

SAD RELICKS AND APT ADMONISHMENTS:  
WORDSWORTH'S DEPICTION OF THE POOR IN HIS WORK DATING FROM THE  
1790s TO 1807

by

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## ABSTRACT

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The aim of this thesis is to show, by means of a chronological study of poverty as treated in the poetry dating from the early 1790s to 1807, that Wordsworth's treatment of this topic was both highly politicized and unusually probing. To look at his treatment of poverty is also to gain some understanding of his changing political and social views over these years.

He began writing about poverty and the poor in a period in which picturesque and/or sentimental ways of viewing poverty alternated with moralistically judgemental ways. His approach and attitudes are soon seen to be different. After a period of fervent protest at the very existence of poverty, he proceeds to probe the more hidden costs, to the indigent, of poverty, an approach which is less overtly polemical. This study seeks to demonstrate that this stage is no less committed and, indeed, comprises an insightful analysis of the social and psychological damage consequent on poverty, damage now widely recognised as one of the major costs of poverty both to the individual and to the state.

Furthermore, Wordsworth becomes concerned with the alienation both from the self and from the other consequent on poverty. It is this that he recognises as a major, yet rarely acknowledged, component of poverty. He recognises, too, his increasing inability to understand the impoverished other. Conscious of the divide that separates the privileged from the indigent, he can only wonder at, and acknowledge, the powers of endurance of which some seem capable. From such examples he, in his precarious vocation of poet, can learn much. Such admiration of the resolution and independence apparent in some of the indigent leads him to espouse values and judgements which tend to differentiate clearly between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Although such attitudes become increasingly

prevalent in Wordsworth after 1807, the work of the preceding years remains a rare, forceful and multi-dimensional cry of protest against poverty.

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## PREFACE

I have followed the stylistic conventions set down by The MLA Style Manual (1985 edition).

When quoting lines of poetry I have merely given the line numbers (omitting the word "line") except where confusion might arise with page references.

I have not always given specific references for historical events which might be assumed to be generally familiar. Such general historical information has been garnered from C.B. Cone The English Jacobins and Albert Goodwin The Friends of Liberty.

The following points should be noted with reference to the Bibliography:

The Bibliography is made up of the works cited in the text.

Under Primary Sources I have placed all the material emanating from the 18th - 19th century period even where the material has been edited in this century.

When referring in the body of my text to particular works by William Wordsworth, I refer to the edition of those works under the editor's name only, although the bibliographic details appear under Wordsworth. In all other cases in my text I have indicated author and editor (e.g. Cowper:Spiller). Again, the entry will appear in the Bibliography under the original writer's name (e.g. Cowper).

References to the Letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth are taken almost wholly from the de Selincourt edition, the volumes being differentiated in the text by the titles Early Letters, Middle Years, or Later Years, and the appropriate volume number. I have used Alan G. Hill's revised edition on only two occasions and have indicated this by reference to Hill and the specific volume number.

References to the Prose works of William Wordsworth are taken primarily from the two volume Owen and Smyser edition and, where necessary from A.D. Grosart's three volume edition. The one exception is that all references to the Preface of Lyrical Ballads are taken from Butler and Green's edition of Lyrical Ballads. I have, of course, indicated these differing sources in

the references.

The phrase used in the title of my thesis, "sad relicks and apt admonishments", is a linking together of two phrases from Wordsworth's writings. From the Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff I have taken "sad relicks", and "apt admonishments" is the pluralized form of a phrase from "Resolution and Independence". The intention is to convey, in brief, two of the ways in which Wordsworth regarded the poor and which frame the period covered in this study. The 1807 version of "Resolution and Independence" reads "strong admonishment" but I have chosen the 1815 epithet "apt" as more euphonious and more appropriate to the study itself.

I formally declare that this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work. I would like to acknowledge and thank my supervisor, Dr Donald Beale, for his encouragement, committed interest and expert guidance.

Since, as I have been reminded, a thesis in submission is really an examination script, my personal expressions of thanks due to colleagues, friends and family are best reserved for another time and another place.

## INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth's poems which focus on the poor arise from a period when poverty was a major political issue. They are written by a man who thought seriously about social problems and showed a repeated interest in the problem of poverty. There were numerous conflicting voices arguing the merits and demerits of the poor and the reasons for their seemingly greater numbers or at least their greater visibility. Poverty was not a neutral issue - depictions of the poor cannot be seen in a neutral light.

I firmly believe with the new historicist critics that literature is part of history, that it is a social practice, that our reading is enriched by a knowledge of the political beliefs of writers who were engaged with the political issues of their time and by an understanding of the social experience which helped to form those political beliefs. Like Raymond Williams, I believe that there is a fundamental error in declaring an arbitrary distance between acts of writing and other kinds of human action, that one ought to be alert to the "social context of utterance" and that often the relations between actual writing and actual historical events and conditions are interesting and important (Williams, Introduction to *Sales*, *passim*). More specifically, I acknowledge Jean Howard's dictum that "rather than passively reflecting an external reality, literature is an agent in constructing a culture's sense of reality", that literature does not merely reflect a context but that it is "traversed by - and produces - the ideologies of its time" (*"New Historicism"* 25, 30). One might well note in this context the words of Robert Bloomfield, the Suffolk labourer-poet, who, planning a poetic come-back in 1814 after the success of his earlier work, *"The Farmer's Boy"*, wrote:

I sometimes dream that I shall one day  
venture again before the public, something  
in my old manner, some country tales, and  
spiced with love and courtship might yet

please, for Rural life by the art of cooking  
may be made a relishing and high flavoured  
dish, whatever it may be in reality.

(qtd.in Sales 19)

The insight that landscapes are not "merely innocent 'representations' of nature, but reflections of political and social ideologies" is noted by Andrew Graham-Dixon as being the contribution of John Barrell in Barrell's studies of painters like Gainsborough, Morland, and Constable (Listener 23 Oct. 1986: 23). It is Barrell's work, particularly on Constable, which has fired my interest in Wordsworth. Barrell emphasizes the hidden politics of the ideal of harmony with nature, and of the tendency to depict, as natural, conditions which have a specific social and political basis. In the paintings he studies, he notes the attempts to naturalize, to distance, to dehumanize, and to render abstract, the particularities of a world in which the social and economic relations were by no means idyllic. Partly this tendency arises from eighteenth-century notions of fidelity to nature. We read in Reynolds's Discourses that this proper fidelity to nature can be achieved only by abstraction from particulars (53, 61). Transient and contingent details, particularity of detail, are avoided, for the conditions are viewed as timeless and natural.

The tendency to view particular historical conditions as timeless and natural can be deeply problematic. When Roland Barthes attacked the Family of Man photographic exhibition, he did so on the grounds that to show the universality of human actions, what we all share - birth, death, work - to depict, in fact, a "family of man", to concentrate on a human essence, is to verge on the merely sentimental, given the other known facts that show, on the contrary, the differences between persons and conditions (Mythologies 100-02). Life is oversimplified, the wrong type of consensus is promoted. Barthes was disturbed that the consolatory function of such an exhibition tends to make us forget, or prevents us from becoming aware of, the injustices. In Wordsworth one can see a movement, over the years, from a



focus on the particular conditions and experiences that separate us to a focus on the universal human heart which we all share. This latter focus has often been judged as demonstrative of Wordsworth's anti-elitism but it can also, more problematically, point to the ignoring of serious inequalities.

It is in the light of Barrell's points about the hidden ideologies of naturalizing, universalizing, harmonizing tendencies that I feel one can look again at Wordsworth's treatment of the labouring poor and the vagrant poor.

What Barrell has said about Constable, in his seminal study, The Dark Side of the Landscape, can alert one to ways of looking at Wordsworth. Barrell talks about the "distance between himself [Constable] and the figures in his landscapes" and of the necessity to maintain that distance in order to depict the harmonious relationship of worker and land (156). He indicates, in landscape painting,

the romantic image of harmony with nature  
whereby the labourers were merged as far  
as possible with their surroundings, too  
far away from us for the questions about  
how contented or how ragged they were to  
arise.

(16)

Ideas like this might profitably engage our minds when re-reading "The Solitary Reaper", a poem that has often been thought to transcend such socio-political questions. Or again, when Barrell concludes that "we should look twice at a notion of nature by which it seems 'natural' that some men should work while others do not" (16), we can perhaps reconsider the poem known as "Point Rash-Judgement" where the speaker feels "self-reproach" and "admonishment" at the rash judgement made about the apparent "idleness" of the sick man, while not questioning the distinction between the three sauntering friends and the reapers whose "busy mirth" they delight in. Or, finally, when Barrell notes that "the more the figures in Constable's landscapes seem to be part of

them, the more the image of man in harmony with nature is of an automaton...dehumanized and naturalised" rather than of a human being (157), one might reconsider the Old Cumberland Beggar. To ask such questions of Wordsworth's poems is to enrich them. As David Norbrook has written, "poems of the past are part of a long, important and frequently vehement dialogue rather than a serene succession of transcendent masterpieces" (London Review of Books 5 June 1986: 8). To blot out the living social moment of production in order to stress the "universal" or "timeless" idea of the poem, is to ignore the fact that Wordsworth's poems and their languages are, in David Simpson's words, "permeated by and created within the social and political debates of their time" ("What Bothered" 589). Simpson vehemently argues that many of Wordsworth's poems demand the kind of attention that critics usually prefer to leave to historians or sociologists (605). To ask questions about the socio-historical experience from which a literary work derives is enormously valuable, most especially when there is a tendency, identified by Marlon Ross among others, for "the Romantic poet" to attempt to "dissolve and distort the concrete socio-historical relations...that actually constitute his experience" (Ross "Naturalizing Gender" 391). Ross sees Wordsworth as having a particular tendency to transform "culturally fabricated status (a socio-historical fact) into a natural and essential place (a transcendent idea)" (391).

It is undoubtedly the case that, since the late 1970s, there has developed a marked tendency to read Wordsworth with close attention to the political dimensions of his poetry, particularly the poetry of the earlier years. This interest has become a dominant one in major studies throughout the 1980s. Although it has long been acknowledged that Wordsworth succumbed to growing political conservatism after 1799, few critics before Friedman in The Making of a Tory Humanist (1979) read Wordsworth's poems politically. For example, F.M. Todd in Politics and the Poet (1957), although focusing on general political issues relating to Wordsworth, did not read specific poems in a politicized way. John Beer, in Wordsworth and the Human Heart (1978), argued that

Wordsworth was working towards the idea that "we have all of us one human heart". Although Beer discusses all the significant poems which focus on a poverty-stricken subject, his sensitive readings of the poems are totally apolitical. Such readings now seem unusual for, since 1978, the approach has changed utterly. Almost every year has produced a major study of Wordsworth which takes cognizance of the social and political context, seeing this as a major dimension of the poetry. Peter Manning writes: "If poems may be shrunk when reduced to their biographical elements, they are equally - if less obviously - impoverished when cut off from the circumstances of their engendering" (257). I have been profoundly influenced by the following critics even when I have not referred to them directly in this study - Averill (1980), McGann (1983), Glen (1983), Bialostosky (1984), Chandler (1984), Thorslev (1984), Rzepka (1986), Turner (1986), Simpson (1987), Kelley (1988), Roe (1988), John Williams (1989), Liu (1989), Jacobus (1989), and Manning (1990). All of these writers emphasise the value of a politicized reading.

In this study I have attempted a close and chronological study of Wordsworth's treatment of the poor. Although some of my readings differ in greater or smaller ways from those of preceding critics, my main interest has been to trace Wordsworth's changing attitude during the 1790s up until 1807. Although the fact that his attitude changed has seldom been denied, how it changed has been a continuing matter of debate. This study will attempt to show that, after an initially conventional treatment of the poor subject, not all that dissimilar to those of the preceding decades, Wordsworth progressed to a highly politicized and committed advocacy of the cause of the poor, which paralleled his intense radicalism of the years 1792-5. Thereafter, it seems that Wordsworth became increasingly interested in the more hidden but no less damaging effects of poverty on the mental and emotional well-being of the impoverished. I argue that this stage is no less politicized than the preceding stage. Although this might be judged merely a matter of emphasis, it is here that I differ from some of the major critical positions. For example, Nicholas Roe's Wordsworth

and Coleridge: The Radical Years (1988) is one of the most important of the recent politicized studies. Roe argues that the 1796-7 "Baker's Cart" fragment "has no political or social purpose comparable to Coleridge's lectures or to Wordsworth's own earlier poetry of protest" (136). What might hitherto have been "used for protest, now elicits no comment at all" (136). Roe further argues that this exemplifies Wordsworth's "development from poet of protest to poet of human suffering" (137). I would rather argue that this fragment, in its depiction of the mental and emotional costs of poverty as evidenced in the listless mother, is most undoubtedly a cry of protest on Wordsworth's part. (See Chapter 5 below). If poverty erodes the mind and spirit, then its insidious consequences far outweigh the mere visible deprivation for long recognised and deplored by radical and sentimentalist alike. Wordsworth was one of the few poets of the period to devote serious and prolonged attention to the subtle as well as the overt consequences of indigence.

The final years covered in this study (1799-1807) reveal yet another change. Having focused on the less visible consequences of deprivation, Wordsworth begins to highlight the ability that some appear to have of surviving the physical, mental and emotional assaults of deprivation. He increasingly sees such persons as examples for all who face or live with uncertainty and, more personally, for himself as a poet. As he encounters the impoverished "other", he is forced into asking questions about his relation to that "other". The potentially troubled nature of this unequal relationship is gradually submerged in the analysis of the gains to the poet from the encounter. This change of focus is part of a more complacent belief in the ability of the individual to survive and of society to deal with the problems of indigence particularly by helping those who show signs of wanting to help themselves. Thus he slips into the conventional tendency of the privileged to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor with the concomitant premise that the poor are always with us. This crude outline of Wordsworth's process of change does not in any way convey the subtle shifts of emphasis and the myriad factors, political, social and

psychological, which might possibly explain his changing views. It is the intention of this dissertation to work towards such an explanation and thereby achieve, perhaps, a deeper understanding of Wordsworth and some of his work.

Jean Howard remarks that "the interpreter and his/her historical moment are present in their interpretations of earlier literary works", that our views are always informed by our present positions, and that current revivals of interest may have to do with current concerns (21, 22, 27). I am well aware of this. In studying Wordsworth's presentation of the poor in the work of the 1790s, I have been constantly struck by the parallels between Wordsworth's England and the recent history of South Africa. In both, an increasingly vociferous and unenfranchised majority was, for the first time, seen as a serious threat to existing institutions and ways of life. Many middle-class intellectuals in the 1790s found themselves in opposition to a government waging war with France and passing increasingly repressive measures against its own people. Despite their profound love for their country, these middle-class intellectuals were often branded as unpatriotic. Increasingly aware of the growing politicization of the unenfranchised masses, they recognized the need for radical changes in the structure of their society if only to avoid the consequences of violent revolution. Often pacifist at heart, they were faced with the dilemma of the need for violent measures in the face of an intransigent government. Often they found it hard to resist a paternalistic attitude to the people whose cause they were advocating. They grappled with major problems of poverty. Often recognizing the inadequacies of humanitarian aid, they still generally shied away from the radical redistribution of land and resources which alone could solve the growing economic problems. When polarization became more marked, when the people began to reject the cautious measures of the liberal approach and assert their own ability to organize themselves and advance their own cause, many - Wordsworth among them - took fright and retreated into support of the status quo. The parallels with the South African experience of the last few years are striking and perhaps they

may aid both understanding and empathy.

## CHAPTER ONE.

## POVERTY, AND THE DEBATE ON POVERTY, IN THE 1790s.

The Philosopher: The causes of a lot of tragedies lie outside the power of those who suffer them, so it seems.

The Dramaturg: So it seems?

The Philosopher: Of course it only seems. Nothing human can possibly lie outside the powers of humanity, and such tragedies have human causes.

(Brecht, Messingkauf Dialogues 1937-40)

But poverty with most who whimper forth  
Their long complaints, is self inflicted woe,  
Th'effect of laziness or sottish waste.

(Cowper, The Task: "The Winter Evening" 1785)

But Providence...hath contrived that, whilst  
fortunes are only for a few, the rest of  
mankind can be happy without them.

(William Paley, Reasons for Contentment 1793)

Pity would be no more

If we did not make somebody Poor.

(Blake, "The Human Abstract" 1794)

In the 1790s an unprecedented combination of factors - economic, political, social, ideological, religious - resulted in the issue of poverty assuming a prominent place in parliamentary debates, monographs, pamphlets, philosophical treatises, art and literature.

During the final decade of the eighteenth century there was both an actual and a perceived change in attitudes to the poor.



Many scholars have emphasised this, most recently E.P. Thompson in Customs in Common, who writes of paternalism being at a point of crisis (42). In an earlier work, he has analyzed the ways in which the gentry during the 1790s "lost their self-assured cultural hegemony", a hegemony which was effectively imposed until that decade ("Eighteenth-century" 165). Long-standing traditions of caring, albeit paternalistic, concern for those in need were increasingly eroded by changing economic conditions. International events coincided with domestic economic changes to ensure that the financially and socially privileged viewed the great mass of labouring poor and the unemployed as the enemy within, a distinct threat to the existing order. Frances, Lady Shelley, in her Diary covering the years 1787-1817 writes: "the awakening of the labouring classes after the first shocks of the French Revolution, made the upper classes tremble" (8-9). Although changes in social relations have been recognised as occurring as far back as the seventeenth century when open-house hospitality, as celebrated in Jonson's "To Penshurst", was already "an isolated and dwindling practice" (Turner, Politics of Landscape 143), there is no doubt that class estrangement increased from the mid-eighteenth century. For all its very real faults, the old Poor Law allowed for a relatively humane interaction and consequent mutual respect between benefactor and suppliant. However, Thompson rightly questions "the old pretences of paternalism and deference" (Customs 95), for it is also likely that such practices reinforced the divisions in society by rendering them "benign...and apparently natural" (Turner, Politics of Landscape 144). In the 1790s, the old was dying, the new was yet to be born, with all the concomitant pains accompanying change.

Much debate has centred around the timing and extent of the so-called agricultural and industrial revolutions. However complex the reality to which these terms refer, it is certain that, during the late eighteenth century, both agricultural and industrial factors exacerbated the conditions leading to short-term distress, whatever the long-term advantages might have been for the English economy. The transformation from a predominantly



agricultural to an increasingly industrial economy was probably the most crucial factor of this period. Landownership, however, still equalled power, and to be without property was to be both socially and politically disempowered. Fewer and fewer owned more and more of the land. Two major contemporary factors which contributed to change in long-established agricultural traditions were the increasing conversion of arable land into pasture and the enclosures of common land. Both contributed to economic hardships for those living on the knife edge of destitution, often a quite literal condition. Irvin Ehrenpreis, for example, cites the documented case of a family who were kept from starvation by a margin of approximately 2/6 per year (33). The increased demand for dairy products led to the increase in pasture over arable lands with consequent reduction of immediate employment. The arable lands were also under threat from industrial enterprise. Alan Booth has noted how "cotton weavers" (presumably the factory owners) in Lancashire leased formerly agricultural land at enormous costs (85). Grain production declined as demand for it increased, and counties like Cheshire, hitherto self-sufficient, had to import grain from Shropshire (85). Higher prices spelt hardships, and prices rose still further when disastrous weather conditions during 1794-5 and 1798-9 led to actual famine. Increasing capitalist enterprise during these years saw the rise of a new entrepreneur in the corn trade - the retailer: "The grain passes from the flourman to the retailer, before it comes in flour into the hands of the consumer" (Robert Barker to Home Office, Nov. 1800, qtd. in Booth 92). Once again the major losers would be those on the margins of existence.

The debate as to whether enclosures were a positive or a negative force has swung back and forth since the Hammond's claim in The Village Labourer that enclosures were harmful to the wellbeing of the poor. Recent studies have assessed the conflicting arguments and the consensus seems to be that owner-occupiers did decline in numbers and about one in four or five of the rural population was affected. Enclosures probably did lead to improved farming methods and to increased job

opportunities in the long term. However it is not surprising that twentieth century scholars disagree, for the effects of enclosure were certainly not clear-cut even to contemporaries. The immediate perceptions seem to have been that enclosures worked against the cottager by increasing rents and reducing job opportunities, as well as removing the right to the commons which was all the land available to the majority of rural labourers (Beckett, *passim*). Certainly there are numerous emotional accounts of hardships suffered and anger vented. E.P. Thompson, who has strongly opposed the anti-Hammond school, quotes extensive contemporary accounts that reveal the unhappiness caused by enclosures. In Sheffield, for instance, in 1791 there was

a massive and very violent dispute following the passage of a private act to enclose six thousand acres of common and waste adjacent to the town, compensating the poor with two acres only....the enclosure commissioners were mobbed; the debtors' gaol was broken open and the prisoners released; there were cries of 'No King!' and 'No Taxes!'

(Customs 125)

Numerous contemporary petitions argued that enclosures removed a valuable means of livelihood from those with no capital or security:

provided the said common be enclosed, many hundreds of poor inhabitants in the said parish will be reduced to distress; as they will be deprived of their present

benefit of rearing horned cattle, pigs etc. and furnishing themselves with fuel in the winter, etc., and the consequences will be immediately felt by the parish at large by the increase of the poors [sic] rates, the breaking and carrying away hedges and other petty larcenies, that the distresses of the poor will reduce them to; and which is and must always be experienced where the poor have not commons and wood lands to assist them.

(Anon. 1785, qtd. in Snell 179)

It was an undoubted fact that enclosures led to a reliance on wage labour. The same anonymous writer comments:

The wife's management of the live stock, [sic] together with the earnings of herself and her children in hay time and harvest, etc, produce nearly as much money in the course of the year, as her husband by all his labour during the same time. How would this class be provided for if the commons were ploughed up?

(Snell 212)

It has frequently been proved how important an "informal sector" - access to wood, water, commonage, grazing for donkeys - is for the survival of the poor.

Other contemporary writers (notably not from the class affected) claimed that enclosures were beneficial. It was argued that they led to increased productivity which in turn led to demand for more labour. Eden, in his Preface to The State of the Poor (1797), argued that "commons and wastes" would give better returns were they to be properly "enclosed and taken care of" by the landowners whose property they undoubtedly were (1: xix).

However, Snell argues that to ignore the hidden costs, as the "cost-benefit" historiography does, is to ignore the ways in which access to land allowed the really poor a modicum of independence and a supplement to diet. His study notes, too, that enclosures, perceived as detrimental by the poor, added to class tensions and aided in the criminalization of the poor (Snell 224). What a paradox it was that enclosures of the commons did lead to an increase in crime and to the heightening of class tensions because some were firmly convinced that it was access to land by the poor which constituted a threat to national security. Arthur Young wrote in 1791:

I know nothing better calculated to fill  
a country with barbarians ready for any  
mischief than extensive commons and divine  
service only once a month.

