many hardships, free from the temptations of city life and from the dangers of intellectual ambition.[9]

Matthew, his schoolmaster in the two poems "The Two April Mornings" and "The Fountain", is an elemental person, a plain countryman, a dweller amid beautiful scenery, who knows the heights and depths of sorrow because of his simplicity.

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[8] Loc. Cit., p. 95.

[9] Works, p. 849.

The sighs which Matthew heard were sighs
Of one tired out with fun and madness;
The tears which came to Matthew's eyes
Were tears of light and gladness.

Yet, sometimes, when the secret cup
of still and serious thought went round
It seemed as if he drank it up--
He felt with spirit so profound.

--Thou soul of God's best earthy mould!
Thou happy Soul! and can it be
That these two words of glittering gold
Are all that must remain of thee?[10]

The Wanderer in The Excursion shows a peasant's ideas about the world, a view which Wordsworth considered the best one. As the poet and the Wanderer stroll through the Lake Country, they talk about simple and human incidents which they encounter, the history of the Ruined Cottage, and an humble funeral.

In the most naked simplicity, he presents the old leechgatherer in "Resolution and Independence". The old man lay:

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it would thither come, and
whence
So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
Like a seabeast crawled forth, that on a
shelf
Or rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself;[11]

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[10] Works, p. 117.

[11] Works, p. 281

The old man related to him his hardships, how he roamed from moor to moor, housed by choice or chance; and in this way he was able to maintain himself. The old man's pitiable plight troubled the poet at first. As he continued his discourse, Wordsworth noticed that the leechgatherer:

> Cheerfully uttered, with demeanor kind,
> But stately in the main[12]

When the old leechgatherer finished his discourse, Wordsworth said:

> I could have laughed myself to scorn
> to find
> In that decrepit man so firm
> a mind.[13]

In "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman," the poet illustrates the power of maternal love. The heroine of the poem, left in sickness by her tribe in a solitary place to die, consoles herself with the grand spectacle of the heavens. She is fortified with the hope that if she were reunited with her child, she could die happy:

> My poor forsaken Child, if I
> For once could have thee close to me,
> And my last thought would happy be;
> But thou, dear Babe art far away,
> Nor shall I see another day.[14]

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[12] Works, p. 282.

[13] Works, p. 282.

[14] Works, p. 84.

Wordsworth embodied his belief in the simple life in his lowly characters-Michael, leechgatherer, baggars, peddlars, and children. Wordsworth found virtue and happiness in humble living. He tells us in The Prelude:

> ...the lonely roads
> Were open schools in which I daily read
> With most delight the passions of mankind,
> Whether by words, looks, sighs, or tears, revealed
> There saw into the depths of human souls
> Souls that appear to have no depth at all
> To careless eyes.[15]

Theory of Language

A second edition of Lyrical Ballads was published in 1800, and in this were included a good many additional poems. The "Lucy Poems", for example, first appeared before the public in this edition. It was to this second edition that Wordsworth attached his famous Preface, in which he sets out, in prose style, the objects of his work, the effects he wanted to obtain, and the vices he wished to avoid. The principal object in these poems was:

> To choose incidents and situations from real life, and to relate them throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men....The language, too, of these men has been adopted because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the

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[15] Works, p. 212.

> best part of language is originally derived; and because from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honor upon themselves and their art in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites of their own creation.[16]

From the many ideas in this passage, there stands out the one essential object-to treat of the essential passions of the heart in simple and unelaborated expressions, and to avoid as being too much under the influence of social vanity, and arbitrary capricious habits of expression. Because this idea had been overlaid by false taste, it was far less likely to win acceptance in 1800 that it is to-day.[17] Wordsworth drew attention to the fact that the affecting parts of Chaucer were almost always expressed in language pure and universally intelligible even to this day.

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[16] Works, p. 212.

[17] George Mallaby, Wordsworth (Oxford, 1950), p. 31.

The danger in adopting a central principle of this kind was that anyone incapable of writing poetry in the specialized, elaborate, and polished language of eighteenth century verse makers and with their well-regulated attention to form and design, might take refuge in this new and looser theory of the poetic art and spill upon the world mean trivialities, not in artificial taste but in no taste, nor dictated by complex and allusive thinking.[18] It is for this purpose that Wordsworth insisted that every poem must have a worthy purpose. He also insisted that every poem should have a purpose that arises spontaneously from the strength of feeling and the depth of meditation. He condemned the empty and meaningless rhyming of some poets:

> Now the co-prescence of something regular something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion. This unquestionably true; and hence though the opinion will first appear paradoxical, from the tendency of metre to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half consciousness of substantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of pain connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose.[19]

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[18] Ibid., p. 31.

[19] Works, p. 796.

"What is a poet?", Wordsworth asked. "To whom does he address himself?" "And what language is expected of him?" "He is a man speaking to men: a man it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature that are supposed to be common among mankind.... He has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughs and feelings which by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind arise in him without external excitement."[20] "The poet", Wordsworth continues, "singing a song which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is the contenance of all Science. He is the rock and defence for human nature; and upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of differences of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time."[21]

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[20] Works, p. 795.

[21] Works, p. 795.

Those excerpts from the Preface are intended to illustrate the basis of Wordsworth's theory of language-a theory on which he worked in all his best period, the two editions of Lyrical Ballads themselves and the two volumes which he published in 1807. The Preface caused a great deal of controversey at the time, even among his own friends. When the principles were first enunciated, they were new and challenging. But Leigh Hunt, who ridiculed much of Wordsworth's poetry, did not question the wholesomeness and the opportuness of his theory. Writing in a note in his Feast of Poets, a satire in which Wordsworth was made to play an ignomimous part, he says:

> Now the object of the theory here mentioned has clearly nothing in the abstract, that can offend the soundest good sense or the poetical ambition. In fact, it is only saying in other words, that it is high time for poetry in general to return to natural style, and that he will perform a great and useful work to society, who shall assist it to do so.... The truth which he tells, however obvious is necessary to be told and to be told loudly: and he should enjoy the praise which he deserves of having been the first in these times to produce it.[22]

Mr. H. W. Garrod in his Wordsworth Lectures and Essays tells us that Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth's theory of language is overrated. He states further that Coleridge had

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[22] Mallaby, Op. Cit., p. 39.

greatly undervalued Wordsworth's poetry.[23] The quarrel over the theory of language has been a bitter one, and Wordsworth's enemies have had an easy victory because they have not paid much attention to what he said.[24] The passage on page one of this section clearly indicates that Wordsworth meant poetic diction and nothing more. Professor Beatty is right when he asserts that it is unfair to argue that he is here setting himself and peasant speech up against Shakespeare and other authors. He was not opposing "the real language of men to that of Shakespeare and Milton but identifying these and opposing them to the perversions of language which had been brought about by Poetic Diction."[25]

Regarding the statement that there is "no difference between the language of prose and metrical composition, the real language of men and the language of the great poets, Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer have the quality of reality, permanence, and philosophicel character, as contrasted with poetic diction."[26]

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[23] H. W. Garrod, Wordsworth Lectures and Essays (Oxford, 1927) p. 163.

[24] Loc. Cit., p. 162.

[25] Authur Beatty, William Wordsworth (Madison, 1927), p.64.

[26] Ibid., p. 65.

In those chapters of Biographia Literaria in which Coleridge criticizes Wordsworth's theories of poetry, he pays no attention to the related subjects of Imagination as Wordsworth conceives it, nor does he refer to Wordsworth's explanation of the effects of metre by similitude in dissimilitude.[27] Because Wordsworth had not contemplated arguments in this field, Coleridge seemedto win the victory.

In 1815, Wordsworth returned to the theory of poetic diction in the "Appendix to the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads". Here he clearly stated that his objections to the theory of poetic diction were based on the grounds of reality and truth:

> The earliest poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote naturally,and as men; feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring and figurative. In succeeding times, Poets, and Men ambitious of the fame of Poets, perceiving the influence of such language, and desirous of producing the same effect without being animated by the same passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of these figures of speech, and made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently applied them to feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connection whatsoever. A language was thus insensibly produced, differing materially from the real language of men in any situation....Poets, it is probable who had before contented themselves for the most part with misapplying only expressions which had at first been dictated by real passions

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[27] Ibid., p. 66.

> carried the abuse still further, and introduced phrases composed apparently in the spirit of the original figurative language of passion, yet altogether of their own invention, and characterized by various degrees of wanton deviation from good sense and nature.[28]

Language, which is different from ordinary language, becomes hardened and artificial.

This plain diction or prose-poetry diction which Wordsworth defends on principle, and adopts for himself, is best shown in his story of "Michael". The old shepherd had seen his son Luke go out to seek his fortune, but not till he was sworn to return with means to save the humble estate, and strength to help his father complete the building of the stone sheepfold, and finally the old man has the news that Luke has plunged into dissolute ways of the city and fled for his misdeeds beyond the seas. Nevertheless:

> among the rocks
> He went, and still looked up to the sun and cloud,
> Performed all kinds of labour for his sheep,
> And for the land, his small inheritance;[29]

though he went as usual to the sheepfold;

> tis believed by all
> That many and many and many a day he thither went,
> And never lifted up a single stone.[30]

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[28] Works, p. 801.

[29] Works, p. 244.

[30] Works, p. 244.

These lines from the "Solitary Reaper" are another good illustration:

> Whate'er the theme, the maiden sang
> As if her song could have no ending;
> I saw her singing at her work,
> And o'er the sickle bending;--
> I listened motionless and still;
> And, as I mounted up the hill,
> The music in my heart I bore,
> Long after it was heard no more.[31]

The Noble Savage

There are close similarities between Wordsworth's treatment of peasants and shepherds and the idea of the "return to nature." Professor Fairchild states in his book The Noble Savage that Wordsworth would have been shocked at the thought of comparing the peasants of the Lake Country and of Switzerland to savages. Nevertheless, Professor Fairchild adds, "the comparison is tempting." One may at least say that the dalesman and the Noble Savage are similarly motivated. They spring from the same revulsion against corrupt society and preach the same gospel of innocent simplicity.[32]

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[31] Works, p. 298.

[32] Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Noble Savage (New York, 1928) p. 180.

Before citing several poems in which Wordsworth makes references to the idea of primitivism, the writer shall attempt to explain Wordsworth's primitivism. From reading his poetry, one never gets the idea that Wordsworth wants to settle in a savage region. Unlike Coleridge and Southey, he never seriously considered "trying the experiment of perfectibility on the banks of the Susquehanna."[33] He intended to achieve his plain living and high thinking at which he aimed in his own life within the existing frame of English society; he wanted to live in the country rather than in the city, but not necessarily in the unspoiled wilderness.

All of his poems did not reveal the primitive in a favorable light. The young man in the story of "Ruth" and the "Squalid creature" in the "Excursion" represent the unfavorable aspects of primitivism. Nor do all the poems reveal Wordsworth's mature views. His general views, however, evidence his abiding faith in the common man.His first one was written under the influence of his youthful enthusiasm for the French Revolution. In The Descriptive Sketches, Wordsworth represents the Swiss mountaineer as bearing the traces of primeval man, free and restrained by none, obeying no law except that dictated by his reason:

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[33]Charles Norton Coe, Wordsworth and the Literature of Travel (New York, 1953) p. 49.

Once Man entirely free, alone and wild,
Was bless'd as free-for he was Nature's child,
He, all superior but his God disdain'd
Walk'd none restraining and by none restrain'd
Confess'd no law but what his reason taught,
Did all he wish'd, and wish'd but what he ought,
As man in his primaeval dower array'd
The image of his glorious sire display'd
Ev'n so, by vestal Nature guarded, here
The traces of primaeval man appear.
The native dignity no forms debase
The eye sublime, and surly lion grace.
The slave of none, of beasts alone the lord,
He marches with his flute, his book, and sword
Well taught by that to feel his rights, prepar'd
With this the blessings he enjoys to guard.[34]

The primitive man is to be admired because his life is in some respects harder and fraught with greater danger. Wordsworth admired the Swiss because of their simplicity and independence. He wrote of the dangers encountered by the Swiss mountaineers:

Ye dewy mists the arrid rocks o'er spread
Whose slippery face derides his deathful tread!
-To wet the peak's impracticable sides
He opens of his feet the sanguine tides,
Weak and more weak the issuing current eyes
Lapp'd by the panting tongue of thirsty skies
-At once bewildering mists around him close,
And cold and hunger are his least of woes
The Demon of the snow with angry roar
Descending, shuts for aye his prison door.[35]

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[34] Works, p. 16.

[35] Works, p. 17.

Of the poems in the edition of 1800, the one that most clearly shows Wordsworth's interest in primitive people is "Ruth". In the poem, Wordsworth introduces a young man who relates his experiences among the Cherokeess in Georgia:

> There came a Youth from Georgia's shore-
> A military casque he wore,
> With splendid feathers drest;
> He brought them from the Dherokees;
> The feathers nodded in the breeze,
> And made a gallant crest.[36]

In the Prelude Wordsworth praised the American Indian as a noble savage. However, in the characterization of the degenerate hero in "Ruth" Wordsworth showed that an "ideal environment" was no positive guarantee of good behavior. If the natural environment, however beautiful is too luxuriant, it may contribute toward loose conduct and indolence. The Youth from Georgia's shore who married and then deserted Ruth was a true child of nature:

> With hues of genius on his cheek
> In finest tones the Youth could speak:
> -While he was yet a boy,
> The moon, the glory of the sun,
> And streams that murmer as they run,
> Had been is dearest joy.[37]

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[36] Works, p. 119.

[37] Works, p. 119.

After describing his life among the Indians and the exotic foliage of the southern part of America, the youth depicts for Ruth the happy, carefree life they could lead together:

> Sweet Ruth! and could you go with me
> My helpmate in the woods to be,
> Our shed at night to rear;
> Or run my own adopted bride
> A sylvan huntress at my side,
> And drive the flying deer.[38]

After their marriage, Ruth looked forward eagerly to life in America on the green "savannahs." Unfortunately, however, she never got there, partly because of the influence of her husband's former companions with whom his boyhood had been spent:

> But ill he lived, much evil saw,
> With men to whom no better law
> Nor better life was known;
> Deliberately and undeceived,
> These wild men's vices he received,
> And gave them back his own.[39]

This, combined with the climate that had nourished him, overcame his genuine attempts to lead a nobler life.