(qtd.in Bermingham 78)

It was Arthur Young, of course, who soon altered his opinions completely and came to deplore the practice of enclosure and the hardships to which it gave rise. On the other hand, it is surprising, given the frequently held belief at the time not only that property was sacrosanct but also that a stake in the land ensured loyalty, that more and more were rendered completely landless and solely dependent on wage labour. As conservative a publication as the Anti-Jacobin, in a review of The Ninth Report of the Society for bettering the Condition, and increasing the Comforts, of the Poor, dated August 1799, comments:

We approve highly of the plan, adapted by  
Lord Carrington, of allotting to every  
cottager on his estate sufficient land  
to enable him to keep a cow; and we heartily  
wish it was generally adopted throughout the

kingdom. Its effect on the peasantry must be highly beneficial; as it tends to connect more firmly the links of the social chain; and to increase the attachment to home, which is the source of much individual comfort and of infinite public good. In short, while it betters the condition, it meliorates the mind of the poor.

(Anti-Jacobin 1799, 458-9)

For the most part, such policies were rarely pursued and the sanctity of property became merely a plea by the property owners in the face of possible threats from the hungry, landless masses. In The Best Use of Bad Times, or Friendly Hints to Manufacturers and Mechanics, on their present Distresses (1793), the author addresses those "struggling with the extremity of want":

I earnestly pray God you may continue to be honest and just in all your dealings; and to regard your neighbour's property as a sacred thing, which like the holy ark ought to be untouched.

(12)

The fears were not paranoid, for unemployment, the proven decline of real wages between 1780 and 1811, the strains on the poor relief system after 1780 (Snell 38, 109), the increase in class estrangement, all these did lead to an increase in the crime rate. Douglas Hay has studied the correlation between dearth and theft in the late eighteenth century which he categorises as a period

when the mercantile, industrial and landed

elites of England were pressing in many different areas to redefine and restrict the property rights of the poor, to make them more amenable to the disciplines of industrial capitalism, and to divide the recalcitrant plebeian communities into stigmatized criminals and acquiescent labouring poor.

(159)

Hay has noted how committals for petty theft increased during the periods of peace (especially between 1783 and 1793), how committals increased as prices rose, and how the numbers of women prosecuted increased during these periods (*passim*). Crimes were being committed by people who were not strictly-speaking criminals, for professional capital offences show no similar signs of fluctuation. Byron, in his maiden speech in the House of Lords in 1812, was one of the few contemporary commentators before the 1820s who made any connections between crime, unemployment and poverty. It was not until towards the end of the nineteenth century that poverty was seen as a contributory factor in crime although there had already been an acceptance that ill-paid clerks might be tempted to embezzle (Emsley, Crime and Society 49). William Godwin was, as always, unusual in the 1790s, in arguing that poverty is the most important source of crime: "the fruitful source of crimes consists in this circumstance, one man's possessing in abundance that of which another man is destitute" (Godwin:Salt 58). As late as 1826, only two M.P.s suggested a link between poverty and crime (Emsley, Crime and Society 54). More typical of the 1790s was Patrick Colquhoun who blamed luxurious living, the improvidence of the poor, and agitators, for the rise in crime (Emsley, Crime and Society 53). It was, however, rather the privileged who indulged in luxurious living and improvidence. Clifford Siskin notes how many late eighteenth-century visitors were astonished at the mobile wealth

evident in England (158). "The exuberant display of wealth in our shops was the sight which most amazed a learned foreigner of distinction who lately resided among us: his expression, I remember, was, that 'they seemed to be bursting with opulence into the streets'", wrote Burke in Letters on a Regicidal Peace in 1796 (Burke:Raffety 6: 307). Conspicuous consumption among the wealthy reached exceedingly high levels during this period. Scholars have calculated that between 1790 and 1820 country house building was at its peak (Cannadine 98). Estates were improved, gardens were landscaped, villages were relocated to improve the view from the Great House, and vast sums of money were expended on entertainment and personal indulgence both in the country and in London. In the 1790s, Lord Verulam spent approximately £1000 per year in London. During the years 1808 to 1810, the Duke of Northumberland was spending £10,000 per year (Beckett 367).

Perhaps Colquhoun's fear of agitators was more appropriate. Although the link was not as simplistic as he might suppose, there is no doubt that the poor were becoming increasingly politicized during the 1790s. Alan Booth has pointed out the ways in which food rioting became increasingly politicized, with greater organisation and planning as the decade progressed: "Henceforth the food riot became an integrated part of a wider conception of working-class protest" (107). As employment opportunities in rural areas declined, more and more flocked to the towns, enlarging the numbers of the urban poor who lived in more overtly squalid conditions of overcrowding and disease and who were freed from the unspoken social controls of village life. Often the first generation to have left their rural family network, they frequently became rootless and beholden to no one in the urban slums. Eden, in The State of the Poor, was not the only one who distinguished between the rural and the urban poor and infinitely preferred the former. For the rural poor tended to be less demanding and less easily assembled into threatening crowds, vociferous, angry and hungry. Poverty in the cramped conditions of a city is often more overtly squalid; a natural landscape often masks poverty's less aesthetic aspects, as the rage for the picturesque evocations of rural poverty attests.

With such discernible changes came the inevitable reaction from the privileged classes. Attention certainly began to be given to the problems of poverty, but perhaps it was mainly out of a pragmatic need to avert possible insubordination as the poor and unemployed became more voluble and visible. Throughout this decade lay the spectre of the French Revolution - and the example it gave of how insecure even the most long-established of institutions and traditions might be. Thompson sums up the change wrought by this crucial fact: "before the French Revolution the insubordination of the poor was inconvenient, now it was seen as menacing" ("Patrician Society" 387). Even such a mild-mannered man as Charles Lamb reveals the selfish fears which prompted concern:

It was never good times in England since the poor began to speculate upon their condition. Formerly they jogged on with as little reflection as horses. The whistling ploughman went cheek by jowl with his brother that neighed. Now the biped carries a box of phosphorus in his leather breeches.

(Lamb to Dyer, undated, qtd. in Thomas,  
Man and the Natural World 45-6)

Cannadine talks of legislation of "unique selfishness" (100) by means of which the privileged classes maintained their privileges and controlled the masses. The increase in capital offences was mainly for offences against property. Leon Radzinowicz has calculated that, between the Restoration and the death of George the Third, "the number of capital offences had increased by about one hundred and ninety" (1: 4-5). The high frequency of executions between 1750 and 1830 is fully attested to in a recent study by V.A.C. Gatrell. Countless acts were passed and clauses added which worked against the poor. The war against France was



also an ambivalent factor. Contemporary statements record that many of the poor knew from experience that war increased poverty whether by inflation or by actual physical disablement. Part of the national product was diverted to the procurement of armaments and to the payment of the army which consumes but does not produce. The Declaration of the Derby Society for Political Information which was printed in the Morning Chronicle on December 25, 1792 (some five weeks before the declaration of war) stated:

We view with concern the frequency of wars. We are persuaded that the interests of the poor can never be promoted by accession of territory....We are certain our present heavy burdens are owing, in a great measure, to cruel and impolitic wars, and therefore we will do all on our part, as peaceable citizens, who have the good of the community at heart, to enlighten each other, and protest against them.

(qtd.in Cone 226)

On the other hand, the war was openly admitted by the authorities to be a welcome means of removing the idle, dangerous poor. The press gang focused mainly on all those who had no lawful employment or calling (Hay 141). Patrick Colquhoun, writing to Dundas in January 1794, suggested that former legislation be revived to empower the state

to raise and levy able bodied idle, disorderly persons (who cannot upon examination prove themselves to exercise and industriously to pursue some lawful trade or employment, or to have some assistance sufficient for

their support and maintenance) to serve his Majesty as Soldiers.

The revival of such an Act...would be the means of ridding society of a vast number of idle, desolute [sic] and abandoned characters which the law cannot reach at present although they live chiefly by the commission of crimes; and from the natural reluctance constantly manifested by this class of people it is evident that nothing will either reclaim them or prevent them remaining as nuisances and pests in society but that species of coercion which the Act above-mentioned authorised.

(qtd. in Emsley, British Society 83)

So desperate were conditions that some did volunteer, but this was openly admitted to be a last resort. One of Coleridge's Notebook entries for 1795 reads: "People starved into War. - over an enlisting place in Bristol a quarter of Lamb and piece of Beef hung up" (1 n. 42). When the bodies of soldiers were "broken" (to use the chilling contemporary term) they returned to the ranks of the unemployed with even fewer chances of employment. Even then they were harried by legislation. In 1792 a clause in the Vagrancy Act of 1744, which permitted seamen and soldiers to beg, was repealed (Hay 140, footnote).

The fact of being at war with France allowed for draconian legislation to be passed, much of it designed to control the oppressed. The major Acts of the decade were Speenhamland in 1795, which pandered to the selfishness of employers, the Two Acts of that same year which banned gatherings and publications deemed seditious, and the Combination Act of 1799 (Goodwin 387, 454). Such legislation, coupled with the adverse economic conditions, the multiplication of nakedly aggressive capitalistic practices, slowly but surely eroded the old paternalistic relationship, and harshly exposed the relations between rich and poor to be disquietingly antagonistic. Years later, even

Coleridge commented on the appalling objectification of the poor:

But in truth and candor [sic] it should be said, that the Working Classes did not substitute Rights for Duties, and take the former into their guardianship, till the higher classes, their legitimate protectors, had subordinated Persons to Things, and systematically perverted the former into the latter.

(1832, qtd. in Brett, Coleridge 253-4)

A sensitive and perceptive observer, John Clare, describes the dark side of the English rural idyll thus in his Prefatory Note to The Parish (1823):

This poem was begun & finished under the pressure of heavy distress with embittered feelings under a state of anxiety & oppression almost amounting to slavery - when the prosperity of one class was founded on the adversity and distress of the other - The haughty demand by the master to his labourer was work for the little I chuse to allow [sic] you & go to the parish for the rest - or starve - to decline working under such advantages was next to offending a magistrate and no opportunity was lost in marking the insult by some unqualified [sic] oppression.

(27)

There were a number of attempts to grapple with the fact of poverty besides the increasingly stringent legislation prompted

by fear. The eighteenth-century quotations used as epigraphs to this chapter point to three contemporary ways of reacting to poverty - to view it either as foolishly self-inflicted, or as ordained by God and thus natural and immutable, or as the result of political practices which create and perpetuate poverty. These three major approaches, with some refinements within these broad categories, were to be found during the 1790s, although admittedly those who shared Blake's views were very rare.

If one shared the views of Bishop Watson who wrote The Wisdom and Goodness of God in having made both Rich and Poor (1793), then there was nothing really to do except perhaps one's Christian duty of charity and pity. If one felt that poverty was self-induced, then one might preach moral fortitude and distinguish clearly between the deserving and the undeserving poor, for some might have fallen into the abyss of destitution more through bad luck and bad management than through vice. The tiny minority who rejected Bentham's view that poverty was "the unchangeable lot of man" (qtd. in Harrison, "Wordsworth's 'The Old Cumberland Beggar'" 37) felt that poverty must be addressed by the state and positive discrimination practised. Not many of the privileged agreed with Paine that what was needed was a radical restructuring of society and ownership of land. He certainly had little middle-class support when he advocated a seminal welfare state in Part Two of Rights of Man (1792), or when, in 1797, he analyzed the structures which determine poverty in Agrarian Justice, itself a direct response to Bishop Watson.

Another source of debate was the legitimacy of formal intervention on the part of the state. Was it not more humane and better economics to follow a laissez-faire policy and thus be enabled to help on an individual rather than on a general and possibly inappropriate basis? For many, because it was natural for society to be ordered this way, interference by the state would be interference with nature (or God), and hence, in the long run, counter-productive if not actually blasphemous. The major divide lay between the proponents of laissez-faire and those who argued for legislation. The former generally opposed the existing Poor Law which was often seen to be a form of

institutionalized charity. On the other hand, the same people might strongly advocate voluntary charity, for few were opposed, as was William Godwin, to charity on principle as something which reduced independence and inculcated pride in the giver and servility in the recipient. Others argued for government-supported relief as a right but were critical of the existing Poor Law. What complicated this apparently clear-cut distinction between the laissez-faire and the interventionist approaches was that the motives or the ideology behind belief in a particular approach held by its advocates might vary markedly.

On reading the contributions to this debate, one soon notes the predominance of three words - independence, charity, relief. These words carried a multiplicity of implications and their definitions were extremely fluid. The way one defined or used these terms tended to reveal one's ideological position. At no time during this decade were these terms anything but heavily loaded.

The debate raged mainly around the need to reform the old Poor Law. In July 1797, in its "Half-yearly Retrospect of the State of Domestic Literature: Political Economy", the Monthly Magazine commented:

Although Mr Pitt's bill [1796] for the maintenance of the poor is generally disapproved, it has had its use in keeping the public attention awake to this important object, and in giving birth to several ingenious publications.

(480)

Certainly "ingenious" is the word for some of the plethora of pamphlets which issued from the press even before the Commons debate referred to. Sir Frederic Eden's bibliography (1797) lists 142 items published between 1788 and 1797 on poverty (Simpson, Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 167). The old Poor Law, which had worked reasonably well in the small cohesive parish, became increasingly inadequate with the greater demands made on it as

economic conditions deteriorated and society became more fragmented and the numbers of urban poor grew. Although it was becoming an unworkable law, one cannot help feeling that some of the criticisms against it stemmed from selfishness and greed as much as from the desire to rationalize its workings and make the relief of poverty more efficient. As Simpson notes: "extremes of hard-heartedness seem to have been more common than excesses of tenderness" (Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 167).

Perhaps one should first mention the arguments of those who advocated some kind of government-supported relief as a basic right for these were by far the smaller group. In 1796 Samuel Whitbread proposed a Bill which would require positive government action to fix a minimum wage which, as he hastily assured the House, did not imply that the price of labour would be determined by government, merely that labour should not fall beneath a certain wage level. He maintained that legislation was needed because wages were falling below prices, and to rely on charity was not only to destroy the independence of the labouring poor but was in itself problematic, "supplied perhaps from a precarious fund, and dealt with a reluctant hand" (English Historical Documents 418, henceforth referred to as Eng. Hist. Doc.). These proposals might seem relatively mild, but significantly the Bill was rejected without a division both in 1796 and when reintroduced in 1800 (Eng. Hist. Doc. 415). Powerful, and valid, economic arguments against minimum wages were based not only on interference with nature and the rights of people to negotiate freely, but on the hard truth that if an employer was not allowed to pay less than a certain amount and that employer felt that the labourer was not worth his or her hire, then the labourer would not be hired and would go hungry.

Thomas Paine also argued that legislation was needed to ensure the rights of the poor. The second part of Rights of Man was mainly concerned with the duties of governments, especially towards the most vulnerable. Although part of his argument about the need to address poverty appealed to the prudence of the rich, much of Part Two concentrated on the need for social justice. He recognised that poverty develops because

the poor have no access to land and no means of altering this situation. He rejected both the contemporary responses to poverty - voluntary charity as well as the involuntary poor relief that the Poor Law (increasingly inadequately) demanded from the members of the parish:

the first step of practical relief  
would be to abolish the poor-rates  
entirely, and in lieu thereof, to  
make a remission of taxes to the  
poor of double the amount of the  
present poor-rates....This support  
...is not of the nature of a charity  
but of a right.

(2: 485, 488)

Such ideas, as well as his advocacy of progressive taxation, went far to ensure the emotional rejection of Paine which is so marked a feature of 1790's polemic. Others, while not going as far as Paine, at least recognised the need for some legislation. George Rose, who was joint Secretary of the Treasury from 1783 to 1801, foresaw that denial of all assistance as a right would not take into account legitimate cases for relief. Charity was too unreliable a means and (here he reveals his basic conservatism) charity might be misapplied - the undeserving poor might benefit. However, some would need assistance, most particularly the aged (Eng.Hist.Doc. 426-430).

Prime Minister Pitt was one of a large group of influential commentators generally opposed to "legislative interference into that which ought to be allowed invariably to take its natural [sic] course" (Eng.Hist.Doc. 419). In his abortive attempts to reform the old Poor Law, he sensibly advocated the removal of a number of oppressive measures. He

argued against the Settlement Laws, in favour of relief in proportion to the number of children who themselves should be employed, and stressed that "parochial aid, administered by those who were intimately acquainted with" the situation was to be preferred to any general law (Enq. Hist. Doc. 419).

Laissez-faire was the chosen approach of Burke, Malthus, Bentham and Eden, to name only the major remaining participants in the debate. Most advocates of laissez-faire believed that poverty was natural, part of the plan of an all-wise Providence. God had planted the instinct or habit of pity in human nature,

and the final cause for which it is  
appointed is to afford to the miserable,  
in the compassion of their fellow-creatures,  
a remedy for those inequalities and distresses  
which God foresaw that many must be exposed to,  
under every general rule for the distribution  
of property.

(Paley, qtd.in Poynter 34)

Paley, in his Reasons for Contentment (1793), demonstrates over a number of paragraphs the various ways in which the poor are actually at an advantage over the rich (7-14). Burke agrees that the existence of the poor is inevitable. He rejects the "puling jargon" that coined the phrase "labouring poor" and reserves the appellation "poor" for those who cannot labour, for, "when we affect to pity, as poor, those who must labour, or the world cannot exist, we are trifling with the condition of mankind" (Burke:Raffety 6: 279-280). Burke is here using "poor" to mean pitiable rather than as an economic description:

I do not call a healthy young man,  
cheerful in his mind and vigorous in  
his arms, I cannot call such a man poor;  
I cannot pity my kind as a kind, merely



because they are men. This affected pity only tends to dissatisfy them with their condition, and to teach them to seek resources where no resources are to be found, in something else than their own industry, and frugality, and sobriety.

(Burke:Raffety 6: 280)

Generally, however, the poor during this period are defined in terms similar to those used by Thomas Bernard, the Secretary of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor: "we mean by the poor" those who have no other means of support "except their daily labour" (qtd.in Cowherd 15). Burke strongly opposed governmental interference. He concludes his "Thoughts and Details on Scarcity" (1795):

My opinion is against on over-doing of any sort of administration, and more especially against this most momentous of all meddling on the part of authority; the meddling with the subsistence of the people.

(Burke:Raffety 6: 32)

He advocates, instead, charity ("which it seems is now an insult to them", 6:5), which he sees as a "direct and obligatory duty upon all Christians" (6:13).

Malthus argued more strongly - reacting against Paine - that the right to subsistence was an illusory right, not founded on the nature of things. In his first Essay (1798), Malthus described poverty as an evil for which there was no remedy. There were only two effective means of improving the condition of the poor. One means was the practice of moral restraint. The second was the abolition of the Poor Law which served to lower wages, encourage early marriage, cause improvidence, and remove independence. Although scholars have now overturned Malthus' correlation between allowances and early marriage with consequent

increased birth rates, his logic seemed to many at the time to be irrefutable (Dûpaquier 92). He argued that social inequalities are actually a spur to effort. Because "moral evil is absolutely necessary to the production of moral excellence" (qtd.in Winch 34), a perfect world would not develop active powers of mind and character. Because he believed that poverty was the product of general laws, Malthus never attributed poverty to weakness of character alone. Sometimes the most worthy might suffer undeserved misfortune and would thus need assistance. Voluntary charity would ensure that only those deserving were assisted.

Sir Frederic Morton Eden, in his study The State of the Poor (1797), also deplored the increasing tendency which he noted in the poor to accept official relief without any evident shame. Repeatedly one finds these moralistic judgements. They take no account of the changing circumstances which caused destitution of such magnitude that questions of shame ought no longer to have been relevant.

It was perhaps the influence of the Evangelical Movement that reinforced the moralistic attitudes of the decade. The gist of the Evangelical message was that class divisions were the work of Divine Providence. William Wilberforce felt that religion "renders the inequalities of the social state less galling to the lower orders, whom also she instructs, in their turn, to be diligent, humble and patient" (Kiernan 48). In the face of egalitarian ideas, "vital religion" could focus on the equality of souls without disturbing the inequality of ranks (Kiernan 49-50). How does one explain pain in this world? The Evangelicals saw it as God's way of chastising here rather than in eternity. Hence they argued that suffering is the natural consequence of sin. The established Church was itself prone to preach morality to the poor rather than to offer any practical help. Evangelicals did likewise: "How much more to be dreaded is a famine of the word of truth than a dearth of earthly food" were the pious words of Sir Richard Hill in 1800 (qtd.in Hilton 208).

The Evangelicals generally valued moral salvation above the practical elimination of poverty. As they were often also Free Traders and proponents of laissez-faire policies, they

rejected formal social and economic programmes of reform. Yet they firmly advocated voluntary private charity. Charity must not be forced, for that detracted from its moral value to the giver and rendered the recipient ungrateful. Voluntary charity, however, reaffirms the ties between rich and poor, and in that belief we can sense the attraction it had, for it maintained the myth of the old paternalist system in the face of the disquieting disruption of the old fixed certainties of rank:

As Force tends to destroy Charity in the Giver, so does it Gratitude in the Receiver....The pauper thanks not me for any thing he receives. He has a right to it, he says, by law, and if I won't give, he'll go to the Justices, and compel me. So that, what is still more provoking to the Contributor, he's forced to pay largely to the Poor, and at the same time sees them ungrateful and saucy, affronting and threatening, and looking upon themselves as equally good, if not better Men than their supporters, without Dependency or Obligation...happy that Nation, where the People live in natural Love and Dependence, and the several Ranks of Kings and Subjects, Masters and Servants, Parents and children, High and Low, Rich and Poor, are attached to each other by the reciprocal good offices of Kindness and Gratitude:... But as long as Charity is forced, we can never expect to see the Receivers of it either grateful or respectful.

(T. Alcock, 1752, qtd.in Poynter 40)

It often seems that the spiritual needs of the giver are considered more important than the material needs of the recipient. This impression certainly arises from a reading of

Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland Beggar" and "A narrow girdle of rough stones and crags". In the latter poem the moral seems to be the "need...to be reserved in speech,/And temper all our thoughts with charity" (72-3), rather than the need to consider the plight of the ailing fisherman.