The characterization of Ruth's suitor seems to be out of keeping with Wordsworth's beliefs. However, his behavior

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[38] Works, p. 120.

[39] Works, p. 121.

can be accounted for without refuting the poet's faith in the beneficent effects of a natural setting on man's moral and spiritual development. The youth's unsuccessful struggle against his lower and wilder impulses serves merely to define more specifically the kind of natural man whom Wordsworth thought ideal. Wordsworth admired the noble savage, not because he was loose-living, indolent, and free from moral restraint, but because he is relieved of the artificial demands imposed by an unnatural society.

In discussing Descriptive Sketches, I have shown that Wordsworth regarded the Swiss mountaineer as possessing some attributes of primitive man, and as living in surroundings calculated to develop the highest qualities in him. Another primitive type that Wordsworth admired was the American Indian. He must have learned about the Indian entirely from his wide reading in travel books.[40] There was, however, one remark in the seventh book of The Prelude in which he described some of the spectacles that the city of London offers to the traveler:

> All moveables of wonder, from all parts,
> Are here-Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfe...
> All out-o-the way far-fetched, perverted things,
> All freaks of nature, all Promethean thoughs
> Of man ...
> All jumbled up together, to compose
> A parliament of Monsters.[41]

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[40] Op. Cit., p. 15.

[41] Works, p. 178.

The Indian is here merely regarded as an oddity. On at least one other occasion, as we shall see in looking at the Excursion, Wordsworth represents the Indian in an unfavorable light; but most times he held the Indian in high esteem. Although as a young man recently graduated from Cambridge he may have regarded him as a freak of nature, gazing upon him, as he told us in The Prelude, with the curiosity of a sightseer in a strange metropolis, he was soon to discover in the Indian many admirable qualities that are often lacking in more highly civilized men. An examination of certain passages in The Prelude shows that Wordsworth associated the Indian with some of his most cherished concepts: with childhood, with simplicity, and with solitude.

In the idyllic picture that he painted his own childhood, he compared his freedom and activity with that of an Indian:

> Oh! many a time have I, a five years' child,
> A naked Boy, in one delightful Rill,
> A little Mill-race sever'd from his stream,
> Made one long bathing of a summer's day ...
> as if I had been born
> On Indian Plains and from my Mother's hut
> Had run abroad in wantoness to sport,
> A naked savage, in the thunder shower.[42]

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[42] Works, p.124.

In the conclusion to the seventh book, "Residence in London", Wordsworth compared the simplicity and dignity of the Indian with the plight of the city dweller:

> Living amid the same perpetual whirl
> Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
> To one identity by differences
> That have no law, no meaning, and no end.[43]

Wordsworth felt that because of his own boyhood surroundings, his

> early converse with the works of God
> Among all regions; chiefly where appear
> Most obviously simplicity and power,-[44]

Although he could understand more than the city dweller, Wordsworth's early visit to London served mainly to strengthen his preference for the simplicity of country life. Yet in describing the contrast between city and country in The Prelude, he used not only recollections of his own boyhood, and adds one striking passage in which he advises us to think of the noble savage:

> Think, how the everlasting streams and woods,
> Stretched and still stretching far and wide, exalt
> The roving Indian! on his desert sands,
> What grandeur not unfelt, what pregnant show
> Of beauty, meets the sunburnt Arab's eye.[45]

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[43] Works, p. 177.

[44] Works, p. 178.

[45] Works, p. 178.

The Wanderer in The Excursion shows evidences of primitivism. There is much of the poet's autobiography in this character. This point was made by Fausset in The Lost Leader. According to Fausset:

> The character at least of The Pedlar, or The Wanderer, as he was later called...was, in fact, the consummation of such characters as Wordsworth had dramatized in some of the "Lyrical Ballads". Fred from domestic ties and the struggle for survival, he lacked the pathos of those earlier figures. But he was better qualified thereby to personify Wordsworth's ideal of the complete man and to be the voice of his mature convictions.[46]

For his images and symbols of what plain living and high thinking might be or ought to be, Wordsworth seized upon the Swiss mountaineer and American Indian, rustic or savage man, living remote from towns. Wordsworth used his primitives to illustrate such inspiring concepts as the golden age of man, the free and simple life of a Swiss canton, and the roving freedom and childlike spontaneity of the Indian whose life is contrasted favorably with that of the city dweller.

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[46] Charles Norton Coe, Wordsworth and the Literature of Travel (New York, 1953) p. 87, derived from Hugh Fausset, The Lost Leader.

Solitude

Solitude, silence, and lonely places are the chief sources of simplicity and power in Wordsworth's poetry. Professor Raymond Havens has stated that Wordsworth used "alone" in the sense of solitary some one hundred and fifty times in his poetry; "solitary" (excluding The Solitary in The Excursion) about seventy-five times; "solitude" or "solitudes" about one hundred and five times; "lone," "lonely," "lonesome," "loneliest," "loneliness" approximately two hundred and fifteen times; he employs "silent" or "silence" some three hundred and fifty times.[47] His use of the term is distinctive since he commonly applies it to places or natural objects, rarely to states of mind, and almost always employs it to suggest something that is desirable.[48] The lovely flowers, birds, clouds, and brooks in lonely places were almost always a pleasure to him.

In his lone characters which he depicts with the most naked simplicity: the pensive traveler while he treads his lonesome path in "A Night Piece", William in "Expostulation

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[47]Raymond Havens, The Mind of a Poet (Baltimore, 1941) p. 57.

[48]Ibid., p. 55.

and Reply", the boy who sits alone mimicking the hooting of owls in "There Was a Boy", "The Cumberland Beggar" who travels along solitarily begging alms, Michael, The Wanderer in The Excursion, the leechgatherer in "Resolution and Independence", Margaret in the first book of the Excursion, Lucy Gray a solitary child who had no mate or comrade, and the "Solitary Reaper."

In a note to "Steeping Westward", Wordsworth stated:

> While my fellow traveler and I were walking by the side of Lock Ketterine, one fine evening after sunset...we met in one of the loneliest parts of the solitary region two well dressed women, one of whom said to us...What, you are stepping westward?[49]

He used loneliness to refer to places and almost never did it suggest something unpleasant. Inversneyde, the home of The Highland Girl is a lonely place, but very beautiful. Ruth in the story of "Ruth" wished to go with the youth from Georgia to some lonely spot in America.

Clifford, in "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle", had found:

> Love in huts where poor
> men lie
> His daily teachers had been
> woods and rills
> The silence that is in the starry sky
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills.[50]

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[49] Works, p. 229.

[50] Works, p. 360.

In lonely places, one could think through his troubles. They had restorative powers. In the mountains, the Wanderer in the Excursion could

> ...feel his faith
>
> All things, responsive to the writing here
> Breathed immortality, revolving life,
> And greatness still revolving, infinite:
> There littleness was not; the least of things
> Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped
> Her prospects, nor did he believe, he saw.[51]

The incidents which seemed most important to him occurred in silence and solitude. In "Tintern Abbey", he thinks of earlier times when he beheld the mountains that on a "wild secluded scene impressed thoughs of deep seclusion." Often when he was in lonely rooms "amid the din of towns and cities he felt sensations sweet" and his mind was tranquilly restored. There was so much joy in solitude that he said:

> ...Therefore let the moon shine on thee in thy
> solitary walk;
> And let thy misty mountains winds be free
> To blow against thee: and in after years,
> When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
> Into a sober pleasure...
> If solitude, or fear or pain or grief,
> Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
> Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
> And these my exhortations![52]

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[51] Works, p. 410.

[52] Works, p. 93.

Some of the best evidence of how Wordsworth loved solitude, silence, and loneliness is to be found in his power of describing them:

> He had been alone
> Amid the heart of many thousand mists,
> That came to him, and left him, on the heights;
> ...they
> who journey thither find themselves alone
> With a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites
> That overhead are sailing in the sky.
> (Michael p. 240)

> There sometimes doth a leaping fish
> Send through the tarn a lonely cheer;
> The crags repeat the raven's croak,
> In symphony austere.
> (Fidelity p. 321)

Nowhere does Wordsworth reveal his peculiar power more than in those lines which deal with solitude, silence, and lonely places.

CHAPTER IV

WHY WORDSWORTH USED THE IDEA AND ITS EFFECT

Before Wordsworth can adequately be understood, one must know the poet's own evolution, his early life among the northern hills, the growth of his passion for nature, his faith in the common man and in the French Revolution, his ardent espousal of rationalistic thought, his loss of faith in the French Revolution, his need for something to believe in, then his strong revulsion from all kinds of doctrinnaire intellectualism, and his return to his belief in the saving power of nature on man's emotional and imaginative intuition.[1] If these things are known, then Wordsworth's reasons for adopting the concept of simplicity will be better understood.

An account of his early life is given in the first four books of The Prelude. Nature, to him, was divine, and it permeated everything. He said in Book II of The Prelude:

> ... Wonder not
> If High the transport, great the joy I felt
> Communing in this sort of earth and heaven
> With every form of Creature, as it looked
> Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
> Of adoration, with an eye of love.[2]

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[1]Douglas Bush, "Wordsworth: A Minority Report", Wordsworth Centennary Studies presented at Cornell and Princeton Universities, ed. Gilbert T. Dunklin (Princeton, 1951), p. 6.

[2]Works, p. 137.

Upon his return from Cambridge during a summer vacation to his native vales and mountains, he told of his extreme happiness. But he was himself apart from external nature and realized that his soul was free, creative, and possessed immortal powers:

> Gently did my soul
> Put off her veil, and self transmuted, stood
> Naked, as in the presence of her God...
> -Of that external scene which round me lay,
> Little, in this abstraction, did I see:
> Remembered bliss; but I had inward hopes
> And swellings of the spirit was rapt and soothed,
> Conversed with promises, had glimmering views
> How life pervades the undecaying mind;
> How the immortal soul with God's power
> Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep
> That time can lay upon her.[3]

He then became dedicated to a power outside himself. As he walked home one morning, he told how he became consecrated to that power:

> The morning rose, in measurable pomp,
> Glorious as e'er I had beheld...
> 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 shining greatly,
> A dedicated Spirit.[4]

Along with this attitude toward nature was an innate respect for humanity. He saw the shepherd independent, strong, a free man:

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[3] Works, p. 147.

[4] Works, p. 150.

Thus was man
Ennobled outwardly before my sight,
And thus my heart was easily introduced
To an unconscious love and reverence
Of human nature.[5]

It was in (1792), when he was in Revolutionary France, that his heart was for the first time all given to human beings and that his love was theirs.[6] Man was coequal with Nature in his consciousness; Nature was ever an inspirer, a teacher, but his thoughts and feelings were centered in humanity.[7] In 1793, he published Descriptive Sketches, which told of the spirit of Freedom that animated the Swiss people. His enthusiasm reached a new high when he saw in France Freedom in the making. He denounced the tyrant kings and appealed to the Almighty to give victory to the Revolutionary cause:

O give, great God, to Freedom's waves to ride
Sublime o'er Conquest, Avarice, and Pride,
To break, the vales where Death with Famine Scow'rs,
And dark Oppression builds her thick ribb'd tow'rs
And grant that every sceptred child of clay,
Who cries, presumptious, "here their tides shall stay,"
Swept in their anger from their affrighted shore,
With all his creatures sink-to rise no more.[8]

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[5]Works, p. 151.

[6]Solomon Francis Gingerich, Essays in the Romantic Movement (New York, 1924), p. 95.

[7]Ibid., p. 96.

[8]Works, p. 19.

During this period, the poet's ideas were of so general a character that he had not developed a distinct philosophy of life. It was a period of moral conflict with him, and of a political crisis as well as a. time of change and growth.[9]

In (1793), England declared war on the French Republic. Though his soul was tossed about in a whirlwind, he did not resort for relief to distinct Christian love or mercy, but only fortified himself by his former revolutionary opinion, which clung to his mind "as if they were its life, nay more, the very being of the immortal soul." And when the worst came, France herself turning traitor to the cause of Freedom, and he was "endlessly perplexed" to the point of despair, he sought consolation not in the graces of Christian fortitude, but in speculative thought an in the study of abstract science, without, any appreciable success.[10] His sister Dorothy's devotion and the ministry of Nature led him back through opening day to the sweet counsels between head and heart.[11] Thus emerged the great Wordsworth of the Lyrical Ballads. Here was an enterprise that was both novel and daring; and in it Wordsworth

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[9]Gingerich, Loc. Cit., p. 100.

[10]Ibid., p. 101.

[11]Ibid., p. 104.

played the dominant part. Douglas Bush in "Wordsworth: A Minority Report" stated that it was Wordsworth's share in the Lyrical Ballads that inaugurated a poetical and spiritual revolution (The Ancient Mariner, "though it rose far above most of Wodsworth's contributions, was unique and altogether inimitable".)[12] Bush went on to say that later volumes showed that poetry could be written in simple language about humble life. It was Wordsworth who set forth the romantic religion of nature that was to fill a growing vacuum, who upheld, against the claims of scientific and logical reason, the higher validity of imagination and intuition, who proclaimed the native grandeur of the human soul and the soul's affinity with the creative spirit that rolls through all things, who maintained that man may be delivered from the bondage of actuality because he has free access to outward and inward sources of enduring beauty and joy and wisdom.[13] Here, he told the world that he, with the help of Coleridge and his sister, had escaped suffering and disillusionment.

During the first part of the nineteenth century, Wordsworth failed to win popularity among the general reading

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[12] Bush, Loc. Cit., p. 4.