Although, as pointed out above, many non-Evangelicals did recognise that voluntary charity was unlikely to be an adequate answer to the pressing needs of the poor (and it might anyway fall solely on the shoulders of the unselfish and philanthropic - always in a minority at any period), very few recognised the insidious nature of charity. Godwin was one of those rare spirits. He argued, in 1793, that "gratuitous distribution" enables the privileged few

to make a show of generosity with  
what is not truly their own, and to  
purchase the gratitude of the poor  
by the payment of a debt....It fills  
the rich with unreasonable pride by  
the spurious denominations with which  
it decorates their acts, and the poor  
with servility, by leading them to  
regard the slender comforts they obtain,  
not as their incontrovertible due, but  
as the good pleasure and the grace of  
their opulent neighbours.

(Godwin:Salt 46, emphasis added)

In the revised edition of Political Justice (1796), Godwin altered "gratitude" to "submission", thereby emphasising what he saw as the power politics that lie at the heart of charity (Godwin: Priestley 2: 430). Such views were shared by Mary Wollstonecraft who, in A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark (1796), writes:

You know that I have always been an enemy  
to what is termed charity, because timid

bigots endeavouring thus to cover their sins, do violence to justice, till, acting the demi-god, they forget that they are men. And there are others who do not even think of laying up a treasure in heaven, whose benevolence is merely tyranny in disguise; they assist the most worthless, because the most servile, and term them helpless only in proportion to their fawning.

(187)

She had, however, conformed to the sentiments of a book-buying public in her short stories written for children in the late 1780s. In these stories appear some of the crudest pieties about charity as well as some penetrating insights into the insidious power that charity grants the giver over the recipient:

Perhaps the greatest pleasure I have received [says Mrs Mason, the children's mentor] has arisen from the habitual exercise of charity...how very beneficial charity is - because it enables us to find comfort when all our worldly comforts are blighted: besides, when our bowels yearn to our fellow creatures, we feel that the love of God dwelleth in us - and then we cannot always go on our way sorrowing....Mrs Mason...looked round for an object in distress...when we squander money idly we defraud the poor, and deprive our souls of their most exalted food.

(Original Stories 71,74,84,86, emphases added)

Although it is difficult to discern how much irony there is in these stories, written as they were in an attempt to gain a livelihood, there is perhaps devastating irony in at least one

of the five illustrations which William Blake provided for the text at publisher Joseph Johnson's request (Original Stories 87). To illustrate one of Mrs Mason's pieties, "Aeconomy [sic] and self-denial are necessary in every station, to enable us to be generous", Blake has drawn well-dressed Mrs Mason holding the hands of her two equally well-dressed young charges and standing in the doorway of an ill-lit room wherein are four members of a family in the typically Blakean posture of despair, bowed backs, bowed heads, limbs seemingly confined in uncomfortable positions, anguish and hopelessness on their faces. The words beneath take on another meaning when illustrated by the man who wrote "Pity would be no more/If we did not make somebody Poor" - who is actually being forced to practise the "aeconomy and self-denial"? (Original Stories 87).

Because they were passionate moralists, Evangelicals discriminated strictly between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Because they demanded gratitude and subservience in exchange for their kindness and benevolence, it would only be those willing to defer who would be deemed deserving. In other words the deserving were those who conformed to Evangelical ideas of what constituted desert rather than any more objective criteria. Pronouncements on this necessary discrimination abound, and, of course, are not confined to practising Evangelicals. Most of those who favoured voluntary charity made this distinction. Hannah More was a prolific advocate of such necessary discrimination:

Come, neighbour, take a walk with me  
                   Through many a London street,  
 And see the cause of penury  
                   In hundreds we shall meet.

We shall not need to travel far -  
                   Behold that great man's door;  
 He well discerns that idle crew  
                   From the deserving poor.

He will relieve with liberal hand  
 The child of honest thrift;  
 But where long scores of Gin-Shops stand  
 He will withhold his gift.  
 (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent.Verse 334)

The more extreme the visible degradation, the less deserving the individual is deemed. Again More expresses this view unflinchingly in one of her moral tales, "Black Giles the Poacher":

[it is a] common mistake, that a beggarly looking cottage, and filthy ragged children raised most compassion...for it is neatness, housewifery, and a decent appearance, which draw the kindness of the rich and charitable, while they turn away disgusted from filth and laziness.

(More 398)

In the Monthly Magazine of December 1796 a correspondent, signing himself "A Constant Reader", displays a moralistic judgement typical of the time:

I make a wide distinction between the honest laborious poor, and the dissolute idle vagrant....To such of these as may be found truly deserving I would have the heart as open as charity herself can expand it. But the latter description of poor, are to be met with at horse races, at the entrances to all places of public amusement, at the corners of all our streets, dinning our ears with their dolefull [sic] cries; sometimes exhibiting sores, distorted limbs, etc. with a quantity of filth and rags, applied, secundum artem, to draw

money from the occasional passenger: which, at night, is generally squandered in cellars, or in houses of ill fame. The one are objects of charity, the other are objects for the whipping-post. I have made use of the term secundum artem, because it is palpable that the squalid appearance of most our vagrants is voluntary....I lay it down, therefore, as a general rule (to which, however, I acknowledge there may be a few exceptions) that a person may appear too miserable to be a real object of charity.

(858-9)

Aesthetic judgements of rural beggars are found, too, in Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals (28 November 1801):

we met a soldier and his wife, he with a child in his arms, she carrying a bundle and his gun - we gave them some halfpence, it was such a pretty sight.

(85)

Dorothy here seems to imply that it was because the family trio made such a pleasing sight (similar to a grouping in a genre painting) that she and William gave them "some halfpence". Significantly the soldier does not beg, for legislation was then in force to prohibit this (see above).

The urban poor and their living conditions were likely to be less picturesque. Not only did the poor need to have a prepossessing appearance. Requisite, too, was an appropriately deferential manner. The anonymous author of The Best Use of Bad Times (1793) knows that "the hand of charity is more readily stretched out to the industrious, sober, and orderly, than to those who have been idle, saucy, and debauched" (10). Others, like Wollstonecraft's Mrs Mason, showed more diffidence in claiming ability to discriminate easily:



I do not wish you...to relieve every beggar that you casually meet; yet should any one attract your attention, obey the impulse of your heart, which will lead you to pay them for exercising your compassion, and do not suffer the whispers of selfishness, that they may be imposters, to deter you. However, I would have you give but a trifle when you are not certain the distress is real, and reckon it given for pleasure. I for my part would rather be deceived five hundred times, than doubt once without reason.

(81, emphases added)

Judgements about deserving and undeserving were closely linked to the avowed preference for encouraging independence rather than dependence in the poor. It is around discussion of these two states that one comes across the greatest instances of muddled thinking. Snell is adamant - independence was "the ambivalent but legitimating cliché of the period" (102). Everyone advocated independence but they did so from varying motives and with varying perceptions of what independence entailed. Independence was part of a celebrated tradition of English liberty - rhetorically much vaunted but very little analyzed.

A.V.Dicey suggested that the high value placed on notions of independence at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century was to a large extent the result of Benthamism and Evangelicalism. Both these major prevailing philosophies, one secular and one religious, emphasised the fundamental principle of individualism, whether by stressing personal responsibility or the securing each of his own happiness (399). Such philosophies do not allow for those who have no means at all of being truly independent, and, in an aggressively competitive society, they can easily lead to a selfish regard only for one's own wellbeing.

The desire to promote independence was the stated

reason for criticising the old Poor Law:

Fortunately for England, a spirit of independence still remains among the peasantry. The poor-laws are strongly calculated to eradicate this spirit.

(Eng.Hist.Doc. 424)

Rather let the poor help themselves by means of the Friendly Societies. Such convictions could, and often did, mask meanness, selfishness and lack of concern.

Many longed nostalgically for the days of old style paternalism, not recognising that such caring paternalism was not often to be found in the newly emergent capitalist conditions. In a rural society where landowners increasingly used mantraps and spring-guns, any natural bonds between landowner and landless peasant were fast being eroded. It was still considered natural for the lower classes to be deferential and grateful for the condescension of their betters. Even someone generally regarded as a sensitive observer blithely internalized similar beliefs:

We are very comfortably situated with respect to neighbours of the lower classes, they are excellent people, friendly in performing all offices of kindness and humanity, and attentive to us without servility - if we were sick they would wait upon us night and day.

So writes Dorothy Wordsworth to Jane Marshall on the tenth of September 1800 (Early Letters 251).

It was quite a shock to many of the upper classes to witness instances of an increasingly assertive manner among both the labouring poor in demanding what they were due as a right, and among those who showed signs of resenting the patronising manner in which relief was dispensed. "That relief which formerly was and still ought to be petitioned as a favour is now frequently

demand as a right" complained Arthur Young in 1797 (qtd. in Hobsbawm and Rudé 69). So much more appealing to the privileged was a belief in the positive ties of interdependence which linked master and servant. Paley, writing in 1793 when the strains in this symbiotic relationship were everywhere appearing, paints a sentimental picture rather than the ugly truth:

Service in England is, as it ought to be,  
voluntary and by contract; a fair exchange  
of work for wage; an equal bargain in which  
each party has its rights and his redress;  
wherein every servant chooses his master....  
this connexion [sic] is frequently the foundation  
of so much mutual kindness and attachment,  
that very few friendships are more cordial,  
or more sincere; that it leaves oftentimes  
nothing in servitude, except the name.

(10)

Paley's odd collocation of such words and phrases as "voluntary" / "contract" and "rights and redress" / "servant...master", culminating in his point that "servitude" is not really "servitude" at all, reveals his own blinkered cultural and economic assumptions which prevent him from acknowledging the lack of any meaningful equality between the parties. Godwin, writing in the same year, saw the situation very differently:

Observe the pauper fawning with abject  
vileness upon his rich benefactor, and  
speechless with sensations of gratitude  
for having received that which he ought  
to have claimed with an erect mien, and  
with a consciousness that his claim was  
irresistible.

(Godwin:Salt 48)

Godwin saw property as crucial to independence in the true sense. William Hale, writing to Patrick Colquhoun in 1800, recognised from his own experience, that this was true:

Many that are respectable mechanics in this parish [Spitalfields], and contributed to the relief of the poor, unable to bear up under the pressure of the times, have had their goods seized. Their poverty has descended into indigency, the pride of their independence is broke, and they become paupers of the parish.

(Eng.Hist.Doc, 421)

Others knew too well that independence presupposes access to at least some property:

The use of common land by labourers operates upon the mind as a sort of independence. [When the commons are enclosed] the labourers will work every day in the year, their children will be put out to labour early [and] that subordination of the lower ranks of society which in the present times is so much wanted, would be thereby considerably secured.

(Bishton 1794, qtd.in Hammond 38)

Thus the privileged classes lauded independence when it implied helping oneself and not demanding anything from others. Yet they demanded the deference, gratitude and servility which are the mark of the dependent. Any manifestations of a truly independent spirit, such as asserting one's rights or seeking bargaining power in one's economic relationships, were severely deplored even when they were not actually prohibited by law (the Combination Acts of 1799). Charity was to be dispensed only to those deemed suitable, and when it suited the benefactors. They

were shocked when the poor sought relief - this was a mark of shameful dependency - yet they delighted in the dispensing of charity which guaranteed that dependency.

The efficacy of workhouses as a solution, particularly to the increasing numbers of the vagrant poor, was much debated. Parish workhouses had hitherto not been much used. Most of the rural poor had usually been helped in their own homes. However, as the Settlement Laws were relaxed and economic conditions deteriorated, fewer were able to be given relief at home and more became vagrants, either in a legitimate search for employment or from choice. Vagrants were both a source of suspicion and an offence to the authorities, and as such had, since Elizabethan times, been subject to various penalties. During the 1790s these wandering figures became more numerous and hence more visible. They were considered a nuisance, non-industrious, and disgusting. Arthur Young referred to "the scum of the non-industrious poor" (qtd.in Simpson, Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 174). A correspondent to the Monthly Magazine, after deploring their "swarms", referred to them as "useless mouths" (December, 1796, 858-9). It was suggested that the workhouses could provide a solution. However, these became an increasing financial drain on the parishes as they became more crowded. Malthus proposed to make the workhouses sufficiently unattractive to serve as the last resort and not "comfortable asylums" (Eng.Hist.Doc. 425). As early as 1783, a Bill proposed by Thomas Gilbert was passed which distinguished between workhouses for the aged, sick and infirm, and houses of correction for the criminal rogues and vagrants. One wonders if there was ever much difference between the two types of place given the rules of the Kendal Workhouse listed by Eden in 1797 and considered one of the more efficient workhouses of the period. Two of its rules read:

If any grown person refuse to work,  
such person to be kept on bread and  
water, in the dungeon, till he is  
willing to work.

That all the Poor relieved in this house,

shall wear the badge K K P on the place appointed: and if any of them shall take the same off, they shall be put into the dungeon for four hours.

(Eden 3: 755-6)

The Kendal Workhouse had at least been efficiently run, for a correspondent to the Monthly Magazine tells of a friend who had "frequently attended the sick in one of those large houses of industry " and who described "scenes of filth and debauchery...such as he could not have believed had he not witnessed them" ("J K", December 1797).

George Rose, in his 1805 treatise Observations on the Poor Laws and on the Management of the Poor in Great Britain, is sadly in a minority in his humane advocacy of the need to employ and relieve the poor in their own homes, leaving the workhouses as "places of retreat" for "such of the aged, the infirm, or infant poor, who are so utterly friendless as to have no relations or other persons who will take care of them" (Eng.Hist.Doc. 429).

With some awareness of the issues under debate, with some acknowledgement of the variety of solutions proposed and measures adopted, one is alerted to the potential significance of any allusions to the poor, either pictorial or literary, during this period. To choose to depict the poor, whether in paint or in print, was, in itself, potentially revealing. Innocent renderings and innocent readings of poverty become less and less possible or fruitful given this historical context. Often, as Raymond Williams has demonstrated, there is a "gap between social reality and literary figuration" (Politics and Letters 305-306), and that gap, too, must be recognised and pondered.

This complex context is an essential one in which to place Wordsworth's depiction of poverty and the poor. For example, to read in his work the terms "independence", "charity", "relief", would seem to call for an awareness of the variable implications of such terms during this period. We will see that Wordsworth

echoes a number of the views and attitudes presented above. Generally, he moves from a position close to that of Paine or Godwin towards the expression of attitudes not far removed from those of Paley or Pitt or the Evangelicals. Likewise the ways in which he depicts the figure of the poor change. Literary depictions of the poor during this period existed together with pictorial depictions and the two media present some fascinating similarities and differences. The next chapter will consider some of the most characteristic ways of presenting the poor in the visual arts in order to highlight the various trends in the two media.

## CHAPTER TWO

FIGURATIONS OF THE POOR IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY:  
THE VISUAL ARTS.

It is by this principle [sympathy] chiefly that poetry, painting, and other affecting arts transfuse their passions from one breast to another, and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness, misery, and death itself.

(Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry...into the Sublime and the Beautiful 1757)

I consider painting as a kind of poetry which excludes all vulgarisms.

(William Gilpin, Three Essays 1792)

It is allowed on all hands, that facts and events, however they may bind the historian, have no dominion over the poet or the painter.

(Sir Joshua Reynolds, "Thirteenth Discourse" 1786)

a) Some theoretical bases of eighteenth-century attitudes to poverty:

As the quotation from Burke suggests, it was considered to be the role of the artist to graft "delight" on to those deeply unpleasant realities "wretchedness, misery, and death itself". Poverty, suitably aestheticized, could draw forth that quality of sympathy which so interested philosophers and aestheticians during this century. It is thus, perhaps, not surprising that the depiction of the poor increasingly became a favoured subject for



artists and writers in the eighteenth century. "What was distinctive about the verse of mid to later eighteenth century was, I think, a posture, an attitude. That controlling attitude was one of sympathy, a call for fellow-feeling" (Rothstein 120). Similar postures and attitudes abound in the genre paintings of this century.

The manifold reasons for this emphasis on sympathy as both a moral and an aesthetic quality are not the subject of this study. Rather I am concerned with the ways in which this new interest guaranteed the selection of particular topics, situations, characters, as appropriate matter for artistic and literary treatment.

The consistency with which an emphasis on feelings and sympathy appears in the works of the major theoreticians of the century is striking. The third Earl of Shaftesbury, David Hume, Adam Smith, David Hartley, Hugh Blair, Edmund Burke and Joshua Reynolds, to name only the most important philosophers and aestheticians, all close contemporaries, all advocate sympathy and, with various emphases, argue that sensations and feelings are not only a means of insight but the basis for any claim to moral consideration.

Hume and Smith both analyze sympathy at some length. Sympathy is central to Hume's system. He regards it as the foundation of our whole moral life. Sympathy, by which we enter into the sentiments of others, is the "soul or animating principle" of all our passions (Hume 80,81). How does one enter into the sentiments of others? One does so by the force of the imagination which is most strong in women and children (87). Pity is "a concern for...the misery of others" and pity entirely depends on the imagination (86). Feelings are stronger than reason as a basis for moral judgement and insight. That belief lies at the heart of much eighteenth-century thought, art and literature.

Adam Smith, in his Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759), published eleven years after Hume's Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, enlarged the significance of sympathy. Agreeing with Hume that it is an activity of the imagination, he further

stated that it is "our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever" (10), and not merely pity or benevolence, although "our sympathy with sorrow is often a more pungent sensation than our sympathy with joy" (45). He restricts pity to mean sympathy with sorrow (10). Sympathy is a "principle of human nature" (43). Certain refinements that Smith introduces into his description of the workings of sympathy go far towards explaining subsequent attitudes displayed towards the misery of others. There might well be less sympathy with the grieving person than "curiosity to inquire into his situation" (11). More importantly, Smith seems to grasp something of the potential self-satisfaction which often accompanies feelings of sympathy, the pleasure we gain from our pity of another. Yet this is as yet merely hinted at:

As the person who is principally interested in any event is pleased with our sympathy, and hurt by the want of it, so we, too, seem to be pleased when we are able to sympathise with him, and to be hurt when we are unable to do so. We run not only to congratulate the successful, but to condole with the afflicted; and the pleasure which we find in the conversation of one whom in all the passions of his heart we can entirely sympathize with, seems to do more than compensate the painfulness of that sorrow with which the view of his situation affects us.

(15-16)

In a further comment Smith explains a little of the psychology underlying the harshness of treatment meted out to those whose wretched state merely offends us:

If we hear a person loudly lamenting his misfortunes, which, however, upon bringing the case home to ourselves, we feel, can produce no such violent effect upon us, we are shocked at his grief; and, because we

cannot enter into it, call it pusillanimity and weakness.

(16)

It was, however, Edmund Burke who, in "the most famous aesthetic treatise of the eighteenth century" (Sambrook 120), A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), published two years before Smith's treatise, added a crucial element to the analysis of sympathy, pity and benevolence. Having identified sympathy as one of the principal links in "the great chain of society" by means of which we "enter into the concerns of others", he identifies it also as a potential "source of a very high species of pleasure" (Enquiry 44). "I am convinced", he continues, "we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others...a delight or pleasure of some species or other in contemplating objects of this kind" (45). However Burke seems to shy away from the potentially insidious implications of this insight, which William Blake confronted, by describing this pleasure as arising from "love and social affection", for "as our creator has designed we should be united by the bond of sympathy, he has strengthened that bond by a proportionable delight" (46). If the passion were merely painful we would shun it but "there is no spectacle we so eagerly pursue, as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity" (46).

Gradually the emphasis came to be placed as much on certain situations as on individual persons as prompting pleasurable feelings of pity. Hugh Blair reveals this development:

It is not enough to admire. Admiration is a cold feeling, in comparison of that deep interest which the heart takes in tender and pathetic scenes; where, by a mysterious attachment to the objects of compassion, we are pleased and delighted, even whilst we mourn.

(qtd.in Sambrook 125)

This interest in "tender and pathetic scenes" came to infuse the aesthetics of the picturesque, a category initially formulated to accommodate that which the beautiful and the sublime did not include. "Where it concentrates upon a particular object, the aesthetic interest [of the picturesque] lies in the emergence of formal interest from an unlikely source (the hovel, the gypsy, the ass)" (Price 277). Ann Bermingham quotes the artist John Thomas Smith:

In poverty nothing will more easily, or more universally excite the attentions of benevolence, than the appearance of neatness and cleanliness. ...But it is nothing to the artist....[T]he neglected fast-ruinating cottage...the weather-beaten thatch...the fence of bungling workmanship....the slatternry [sic] of tubs and dishes scattered about the door - the intrusion of pigs...offer far greater allurements to the painter's eye.

(108)

The picturesque, despite focusing on some potentially problematic situations and characters (for example, destitution, vagrants, banditti), was clearly not concerned with moral, metaphysical, social or political issues. In terms of the picturesque, human subjects and inanimate objects were not differentiated - the worn-out old carthorse, the beggar, the hovel, were reduced to the same level - objects selected merely for their picturesque potential. An attitude of complacent acceptance is the characteristic mark of pathos and sentimentality which frequently inform the picturesque aesthetic. Certain groups were judged to be particularly suited as objects of pity to be aesthetically grouped in picturesque manner. Such were the poor cottager and his family, women, children, animals, and, later, slaves (Brewer 8). The culture of sensibility focused particularly "on women's

feelings especially in circumstances of distress" and it is woman-in-distress who was fetishized as the male object of desire (Brewer 8). This is certainly evident in the longest novel of the century, Richardson's Clarissa.

Over and above the philosophical interest in sympathy and the expanding culture of sensibility, was the emphasis, in both Methodist and Evangelical circles, on feeling as being necessary to a truly religious spirit. Pity fuelled many of the charitable reform movements which proliferated among Evangelicals during the final years of the century and beyond.

The increased interest in eliciting pity and depicting the pitiable is of course entirely consistent with the harshness of conditions and the hardening of attitudes depicted in the first chapter. For pity, as Blake so perceptively discerned, is a notoriously problematic attitude. It flourishes most whenever there is most need to conceal from oneself the extent of one's own collusion with the system that reduces some to a pitiable condition.

#### b) The aesthetics of poverty: the visual arts:

A number of recent critics, most notably John Barrell and Ann Bermingham, have revealed the ways in which the landscape art of the eighteenth century speaks to us about a world of social and economic relations differing from the harmonious and ordered world which is depicted. Taking a lead from these pioneering studies, I would like, in this section, to trace the various ways in which the poor are depicted by some key eighteenth-century artists, and indicate both how presentations of the poor became increasingly popular and how they altered as the century progressed. This increasing yet changing depiction parallels similar trends in the literary depictions of poverty - traditions which Wordsworth was to inherit and transmute.