[13] Ibid., p. 4.

public. The first unsympathetic criticism came from Jeffrey in the Edinburgh Review. Not all of his criticism was unfavorable. He put Wordsworth in the "Lake School" and against it he fought very hard. He called the Lake school a brotherhood of literary heretics and dissenters. In an essay in the Edinburgh Review, Jeffrey stated:

> This will never do! It bears no doubt the stamp of the author's heart and fancy: but unfortunately not half so visibly as that of his peculiar system. His former poems were intended to recommend that system and to bespeak favour for it by their individual merit; but this we suspect, must be recommended by the system, and can only expect to succeed where it has been previously established. It is longer, weaker, and tamer than any of Mr. Wordsworth's other productions; with less boldness of originality, and less even of that extreme simplicity which wavered so prettily, in the "Lyrical Ballads."[14]

Jeffrey, here, had reference to "The Recluse", or the first book of the Excursion. In a note to the same essay, he had this to say:

> I can easily understand that many whose admiration of "The Excursion", or the "Lyrical Ballads", rests substantially on the passages which I too should join in admiring, may view with greater indulgence than I can do, the tedious and flat passages with which they are interspersed, and may consequently think my censure of these works a great deal too harsh

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[14]Frances Jeffrey, Essays on English Poets and Poetry (London, 1819) p. 525.

> and uncharitable. Between such persons and me, therefore, there may be no radical difference of opinion, or contrariety as to principles of judgment....Now I have been assured not only that there are such persons, but that almost all those who seek to exalt Mr. Wordsworth as the founder of a new school of poetry, consider these as by far his best and most characteristic productions; and would at once reject from their communion any one who did not acknowledge in them the traces of a high inspiration.[15]

The Lake School was always imitating somebody especially Milton,he explained. Of The Excursion, he said:

> We have imitations of Cowper, and even of Milton here; engrafted on the natural drawl of the Lakers, and all diluted into harmony by that profuse and irrepressible wordiness whidh deluges all the blank verse of this school of poetry, and lubricates and weakens the whole structure of their style.[16]

Throughout the essay, he put Wordsworth in a school. Wordsworth belonged to no brotherhood, even in the first issue of Lyrical Ballads, Coleridge hardly cooperated.[17]

Another phase of criticism came from William Hazlitt. Through his views changed later, the first criticism was altogether unfavorable.

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[15] Ibid., p. 525.

[16] Ibid., p. 526.

[17] David Watson Rannie, Wordsworth and His Circle (London, 1907), p. 316.

> The spirit of Jacobin poetry is rank egotism. We know an instance. It is of a person who founded a school of poetry on sheer humanity, on idiot boys, and mad mothers, and on Simon Lee, the old huntsman. The secret of the Jacobin poetry and the anti Jacobin politics of this writer is the same. His lyrical poetry was a cant of the commonest people, to level the great with the small; and his political poetry is a cant of loyalty to level Bonaparte with kings and hereditary imbecility ....The person admires nothing that is admirable, feels no interest in anything interesting, no grandeur in anything grand, no beauty in anything beautiful. He tolerates nothing but what he himself creates; he sympathizes only with what can enter into no competition with him, with the bare earth and mountain bare, and grass green in the green field. He sees nothing but himself in the universe. He hates all greatness and all pretensions to it but his own.[18]

Two years later, Hazlitt wrote differently of Wordsworth. He not only gave Wordsworth's weaknesses but his strengths as well:

> Fools have laughed at wise men scarcely understand them. He takes a subject or a story merely as pegs or loops to hang thought and feeling on; the incidents are trifling, in proportion to his contempt for imposing appearances; the reflections are profound, according to the gravity and aspiring pretensions of his mind....His popular, inartificial style gets rid (at a blow) of all the trappings of verse, of all the high places of poetry: "the cloud capt towers, the

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[18] Ibid., p. 320.

> solemn temples, the gorgeous palaces," are swept to the ground, and "like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind.".... Kings, queens, priests, nobles, the altar and the throne, the distinctions of rank, birth, wealth, power, "the judge's robe, the marshal's truncheon, the ceremony that to great ones longs," are not to found here.... He gathers manna in the wilderness; he strikes the barren rock for the gushing moisture. He elevates the mean by the strength of his own aspirations, he clothes the naked with beauty and grandeur from the stores of his own recollections.[19]

The best exposition of this kind of criticism is found in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, though Coleridge bore a chief part in the work. When Wordsworth published an exposition of the theory of this work, Coleridge did not agree with all of it. A large part of Biographia Literaria was a disagreement with Wordsworth's doctrine of imagination and poetic diction and an examination of the inconsistencies between his theory and his practice:

> My own differences from certain supposed parts of Mr. Wordsworth's theory ground themselves on the assumption that his words had been rightly interpreted, as purporting that the proper diction for poetry in general consists altogether in a language taken, with due exceptions, from the mouths of men in real life, a language which actually constitutes the natural conversation of men under the influence

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[19]William Hazlitt, Lectures on English Poets, in Selections from His Writings (London, 1889), p. 138.

> of natural feelings. My objection is, first, that in any sense this rule is applicable only to certain classes of poetry; secondly, that even to these classes of poetry it is not applicable, except in such a sense, as hath never by any one been denied or doubted; and lastly, that as far as, and in that degree in which it is practible, yet, as a rule, it is useless, if not injurious, and therefore, either need not or ought not to be practised.... Now it is clear to me that in the most interesting of the poems, in which the author is more or less dramatic, as "The Brothers", "Michael", "Ruth", "The Mad Mother," etc., the persons introduced are by no means taken from low or rustic life in the common acceptation of those words; and it is not less clear that the sentiments and language, as far as they can be conceived to have been really transferred from the minds and conversation of such persons are attributable to causes and circumstance not necessarily connected with their occupations or abode. The thoughts, feelings, language, and manners of the shepherd-farmers in the vales of Cumberland and Westmoreland, as far as they are actually adopted in those poems, may be accounted for from causes, which will and do produce the same results in every state of life, whether in town or country....On the other hand, in the poems which are pitched at a lower note, as the "Harry Gill", "The Idiot Boy", the feelings are those of human nature in general; though the poet has judiciously laid the scene in the country, in order to place himself in the vicinity of interesting images, without the necessity of ascribing a sentimental perception of their beauty to the persons of his drama.[20]

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20 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria" Anthology of Romanticism, ed. Ernest Bernbaum (New York, 1948), p. 338.

Toward the end of Biographia Literaria, Coleridge talked about the real value of Wordsworth's poetry as it was known to him:

> Last and preeminently, I challenge for this poet the gift of imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word. In the play of fancy, Wordsworth, to my feelings, is not always graceful, and sometimes recondite. The likeness is occasionally too strange, or demands too peculiar a point of view, or is such as appears the creature of predetermined research, rather than spontaneous presentation. Indeed his fancy seldom displays itself as mere and unmodified fancy. But in imaginative power he stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own....His fame belongs to another age, and can neither be accelerated nor retarded. How small the proportion of the defects are to the beauties, I have repeatedly declared; and that no one of them originates in deficiency of poetic genius. Had they been more and greater, I should still, as a friend to his literary character in the present age consider an analytic display of them as pure gain; if only it removed, as surely to all reflecting minds even the foregoing analysis must have removed, the strange mistake, so slightly grounded, yet so widely and industriously propogated of Mr. Wordsworth's turn for simplicity! I am not half as much irritated by hearing his enemies abuse him for vulgarity of style, subject, and conception, as I am disgusted with the gilded affected admirers, with whom he is forsooth, a sweet simple poet![21]

Coleridge did not attack Wordsworth with the bitterness of Hazlitt in his earlier criticism. His friendliness of tone,

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[21] Ibid., p. 368.

most likely, caused many readers unsuspectingly to form their opinions from Coleridge while overlooking the alienation of spirit that had subtly altered the aspect of what Coleridge wrote. The impression that Biographia Literaria gave of Wordsworth was disappointing. Coleridge is the one person that could have given an interpretation of Wordsworth, the poet, because of their once intimate understanding and oneness of mind.