With the one major exception of William Hogarth, urban destitution and the urban working class were not popular topics for eighteenth-century artists. The economy of the eighteenth century was still primarily an agricultural one and it was not

until the nineteenth century that artists, both pictorial and literary, turned their attention to conditions in the cities and towns. Most eighteenth-century artists were still engaged in celebrating the status of their patrons, the great landowners. Towards the end of the century, the picturesque favoured rural subject matter which likewise found popular favour, Barrell argues, because of the increased nationalistic spirit following the outbreak of hostilities with France (20). The values of "Merrie England", a nostalgia for the seemingly timeless cycles of rural life, accompanied the fears engendered by the cataclysmic changes visible in post-Revolutionary Europe.

Richard Wilson (1714-1782) is of interest because his landscapes form a good example of some major eighteenth-century practices - the naturalization of prevailing structures of power, the concern to depict relations between landowner and labourer as part of a harmonious design, and to ensure that the rural labourer provides evidence of "a pastoral ideal on the one hand (man in harmony with nature), and of a social ideal on the other (the poor in harmony with the rich)" (Solkin 125). Labourers, although present in his landscapes and views of country estates, form part of the harmonious design and are either engaged in seemingly leisurely pursuits or are at rest. The human figures are always eclipsed by the panoramic landscapes and so the tranquil mood of the whole leads the viewer to read the figures as part of that tranquillity. Even the arduous task of chopping wood, depicted in Dinas Bran from Llangollen (1770-1) appears to be one of the natural rhythms of life because of the overall Arcadian mood of the painting. Solkin makes the crucial point that the taste for the English gardening style (panoramas which Wilson depicts with such tranquil grace) - seemingly natural yet the result of major doctoring of the landscape - arose not only as a reaction to the formality of the parterres, gravel walks and topiary of the preceding style, but also because, thereby, the vast estates, accumulated by annexing smaller farms and enclosing common land, might be seen to acquire "the force of organic inevitability" (126).

In George Stubbs's Labourers (1787), three of the four male

figures have expressions of weariness and dissatisfaction. Yet we know that Labourers was a posed picture, commissioned by Lord Viscount Torrington of Southill, who

had often seen them at their Labours appearing like a Flemish Subject and therefore he desired to have them represented....during dinner the old men were ordered to prepare themselves for their Labours with a little cart drawn by Lord Torrington's favourite old Hunter which was used only for these easy tasks - for this being the first Horse his Lordship ever rode was the principal motive for ordering this picture....they [the labourers] at length fell into a dispute about the manner of putting the Tail piece into the Cart, which dispute so favourable for his [Stubbs's] purpose lasted long enough for him to make a sketch of the picture.

(Ozias Humphry manuscript, qtd.in Taylor  
40-41)

From this we note two things. Firstly, the picture is commissioned and, however naturalistic it may seem, it has been deliberately posed. Secondly, the Viscount's interest seems to be mainly in having a portrait made of his favourite old Hunter and in imitating the fashionable Continental genre paintings. The labourers were not intended to be the primary subject and their grumpy expressions might well have been the result of their spontaneous altercation. What remains ambiguous from Humphry's account is whether Stubbs's purpose was to depict them unsmilingly. The male reaper looking across to the mounted master in Stubbs's Reapers (1784) certainly has a rather defiantly challenging expression. Yet the overall effect of these canvasses, Reapers, Haymakers (1785), and Labourers, is of a stylized frieze, so formally and with such pleasing symmetry are the figures arranged. The human figures are grouped as are the

horses in such paintings as Mares By an Oak-Tree (1764-5) and Mares and Foals in a River Landscape (1763-8), figures on a classical frieze. We might be momentarily puzzled by the potentially disturbing effect of those glimpses of alienated expressions in Reapers and Labourers, but the final effect derives from the pleasing nature of the whole composition. Certainly the neatness and cleanness of the clothing and the symmetry of the poses give these works the feel of choreographed balletic re-enactions of the tasks depicted.

Gainsborough (1727-1788) forms the link between the establishment landscape painters and the genre painters who proliferated towards the end of the century and beyond. Towards the end of his career, in the 1780s, Gainsborough started to paint what were described by Reynolds as his "fancy pictures" (Reynolds 382). The first was exhibited in 1780. What is extraordinary when we see these paintings of winsome peasant children and beautiful little beggar girls is that contemporary commentators, despite noting their idealizing tendencies, could describe them as imitative of nature. To turn to Reynolds is to grasp something of what contemporaries might mean by an imitation of nature. In his "Third Discourse", Reynolds argues that the artist "corrects Nature by herself, her imperfect state by her more perfect" and "learns to design naturally by drawing his figures unlike to any one object" (54). He continues, "[f]or though the painter is to overlook the accidental discriminations of Nature, he is to exhibit distinctly, and with precision, the general forms of things" (64). It is clear that what was striking to commentators in the context of eighteenth-century art was that here, for the first time, attention was being focused on the poor even though the reality of poverty was neither seen nor depicted. Indeed Reynolds' term "fancy pictures" nicely reveals the deliberately charming escapism that these paintings provide. Reynolds, in his "Fourteenth Discourse", talks of "the interesting simplicity and elegance of his [Gainsborough's] little ordinary beggar-children" (376). He continues:

when he had fixed on his object of



imitation, whether it was the mean and vulgar form of a woodcutter, or a child of an interesting character, as he did not attempt to raise the one, so neither did he lose any of the natural grace and elegance of the other; such a grace, and such an elegance, as are more frequently found in cottages than in courts.

(382-3)

The concern with the picturesque potential of the subject matter is clearly evident. When one looks at the two paintings which must have been the ones Reynolds had in mind, one finds that the overall mood is of sentiment and pathos. The Woodman (1787), known to us through the engraving in stipple by P. Simon (1791), as the original was destroyed by fire in 1810, was Gainsborough's first "fancy picture". It is most remarkable for the expression on the woodman's face. His face is literally illuminated by a seemingly divine effulgence from above. Despite his bundle of wood, his rather ragged clothes and his mongrel (whose attention is likewise fixed on a high point beyond the frame of the picture), the figure has the pose and expression familiar from renderings of sanctity in religious paintings. Gainsborough might not have "raised" the woodman in terms of smartening up his appearance but he has made his whole demeanour suggestively enlightened. Gainsborough's second "fancy picture", Girl with Pigs, was actually bought by Reynolds. Although once again the dress of the child is obviously not of the quality found in the contemporary society portraits of children and she is accompanied by pigs rather than the more usual children's pets, the painting, far from documenting poverty, is rather charmingly picturesque, the child's rather mournful expression eliciting a pleasing pathos intensified by the very generalized natural setting familiar from Gainsborough's more fashionable outdoor portraits. In Cottage Girl with Dog and Pitcher (1785) we have again the ragged clothes and bare feet and disconsolate expression on the face of the very appealing little girl standing in the familiar

generalized landscape. The addition of a small and cuddly puppy in her arms points the way to the sentimental studies of the next century. The Cottage Door (c. 1780) is also more picturesque than realistic. Magnificent Gainsborough trees frame the cottage in front of which stands a mother with her six children. The mother's face and hairstyle are strikingly similar to those in any number of his society portraits, and although the children's garments are ragged, the group forms a pleasing triangular shape under the pyramidal trees. The overall effect is attractive, not distressing. Such paintings could serve to illustrate the sentimentalized tableau painted by William Paley in Reasons for Contentment (1793):

I have heard it said, that if the face of happiness can any where be seen, it is in the summer evening of a country village. When, after the labours of the day, each man, at his door, with his children, amongst his neighbours, feels his frame and his heart at rest, every thing about him pleased and pleasing, and a delight and complacency in his sensations far beyond what either luxury or diversion can afford.

(12-13)

A very different picture is "painted" by Godwin in the third edition of Political Justice (1797):

In the evening they return to a family, famished with hunger, exposed half naked to the inclemencies of the sky, hardly sheltered, and denied the slenderest instruction, unless in a few instances, where it is dispensed by the hands of ostentatious charity, and the first lesson communicated is unprincipled servility.

(Godwin: Priestley 461)

Certainly contemporary reactions to the "fancy pictures" concentrate on the delight they impart to the viewer. Michael Rosenthal quotes from a contemporary critic, Sir Henry Bate Dudley's remarks on the 1787 Woodgatherers, "these charming little objects [the children]...cannot be viewed without sensations of tenderness and pleasure, and an interest in their humble fate" (194). However Rosenthal suggests that the "fancy pictures" depict Gainsborough's knowledge of the "harrowing aspects" of country life (194). I would disagree, for the paintings are too aesthetically pleasing, the placing of the figures too classically allusive, the figures themselves too attractive, to evoke the kind of horrified recognition of the facts of poverty which Rosenthal seems to argue is Gainsborough's purpose. We know that Gainsborough selected child models who conformed to his ideals of beauty and innocence. Ellis Waterhouse describes these "fancy pictures" as depicting "a sort of faubourg of Arcadia" inhabited by "ideal small figures of persons of the peasant class whose life is unclouded by the existence of the world of towns or fashions" (178). Reynolds admired the "fancy pictures" for their display of the elegance and grace "more frequently found in cottages than in courts" (383). In his "Thirteenth Discourse", he asserted that the arts "address themselves only to two faculties of the mind, its imagination and its sensibility" (350). Sensibility was Gainsborough's great contribution to the British School according to Waterhouse (171). Constable remarked that on looking at Gainsborough's paintings "we find tears in our eyes, and I know not what brings them" (qtd. in Waterhouse 171).

Certainly the taste for genre paintings of the poor increased from the 1780s onwards. Barrell notes that in 1792 "the number of rural genre pictures exhibited at the Academy suddenly went up sharply, to about three times the average for the previous five years" (20). He attributes it to the patriotic interest in things English as war with France approached and also to the death of Reynolds (1792) who rather scorned "low and

confined subjects" (qtd.in Sambrook 152). However, as we have seen, Reynolds liked Gainsborough's "fancy pictures" primarily because potentially low subjects were treated in an elegant and graceful manner. Depicted with elegance and grace, poverty-stricken figures would elicit compassionate interest and heartwarming sentiment as well as providing that frisson which formed part of the attraction of the picturesque aesthetic. Waterhouse quotes a writer in the Gentleman's Magazine for 1780: "you will find artists who know nothing of Greek and Latin, and can hardly talk English, paint a beggar-boy or gypsey-girl [sic] with all the propriety of Poussin or Rubens" (180). Surely this correspondent had the carpenter's son John Opie, the "Cornish wonder", in mind. Opie's best known painting, The Peasant's Family (c. 1783-5), is highly imitative of Gainsborough's manner both in its decontextualized rendering of a mother, her two children and a dog, in a landscape, and the aesthetically pleasing placing of the figures.

In the 1790s the fashion for genre paintings was continued by a number of painters, most notably George Morland (1763-1804) and Francis Wheatley (1747-1801). Morland's major output dates from the 1788-98 decade. His work reflects the interest in rural figures and occupations. Paintings like Outside the Alehouse Door (1792) present subject matter which might well have been treated unsympathetically given the strictures against lower class drinking, yet the treatment is seemingly unmoralistic. Contemporaries might have argued that Morland's notorious love of drinking has resulted in an affectionate rendering of the subject. Barrell argues that the two men are "talking politics" (114) because Barrell considers Morland to be distinguishable from contemporary genre painters in that, in many of his works, he does not sentimentalize poverty and instead displays a disconcerting tendency to expose its miseries. Certainly Morland's works often reveal a less sentimental version of rural life than do Gainsborough's. However Barrell does admit that one must not overstate the case. Outside the Alehouse Door might as easily serve as an illustration for Hannah More's Village Politics (1793) or any of her Cheap Repository Tracts (1795-8).

Morland's rustics could be engaged in those highly didactic dialogues that take place between such illustrative figures as Jack Anvil and Tom Hod, especially as only the seated figure is drinking and smoking; the standing figure seems to have no time for such idle habits.

Rural cottages abound in Morland's works. This taste for cottages was simultaneously being served by the publication during the 1790s of various architectural studies, such as Charles Thomas Middleton's Picturesque and Architectural Views for Cottages, Farm Houses and Country Villas (1793) and James Milton's Essay on British Cottage Architecture (1795) (Joseph Burke 378). Wordsworth's The Ruined Cottage, which dates from 1797-8, undoubtedly emerges, in part, from this current interest.

Francis Wheatley, best known for his greatly popular Cries of London, prints of which sold steadily from 1792 and have adorned biscuit tins and table mats virtually ever since, is also worth noting because of his penchant for painting scenes of charity being dispensed. Wheatley's pictures differ markedly from Hogarth's depictions of London low-life, which date mainly from mid-century. The difference between the work of the two artists is, to a large extent, the difference between bitter satire and picturesque sentiment. Wheatley's Mr Howard Offering Relief to Prisoners (1787) both commemorates a philanthropist and, with its group of imprisoned grandparents, parents and children, satisfies the contemporary taste for pathos. These are certainly the deserving poor.

Of course, with the exception of Gainsborough (and his "fancy pictures" form only a small and late part of his oeuvre), none of these painters specializing in the genre of sentiment would be rated as major artists. Yet it is in the works of minor popular artists that one can often gauge the tastes of a period. What the trends detailed above reveal is the growth of the interest in the peasant figure as one whose economic and social condition elicits a patronising interest readily mingled with pleasing emotions of sympathy and pity. Artistic figurations of the poor tend to depict the deserving poor, for it is those that have aesthetic and emotional appeal.

With the work of John Constable, we return to the art of landscape rather than portraiture or anecdotal material within a landscape. The difference between, say, Richard Wilson and Constable is illustrative of the changes wrought in the fifty years or so that separate them. Constable knew the country intimately, especially his Suffolk landscape. He knew well the labour that goes into maintaining agricultural productivity. He witnesses and comments on the increasing rural unrest which by the 1810s was affecting Suffolk. As many critics have noted, he treats the human subjects as "integral to the landscape" (Rosenthal 204). The labourers he paints might all be engaged in tasks but they are quite obviously depicted because they fulfil a function in compositional terms. He is not concerned with them as individuals, despite being the one artist mentioned so far who was acquainted with actual rural labourers. Although he and his family were noted for their charitable contributions, the Constables revealed distrust of the increasing radicalization of the poor and a firm commitment to the interests of the landowners. More significantly, it has been noted by scholars how, by the 1820s, Constable's politics (never radical) had moved far to the right and how this affected his treatment of the landscapes he knew so well. He no longer made any attempt at "naturalism of appearance" in his Stour Valley paintings of these final years (Rosenthal 211). It is as if the reality of what was happening to sour the old paternalistic relations was something from which he turned away because the "harmonious and mutually benefitting interaction between subject and landscape had been destroyed" (Rosenthal 11). Constable shared with Wordsworth a strong opposition to the 1832 Reform Bill (Rosenthal 234, Gill, Wordsworth 362-3).

This brief overview of artistic figurations of the labouring poor reveals most importantly how little interest there was in any attempt to convey the actualities of poverty. Most artists were still subject to patronage, and patrons would not particularly have wanted harrowing reminders of the realities of an economic system which ensured their wealth at the expense of some one else's poverty. Even relatively independent artists

needed to sell their work and, again, realities which might well evoke a deep sense of guilt would be far less in demand to complete a fashionable decor than studies exuding picturesque sentiment. In the great landscapes, whether of the mid-eighteenth century or the early decades of the nineteenth century, the labourer is present as part of the design, with the same function as a cloud or a tree or a horse or a plough. When the focus is more pointedly on the figure of the labouring poor, as in the genre paintings of the 1790s, then the artist's concern appears to be to elicit the sympathetic pleasure which such pathetic but aesthetically appealing objects might naturally arouse. When we turn to literary figurations in the following chapter we find similar trends. There is the same tendency to concentrate on the rural poor and to render poverty as picturesque. Women in distress, or women and children in distress, are favoured subjects. Because the purpose is most frequently to elicit the pleasurable feeling of sympathy, and, more particularly, pity, it is the deserving poor who are favoured. The undeserving poor, when treated, serve primarily as moral warnings. Yet there are also some crucial differences between pictorial and literary treatments. Perhaps it is not surprising that this should be so, for the written work has a potential audience wider and less predictable than the oil painting or even the more widely disseminated print. Imaginative literature is seldom limited to unadulterated documentation. Even were depictions of poverty to be relatively accurate, the imaginative treatment in words could incorporate many other pleasures, both formal and material. A visual work of art is bounded by its frame and is necessarily more unrelenting in its static objective reality should it depict horrific facts. Goldsmith's socio-political points in The Deserted Village (1770) were generally neither pleasing nor accepted, yet the poem was an immediate success, going through six editions within four months of publication. Greater freedom, both of meaning and interpretation, is perhaps possible for the written word in contrast to the pictorial representation, especially when pictorial art is primarily representational as it was in this period. Another point of difference to remember

is the one pointed out by John Lucas, that, because a poem exists in time, whereas a painting exists in space, a poem has more potential for the gradual unfolding of information, information which might even upset initial expectations (62). It is thus possible to find, even in the most conventional depictions, moments which point to an awareness of the realities which might lie behind and belie the aestheticized renderings of poverty.

Wordsworth's earliest renderings of poverty often derive from both a pictorial and a literary tradition. The female vagrant in The Evening Walk is described in terms which draw from both these traditions. Yet Wordsworth was soon to reveal an awareness of the conflicts inherent in attempting to render the actual conditions of poverty as he perceived them - conditions which appalled him - in the inherited traditions of form and expression.



## CHAPTER THREE

LITERARY FIGURATIONS OF THE POOR IN THE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

Hail, happy lot of the laborious man,  
Securest state of life, great Poverty,  
To thee thrice hail!

(Samuel Jones, "Poverty, in Imitation of  
Milton" 1714)

The poor, inur'd to drudg'ry and distress,  
Act without aim, think little and feel less,  
And nowhere but in feign'd Arcadian scenes,  
Taste happiness, or know what pleasure means.

(William Cowper, "Hope" 1782)

By such examples taught, I paint the cot,  
As truth will paint it, and as bards will not.

(George Crabbe, The Village. 1783)

a) The literary treatment of poverty in the eighteenth century -  
minor voices.

The literary treatment of poverty and the poor during the eighteenth century shows, as does the pictorial treatment, an increase towards the end of the century in the tendency to concentrate on the pitiable object or situation. However there is undoubtedly more evidence throughout the century, in the literary treatment, of some awareness of the disadvantages of poverty and the ways in which the poor are victimized. One might wonder that this had ever been in doubt, but there was a long-standing tradition of regarding the poor as God's special favourites, an attitude which often led to a comforting misreading of the beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5.3). Poverty of spirit (humility) was often read as poverty in an economic sense. This

idea, which initially might have been a deeply held conviction, was, towards the end of the eighteenth century, increasingly used to justify poverty and a lack of concern for the problems of the poor.

David Nichol Smith, in The Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse (1926), selects only six poems about poverty or the poor - the "Apology for Vagrants" extract from Langhorne's The Country Justice, the "Parish Poor-House" extract from Crabbe's The Village, and two appalling but earnest examples of Dactyls and Sapphics by Robert Southey with their respective parodies by George Canning. Roger Lonsdale, in his recent selection, The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse (1984), seeks "to subvert traditional accounts of the nature and development of eighteenth-century poetry [rather] than to supplement them" (Intro. xxxvii). In doing so, he has discovered and selected numerous examples of hitherto marginalized voices speaking of what were considered by polite taste as less decorous subjects. Poverty is certainly one of the topics which is given more coverage in this anthology and the chronological method of entry allows one to note general trends. Of course Goldsmith, Cowper and Crabbe remain the major voices speaking out on poverty but some useful information can be gained from a brief look at a few of the lesser voices. Lonsdale has attempted to give representative examples from the plethora of material which he has scanned. Significantly he states that he considers that many of these "submerged" poets (xxxix) "anticipate the supposedly revolutionary challenge to polite taste which Wordsworth would introduce...in 1798" (xxxviii).

A very early poem by William King, "The Beggar Woman" (1709), has, as its topic, the comic trick served on the aristocrat by a wily member of the lower classes (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 79-80). The situation often revolves round the sexual harassment of a young rural lass and the subsequent ridicule of her would-be seducer. In this poem she is a beggar "yet not so mean/But that her cheeks were fresh and linen clean". Of course her mendicant state is largely irrelevant, serving only to enhance the joke against the gentleman. As such, the beggar

woman is a stereotypical comic type. It would be unlikely that a poem dating from the last years of the century and entitled "The Beggar Woman" would be in this comic mode.

Another conventional way of referring to poverty in the early decades of the century was to praise the personified abstraction. "Most venerable Poverty! to thee all hail!" are the final lines of Samuel Jones's 1714 poem quoted as an epigraph (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 108-9). Pious platitudes emanate from a speaker who is obviously not poor and is ignorant of the actualities of poverty. As happens in this poem, praise of an economic state slides into praise of poverty of spirit (or what we would perhaps call "humility"), the reverse tendency of the conventional reading of the beatitude quoted. Where such a poem differs from the kind of apologetics for poverty published by writers like William Paley and Bishop Watson in the final years of the century is that this is an apostrophe to an abstraction and not an attempt to engage with the reality of the condition. The abstraction "Poverty" is furnished with generalized imagery traditionally thought to characterize the indigent state. The poet might as easily have apostrophised "Hope" or "Liberty" or "Death". This artificial, albeit insensitive, eulogy is rather less objectionable than the special pleading from the lips of the good bishops who were responding to actual and immediate conditions.

Nicholas James's "The Complaints of Poverty" (1742) is, as its title suggests, an example of a way of presenting poverty which looks back to a long tradition of "complaint" verse (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 342-3). The tradition of the lament is still strong in poems like this, both in the choice of the "ages of man" chronology and in the very generalized woes appropriate to each stage. The artificiality of the whole is underscored by the use of the first person plural. The fiction is that "we", the poor, are addressing the rich ("Unless you deign to aid our miseries" 8). The only line out of 64 which hints at any specific historical-social practice is line 55 which alludes to the payment of relief by the parish to the indigent, a practice which, of course, operated over a number of centuries.

Otherwise the existence of poverty is attributed to such vague causes as "the harsh master and penurious dame" (24), "Fate" (54), "Base covetise" (66), and "pride" (68).

Within a few years the choice of poverty or the poor vagrant as the topic of a poem was to result in a very different kind of work. Thomas Moss's "The Beggar" (1769) shows unmistakeable signs of a new lachrymose sentimentality (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 552-3). The quavering appeals of the first person speaker are rendered in alternating rhymes rather than in the rhyming couplets favoured hitherto. This results in a more lyrical, less snappy effect than the couplet form. It is aurally reminiscent of ballad rhymes and hence closer to popular verse. The alternating rhymes and resultant see-saw rhythms suggest, more audibly, the waves of emotional pleading of the suppliant speaker. There is a direct appeal for pity ("Pity the sorrows of a poor old man!"), and the desired response is graphically imaged:

Should I reveal the source of every grief,  
If soft humanity e'er touched your breast,  
Your hands would not withhold the kind relief,  
And tears of pity could not be repressed.