Although Thomas DeQuincey was an early acquaintance of Wordsworth's, his criticism came late. In September 1845, he published in Tait's Magazine, an essay of Wordsworth's poetry.[22] He reopened the old problem of Wordsworth's diction and subjects. Of the former, he concluded, as did Coleridge before him, that had Wordsworth not brought forward a theory of diction in his early Prefaces, no issue would have been raised by the poetry itself in the minds of either critics or readers. DeQuincey agrees that at the time of Lyrical Ballads bad taste in the language of poetry was prevalent, but he points out that Wordsworth's experiment in purity of diction, in the use of the language of ordinary life, was nothing new.

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[22] James Venable Logan, Wordsworthian Criticism (Columbia, 1947) p. 42.

> Spenser, Shakespeare, the Bible of 1611, and Milton-how say you, William Wordsworth are these sound and true as to diction, or are they not? If you say they are, then what is it that your are proposing to change? What room for a revolution?....If the leading classics of the English Literature are in quality of diction and style, loyal to the canons of good taste-then you cut away the locus standi for yourself as a reformer: the reformation applies only to secondary and recent abuses.[23]

DeQuincey seemed unaware that Wordsworth was not trying to revolutionize English poetry but was returning to the true and native style of the language.

In spite of the dogmatic journalism and personal partisanship, Wordsworth was an influence on the thought and poetry of his day. This evidenced by Keat's references to Wordsworth in his letters. In a letter to Reynolds, dated May 3, 1818, Keats had this to say:

> ....Ihave nothing but surmises, from an uncertainty whether Miltons (sic) apparently less anxiety for Humanity proceeds from his seeing further or no than Wordsworth: And whether Wordsworth has in truth epic passion, and martyrs himself to the human heart, the main region of his song...I will return to Wordsworth whether or no he has an extended vision or a circumscribed grandeur-whether he is an eagle in his nest, or on the win...I will put down a simile of human life as far as I now perceive it; that is, to the point to which I say we both have arrived at. Well I compare human life to a large Mansion

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[23] Ibid., p. 42.

> of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us-we no sooner get into the secondChamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight. However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man-of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression-Where-by this chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open-but all dark-all leading to dark passages. We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a mist. We are now in that state-We feel the "burden of the Mystery"-To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote Tintern Abbey....Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton, though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect, than individual greatness of Mind.[24]

Victorian criticism did not have the bitterness or partisanship that characterized the best contemporary criticism of the poet. Most of the Victorians expressed approval of the

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[24] Ibid., p. 44. Derived from The Letters of John Keats, ed. M. B. Forman, (London, 1931).

theory expressed in the Prefaces. In regard to Wordsworth's statement that the language of common speech must be purified, David Masson said "This would leave us a very select language indeed, the sap and flower of all popular speech."[25] J. C. Shairp commented "Seeing truth and beauty in many things hitherto considered unfit for poetry, Wordsworth opened up vast tracts that had been lying waste and brought them into the domain of poetry."[26] Arthur Hugh Clough remarked that Wordsworth's theory, as directed not against style in general but against the prevalent vices of style, was useful perhaps, but his practice was far more meritorious."[27] Wordsworth achieved the harmony between thought and word, which Clough said is no light thing, for style is so much more than ornamental. The poetic eloquence of Wordsworth was pointed out by Swinburne. The poet, he said, at times achieved a music educed "from the simplest combinations of evidently spontaneous thought with apparently spontaneous expression."[28]

The final judges of any poet's real values are the body of cultivated readers including scholars and literary critics.

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[25] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

[28] Ibid., p. 62.

Literary critics during the nineteenth century were the natural guides for the public at large.[29] Wordsworth was pretty thoroughly estimated by many critics, especially Coleridge, and, though some did him no service by making him a builder of a system, on the whole the estimate was judicious.

It was the consciousness of a lofty and consecrated purpose in all he had written that enabled him to withstand the pitiless storm of abuse which beat upon his head, that made him tell his friends who became anxious about the future of his poems: "Trouble not yourself upon their present reception; of what moment is that compared with which I trust is their destiny?-to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and to feel, and, therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous."[30]

A very fine tribute was paid to Wordsworth by the American poet, James Russell Lowell. "Wordsworth has won for himself a secure immortality by a depth of intuition which makes only the best minds at their best hours worthy, or indeed capable, of his companionship, and by a homely sincerity

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[29]Douglas Bush, A Minority Report, p. 7.

[30]Andrew W. George, "Biographical Sketch," Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, Cambridge ed., p. x.

of sympathy which reaches the humblest ear. Our language owes him gratitude for the habitual purity and abstinence of his style, and we who speak it, for having emboldened us to take delight in simple things, and to trust ourselves to our own instincts."[31] It was in the summer of 1839 that Wordsworth was permitted to realize that for which he labored so assiduously and prayed so earnestly, when, by the foremost University of his land, he was honored as one of the chief glories of English poetry and the greatest name since Milton. Mr. Keble, the professor of poetry in the University, introduced him to the Vice Chancellor as being "one who has shed a celestial light upon the affections, the occupations and the piety of the poor."[32]

To most readers, Wordsworth had a special message concerning man and nature. Although his mature experience was a continuation of his childhood and his youth, it was not any spontaneous growth; it was a strong and conscious revolt against the scientific view of the world and man. In the century or more since Wordsworth died, science more than he could have ever anticipated has mechanized civilication and the heart of man and a good deal of modern poets and readers, but actually he means very little to a goodly number of them.[33]

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[31] Ibid., p. xxxviii.

[32] Ibid., p. x.

[33] Bush, Op. Cit., p. 9.

No one had ever praised Wordsworth more than Matthew Arnold, though he did not always understand him. However, no one either wrote more earnestly of the poet's healing power:

> He too upon a wintry clime
> Had fallen-on this iron time
> Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.
> He found us when the age had bound
> Our souls in its benumbing round;
> He spoke, and loosed our hearts in tears
> He laid us as we lay at birth
> On the cool flowery lap of earth;
> Smiles broke from us and we had ease.
> The hills were round us, and the breeze
> Went o'er the sunlit fields again:
> Our foreheads felt the wind and rain
> Our youth return'd: for there was shed
> On spirits that had long been dead,
> Spirits dried up and closely-furl'd
> The freshness of the early world.[34]

These lines, written in 1850, expressed what Arnold and his age owed to Wordsworth. Almost thirty years later, in the essay that prefaced his anthology, Arnold delivered the verdict that Wordsworth was and would remain the greatest English poet after Shakespeare and Milton and that he was superior to all modern continental poets, because the ample body of his poems, especially the many good short ones, were superior in power, in interest, in the qualities which give enduring freshness, to that which any of the others have left.[35] The memorial tribute quoted was an admission that the poet did not meet but withdrew

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[34]Bush, Ibid., p. 10. Derived from Matthew Arnold, Memorial Verses.