(21-24)

The causes of the miserable old man's poverty-stricken state are buried in pious clichés and vague abstractions: "Heaven sends misfortunes - why should we repine/'Tis heaven has brought me to that state you see" (25-26); "But ah! Oppression forced me from my cot" (31); "My tender wife.../Struck with sad anguish at the stern decree" (38). Because "Oppression" is personified (31), because the "stern decree" is not actually spelt out and is qualified by a definite article rather than a noun or a pronoun to indicate the source of the decree, the facts of forced removals and the decrees authorising them lie safely beneath the bland surface. The situations are predictable. The daughter "lured by a villain" is "cast abandoned on the world's wide stage" (34-5); the wife dies "a victim to despair" (39-40). A

number of details foreshadow Wordsworth's "The Thorn", "The Old Cumberland Beggar", or "Salisbury Plain", and this sense of déjà vu serves to remind one that Wordsworth did draw from a common stock of situations and characters. Mayo, in his pioneering article, "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads", noted this poem, known as "The Beggar's Petition", with no authorship assigned, as having been endlessly reprinted in the 1790s together with a great many other poems about mendicants (504).

The direct appeals for pity were soon to be joined by the creeping infection of a self-congratulatory sense of Christian duty well performed. A short poem by Christopher Smart from his volume Hymns for the Amusement of Children (1770) reveals an additional sentimental ploy - the child as patron (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 449). So were such habits inculcated into other children:

I just came by the prison door,  
I gave a penny to the poor:  
Papa did this good act approve,  
And poor Mamma cried out for love.

Whene'er the poor comes [sic] to my gate,  
Relief I will communicate;  
And tell my sire his sons shall be  
As charitably great as he.

Reading verses like this, one comes to value anew the remarkable transformation by Blake, for the purposes both of searing irony and exposure, of such accepted pieties.

During the final two decades of the century, there was an increase in the number of poems detailing specific grievances and specific practices which worked against the poor. As early as the mid - 70s, John Langhorne's The Country Justice had attacked some specific abuses. Wordsworth wrote in 1837 to Samuel Cater Hall complimenting him on his critique of the poem:

You praise it, and with discrimination -

but you might have said still more in its favour. As far as I know, it is the first Poem, unless perhaps Shenstone's Schoolmistress be excepted, that fairly brought the Muse into the Company of common life, to which it comes nearer than Goldsmith, and upon which it looks with a tender and enlightened humanity - and with a charitable, (and being so) philosophical and poetical construction that is too rarely found in the works of Crabbe.

(Later Years 2: 829)

The Country Justice is beseeched to take note of the iniquitous practices of that "monster furnished with a human frame" - the Parish Officer, among whose cruelties is the practice of driving the heavily pregnant woman beyond the bounds of the parish in order to prevent her and her child from being an additional burden on the parish poor rates (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 622-3). Langhorne deflates with acerbic energy the myth of pleasantly healthy rural occupations. Rather he tells of "harvest's burning suns and sickening air" (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 622), which destroy the health of the breadwinner and force the "pale mother" to repair to the "proud farmer" by whom she is "referred to vestries, and a distant day! / Referred to perish!". The sense of a play on "parish/perish" is unavoidable and Langhorne's bitterness is unashamed:

Is my verse severe?  
Unfriendly to the human character?  
Ah! to this sigh of sad experience trust:  
The truth is rigid, but the tale is just.

(622)

Yet Langhorne can also reveal some predictable middle-class prejudices. In the same poem there is a passage displaying stereotypical distrust of professional vagrants. Expressing a conventional sentimentalized view of the gypsies' envied liberty

which ensures a life of "ragged luxury" (620), he singles out their notoriety as fortune tellers who "seek, with dangerous art,/To aid the native weakness of the heart", and concludes with a quite vicious plea to drive such layabouts off from the "lab'ring hive" of the village (621). Likewise, in "Gipsies" (1807), Wordsworth will castigate, most severely, the indolence displayed by the gypsies.

Some verses dating from the last two decades show a marked discrepancy between manner and matter. A particular abuse or practice might be treated in a rollicking 3/4 measure, complete with chorus. One gets the impression that poems of such a kind, for example, "The Cottager's Complaint, on the Intended Bill for Enclosing Sutton-Coldfield" (1782) by John Freeth, are the product of bar-room lyricists (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 658-9). Another serious social problem that received lighthearted treatment was the "broken soldier" discharged without compensation and "Reduced from port to port to beg" as the anonymous author of "The Soldier that has Seen Service. A Sketch from Nature" phrases it (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 751-2). Another anonymous poem on this theme combines a rollicking rhythm and some wittily facetious phrasing (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 785-6). Yet this poem, "The Volunteer" (1791), is pointedly satirical in its choice of epigraph "Dulce est pro patria mori" and ends on a sardonic note, "Some merciful volley then shatters a leg,/And his crutches procure him permission to beg" (40-1). The anapaests used to express these points result in the bitter effect which Byron sought too, twenty-nine years later, in the Stanzas "When a man hath no freedom to fight for at home". Such anapaestic tetrameters, when used for the straightforward didacticism of Hannah More, do not, of course, have the same chillingly incongruous effect. By the mid-90s More was prolifically engaged in anti-Jacobin propaganda much of which involved the immediate countering of the populist lyrics with similarly styled compositions of a reactionary nature. "The Riot; or, Half a Loaf is Better than No Bread. In a Dialogue between Jack Anvil and Tom Hod" (1795) shows More weaving her way through an argument of quite exceptionally devious logic to prove, Paley-







Arrears of her Pension" (1734) has an affecting and chilling particularity emerging from the conventional couplets (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 233-4). The woman's crazed state rings horrifyingly true:

Now, wild as winds, you from your offspring fly,  
Or fright them from you with distracted eye;  
Rove through the streets; or sing, devoid of care,  
With tattered garments and dishevelled hair;  
By hooting boys to higher frenzy fired,  
At length you sink, by cruel treatment tired,  
Sink into sleep, an emblem of the dead,  
A stone thy pillow, the cold earth thy bed.

(11-18)

Disturbing, too, is the eerie evocation of the fatal loss of courage in the heat of battle "when they [Britain's martial sons] next the hostile wall attack,/Feel the heart fail, the lifted arm grow slack" (21-22). In 1725 Mary Barber had published in Dublin "The Widow's Address", a verse petition on behalf of an army officer's widow which actually reached Lady Carteret, wife of the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland (Lonsdale, Eighteenth-Cent. Verse 118). For Mary Barber the topic had been more than just an academic exercise. It is to Lonsdale's credit that he has salvaged voices like Mary Barber's from long neglect.

b) The Literary treatment of poverty in the eighteenth century:  
major voices - Goldsmith, Cowper, and Crabbe.

It is useful to consider the contribution of Oliver Goldsmith (?1730-1774) because, although he devotes only one poem, The Deserted Village (1770), to a consideration of the fate of the rural poor (with a fleeting reference to the topic in The Traveller 1764), his particular treatment of the topic and the enormous success of the work warrant a brief discussion. In The Traveller, or a Prospect of Society (Lonsdale, Gray 632-57), Goldsmith alludes to the topic that was to become the major theme

of The Deserted Village - the depopulation of the countryside due to the rapacity of the wealthy landowner (lines 397-412). The overt subject of The Deserted Village (Lonsdale, Gray 674-94) is the dispossession of the peasant of his land as a result of the desire of the wealthy to enlarge their estates, vast areas of which were often destined to remain unproductive as mere pleasure parks. Goldsmith also treats of the expansion of trade at the expense of agriculture. Yet a more personal concern, and one of great significance, emerges with the seemingly sudden inclusion of "sweet Poetry" (line 407) in the train of rural virtues which are seen, like the literal villagers who possess them, leaving the land (both the countryside and England). It is Poetry that "found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so" (414). This conflation of the dispossessed poor and the poet who is likewise exiled is, in retrospect, seen to underlie the whole poem, for the idyllic youth of the poet in the village and his projected future return to this Eden as bard, a future which is no longer possible, parallels the paradise lost of Auburn itself. This poem, apparently about the actual depopulation of a village (and we must give credence to Goldsmith's assertions in his Dedication to Reynolds that the poem is the result of actual investigations over a number of years), reveals itself to be, on a less literal level, about the marginalization of the poet and the poetic spirit in an increasingly materialist world. As such it foreshadows Wordsworth's profound sense of identity with the dispossessed and disadvantaged in his world of "getting and spending".

In other respects, Goldsmith is quite traditional in his depiction of the poor. The economic hierarchy that determines the existence of those who are subject to toil and labour is nowhere questioned. It is the fact that "contented Toil and hospitable Care" are being exiled that he deplores, and the epithets are noteworthy indicators of the paternalistic sentimentalization of the reality of the life of the poor. Twice he focuses on the persons most likely to be at the bottom of the economic heap - the pathetic widowed old woman and the seduced and abandoned young woman (129-136, 325-336). The focus on these characters

probably derives from their potential for arousing sentiment rather than from any serious awareness of the ways in which they constitute the most disadvantaged group. One suspects that few, until the 1790s, bothered themselves much with the specific ways in which women were economically the most vulnerable. In his speculations about the likely fate of those forced to seek a livelihood in America's wilderness, Goldsmith utters conventional eighteenth-century Eurocentric sentiments (341-358). The letters from such emigrants often reveal rather the unexpected advantages in having been forced to leave the economic harshness of England:

There is no difficulty of a man's getting land here...many will let a man have land with a few acres improvement and a house on it without any deposit...I think [sic] God my wife and I never found ourselves so comfortable in England as we do here, we have a good comfortable house to live in, and a good cow for our use, and a plenty of firing...there is no distinction between the workman and his master, they would as soon shake hands with a workman as they would with a gentleman...It is not here as in England if you dont liket [sic] you may leaveet et [sic] is here pray do stop i [sic] will raise your wages.

(qtd.in Snell 12-13)

One final point that must be made relates to style. Whenever an educated poet writes about poverty-stricken illiterates there is, potentially, a gulf between poet and subject matter, for the poet's "special authority for speech tends to distinguish him socially and intellectually from those he seeks to merge with sympathetically" (Feingold 185). Likewise, there is often a gulf between style and subject matter. This mismatch was a serious problem which was to be addressed in part in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Unless one was to treat the poor in the old

idealizing pastoral tradition, new forms would need to be forged, for poetry was still too closely associated with an elitist philosophy and manner and an elitist readership. We sense the underlying awareness of this discrepancy in the reactions of contemporary critics to the poem, in Goldsmith's revealing remarks about his purposes, and in accounts of his methods of composition. The critics unanimously lauded the poem's poetic merit while rejecting the validity of its depiction of rural depopulation. The two aspects were easily divorced. William Cooke tells of the deliberate way in which Goldsmith versified his material:

His manner of writing poetry was thus:  
 he first sketched a part of his design  
 in prose, in which he threw out his ideas  
 as they occurred to him; he then sat carefully down to versify them, correct them, and add such other ideas as he thought better fitted to the subject. He sometimes would exceed his prose design, by writing several verses impromptu, but these he would take uncommon pains afterwards to revise, lest they should be found unconnected with his main design.

(qtd.in Lonsdale, Gray 669)

Even more revealing is the answer Goldsmith is purported to have given to the question as to why he had not expressed these socio-political views in a prose pamphlet: "It is not worth my while. A good poem will bring me a hundred guineas, but the pamphlet would bring me nothing" (Lonsdale, Gray 671). Versifying the facts was an economically sound decision.

William Cowper (1731-1800) was one of Wordsworth's favourite poets of whom he never tired. "Though I can make but little use of my eyes in writing, or reading, I have lately been reading Cowper's 'Task' aloud", he writes as late as 19 January 1841 (Later Years 3: 1063). Coleridge considered Cowper to be one of

the first who "combined natural thoughts with natural diction" (Biographia Literaria 13), a characteristic which undoubtedly would have endeared him to Wordsworth. Others found the plainness of style more problematic. John Scott, in his Critical Essay (1785), thought that Cowper succeeded in conveying "village ideas" in "village language" and only just escaped being "prosaick or mean because such passages we know are the effect of choice, not of incapacity" (qtd.in Lonsdale "Goldsmith" 241). It is Cowper who most clearly exemplifies the principles and the prejudices of the Whig cause he espoused. Taking pride in the virtues of the British Constitution, he was predictably anti-Paine, anti-democrat, anti-republican. Yet he recognised the need for reform to avoid revolution, for "power founded in patronage and corrupt majorities must govern this land no longer" (Cowper:Spiller 980). He was sympathetic to the demands of the Dissenters and Roman Catholics for full civil rights. He applauded the first stage of the French Revolution. He had, as early as 1784, written of the torture of solitary confinement in the "horrid tow'rs th'abode of broken hearts" of the Bastille in some of the most grisly and graphic lines of "The Winter Morning Walk" section of The Task (Cowper:Spiller 498-500). Again, predictably, the excesses of the revolutionaries had, by the end of 1792, led him to abhor what he saw as the French propensity for barbarity, in words which frequently betray deep-lying jingoist prejudices (Cowper:Spiller 983,993). However, he hated the idea of war and held firmly to his belief in liberty, a belief which assured his anti-slavery fervour.

With such beliefs and values, it is not surprising that the depiction of the poor in his poetry is almost a text-book display of contemporary Whiggish attitudes. His major treatment of the poor occurs in The Task (1785) (Cowper:Spiller 395-542) and in a few earlier poems. It is valuable to look at his work both because it displays conventional ways of depicting the poor which would have been familiar to Wordsworth, and because it illustrates so resoundingly the traditional eighteenth-century ways of seeing before the tensions of the '90s decade complicated attitudes to the poor.

Cowper accepted implicitly that poverty was natural. Unpleasant as it might be, it was part of the "shifting" and "various" plan "by which Heav'n rules the mixt affairs of man" ("Hope", 15-16). Thus, although one must sympathise with the poor, and try to relieve their sufferings, there is nothing much else that one can or should do. Cowper never denies the unpleasantness of being poor. Sorrow is confined to cottages ("Expostulation" 29). Only in "feign'd Arcadian scenes" do the poor "taste happiness, or know what pleasure means" ("Hope" 9-10). Unremitting physical labour is the primal curse (The Task, "The Sofa" 364) although the very title of this section, "The Sofa", suggests that this curse does not fall on all alike. In the two poems published in 1782, "Truth" and "Hope", he claims that the poor are not only "inur'd to drudg'ry and distress" ("Hope" 7), but, in an ironic demonstration of his own tendency, he claims that they also have a limited capacity to feel their hardships and comprehend their position. He seems to imply that they are of a different species, more like dumb brutes than his own kind. In "Truth", there is a character sketch of a cottager who "at night/Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light" (322). Here the zeugma, beloved of Augustan poets, has a quite shocking effect because Cowper chooses to be witty at the expense of any attempt to understand the burden of that heart:

She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,  
Has little understanding, and no wit,  
Receives no praise, but (though her lot be such,  
Toilsome and indigent) she renders much;  
Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true,  
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;  
And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes,  
Her title to a treasure in the skies.

(323-330)

Not only is she doomed by nature to this "toilsome and indigent" state, but she is also "by nature fit[ted]" to endure, lacking, as she does, much "understanding" or any "wit" - those two

touchstones of eighteenth-century gentility. The combination of the pointed rhyme of the couplets, the neat juxtaposition of her "sparkling" eyes and the "treasure in the skies", and the punning "charter" and "title", enforce the sense that the speaker is making a joke at her expense. It is after all about a serious matter - her trust in a Heavenly reward for the suffering endured below - but, phrased like this, it takes on a deeply patronising air.

In "Hope", there is another example of the way in which certain stylistic features of Augustan verse can render a statement particularly callous. The poor "[a]ct without aim, think little and feel less" (8). This is neatly expressed but tritely fallacious. The very display of such wit seems to carry an assumption that the reader will appreciate it. There is little serious consideration of the plight of the subject. If the latter is desired, either a very different form of expression needs to be forged, or one must avoid such overtly flamboyant wit, as Crabbe was to do (see below).

In a long passage in "The Winter Evening" section of The Task describing the rural swain at work and at home, there is a collocation of traditional canards about the poor (333-512). It opens with the recognition that some suffer more than we do and it is necessary to sympathise with them. The labourer, accompanying the heavily-laden wain, is said to be "form'd to bear" the "pelting brunt of the tempestuous night" (350-1). The toiling steeds are described anthropomorphically with "jutting chests" (350), the labourer seems almost one of the horses, inured to pain:

Oh happy! and, in my account, denied  
That sensibility of pain with which  
Refinement is endued, thrice happy thou.  
Thy frame robust and hardy, feels indeed  
The piercing cold, but feels it unimpair'd.  
(357-361)

The interjected "in my account" seems to point to an awareness

of the subjectivity of the depiction. This was written at a time when mortality rates among the poor told a very different story. There follows a moving description of the poor labourer's household. These are the deserving poor, "Poor, yet industrious, modest, quiet, neat, / Such claim compassion" (374-5 emphases added). They scorn to beg (405) "chusing [sic] rather far/A dry but independent crust, hard-earn'd" (408-9), while the undeserving poor clamour for aid (413-4). These latter shamelessly wear rags and coarse tattered garb which the deserving "would blush" to do (415). One recalls Hannah More's beady-eyed observation in her story of "Black Giles the Poacher" about the kind of appearance most likely to raise compassion (see Chapter 1 above).

To the deserving poor Cowper holds out only vague comforts:

Time itself  
 Shall much befriend you. Time shall give increase  
 And all your num'rous progeny well train'd  
 But helpless, in a few years shall find their  
hands,  
 And labor [sic] too.

(410-414)

In the meantime we will relieve those we judge worthy of relief: "Meanwhile ye shall not want/What, conscious of your virtues, we can spare" (414-416 emphasis added). Placing "conscious of your virtues" immediately before the reference to the alms reveals that the granting of alms is dependent on the benefactors' own sense of pleasure in the perceived virtues of the suppliant rather than being dependent on the perceived (let alone the real) needs of the suppliant. Cowper then continues with a diatribe against the undeserving poor whose indigent state is the result of "laziness or sottish waste" (431). A "day of sloth" (434) (no consideration of the probability of a lack of jobs) leads to a night of pillage, the proceeds of which are squandered in "the styes/That law has licensed" (470-1). It is in such places that even worse habits are inculcated, for "here they learn/The road



that leads, from competence and peace/To indigence and rapine" (495-7). Like many others, Cowper equates the imbibing of drink with the imbibing of dangerous ideas. Throughout these lines of harsh judgement meted out to those deemed undeserving, there is no thought given to the desperation that might well drive the poor to crime - or to drink - or even to thoughts of revolution. When he is not actually castigating the poor, Cowper generally uses the patronising epithets common at the time, words like "boorish" ("The Sofa" 298), "lubbard" ("The Garden" 400), words which did have negative connotations by this period and which assert the difference between us and them. Or there is the more subtle or perhaps just more internalized use of metaphors that perform the same divisive function. In a passage from "The Garden" section of The Task, we have an example of this:

Strength may wield the pond'rous spade,  
May turn the clod, and wheel the compost home.  
But elegance, chief grace the garden shows,  
And most attractive, is the fair result  
Of thought, the creature of a polish'd mind.  
(636-640)

Inevitably "clod" and "compost" are aligned with "strength" and, by extension, to those with brute force, whereas "grace", "attractive", "fair", "thought" and "polish'd mind" are the attributes of the privileged. Placing "thought" and "the creature" in apposition serves to imply that, not only "elegance", but thought itself, is the "creature of a polish'd mind". A little earlier, the same equation of brutishness with the labourer as against intelligence with the master is made:

Or if the garden with its many cares,  
All well repay'd, demand him, he attends  
The welcome call, conscious how much the hand  
Of lubbard labor [sic] needs his watchful eye,  
Oft loit'ring lazily if not o'erseen,  
Or misapplying his unskilful strength.

Nor does he govern only or direct,  
 But much performs himself. No works indeed  
 That ask robust tough sinews bred to toil,  
 Servile employ - but such as may amuse,  
 Not tire, demanding rather skill than force.

(397-407)

"He", in the above lines, is "the self-sequester'd man" (386). We will see, below, how Dorothy Wordsworth describes William's supervision of the garden layout at Coleorton in similar terms. Cowper at times reveals the tendency, discernible in the landscape painters of the period, to conceal the actual back-breaking nature of the labour that is demanded, whether to ensure agricultural productivity or to landscape the pleasure parks of the rich. He directs our attention, "[w]e may discern the thrasher at his task" ("The Sofa" 356 - one notes the voyeuristic collusion with the reader), to the arduous task of threshing. The effort involved is claimed to be the "primal curse" (364), oddly reserved only for some, an effort which is "soften'd into mercy; made the pledge/Of chearful [sic] days, and nights without a groan" (365-366) - a strange piece of logic which does not bear much looking into if its effect of claiming cheer and joy is to stand firm. This is followed by a long paragraph which begins with the suggestion that all this effort is part of the natural cosmic cycles of "ceaseless action" (367), and turns into an argument in favour of the active healthy life, for to be sedentary is to risk disease of mind and body. The seamless way in which the observation of another's arduous labour turns into a eulogy of the healthy dividends of an active life is noteworthy. In contrast, there are many other moments when Cowper eulogises rather the pleasures of leisure:

Oh friendly to the best pursuits of man,  
 Friendly to thought, to virtue, and to peace,  
 Domestic life in rural leisure pass'd!

("The Garden" 290-292)

Indeed the whole poem "stresses the delights of a retired life" (Drabble 964). The overall title of the poem, The Task, alludes to the task set Cowper by Lady Austen to compose a poem, taking as its starting point the sofa in his room (Drabble 964). The labour of the poet thus becomes a eulogy of leisure. The title chosen emphasises the effortful mental labour involved in creating a work of art. Such labour is of a very different order to the physical labour demanded of the poor - yet often the two types of labour were linguistically interchangeable as when Dorothy Wordsworth, writing to Lady Beaumont in 1807, observes:

He [William] is here very happy in his employment [supervising the making of a garden at Coleorton], and I assure you that you need not give yourself a moment's care about interrupting him in his poetical labours; for those will and must go on when he begins, and any interruption, such as attending to the progress of the workmen, and planning the garden, is of the greatest use to him. After a certain time the progress is by no means proportioned to the labour in composition, and if he is called from it by other thoughts, he returns to it with ten times the pleasure, and his work goes on proportionally more rapidly.

(Middle Years 1: 117)

Wordsworth is employed in mental labour, both supervising the garden layout and composition. The workmen are employed in physical labour. The arduousness of this labour is downplayed in the passing reference to their "progress".

Chiming in with the voices of his age, Cowper denounces the "vagabond and useless tribe" of gypsies (paradoxically in the section entitled "The Sofa" 559). This passage contains

predictable assertions about their dishonesty ("Loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal" 573). When, in 1807, Wordsworth writes "Gipsies" he will reiterate all these commonplaces in a poem which tellingly reveals him possessed of the mindset of his class (see Chapter 8 below). Cowper finally suggests that the gypsies' active life outdoors is physic "to heal th'effects/Of loathsome diet, penury, and cold" (590-1).

About charity, Cowper is as clear-sighted almost as Godwin, and one of his finest passages of sustained social satire occurs in the 1781 poem "Charity", directed against those who are charitable only to "lull the painful malady" which is a "queasy conscience", or for the sake of mere show (447-8). In a comment which foreshadows Blake, he recognises the psychological and moral advantages which the poor provided for the rich - advantages which "must cease for ever when the poor shall cease" (452).

There is a crucial moment in "The Winter Evening" section of The Task when Cowper does more than suggest that poverty is merely physically and emotionally disadvantageous, stressing that it has an eroding effect on the mind itself, "[w]here penury is felt the thought is chain'd" (397). Subsequent lines in "The Winter Morning Walk" explore how vital liberty is - not only physical liberty - and the power of the verse demonstrates the force with which he feels this to be so:

'Tis liberty alone that gives the flow'r  
Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume,  
And we are weeds without it. All constraint,  
Except what wisdom lays on evil men,  
Is evil; hurts the faculties, impedes  
Their progress in the road of science; blinds  
The eyesight of discov'ry, and begets,  
In those that suffer it, a sordid mind  
Bestial, a meagre intellect, unfit  
To be the tenant of man's noble form.

(446-455)

Undoubtedly Cowper could write plainly and tellingly about the poor. The lines descriptive of the poor abandoned woman who "roams/The dreary waste" ("The Sofa" 546-7) "press'd with hunger" and "pinch'd with cold" (555-6), thereby foreshadowing many such in the verse of the next few years, ends with the chillingly abrupt "Kate is craz'd" (556) where the alliteration enforces the hideous certainty of the fact. Yet, too often, liberty and leisure were seen as the prized prerogative only of the few - understandably termed "privileged". Liberty and leisure were inextricably connected, both dependent on the ownership of property which paradoxically freed one from the arduous duty of maintaining that property oneself.

George Crabbe (1754-1832), almost as long-lived as Wordsworth, is the poet who most needs to be considered in any study of Wordsworth's treatment of the poor, because the poor were pre-eminently Crabbe's focus of attention, and his attitude and presentation differ in some important ways from Wordsworth's.

Crabbe chooses the heroic couplet form but, in his hands, the rhymes of the couplet are used primarily to press home a point which is often sharp and bitter rather than as a means of highlighting facetious wit.

He published The Village (Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 157-74) in 1783 when he was 29 and Wordsworth 13, and it is salutary to consider what differences can be seen between this work and his next major work, The Parish Register, published the year of Wordsworth's Poems in Two Volumes (1807) when revolution, war, the success of the abolitionist cause and the increased official interest in the poor had affected the attitudes of many. I shall confine myself to these two works, stemming as they do from before and after the crucial '90's decade.

Crabbe insists at length in the first lines of The Village that he will give "the real picture of the poor" (5). The propensity of the pastoral to idealize the conditions of rural labour is rejected. James Thomson's description of harvest time in The Seasons (1746) is a typical example of the conversion of the arduous nature of the work under the late summer sun into a picture of health-giving activity with sexual overtones:





Whose outward splendor [sic] is but Folly's dress,  
Exposing most, when most it gilds distress.

(79-84)

There is then a paragraph devoted to the gypsies (85-88), but in Crabbe's treatment we are far removed from Cowper's jolly if deviant group. Here the gypsies' nomadic lifestyle, in traditional renderings a source of pleasure, is presented as the "joyless" flight from "civil art and social" (85, 87). The next paragraph focuses on the reciprocal vices of employer and employee. Master and labourer are alike a party to anti-social behaviour, rendering society an atavistic jungle:

Here too the lawless merchant of the main  
Draws from his plough th'intoxicated swain;  
Want only claim'd the labour of the day,  
But vice now steals his nightly rest away.

(89-92)

Nature is either "niggard" or smiling only for the few, rendering the many "doubly poor" thereby (139).

In a long passage in Book One of The Village (140ff.) Crabbe addresses the privileged reader with whom he cannot deny identification, and attacks "our" tendency to paint false pictures of "them" - the divide between the two groups is a measure of the problem. The insensitive attitude which judges those no longer capable of strenuous effort as "lazy" is sharply castigated, "[a]nd, when his age attempts its task in vain,/With ruthless taunts of lazy poor complain" (198-9). These lines form part of a lengthy portrait of an indigent old man (188-239) which needs to be read alongside Wordsworth's "Michael" and "The Old Cumberland Beggar" to enable us to gain a greater insight into Wordsworth's particular agenda and the purpose behind his two portraits. Crabbe's old shepherd "murmur[s] to the winds that blow" (202), "murmur" here very probably bearing its common meaning of an expression of discontent by indistinct complaint, indistinct by reason of his weak old age. This is not the vision



of Michael's symbiotic relationship with the winds or the speaker's plea to allow the old Cumberland beggar freedom so that the "chartered wind" can "beat" against the old man's "withered face" (168-9). The flocks Crabbe's old shepherd tends are "others' gain, but killing cares to me" (217). This shepherd does not even have a good relationship with the sheep.

In Book Two, Crabbe lightens the picture a little by depicting the "gleams of transient mirth and hours of sweet repose" (4) in order to avoid a one-sided picture. He then demonstrates that, in moral terms, rich and poor share a common humanity. To make such a point, however true, is to change the angle of one's approach. Another new argument comes just before the concluding panegyric on the Manners family, when Crabbe remarks that the rich are also "victims of distress", even if it is not material distress. The poor must remember that, before they succumb to envy of the rich. Thinking of the distresses of the rich, the poor must let their "murmurs cease" (113). Here, the noun bears, once again, its implication of (potentially rebellious) complaint. Thus the poem, which has shown the most clear-eyed assessment of the lot of the poor to date, concludes by dwindling into conventional sententious moralising. Having shown a strong aversion to traditional sentimentalization of the poor, Crabbe, in this poem, is concerned to document the truth rather than appeal directly for change. Indeed, the poem ends with an organic metaphor - the aristocratic Manners family likened to the ever-flowing river. We are left with the wish that a benevolent aristocracy might ever fertilize the land.

Certainly in The Village Crabbe has revealed graphically the miseries of the poor and rejected prevalent eighteenth-century tendencies, either to sentimentalize their condition or to divide them into the deserving and the undeserving. Yet the existence of poverty is not questioned nor is there any interest, either in envisaging a restructuring of society which might possibly eradicate the apparently unalterable fact of poverty, or in analysing the nexus between wealth and poverty. During the 1790s such ideas were articulated, albeit by a tiny minority. Such ideas were thus conceivable. To look now at The Parish Register

(1807) (Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 212-80) will be to gauge whether Crabbe was at all affected by the manifold discussions around the issue of poverty in the 1790s.

The Preface to Poems 1807 promises that The Parish Register, like the earlier The Village, will

endeavour once more to describe Village  
-Manners, not by adopting the notion of  
pastoral simplicity or assuming ideas of  
rustic barbarity, but by more natural  
views of the peasantry, considered as a  
mixed body of persons sober or profligate,  
and from hence, in a great measure,  
contented or miserable.

(Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 207)

However, this proposal reveals a rather different purpose from that of the earlier poem. Although there is the claim to depict documented actuality, "natural views" rather than conventional literary stereotypes, Crabbe reveals that he will differentiate between the sober and the profligate, the sobriety or profligacy being "in a great measure" the cause of "their" content or misery. Misery or contentment are not seen as the result of certain conditions of life, but rather as the result of certain behaviour which inevitably leads to contentment or misery. This allows for the presentation of an assortment of characters in action, a narrative tendency which was to become Crabbe's special forte, culminating, most notably, in the stories of Ellen Orford, Abel Keene, and Peter Grimes in The Borough (1810).

The opening lines "[t]he Year revolves, and I again explore/The simple Annals of my Parish-poor" (1-2) set the tone and mood. The speaker's tone is ruminative and paternalistic - the parish priest reminiscing about the births, copulations and deaths in his parish. This work is not, as was The Village, an exposé of the miseries of poverty; rather it is an indulgent, albeit dramatic, record of the characters in a village. Briefly Crabbe reminds us that his village is no Auburn or Eden (26), but

the reason he gives is illuminating. He attributes this to the traditional belief in mankind's sinful state, "[s]ince Vice the world subdued and Waters drown'd" (25). Obviously this poem is not going to suggest any specific sociological or political reasons for any woes it will relate. The causes will be purely moral ones. The two halves of the rhyming couplet neatly differentiate in traditional fashion "th'abstemious few" blessed (sic) with "Toil, care, and patience" (29) from the "thoughtless herd" pursued by "Fear, shame, and want" (30):

Hence good and evil mix'd, but Man has skill  
And power to part them, when he feels the will;  
Toil, care, and patience bless th'abstemious few,  
Fear, shame, and Want the thoughtless herd pursue.  
(27-30)

One notes the confident assertion that one can discriminate absolutely. The words "good" and "evil" quickly assume the force of good persons and evil persons. Throughout the work such judgemental epithets will predominate to explain the success or failure of various villagers. The first 276 lines form an overview of the village - the poem is thereafter devoted to anecdotes.

This village is blessed with what was at least unusual by this time - an "indulgent" squire who assigned to every cottager a piece of land for his own private use and profit (129-138). Yet this is no longer the norm for the narrator admits that, so far, he has been describing "fair scenes of peace" (166), the condition of the sober and contented. Now "Vice and Misery...demand the song" and we will "turn our view from dwellings simply neat,/To this infected Row, we term our Street" (168-9). Of course this slum is inhabited by the "Sot, the Cheat, the Shrew" (171). There is no concern to give any specific reasons for such self-destructive behaviour other than deplorable human weakness. Some lines later, the speaker is even more moralistic:

Whence all these woes? - From want of virtuous

will,

Of honest shame, of time-improving skill;  
 From want of care t'employ the vacant hour  
 And want of every kind but want of power.  
 (226-9)

Here the word "want" most obviously means "lack of", yet there is, paradoxically, a sense in which the poor have wants of every kind, including desire for power. Yet Crabbe appears to occlude that meaning for here the power of the undeserving poor lies solely in their capacity for dissolute behaviour and vicious connivance. Lack of moral fibre is castigated and the sufferings are seen to be explicable, inevitable and just. In contrast to the picture painted earlier of viable smallholdings, "[s]lothful waste" (245) has destroyed the viability of the land of villagers such as these.

In concluding the general overview, Crabbe once again differentiates between the deserving and the undeserving - the former we willingly relieve and the latter only when we are forced to do so:

Such are our Peasants, those to whom we yield  
 Praise with relief, the Fathers of the Field;  
 And these who take from our reluctant hands,  
 What Burn advises or the Bench commands.  
 (269-272)

Only the hardworking peasants, who yield us the harvest by their industry in the fields ("the Fathers of the Field"), deserve our praise and relief.

The tales that follow concern the already familiar types found in any annals of the poor. Indeed the first tale is of Lucy, the Miller's daughter, whose history of love and loss and incipient madness is the history of many another abandoned female in the literature of this period.

At times Crabbe sounds ominously like William Paley exhorting the poor to remember the greater problems there are in

being rich. Gerard Ablett, bemoaning his wife's financially burdensome fertility, is told that soon "all thy Boys shall be/Lords of a cot, and labourers like thee" (492-3), and his daughters settled in marriage, whereas his rich Master will be struggling to accommodate the voracious financial demands of his offspring.

The critical reception of The Village and The Parish Register reveals some interesting things. A number of critics dwelt on the content of The Village judging it to be as exaggerated in the opposite extreme as the rejected idyllic view (Monthly Review November 1783 cited in Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 664). The British Magazine and Review for August 1783 felt, on the contrary, that it was accurate in its presentation of the wretchedness of rural poverty (Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 664). Others hoped that the details were not taken from life. Cartwright, in the Monthly Review of November 1783, noticed with disfavour the inconsistency between the castigation of conditions in the first part and the argument in the second part that the poor need not envy the rich because neither virtue nor happiness depended on rank or station (Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 664). Given that Crabbe was extremely insecure about his literary ability and sought the advice of his mentor, Edmund Burke, who passed the manuscript on to Samuel Johnson, and that he gratefully accepted comments from each of them, one might ponder on how much the opinion of those two men, if not their actual suggestions, affected Crabbe's revisions.

In the case of The Parish Register there was no comment, as there had been in reaction to The Village, about the truthfulness or not of the picture of village life, presumably because there was nothing in it that would alarm the genteel reader. Critical comment was devoted rather to its style which was thought to be coarse and often careless, both grammatically and metrically (Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 687). There are very few figures of speech, and no superficial marks of poetry except for the versification; the deliberate ordinariness of the material would seem to demand a plain, unvarnished style. However, this understated style did not accord well with ideas still prevailing

of what constituted poetry - ideas which Wordsworth challenged in the argument of the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, published in January 1801. Poetry was still, for most readers, the exclusive domain of a particular class, a class which demanded elegance and polish: "[f]or the very essence of poetry is an elevation in thought and style above the common standard; and if it wants this character, it wants all that renders it valuable", wrote Mrs Barbauld when introducing her Hymns in Prose for Children by the Author of Lessons for Children (1781) just two years before the publication of The Village (qtd. in de Sola Pinto 84).

Crabbe's avoidance of those elements which constituted readers' notions of the "poetic" was considered at least odd, if not downright unacceptable. An anonymous writer in the Edinburgh Annual Register of 1808, in an essay entitled "Of the Living Poets of Great Britain", called him "an original poet, he is sui generis" (qtd.in Broman 43). It was The Borough (1810) which evoked the most debate. A reviewer in the Edinburgh Review of April 1810 stated:

his characters and incidents...are as common as the elements of which they are compounded are humble; and not only has he nothing prodigious or astonishing in any part of his representations, but he has not even attempted to impart any of the ordinary colours of poetry to those vulgar materials.

(qtd.in Broman 44)

A less enthusiastic critic, in the Quarterly Review of November 1810, declared that his work was "essentially hostile to the highest exercise of the imagination" (Broman 44). In 1834, in Table Talk, Coleridge charged Crabbe with "an absolute defect of the imaginative power" (1:465-6). The criticism seems to be that Crabbe does not bring to bear on the facts any of the illuminating and transforming power of the creative imagination, but merely documents. Crabbe, in a letter of 1816, stressed the

factual basis of his works:

indeed I do not know that I Could paint merely  
from my own Fancy & there is no Cause why we  
should. Is there not Diversity sufficient in  
Society? & who Can go, even but a little into  
the assemblies of our fellow Wanderers from the  
Way of perfect Rectitude, & not find Characters  
so varied and so pointed that he need not call  
upon his Imagination?

(qtd.in Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 686)

In his shifting use of singular and plural pronouns, Crabbe seems to imply that we all share with the artist a capacity to recognise the potential interest value to be found in the variety of human life. Crabbe does not feel the need either to invent or to varnish the facts which he feels have intrinsic interest. It would seem that the misunderstanding lies in the different meaning given to "imagination" by Coleridge and Crabbe. For Coleridge, it is the transforming power which an artist, qua artist, brings to bear on reality, thereby rendering more fully its essence and truth. This he feels Crabbe fails to do by his apparently unmediated documenting of actuality. For Crabbe, the "imagination" he rejects seems closer to what Coleridge would term "fancy" - an artificial adulteration of the facts for the purposes of instilling a spurious interest value.

Jeffrey, with his own particular anti-Lakist agenda, praised Crabbe in the Edinburgh Review of April 1808 for the ways in which he contrasted with the "elaborate raptures" of the Lake poets (Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 687). Perhaps this explains the sharpness of tone in Wordsworth's letter to Samuel Rogers in September 1808:

I am happy to find that we coincide in  
opinion about Crabbe's verses; for poetry  
in no sense can they be called....After all,  
if the Picture were true to nature, what

claim would it have to be called Poetry? At the best, it is the meanest kind of satire, except the merely personal. The sum of all is, that nineteen out of 20 of Crabbe's Pictures are mere matters of fact; with which the Muses have just about as much to do as they have with a Collection of medical reports, or of Law cases.

(Middle Years 1: 244)

Just as in the 1843 Fenwick note to An Evening Walk, where he states that he was unwilling, albeit unconsciously, "to submit the poetic spirit to the chains of fact and real circumstance" (Averill 302), so here he seems close to advocating the simplistic doctrine that Poetry equals fiction. Yet Poetry for Wordsworth (as for Coleridge) implies the use of the transforming and creative power of the imagination. Some of Wordsworth's most poignant and socially aware work of the 1790s was "true to nature" in that it was rooted in the actuality of observed conditions. Yet Wordsworth would have argued that such truth to nature does not imply a painstaking attempt to mirror actuality without any creative control of the material, for this would be, as he seems to feel Crabbe's work to be, a mere cataloguing of observed conditions, the work of a sociologist rather than of an artist. Wordsworth did show increasing tendencies to write in a conventionally poetic manner and, by 1808, might well have been antipathetic to Crabbe's plain style. What is noteworthy is that most contemporary commentators accept unquestioningly the documentary accuracy of Crabbe's depiction of poverty. What causes unease is his "unpoetic" style. Few seem to entertain the possibility that the style is a deliberate attempt on Crabbe's part to suit style to the humble, plain matter. Significantly it was Byron, noted for his own direct realism, who appreciated Crabbe's plain manner and who championed a poet whose work seemed increasingly sui generis.

The change in attitude from The Village to The Parish Register did not go unnoticed by contemporaries:



Mr Fox repeated, once or twice, that it was a very pretty poem; that Crabbe's condition in the world had improved since he wrote the 'Village', and his view of life and of mankind had improved likewise. 'The Parish Register' bore marks of some little more indulgence to our species; though not so many as he could have wished, especially as the few touches of that nature are beautiful in the extreme.

(Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 685)

Crabbe remained a chronicler of the poor and marginalized. Jerome J. McGann has argued persuasively for the reassessment of Crabbe as a formidable alternative voice to that of the Romantic Idealism of Wordsworth and Coleridge (Beauty of Inflections 308). The bleakness of the narratives in The Borough clearly supports McGann's thesis. However, it is both The Village, which Wordsworth would undoubtedly have known when he began writing, and The Parish Register, published in the year of Wordsworth's two-volume edition of Poems, which are most relevant to this study.

In Book One of The Village, Crabbe reveals a deep awareness of the indignities of poverty, and a spirited rejection of the iniquity of glossing over these real sufferings. Book Two of The Village concentrates, however, on the vices common among the poor. Pre-empting the reader's possible question as to why he, on the evidence of Book One, an obvious champion of the poor, now relates these humble crimes (87), Crabbe reveals his purpose now to be to indicate that rich and poor are morally (or immorally) equal. Thus Crabbe's focus has changed from an exposé of the painful realities of poverty to an explanation for the miseries on moral grounds.

The Parish Register likewise opens with a rejection of the existence of Arcadia. Now, however, the point is, not that the reality of rural poverty is far removed from the sentiments of traditional poetry, but that the world, generally, is a place of mixed fortunes. It has been suggested that Crabbe reacted to the

over-optimism of liberal reformers (Hatch 195). Certainly, in the Preface to Poems 1807, he notes and rejects "hyperbolical or hypocritical professions of universal philanthropy" (Crabbe:Dalrymple-Champneys 207). Could it not also be that, by 1807, he, like Wordsworth, was reacting adversely to the increased politicization of the poor, and consequently discriminating more absolutely between the deserving (the mild-mannered and obsequious) and the undeserving (the vociferous agitators)? There is no denying the graphic qualities of The Parish Register. Such vividly documented activities as the cock fight (1: 257-268) are richly informative. Such clear-eyed perceptions of human traits as delightfully self-serving as "to call the Wants of Rogues the Rights of Man" (1: 815) are both perceptive and amusing. Yet, far from pitilessly exposing the hardships of the poor (as in Book One of The Village), Crabbe has now seemingly succumbed to the argument, popular in the debate about poverty during the '90s, that with sufficient "will" Man has the "power" to influence the trajectory of his life. To argue that is to fail to understand the validity of what Thomas Paine propounded in Agrarian Justice (1795-6):

the great mass of the poor in all countries  
are become an hereditary race, and it is next  
to impossible for them to get out of that state  
themselves.

(3: 339)

Such an awareness was not confined to the radical Paine, for in 1797 Sir Frederick Morton Eden, in The State of the Poor, concurred, albeit with his own more pessimistic emphasis:

at no period of our history have the labouring  
classes been able to subsist, without a continual  
and unremitting exertion of labour; that they are  
exposed to calamities, such as no human foresight  
can avert, which may reduce them to penury and  
want; and that, whatever improvements may take

place in civil society, there is no probability that "the Poor will ever cease out of the land".

(1:413)

By the time Wordsworth began his poetic career, literary depictions of poverty and the poor formed a well-established topic. Although popular verse in the eighteenth century had moved from apostrophes to the abstraction "Poverty" to tear-provoking vignettes of the deserving poor and moralistic warnings about the undeserving poor, more serious poets had attempted to convey at least some of the less appealing realities of the indigent state. Yet however unvarnished was the representation of poverty in Goldsmith, Cowper, or Crabbe, none of them questioned the existence of poverty. Whereas Cowper differentiates clearly between the deserving and the undeserving poor, Crabbe does so, not in The Village (1783), but in The Parish Register (1807). The crucial upheavals of the 1790s intervene and it is not unlikely that the increased politicization of the poor affected Crabbe's attitude as it seems to have done Wordsworth's.

Within the eighteenth-century treatment of poverty one discerns foci and trends which appear again in Wordsworth's work. Not only are women, particularly abandoned mothers, a favourite subject, but, in the work of Goldsmith, Cowper, and Crabbe, one finds interesting aspects which Wordsworth was to develop. For example, in Goldsmith, the condition of the poor is seen to have affinity with the poet's marginalized and precarious state, while Cowper touches on the connection between poverty and mental trauma, and Crabbe consciously rejects conventional poeticisms as unsuited to the realities of poverty. Indeed all three of these major poets show at least some awareness of the problems of expressing new matter in old poetic ways. Yet there is one crucial difference when we look at the work of Wordsworth. He proves to be one of the first serious voices to speak out vehemently against the very existence of poverty and to engage seriously with the hidden costs of poverty both to the individual and to the nation. The following chapter will start to follow his

journey from his use of the inherited conventions to the attainment of his distinctive voice of protest.