[35]Ibid., p. 12.

from the problems of the modern mind. Of course, Arnold was just one person, not an authority for the age. Wordsworth was no escapist and did not avert his eyes from human suffering, but fully recognized the common lot.

Professor Douglas Bush divided Wordsworth's good poetry into two kinds: one kind or group comprised some short poems in which nature is subordinate to humanity and in which there is little or no philosophizing. Of these "The Solitary Reaper" stood as a perfect example. Here the slightest of rural incidents which could have occured in any country in any age, is not artifically heightened but simply realized, with a power of verbal and rhythmical suggestion that is at once homely and rich, concrete, and magical. And to that he added some other pieces of similar timeless and "Commonplace Universality", such as the best of the "Lucy Poems." The second group which he praised most was Wordsworth's sonnets.[36]

In his lecture at the Cornell Centennary Celebration, Professor John Crowe Ransom had much praise for Wordsworth:

> Our poet was one of the giants. We can not say less, for Wordsworth did what Burns and Blake could not do: he reversed the direction of English poetry in a bad time and revitalized it. He was driven to a conception of poetry which was more radical, or thorough-going than that of any of his predecessors, but it justified itself

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[36] Ibid., p. 21.

> in his own poetic production. It is Wordsworth's innovations in the theory upon which I should like to offer some notes, as my tribute to the poet: in the theory, because he theorized as well as practised;and notes, because my impressions are speculative and imperfect, and in what has always been an area of speculation do not aspire anyway to be demonstrative.[37]

Mr. Ransom paid tribute to the innovations in poetic theory which were set forth in the Preface. Coleridge, he thought, could have said more for them than he did. There followed a revealing commentary, in terms of modern critical theory on the approach to experience and the poetic devices in which Wordsworth excelled. He admired, especially, the plain style of "Michael", "The Solitary Reaper", the Lucy poems, and "The Prelude".

When satirists and critics called Wordsworth's poems childish, they spoke the truth, although not in the sense which they gave to the word.[38] The poems are childish in their attempt to recapture the attitude of the child, to look at the world, as does the modern artist, through the unsophisticated

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[37]John Crowe Ransom, William Wodsworth: "Notes Toward An Understanding of Poetry", Wordsworth Centennary Studies Presented at Cornell and Princeton Universities (Princeton, 1951), p. 91.

[38]Raymond D. Havens, "Simplicity a Changing Concept", JHI (New York, 1953), p. 30.

eyes of childhood.[39] "The poet is one who carries the simplicity of childhood into the powers of manhood; who with a soul unsubdued by habit, unshackled by custom, contemplates all things with the freshness and wonder of childhood."[40] This definition of the poet, by Coleridge, is the spirit which these poems were intended to embody.

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[39] Ibid., p. 30.

[40] Ibid., p. 30.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

Wordsworth was a poet of reaction. Although he lived through one part of the Revolution and was a part of it, he rebelled against the attitude of life which it approved as he rebelled against the disillusionment and loss of hope which Revolutionary thought and action brought upon the world. At this point, Wordsworth's mature poetry began. He did not sink back into the old but looked forward into the future. The publication of The Lyrical Ballads was a reaction from what is known as the Artificial School of Dryden and Pope. By the authority of Shakespeare and Milton, he judged the practices in which the theorists and practitioners of artifical "Poetic Diction" indulged, and set out to classify the ideas of the time on poetic theory by calling attention to the main traditions of the English language, and by pointing out that any permanent and "philosophic" language must be based not on the mere authority of critics but on the real experiences of real people.

Most of the poems in the Lyrical Ballads deal with human characters and indicate the poet's attitude toward humanity. Among the personages represented are a neglected young

man of genius, a female vagrant, a little girl who insisted her dead brother and sister were alive, an outcast woman suspected of child murder, a poor shepherd who has lost his flock, a mad mother, an idiot boy, a very old man, and a forsaken Indian woman. He found in humble man an object of delight, of pure imagination, and love. He became convinced that formal education had little to do with real feeling and just sense, and that books which were judged by the wealthy few were misleading and debasing. He believed, however, that wherever grace and culture were utterly unknown, where oppression, poverty, and labor were in excess, love and truth could not thrive. He portrayed his characters in the simplest language, and in a very realistic manner. He used a speech born of the individual heart and not of conventional lips. There was no studied phrase making, no scholastic forms, nothing got up for effect. Instead, he used for his medium common, actual things.

One of Wordsworth's greatest merits lay in the treatment of these common, homely, and familiar themes. I think that he was aware of the fact that in the homes of the wealthy there were sorrows, patient virtues, tender ministries, sweet compassions, and strong, clean, sweet, and gentle souls. But of them poetry had always been mindful. It was full time, he

felt, that other sections of humanity should be so honored. The homes of the poor and unhonored had their brave, true, tender hearts, their treasures of modest, gentle, heroic virtues. Poetry written about the humble has this special advantage, that it strikes down deeper into the soul for being less supplied with the means of expression. Wordsworth did a great service for the rich as well as the poor, for he made them know that the poor may be as rich as they and even richer.

The story of "Michael", published after the Lyrical Ballads is one of Wordsworth's greatest achievements. It was a tragedy of broken hopes, the tale of a shepherd's loss of his only son. It especially illustrated the distinction that Wordsworth claimed for all of his poems-"the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling." The deepest affections, the incurable sorrow, the unconquerable spirit of the old man are the qualities which were the moving force of the poem. The simplest literary devices were used. The plain presentation without exaggeration of detail from Michael's family life made the hero and admirable one. "Resolution and Independence", often classified as a companion poem to "Michael", is another good example of Wordsworth's making the most of a slight, almost trivial incident. The old leechgatherer was presented in the most naked simplicity possible.

Regarding his theory of poetic diction, I have attempted to show that Wordsworth identified the real language of men and opposed it to the perversions of language which had been brought about by artificial poetic diction. The classicists had an inventory of words and phrases such as plain, everyday people never used. They believed this to be the only language for poetry. Wordsworth held that poetry was not and ought not to be made the creature of fashion, that it had its birth in the human heart, and that its domain was as broad and general, in every respect, as the source from which it sprang-the human heart. Then, too, he held that there was no essential difference between the language of prose and the language of poetry. He maintained that where the feelings and thoughts are the same in both, the language has a right to be the same also; apart from the conditions of metre and rhythm,neither the words nor the arrangement of them need to differ at all. Coleridge pointed out the weaknesses of Wordsworth's reasoning on the aesthetic side of poetry, but paid no attention to Wordsworth's explanation of the effect of metre by the principle of similitude in dissimilitude.

Wordsworth proved that language which differed from ordinary language became hardened into an artificial one and never was the real language of men in any situation. This

artificial and unreal language could never be the medium of the reality of life, contemplated by the imagination; only the real language of real men and real poets could express imaginative truth and reality.

The poet was aware that among the common people there are many individuals whose speech teems with phrases fit for use in either verse or prose. He meant simple people with their families, very tenacious of their ancestral acres and manners, of simple and homely tastes, yet intelligent and thoughtful, grave and sober livers with good habits and morals. The language of these people breaks from them spontaneously and is better for poetic use than those of the highly educated as it has more truth in it. Wordsworth's practice runs in accordance with the foregoing. In "Michael", and "We Are Seven", the language is so clear and simple that a child may understand it, yet so pure and true that the best minds could not fail to appreciate it. Usually, when his themes were common life, his diction was simple. When his thoughts were of another region, as in the great "Immortality Ode", the language was different.