## CHAPTER FOUR

FROM THE VALE TO THE PLAIN: WORDSWORTH'S JOURNEY FROM  
INNOCENCE TO EXPERIENCE.

But, Charity, thy treasures show  
 A warmer tint and riper glow,  
 And richly teem with smiling store  
 For the long Winter of the poor.  
 (The Vale of Esthwaite 149-152, c.1787)

All blind she wilders o'er the lightless heath,  
 Led by Fear's cold wet hand, and dogg'd by Death.  
 (An Evening Walk 285-6, c.1789)

And homeless near a thousand homes I stood  
 And near a thousand tables pined and wanted food.  
 (Salisbury Plain 386-7, 1793)

To read the range of poems written by Wordsworth from his student days until those appearing in what was to prove one of his major publications, the Two Volume Poems of 1807, is to note the rise and fall of his concern with the specifics of poverty and with a politicized approach to the problem of poverty. The poor vagrant figure, who first appears in his earliest work in a wholly conventional manner, becomes a source of almost obsessive interest during the years 1793-1798, years which were crucial to Wordsworth both personally and professionally. The final cluster of poems dealing with the vagrant poor, the abandoned, the outcast, the dregs of society, were written in the spring of 1802 but not published until 1807. After 1802 much was to change both in Wordsworth's personal life and in his poetic interests, and it is significant that, whereas six out of nineteen of Wordsworth's poems in the 1798 edition of Lyrical Ballads concerned the marginalized figures who are the subject

of this study, only five out of approximately one hundred and fourteen poems in the 1807 volumes treated such subjects. Wordsworth certainly did not abandon his interest in the problems of poverty nor in the condition of being poor and marginalized, but it was in the 1790s that the personal and the political combined to render the figure of the poor man, woman, or child, of such crucial interest to him. Schooled by Michel Beaupuy, his interest in these marginalized figures was acute, and his own experience of alienation and lack of direction on his return from France in late 1792 meant that such outcast figures were fitting mental companions on his own private odyssey through the turbulent paths of this decade.

The Vale of Esthwaite (c.1787) is Wordsworth's first extended attempt at poetry (Hayden 1: 50-66). Over 500 lines are extant and, in tetrameter couplets, the poem covers the course of a day purportedly in the valley of Esthwaite. However, the landscape is that of countless sub-Miltonic poems of the eighteenth century, and only rarely is there a sharpness of carefully observed detail. The poem abounds in short Gothic set-pieces and the daylight hours are given far less space than the twilight gloom or the even more pleasingly awful shades of night. It is no surprise at all, amid this literary collage, for Pity and Charity and the "wild love wailings" (166) of an abandoned female to occupy their wonted space in a poem so derivative. As night falls, so, too, does "the tender twilight" fall on the heart (125-6). "Sweet Pity" (127) is something to be indulged in, purposeless and undirected, "[t]he heart, when passed the Vision by,/Dissolves, nor knows for whom [n]or why" (129-130). Pity, something with which a "Bard can never part" (139), is, in terms of mood, the "Autumn of the heart" (140), whereas Charity, which inevitably follows a few lines later, although also Autumnal, is the cornucopia providing for "the long Winter of the poor" (152). The extended metaphor, although conventional, is not without aptness but the whole is an academic exercise of uncertain quality. Not many lines later, the wails of that most favoured literary figure - the bereft and crazed female - are, seemingly, heard:

my listening ear  
 The wild lone wailings seems to hear -  
 Of one who crazed with care and pain  
 Hung to her straw and clanking chain.  
 (165-8)

The Vale of Esthwaite is little more than a listing of stock situations and characters and this crazed female figure is just one of these. The speaker himself, a cipher rather than an individualized personality, could not have any credible interaction with such a figure who is part of the predominant Gothic scenery rather than one bearing any documentary status. When the lines resume, it is for the moon to shine momentarily on a distant hamlet in one of the poem's many, brief, snapshots.

It is, however, in Wordsworth's first two published poems, An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches (1793), that development begins to take place in the presentation of pitiable poverty. It is essential for one to look at these works chronologically if one is to trace the significance of this development in the light of Wordsworth's personal biography. An Evening Walk was most probably begun in late 1788 and "tinkered with" as late as 1792 (Averill 13). Descriptive Sketches was written in France during 1792. The two poems appeared on January 29th 1793 and were thereafter much revised (An Evening Walk most extensively in 1794 and Descriptive Sketches as late as 1836). The changes that we see in the treatment of conventional imagery, both in the two poems as first published and within the revisions thereafter, are often significant as an indicator of Wordsworth's changing attitudes, most especially with regard to poverty.

Averill notes that An Evening Walk was probably begun about October 1788 and that the first entry in DC MS 7 (which contains most of the material for the poem) is the description of the female vagrant, together with the lines on pity and hope, from The Vale of Esthwaite. A notebook dating from mid-1788, some months earlier, has blank verse lines describing a vagrant woman and her family (Averill 4-5). This at least suggests that the

figure of the female vagrant formed an important starting point for Wordsworth - a set-piece which was to form the germ of a number of later poems.

An Evening Walk, while not quite as obviously in search of a subject as Keats's "I stood tip-toe", is still very much a beginner's poem. It does have an overall shape imposed by the temporal framework, but the speaker is clearly grasping at anything remotely suitable for poetic treatment. The progress is episodic; linking phrases, like "I love to mark" (1793, 141), or "I love beside the glowing lake to stray" (1793, 195), gloss over the lack of tight thematic cohesion. The overall mood is suggested in these lines, retained in all versions:

But o'er the sooth'd accordant heart we feel  
 A sympathetic twilight slowly steal,  
 And ever, as we fondly muse, we find  
 The soft gloom deep'ning on the tranquil mind.  
 Stay! pensive, sadly-pleasing visions, stay!  
 Ah no! as fades the vale, they fade away.  
 Yet still the tender, vacant gloom remains,  
 Still the cold cheek its shuddering tear retains.  
 (1793, 381-388)

Many of the characteristics of eighteenth-century sentimental verse are present here - the use of the first person plural, the indulgence in "sadly-pleasing" sentiment, the gathering dusk bringing with it its concomitant dimming of mental faculties until heart and mind are equally lulled by, and in, the "sympathetic twilight", the use of exclamation marks in an attempt to infuse drama into the overall soporific pace, the inevitable "shuddering tear" transfixed on the "cold cheek". The lexical set - "steal [away]", "fade away", "gloom" (twice), "twilight", "visions", "pensive", "sadly-pleasing", "shuddering" - is that beloved by Ann Radcliffe and fellow Gothacists. Such words are suggestive of an indeterminacy which is both disturbing and pleasantly titillating. It is thus no surprise that that favourite figure of sentimental verse - the ailing young





Only lines 249-250 survive in the 1836 version, and at first glance it might seem that the 1793 lines are overwrought and expendable. Certainly there is melodrama, but the total effect of the desert-like landscape, dry and bleak, the searing heat and the feverish and "o'erlabour'd" body is striking, especially given the gentle poeticisms of much of the rest of the poem. The arid present and future prospect is contrasted with the well of hope, a source of refreshment no longer viable. The emblems in the final line are both symbolically suggestive and also appropriate to the already emphasised difficult progress and spiritual and physical drought suffered by the mother. The multiple consonants in line 247, difficult to enunciate, evoke the painful progress of the woman. The carefully observed detail of the arm numbed by the weight of the child (251) emphasises the way a relatively minor pain can add to psychological distress even when much greater pain is being endured. "Shakes" has overtones of "shaking the fist", as if the woman, by her very being, calls down vengeance. Her present landscape of the bleak mountain with its "shadeless height" compares with his sterile landscape, "Bunker's charnel hill".

There are other moments in the 59 lines given to the vagrant woman where the images are carefully observed and striking. One of these is the description of the glow-worm's significantly "harmless" ray (when all else is baleful) which sheds "small circles of green radiance [which] gleam around" (278). This was inexplicably omitted in 1836, despite Coleridge's flattering and (rare for Coleridge) acknowledged borrowing of it in "Lines Written at Shurton Bars, near Bridgewater, September 1795".

The concluding paragraph of this section is full-blown Gothic with chiaroscuro staging of the final moments of life (279-300). In line 285 there is the first presentation of those despairing wanderers through landscapes inhospitable to humankind, wanderers who trouble the mind and who so epitomise Wordsworth's poetry of the 1790s, "all blind she wilders o'er the lightless heath". The Gothicisms of these lines attempt to render the passion and urgency with which Wordsworth invests the inherited convention. The extravagant emotional intensity of the

imagery serves to render these paragraphs a startling contrast to the bland and gentlemanly peripateticism prevailing elsewhere in the poem. Lucas argues that Wordsworth's "tastelessness" in 1793 is deliberate - he intends the stark actuality of the woman's plight to contrast with the picturesqueness of the tastefully composed world of the convention in the rest of the poem (59). What is noticeable in this first published work is that there already exists tension between, in John Williams' words, "the aesthetic conventions in landscape description, and the less than picturesque realities of the countryside" (39).

In the Fenwick note to An Evening Walk, Wordsworth confesses his unwillingness (of which he was, he states, unconscious at the time) "to submit the poetic spirit to the chains of fact and real circumstance" (Averill 302). This might well be a post-facto judgement, dating as it does from 1843, for by 1793 he was to bring the passion and urgency displayed in the treatment of the imagined figure of the female vagrant to bear on actual instances of distress and despair. It would thus seem more likely that An Evening Walk, far from being an example of his later distaste for "mere matters of fact" (Letter to Rogers 1808 in Middle Years 1: 244), was rather an example of a young poet's heavy reliance on consciously literary models.

The accompanying poem in the 1793 volume, Descriptive Sketches, reveals some significant changes from An Evening Walk. Descriptive Sketches is still a loco-descriptive poem, and yet the choice of scenery, the awe-inspiring landscape of the Alps, is sufficient, in itself, to result in a very different mood and tone from An Evening Walk. Yet there is more than just a change from the beautiful to the sublime. The poem purports to be about Wordsworth's 1791 walking tour with Robert Jones, and certainly the route is generally that of their journey. However, the poem was written while Wordsworth was in Blois in the spring and summer of 1792 and completed in Orleans in October (see lines 760-762). All commentators have agreed that, although its geography is that of the 1791 tour, its mood in no way reflects the light-hearted enthusiasm of the vacationing student of 1791 but rather reveals the anxious, unsettled, revolutionary months

of 1792. Anxiety and an unsettled mood would understandably have resulted from his relationship with Annette Vallon, now pregnant with his child, and from the public events in France. Massacres in Paris in September and violent riots nearer home in Orleans, to which he had moved from Blois in September (Roe 70), make the Gothicism of the poem an entirely appropriate medium to convey the sublime horror and awesome terror of those days:

From viewless lamps a ghastly dimness falls,  
 And ebbs uncertain on the troubled walls,  
 Dim dreadful faces thro' the gloom appear,  
 Abortive Joy, and Hope that works in fear,  
 While strives a secret Power to hush the  
croud,[sic]  
 Pain's wild rebellious burst proclaims her rights  
aloud.  
(648-653)

The Swiss Alps, in their awesome splendour, suit Wordsworth's deepening understanding of the rigours of existence. Given the reputation of the Swiss for sturdy independence, mention of the Alps also sparks off thoughts of "Freedom" as opposed to "Oppression" (520-541), words which resonate with the rhetoric of 1792. The Swiss peasant retains a primeval freedom and feels "his rights" (534). The poem concludes with a rousing tribute to Liberty and a prayer to God to aid the cause of freedom versus oppression. A few weeks before he concluded the poem, France had proclaimed herself a Republic, and it is in a spirit of expectant hope that the poem ends. The language of these lines is the language of millenarian vision, the metaphors those common to most radical writers of these years. There might be "fire" brought by "Hell's own aid" (781) but "[l]o! from th'innocuous flames, a lovely birth!/With its own virtues springs another earth" (782-3). Freedom must oppose "dark oppression's thick-ribb'd tow'rs (795). Unbeknown to Wordsworth, William Blake described the Bastille in The French Revolution (1791) in similar

terms - "her [Paris's] grey towers groan, and the Bastille trembles./In its terrible towers the Governor stood, in dark fogs listening the horror" (18-19). It is interesting to compare the rhetoric of this concluding section of Descriptive Sketches with the Blake poem. Because Blake is noted for a style that is prophetic/apocalyptic, readers seldom flinch at his Gothicism, whereas, because Wordsworth is customarily associated with simplicity, his writing here is often judged to be juvenile and melodramatic. It is salutary to remember that Blake had no qualms about writing, in the same years, both the lucid Songs of Innocence and of Experience as well as the impassioned The French Revolution, America, and Europe with their chiaroscuro effects and millenarian imagery.

While Descriptive Sketches as a whole does not foreground poverty, one 54-line section does focus on a single mother. More space is given to this Grison gypsy than to any other figure in the poem. Men and women travel through "life's long deserts" as part of "a mighty caravan of pain" (193, 196), yet she is alone, hopeless and helpless, wandering "hand in hand with Fear" (200). Nature is, to her, threatening and alien - every natural occurrence is described as inimical, even the "deep quiet gloom" appals. The long list of cacophonous sounds (223-237) serves to evoke the maddening effect such sounds can have on a disturbed mind which to an undisturbed mind would be neutral and natural. Her world is filled with these discordant, alarming noises emanating from Nature, man ("far beneath Banditti voices talk", 234) and animals, culminating in the howl of the "famished wolf" (240) attracted by the contrasting "small cry" of her babe (242). In the next poem Wordsworth was to write, the wolves will be human ("each prowls to strip his brother of his fleece", Adventures on Salisbury Plain, 659). In that next poem too, Wordsworth will fuse the female vagrant, already a firmly entrenched ingredient of his poetry, with the political urgency discernible in Descriptive Sketches, in an engagement with the social and political realities of his world rather than with the abstract conventions of his literary inheritance.

Most contemporary reviews evaluated the poem's descriptive

qualities in terms of picturesque norms, one reviewer even referring to "Mr Wordsworth's paintings" (Averill 304). It is thus not surprising that three out of the five reviews singled out the beggar woman for particular praise, although one reviewer considered that it "has not equal strength" with the soldier's wife in Langhorne's Country Justice from which it was thought to derive (Averill 304).

Descriptive Sketches was read mainly as a descriptive poem of uneven quality, although the potential of the sublime landscape and its first celebration by an English poet were applauded (Birdsall 300). It is, however, clear that Wordsworth's political points go unnoticed in the reviews. Even Thomas Holcroft, in the Monthly Review of October 1793, was particularly puzzled that the speaker, amid such thrilling delights, is "forlorn" (Birdsall 301). The Analytical Review (predictably) does feel that the subject of freedom is treated in "pleasing lines" (Birdsall 299), but perhaps it is not surprising that most readers seem to have missed the ways in which the poem reflects current political events. Not many English readers had had actual experience of post-1789 Europe, and, misled by the "Descriptive" in the title and the fact that the poem was yoked to An Evening Walk, they would tend to read the poem as a presentation of aspects of the sublime - the aesthetic category increasingly admired during these decades. Perhaps, too, there was conscious or unconscious self-censorship at play among the reviewers, for 1793 was a year in which outspoken political views could lead to prosecution (Goodwin 271-2). It might have been simpler and safer to avert the eyes from any remotely political points and concentrate on the purely aesthetic.

During 1794 Wordsworth revised and extended An Evening Walk. His experiences during 1792 and 1793 (which will be elaborated below) meant that the Wordsworth of 1794 could not be the same person who had written the first version of the poem. Many of the additions to the text reflect the personal experiences of 1792-3 - "he who long with languid steps had toiled/Across the slippery moor, oppressed and foiled" (1794, 57-8) surely gains resonance from his own journey across Salisbury Plain in July 1793. The



shepherds trembling at the "new alarms/As if ye heard the din of civil arms" (358-9) hint at his own personal distress at the increased polarization in England following the outbreak of war with France, a war favoured by most, but abhorred by Wordsworth. Yet these are relatively minor additions. More relevant to this study are the ten lines added to the female vagrant section. The woman's soldier husband lies dead, originally on Minden's plain, a reference to the Seven Years War. In the published version of 1793, "Minden" has been altered to "Bunker's" hill - the reference to the American Revolutionary Wars perhaps signalling Wordsworth's intention to allude to the present Revolution's great precedent. In the revisions of 1794, the place name has not been inserted - the space is left blank, perhaps because Wordsworth was considering a yet more contemporary battle site to link this widow's distress more specifically with the present war with France which he so deplored.

The major expansion involves the insertion of the details surrounding an actual incident. As Wordsworth puts it in a note written six years later, "these verses relate the catastrophe of a poor woman who was found dead on Stanemoor two winters ago with two children whom she had in vain attempted to protect from the storm in the manner here described" (Averill 148). However, scholars have noted that there is no reference in contemporary records to such an incident. "The Parish Register of Brough under Stainmore [sic] does, however, note the case of three men who 'perished by the inclemency of the weather on Saturday, 25 January 1794'" (Averill 148). Wordsworth might well have heard of this incident, inserted it immediately into his female vagrant's history, and, years afterwards, "remembered" it as having actually occurred to a woman and her children. Because of the powerful impact of the convention of the vagrant mother, an actual incident is "remembered" in terms of this convention. One of the most conventional figures of the eighteenth-century sentimental tradition thus acquires "documentary" status as Wordsworth increasingly discovers that it is poverty-stricken women and children who are most vulnerable. Paine, writing in Rights of Man (1792), identified "two classes of people to whom

the laws of England are particularly hostile, and those the most helpless: younger children, and the poor" (2: 501). During the 1790s, Wordsworth demonstrates repeatedly his acknowledgement of that view.

The last major revisions were made for the 1836 edition. The poem is pruned of many of its overt Gothicism and the female vagrant section is reduced from 59 lines (69 in 1794) to a mere 26. Out go the lines about the dead husband on "Bunker's charnel hill" which locate the woman in a specific historical context and emphasise that she is bereft of her helpmeet and lover through the agency of war. In 1836, words like "burning" and "bitter" become "dusty" and "sleety", reducing the melodrama but also the force of the anger. Moorman argues that Wordsworth cut this section in 1820 and subsequently because the lines are weak (118). She does not contemplate the possibility that the excisions are in keeping with all Wordsworth's later attempts to soften the social criticism and remove the documentary details of his 1790s poetry.

Certainly the major revisions to Descriptive Sketches, which were made painstakingly for the 1836 edition (Birdsall 18ff.), suggest that Wordsworth was concerned to tone down the apocalyptic language and revolutionary fervour of the 1793 edition, for the major changes occur in the last few paragraphs. The personifications, "Oppression", "Machination", "Persecution", "Ambition", and "Discord" are excised, as is the contrasting euphoria. The "lovely birth" heralding "another earth" (1793, 782-3), becomes an illusory vision: "All cannot be: the promise is too fair/For creatures doomed to breathe terrestrial air" (1836, 663-4). The 1836 version is more restrained and certainly more pious ("reason ... knows that only from high aims ensue/Rich guerdons" (665, 667-8). Its final lines do not register, as do those of 1793, the disquiet which paradoxically accompanied the overt welcome given by Wordsworth to the events in Paris in late 1792. The 1793 poem was too raw and passionate to satisfy the 66 year old poet laureate - it was too revealing of both the faults and the enthusiasms of the radical young republican and of the traumatic nature of 1793. He pronounced it too full of "swagger



and flourish" (Edward Quillinan, qtd. in Birdsall 19), but, in rejecting the impassioned style, he was rejecting the fervour which accompanied the turbulence of the Revolution and which revealed only too clearly his political views at that time.

Central to an understanding of Wordsworth's development in the 1790s are the experiences of 1792 and 1793 and the work, both in prose and verse, which dates from that period. He had returned from France at a time when loyalist and anti-reform sentiments were sweeping the country. Organisations like Reeve's Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, founded in November 1792, exacerbated anti-reform bigotry. The Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, written in the early months of 1793 has a raw quality which reveals, with no later adulteration, the extent of Wordsworth's passionate commitment during that period to revolutionary ideals. The Bishop's Appendix was published four days after Louis XVI's execution to accompany the second edition of a sermon first published in 1785 entitled The Wisdom and Goodness of God in having made both Rich and Poor. The content of the sermon would have inflamed Wordsworth, freshly returned from France where he had imbibed the sanguine hopes for the amelioration of conditions for all citizens from the impassioned soldier, Michel Beaupuy, and the militant republicanism of such as Gregoire, the Bishop of Blois, whom he refers to approvingly in the Letter. In his Appendix the Bishop of Llandaff had expressed his revulsion from the recent events in France. From having sympathised with the initial attempt by the French to free themselves from arbitrary power, he now denounced their methods of doing so, and particularly attacked their recent acts of declaring a republic and executing the king. A republic is for him "the most odious of tyrannies, the tyranny of equals" (Grosart 1:25). Joseph Priestley wrote in February 1793 that "a dread of everything tending to Republicanism is manifestly increased of late years....The very term is become one of the most opprobrious in the English language" (qtd. in Owen and Smyser 1:50). Wordsworth, in responding to the Bishop, flaunts his republicanism ("with...a republican spirit" Owen and Smyser 1:31). As Cone points out,

"even Major Cartwright who favoured literal manhood suffrage did not go all the way to Republicanism" (100). The Bishop reiterates the advantages of the British Constitution, as well as the impartial and incorrupt courts, equality before the law, equality of opportunity and the liberal provision for the poor to be found in England. In what is clearly an allusion to Rights of Man, he rejects the idea that "has been studiously inculcated into the minds of the multitude" that a monarchy "is a far more expensive mode of civil government than a republic" (Grosart 1:27). He then rejects the idea that "peasants and mechanics" can or should amend a constitution which is in any case "so perfect as neither to require or admit of any improvement" (Grosart 1:28). He concludes with jingoistic praise of a nation "so powerful, so rich, so beneficent, so free and happy as our own" (Grosart 1:29). Wordsworth was obviously aghast at such views, as the pugnacious and often heavily sarcastic tone of his response reveals. Just as the Bishop's Appendix, in dealing with such topics as monarchy versus a republic, the British constitution, the people's participation in the political system and poverty, was clearly responding to Paine, so Wordsworth's Letter is a detailed regurgitation of much of Paine, with much use of Paine's actual phrasing from both Common Sense and Rights of Man, as he answers Llandaff point by point. An overview of the topics covered by Wordsworth reveals the same topics as in Rights of Man with the obvious difference from Paine that his starting point, like the Bishop's, is the recent execution of Louis XVI. Paine had distinguished between the objectionable principle of monarchy and the person of the monarch in Rights of Man and when pleading for Louis' life at the king's trial. Wordsworth is far more callous in his scornful dismissal of those who "bemoan his [Louis'] death" with the "idle cry of modish lamentation" when there are more important issues at stake (Owen and Smyser 1:32). Years later, in 1820, writing from Paris, he will talk of missing "many ancient buildings, particularly the Temple, where the poor King and his family were so long confined" (Middle Years 902). He then discusses the violence in France. Like many radicals then and now he comes close to justifying the need for violence in the

face of an intransigent power or in extreme danger - "[l]iberty in order to reign in peace must establish herself by violence" (Owen and Smyser 1:33). Violence is also the obvious result of violence. "They learn it in the Governments they live under; and retaliate the punishments they have been accustomed to behold" writes Paine (2: 295). It was a familiar argument:

[The] tyrannic acts they had seen or heard of, practised on their fellow citizens, had inured their minds to scenes of horror [sic] and barbarity. The Bastille had accustomed them to condemn and punish without trial or accusation; the frequent repetition of public capital punishments ...had familiarized them with putting men to death; the gibbets of the State point to the lanterns, and the racks, stakes and wheels of established authority, had fatally habituated them to shut their ears against the cries of the dying, and to abuse the bodies of the dead.