Although there are close similarities between Wordsworth's treatment of peasants and shepherds and the idea of primitivism, I do not think that he thought of them as savages.

They both sprang from the same revulsion against corrupt society and preached the same gospel of innocent simplicity. The poems which dealt with primitivism showed an interest in the idea but they did not always reveal the primitive in a favorable light nor did all of them express Wordsworth's mature views. His interest in the idea of the noble savage stemmed from the fact that the savage was relieved of the artificial demands imposed by an unnatural society. Wordsworth used his primitives to illustrate such inspiring concepts as the golden age of man, the free and simple life of a Swiss canton, and the freedom and childlike spontaniety of the Indian whose life is contrasted favorably with that of city dwellers.

The chief sources of simplicity and power in Wordsworth's poetry are solitude, silence, and loneliness. His use of these terms was distinctive, as he ordinarily applied them to natural objects, rarely to states of mind, and almost always employed them to suggest something that was desirable. He showed that lonely places where one could think through one's troubles had restorative powers.

Though Wordsworth's style is sometimes a little heavy and cumbrous, one could never call it ornate. He always sought for pure, intelligible English. Sometimes his style is so pure, so simple, so penetrating, and of such perfect transparency

as to cheat the sense; it causes you to see nothing but the thought it enshrines. "The Highland Girl", "Stepping Westward", and "The Solitary Reaper" are good examples.

Wordsworth's poetry, with all of its beauty and sweetness of tone, has a firm basis of realism. He showed that the finest of poetry could be extracted out of things very close to us and always in our sight. The impulses and the materials of his work are drawn from the common realities of nature and man. He thought the poet's business was to exalt the real rather than to attempt to realize the ideal. His loftiest poetry had a fusion of the lowly and a pulsing of real human blood. Even when its form was most radiant with celestial light, still it breathed an odor of fact, and homelike fragrance of earth. To him, the poetic expressed the inner heart of man, the deepest secrets of the human mind, the responses of heart and mind to nature. He worked toward this end because he believed that poetry can be a true thing. His method was to look steadily at the object. He watched intently the surfaces of things so as to read their inner meaning and listened to the words of simple people, beggars, children, rustics, even idiots to draw from them hints and signs of ultimate truths.

Beyond all poets, Wordsworth is the poet of the home. He loved to be at home with the ideas and emotions of simple minded people and to voice the poetry that dwelt in them. He found meanings and interest in plain, common, homefelt realities lying right about his path.

Wordsworth achieved simplicity in his treatment of the simple affections. Among these simple affections of human nature is the love that a mother has for her children. "The Forsaken Indian Woman," "The Idiot Boy," "The Mad Mother," and "The Thorn" are good representatives. Fatherly love is expressed in "Two April Mornings," and "The Fountain" and fraternal love in "The Brothers." A number of other poems were directed toward the assertion of some all-important thing in humanity. The poems "The Last of the Flock" and "Michael" are poems based on the love of property. The first is a very simple situation: the man has fallen into poverty and has lost his manliness; he "weeps on the public roads alone!" In "Michael" the property involved is landed property, and because with this love of property is united love for his son, Luke, the two loves strengthened each other, and in the end the love of property sustained him after the son left.

The account of the Wanderer's life in the <u>Excursion</u> restated the theme expressed earlier in the "Preface", namely,

that "In Humble and rustic life, the essential passions of the hear find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity ...speak a plainer and more emphatic language and are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature."

> From his native hills
> He wandered far; much did he see of men,
> Their manners, their enjoyments, and pursuits
> Their passions and their feelings, chiefly those
> Essential and eternal in the heart,
> That mid the simpler forms of rural life,
> Exist more simple in their elements,
> And speak a plainer language.[1]

Wordsworth's ideal of human character may be said to culminate in this, that the simplicity of the child should be kept by the mature man or should be regained by meditation and choice. I think that he best summed up this idea in this little poem:

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky;
> So was it when my life began;
> So be it when I shall grow old,
> Or let me die!
> The child is father of the Man;
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety.[2]

Critics have mocked at, over emphasized, and misunderstood Wordsworth's simplicity. But it lies at the very core

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[1]Works, p. 427.

[2]Works, p. 277.

of his art. He sought and tried to express the truth with the least possible deviation. In all his artistic experiments, his salvation lay in the integrity of his imagination and in his single minded devotion to what he knew within:

> Love had he found where poor men lie;
> His daily teachers had been rocks and rills,
> The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills.[3]

The Prelude reconstructs the real basis of the grounds on which Wordsworth felt impelled to select themes from rustic life in his poetry. The peasants and dalesmen had already stood glorified and transfigured to the childish imagination of the poet because of the sublime background of Nature against which their life is placed. The spiritual value of rustic life was doubly endearing to him on his emergence from the abyss of despair into which he was plunged on the failure of his revolutionary dreams. At a time when he had lost all faith in human nature, rustic life was revealed to him as a welcome refutation of his morbid and pessimistic fancies and as a happy confirmation of his faith in the innate nobility and dignity of man, even in his lower grades. He had wandered to eternal truth and he indicated this way. It is the story of his soul's adjustment in a changing age. He began with the French

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[3]Works, p. 360.

Revolution and recoiled from it when he saw where it led; he had the singular fortune of being in France from 1790 to 1792 and to become so deeply involved in it as to be a part of it. His message here seems to be that when the life of the mind draws its sustenance from reality, through childhood, youth, and maturity, the mind develops towards Truth, Reason, and Imagination. Despair and loss of hope and faith in life come to those who build on the foundations of other people's opinions.

In the Thirteenth Book of The Prelude, he showed from what depths of his soul came the light that transfigured for him the face of rustic life:

> When I began to inquire,
> To watch and question those I met, and speak
> Without reserve to them, the lonely roads
> Were open Schools in which I daily read
> With most delight the passions of mankind,
> Whether by words, looks, sighs, or tears, revealed:
> There saw into the depth of human souls,
> Souls that appear to have no depth at all
> To careless eyes.[4]

In Wordsworth's poetry, there is a deep concern for the life of humbleness and quiet, a search for peace, a sense of the burdens of this life. There is a belief that the bonds of society ought to be inner and habitual, not merely external

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[4] Works, p. 214.

and formal.[5] There is the consciousness of the neighbor, his impulse to bring into the circle of significant life those who are simple and outside the circle of social pride, and also those who, in the judgment of the world, are queer and strange and useless.

This, then, is a study of what lay at the core of Wordsworth's thought-simplicity. Poets before him had stressed the importance of a poet's need for strong feeling, have felt the need for solitude, silence, and loneliness, have distrusted reason, have known the value of the imagination, have known that there was virtue in the simple life and simple living. But these poets did not attach to these ideas the importance and significance that Wordsworth gave to them; it remains for him to explain them in their most pure and profound form.

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[5]Lionel Trilling, "Wordsworth and the Iron Time", Wordsworth Centennary Studies (Princeton, 1951), p. 132.

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