(Crossley and Small 76)

These are the words of Thomas Christie writing his "Letters on the Revolution in France". But it was easier to excuse the relatively confined violence of 1789 (to which Paine and Christie refer), less easy to excuse the violence of 1792 which Wordsworth is having to acknowledge. He often seems to be arguing that the end justifies the means. He writes of "[t]he necessary suspension of the mild and social virtues ... for political virtues are developed at the expense of moral ones" (Owen and Smyser 1:34).

By the following year he was to write:

I recoil from the bare idea of a Revolution ...if a revolution must afflict us, they [rules of political justice] alone can mitigate its horrors and establish freedom with tranquillity. After this need I add that I am a determined enemy to every species of violence?

(letter to Mathews, June 1794, Early Letters

120-1)

This change is usually attributed to Godwin's influence, but one must not forget that Paine too was never comfortable with the use of violence for revolutionary ends - "[t]he moral principle of revolutions is to instruct, not to destroy" (Paine 3: 277). There follow in the Letter most of the Painite principles, a large portion of the final pages of what is extant being a discussion of the iniquities of increasing artificially any of the natural and inevitable distinctions between people. Wealth, especially, might well be unequal because of inequality of talents and industry. However, because "wealth not only can secure itself but includes even an oppressive principle", measures must be taken to avoid exacerbating conditions which lead to "extremes of poverty and riches" which "have a necessary tendency to corrupt the human heart" (Owen and Smyser 1:43). These sentiments are rather different from those who talked, like Bishop Watson, of "[t]he Wisdom and Goodness of God in having made both Rich and Poor". In this Letter, Wordsworth believed, like Paine, that "we should be just before we are generous" (Owen and Smyser 1:42). Like Paine, he felt strongly that mendicancy could and should be eradicated. He holds "the comfortable hope that the class of wretches called mendicants will not much longer shock the feelings of humanity" (Owen and Smyser 1:42). Poverty is exacerbated by the extravagant system of monarchical government and by war "which is now giving up to the sword so large a portion of the poor and consigning the rest to the more slow and more painful consumption of want" (Owen and Smyser 1:49). It was war and the suffering and destitution it caused which was to be the topic of the first version of Salisbury Plain which he wrote in the late summer of 1793. On February 14th, Godwin's Political Justice was published by Johnson, who had published An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches on the 29th January. In May the Unitarian William Frend was dismissed from his chair at Cambridge for publishing his pacifist, philanthropic "The Effect of War on the Poor". Booksellers were prosecuted for selling the works of

Paine. Imprisonment for as much as four years was the punishment inflicted. The suspension of habeas corpus was discussed in Parliament and the Traitorous Correspondence Bill was passed. In August the first transportation of radicals to Botany Bay took place. In this charged political climate the radicalism of the sentiments of Wordsworth's writings is striking. Striking, too, is the speed of his politicization. In May 1792 he had written to Mathews from Blois of his plans to take holy orders, offering himself as a sharer in any literary scheme that Mathews might be contemplating, revealing himself to be not yet very involved or knowledgeable about the French political situation, and expressing a commonplace patriotism which Bishop Watson might as easily have penned:

You [Mathews] have the happiness of being  
born in a free country, where every road  
is open, and where talents and industry are  
more liberally rewarded than amongst any other  
nation of the Universe.

(Early Letters 76)

No letters survive from 1793 and, by February 1794, he had decided not to take orders. On the 23 May 1794 he wrote to Mathews, now referring to himself as a "democrat" and alluding to the recent banishments and arrests (Skirving and Margarot banished in January, Gerrald in March, and Thelwall and Hardy arrested in May) which he found abhorrent (Early Letters 115). The next month he spelt out his political views at length. Still rejecting "monarchical aristocratical governments", hereditary distinctions and privileges of all kinds, he described himself as thus "not amongst the admirers of the British Constitution" (Early Letters 120). He reveals the influence of Godwin in his references to the "progress of human improvement" which ought not to be hindered, his rejection of a rapid overthrow of the present system ("I recoil from the bare idea of a Revolution"), his abhorrence of violence (a marked change from 1793), his advocacy of a rational diffusion of the "rules of political justice" by

"every enlightened friend of mankind" which will "guide the hand of Reform" and mitigate the horrors should a revolution afflict a nation (Early Letters 120). He follows Godwin, too, in setting great store on freedom of enquiry. People should be enlightened but not inflamed, and into "each man's hand [I would put] a lantern to guide him" (Early Letters 121). By November 1794, when discussing politics in a letter to Mathews, he was far more measured. Although he likened the "present ministry" to Macbeth "so deeply advanced in iniquity that...they cannot retreat", he recognised that many good men do support the war even though he was still strongly opposed to it (Early Letters 127). By December, writing again to Mathews, though rejoicing at the acquittal of the political prisoners on 5 December, he showed a sense of balance by praising the soundness of a Constitution which allowed justice to prevail (Early Letters 129).

As we have seen from his Letter to Llandaff and from his expressed views as late as December 1794, his opposition to the French war remained constant, as did his realization of the suffering caused by a war which was fought, in his eyes, for all the wrong reasons. The first version of Salisbury Plain was written in the late summer of 1793 and is linked to those paragraphs in the Letter to Llandaff which deplore the "oppressive principle" of wealth, the psychologically damaging effects of either extreme riches or penury, the depopulation of the countryside, the want which necessitates dependence on "the ostentatious bounty of oppressors" and/or the "insidious offerings of compulsive charity", and the war which is most damaging to the poor (Owen and Smyser 1:43,34,49). It is often argued that severe unemployment and pauperization came only after Waterloo when the job market was flooded by returning soldiers. Yet Clive Emsley has also reminded us that the war itself disadvantaged many, for the manufacturing towns were hit by recession as the lucrative trade treaty with France collapsed. "Before the war was three months old 7000 were reported to be out of work in and around Manchester" (British Society 30). Another source of pauperization was the departure of the bread winner to the army or navy. There was undoubtedly an increased burden



placed on the poor rate. In The State of the Poor, Eden writes in May 1795 of Nottingham:

No satisfactory reason could be ascertained for the late rapid rise of the Rates: the principal stocking-manufacturers say, that the war has not very materially affected them, as their chief exportation is to America: it is true, that the population of Nottingham has increased considerably, of late years, but not in proportion to the Rates. Their rise is, here, generally attributed to the high price of provisions, the scarcity of common labour, and the great number of soldiers' and militia-men's wives and families, who have, of late years, become burthensome to their parishes.

(2: 579)

These changes added to the strains already caused by enclosure, bad harvests and the increasing use of agricultural machinery.

The central figure of Salisbury Plain, the vagrant widow, looks back to Wordsworth's first deployment of that figure but now she is invested with a social and political resonance. She emerges from the pages of literary history and wanders across that very Plain over which Wordsworth had walked (likewise alone and cast down). She speaks to us about the England of the mid-1790s while retaining all the accumulated force of her literary forebears.

Stephen Gill maintains that, along with the Letter to which it serves as a complement, Salisbury Plain "deserves a place with more famous works...which reflected the radical and humanitarian opposition of the 1790s" (Wordsworth 5). The first version of this work, although not as documentarily explicit or detailed as the expanded Adventures on Salisbury Plain of 1795-1799, nevertheless summarizes the views of the radical opposition of these years. Wordsworth here uses poetry to try to make the reader feel the social and political wrongs expressed directly

in the prose Letter two or three months earlier. Coleridge was speaking of Salisbury Plain when he later recalled that what struck him as indicative of poetic genius was "the union of deep feeling and profound thought" (Biographia Literaria 48).

In his biography of Wordsworth, Stephen Gill reminds us that Wordsworth's solitary walk across the bleak and storm-lashed Plain was undertaken when he had both personal and political cause for severe depression (Wordsworth 74). Certainly the finished poem, with its bleak and wasted setting and its nightmarish vision of a life where all that even the happiest find is a "green spot 'mid wastes interminably spread" (423), reflects his downcast mood. Years later, in his notes to the poem in 1843, it is this mood which is vivid in his memory:

During the latter part of the summer of 1793, having passed a month in the Isle of Wight, in view of the fleet which was then preparing for sea off Portsmouth at the commencement of the war, I left the place with melancholy forebodings. The American war was still fresh in memory. The struggle which was beginning, and which many thought would be brought to a speedy close by the irresistible arms of Great Britain being added to those of the Allies, I was assured in my own mind would be of long continuance, and productive of distress and misery beyond all possible calculation. This conviction was pressed upon me by having been a witness, during a long residence in revolutionary France, of the spirit which prevailed in that country. After leaving the Isle of Wight, I spent two days in wandering on foot over Salisbury Plain, which, though cultivation was then widely spread through parts of it, had upon the whole a still more impressive appearance than it now retains.

The monuments and traces of antiquity,



scattered in abundance over that region, led me unavoidably to compare what we know or guess of those remote times with certain aspects of modern society, and with calamities, principally those consequent upon war, to which, more than other classes of men, the poor are subject. In those reflections, joined with particular facts that had come to my knowledge, the following stanzas originated.

(Grosart 3: 9-10)

There is, of course, no hint in this account of his reactions to the enforced separation from Annette Vallon and his child, nor of the alienation felt by one who strongly opposed the war for ideological reasons as well, nor any hint of his earlier radical politics. Yet his depressed mood still forms a large part of the memory:

My ramble over many parts of Salisbury Plain  
put me, as mentioned in the preface, upon  
writing this poem, and left upon my mind  
imaginative impressions the force of which  
I have felt to this day.

(Grosart 3: 11)

He still emphasises, as he had done in his 1795 letter to Wrangham, that the major concerns, as well as the primary motivation of the poem, were the effects of war on the poor and "particular facts than had come to my knowledge", presumably those instances of "the vices of the penal law" which are largely added to the revised version referred to in the letter (Early Letters 145).

The poem opens and closes with declamatory stanzas denouncing a barbaric world of oppression and misery, where war breeds endless war, and "Exile, Terror, Bonds and Force" (515) take the place of Truth and Justice. In between is the narrative, an episode illustrative of this bleak world. A female vagrant

tells her representative story to another travelling with painful step "o'er Sarum's plain" (38). The poem is set during the American War but its situation is clearly contemporary England. Not only had Paine referred to the American experience and the American war of Independence on almost every page of Rights of Man, but the American and French wars were constantly spoken of in the same breath. Years later, in his Convention of Cintra (1809), Wordsworth coupled the two: "[i]n the course of the last thirty years we have seen two wars waged against Liberty - the American war and the war against the French People in the early stages of their Revolution" (Owen and Smyser 1: 308). In the war ethos of mid-1793, displacement was a necessary expedient.

A major thrust of the poem is still the poverty of a female vagrant - poverty caused by Oppression and War, and thus not a natural condition to be accepted as God's will. From Wordsworth's 1843 recollections, we learn that the female vagrant section predates even the 1793 walk across the Plain (Grosart 3: 10-11). Gill suggests that Wordsworth is probably confusing this section with lines jotted down earlier in manuscript describing vagrants (Gill, Salisbury Plain 7). Whatever the actual sequence of composition, we have here another indication of the enduring importance to Wordsworth of the figure of the vagrant woman. In 1843 he recalls this section as being seminal and furthermore asserts that the details of her story are drawn from life:

All that relates to her sufferings as a soldier's wife in America, and her condition of mind during her voyage home, were faithfully taken from the report made to me of her own case by a friend who had been subjected to the same trials, and affected in the same way.

(Grosart 3: 11)

Wordsworth here stresses the documentary truth of the female vagrant as he had when discussing the earlier An Evening Walk. Given the plethora of examples of such a conventional figure in contemporary and preceding literature, it is noteworthy that

Wordsworth feels the need to insist that his vagrant women are rooted in historic reality. They are thus not to be confused with the fictional figures of sentimental verse designed merely to evoke pity. Certainly these poor vagrant women had existed throughout the centuries, yet the conventional fictional treatment of them, at least during the eighteenth century, was concerned primarily with indulging the sentiments of the reader and evoking the pleasurable and salutary feeling of pity. Wordsworth, in these poems, has another purpose - a political purpose. He locates his characters in a recognisable landscape and depicts their plight in credible terms. The fate of the vagrant woman in this poem is shown to be the logical outcome of a number of historical and sociological conditions which he himself has observed and commented upon in his letters. It is as if he were saying: "these are real people, not mere fancy dress waifs; read them sentimentally at your peril". Marlon B. Ross states categorically that "Wordsworth starts his career as [a] propagandist...self-consciously propagating certain ideologies...in the hope of transforming political reality" (Contours 25-6). It is significant that it was the female vagrant section that was selected for separate publication in Lyrical Ballads. Presumably Wordsworth was trading on the ease with which such a figure did, at least in name, conform to readers' expectations.

The first fifteen stanzas of Salisbury Plain focus on the traveller on the plain. The complete desolation of the landscape is evoked by a series of negative statements (stanzas 6, 12 and 13). Synonyms for "desert waste" predominate. The traveller is terrifyingly alone, his isolation mirrored in the emptiness of the huge plain. Into a "blank sky" (41) there rises a moon which spreads only "a sickly glare" (119). He arrives at a shelter known in the area as "the dead house of the plain" (126) - the shelter it provides would not long sustain life under such bleak conditions. Here he discovers a "female wanderer" - a fellow traveller on this earthly journey. There is a strong sense that this plain is the setting for life's arduous journey - comparable to Dante's "dark wood", Bunyan's "Slough of Despond" or



wrong" which takes advantage of natural reverses to acquire greedily all that the poor farmer can no longer maintain. Wordsworth, in revising the poem, elaborated this section and gave more concrete examples of what "Oppression" entailed and who the Oppressors were, whereas here, in the use of allegorical abstractions, we can see how the influence of Spenser radiates beyond the adoption of his stanza form. This abstract mode reaches a climax with the forceful personifications of the final two stanzas of the poem.

She is saved from destitution by her loved one, and survives thereafter through "constant toil" (290). After four years an eerie hush descends as the wheels of cottage industry are stopped by the call to war. Forced by want, her husband enlists. Their survival depends now on the enemies' defeat, as "doglike" they "lap...their brother's blood" (315). Thus Wordsworth reveals how the greedy exploitation of another lies at the root of both dispossession and warfare. Reaching the point at which she recalls the deaths of her husband and children, she pauses in her story. At this low point, Wordsworth inserts three stanzas in which the description of Nature's beauty highlights the ruination which mankind wreaks upon itself. Wordsworth emphasises, as the worst aspect of the widow's condition, the sense of complete alienation from her fellow human beings, "[s]ome mighty gulf of separation passed/I seemed transported to another world:...For me, farthest from earthly port to roam/Was best; my only wish to shun where man might come" (370-1, 377-8). In The Prelude, writing of the devastating sense of alienation which descended upon him when England declared war on France, Wordsworth used, to describe that period, 1793, words and images similar to those he had given in that same year of 1793 to the vagrant widow, "this [was] a stride at once/Into another region....Now [I] from my pleasant station was cut off/And tossed about in whirlwinds....When in the congregation....prayers were offered up,/Or praises for our country's victories;...I only, like an uninvited guest/Whom no one owned, sate silent" (1805 10: 241-2, 258-9, 269-274).

When the ship on which she is returning from the (American)



war reaches England, it is no longer home for her, "[a]nd homeless near a thousand homes I stood,/And near a thousand tables pined and wanted food" (386-7). The climactic effectiveness of this couplet is achieved by a number of features. The repetition, the oxymoronic "homeless/homes", the pun on "wanted", the evocation of the wealth and largesse in the hyperbole "thousand" which conveys the visible wealth noted by many observers, a wealth which existed alongside destitution, and the clinching force of the concluding alexandrine which emphasises the extent of that empty longing.

Dawn breaks and the "gorgeous" sun reveals a more welcoming landscape, a valley with a lowly habitation. The new dawn hints at the possibility of change if the "Heroes of Truth" can raise the "herculean mace /Of Reason" (541, 545). The imagery of the dawn and the rising sun resonates with the revolutionary rhetorical commonplaces of the period as found, for example, in the "Marseillaise", "[t]he rays of the sun have vanquished the night,/The powers of darkness have yielded to light". The changed landscape and mood are accompanied by the compassionate actions of the traveller, or perhaps the perspective is altered because of the compassion. The traveller's eye is dimmed "with Pity's tear" (400). The female vagrant has evoked this response in the traveller as predictably as she had ever done in preceding works. Yet it is a mark of the intensity of the commitment, the seriousness of the mood, that the response does not seem excessive. Perhaps, too, the sense that this vagrant is anchored in historical reality, that her fate is the actual fate of many like her and, most importantly, that the speaker is engaged with this historical reality with evident intensity, prevent this section from appearing as mere titillation of the reader's sensibilities. The traveller can point out a source of only temporary respite - a "green spot 'mid wastes interminably spread" (423), an oasis of human empathy. Such green spots are as sustaining as are Wordsworth's "spots of time" to his personal psyche. This human empathy survives most noticeably among ordinary humble people who are not party to oppressive forces. Oppression is metaphorically depicted as the haughty Lady

Bountiful of a mansion who doles out charity in return for obsequious gratitude:

For want how many men and children die?  
 How many at Oppression's portals placed  
 Receive the scanty dole she cannot waste,  
 And bless, as she has taught, her hand benign?  
 (435-8)

While Spenser's *Pride* is called to mind (*Faerie Queene* 1:4), the lines also express the selfish motives that lie behind charity and the hypocrisy which cloaks rampant exploitation in the gracious folds of Christian charity. The allegorical personifications underline the allusion to Spenser evident in the very choice of the stanza form and in the routing of Error by Reason in the final stanza. By means of these quintessentially Spenserian personifications and by the choice of the Spenserian stanza form, Wordsworth not only acknowledges the influence of one of the major epic poets of England but perhaps also consciously appropriates a form, hitherto associated with a royalist and elitist enterprise, for his own politically contrasting purposes. Samuel E. Schulman argues that Wordsworth was thereby also exploiting "Spenser's Englishness, his prestige as a patriot and a native moralist", a useful thing to do when "writing poems sympathetic to Jacobin principles" (222). He was soon largely to abandon the Spenserian stanza form, in his poems dealing with humble matters, in favour of common ballad metres and blank verse which are less ornate and thus, perhaps, more suited to plain speaking.

A few lines further on Wordsworth expresses topical matters in striking metaphor. The authors of the Declaration of the Derby Society for Political Information, published in the *Morning Chronicle* of December 25 1792, had asserted: "[w]e are persuaded that the interests of the poor can never be promoted by accession of territory, when bought at the expense of their labour and blood" (Cone 226). Wordsworth might well have read this, given





familiar in descriptions of revolutionary events, with the fervour of Spenserian moral allegory:

Heroes of Truth pursue your march, uprear  
Th'oppressor's dungeon from its deepest base;  
High o'er the towers of Pride undaunted rear  
Resistless in your might the herculean mace  
Of Reason; let foul Error's monster race  
Dragged from their dens start at the light with  
  pain  
And die; pursue your toils, till not a trace  
Be left on earth of Superstition's reign,  
Save that eternal pile which frowns on Sarum's  
  plain.  
  (541-549)

The poem is as much a document of its period as Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France or Paine's Rights of Man. To forget its context is to blunt one's recognition of the appropriateness of its Gothic rhetoric and chiaroscuro imagery to the sensational events occurring at this time, a time which Burke characterized thus:

Everything seems out of nature in this strange chaos of levity and ferocity, and of all sorts of crimes jumbled together with all sorts of follies. In viewing this monstrous tragi-comic scene, the most opposite passions necessarily succeed, and sometimes mix with each other in the mind; alternate contempt and indignation; alternate laughter and tears; alternate scorn and horror.

(Burke:Raffety 4: 10)

On 20 November 1795, Wordsworth wrote to Francis Wrangham from Racedown Lodge where he and Dorothy had settled a few weeks before. In this letter he includes some lines to add to their

joint translation of Juvenal's eighth Satire. The lines ridicule the King ("Heavens! who sees majesty in George's face?"), the Queen and also some leading aristocrats and cabinet ministers. The anti-monarchical and anti-aristocratic sentiments make it likely that the lines "[i]s Common-sense asleep? has she no wand/From this curst Pharaoh-plague to rid the land?" allude to Paine's early anti-monarchical pamphlet Common Sense (1776). Wordsworth concludes his letter with a reference to Salisbury Plain:

I have a poem which I should wish to dispose of provided I could get any thing for it. I recollect reading the first draught [sic] of it to you in London. But since I came to Racedown, I have made alterations and additions so material as that it may be looked on almost as another work. Its object is partly to expose the vices of the penal law and the calamities of war as they affect individuals.

(Early Letters 145)

It seems significant that Wordsworth openly admits to the poem's political dimension even as he suggests that this is only part of its intention. This dimension is borne out by the additions and alterations to the story of the vagrant widow which Wordsworth made during 1795. Approximately thirty more stanzas were added, and the woman's history was now embedded in the story of the sailor which is given greater coverage. The various excisions or emendations to the existing material are, at times, an improvement, such as the removal of the embarrassing stanza describing the woman's breasts likened to swans swelling and sinking (stanza 24), and the removal of some of the more sensational Gothicismisms like the "voice as from a tomb" that warns the traveller from Stonehenge. Other Gothicismisms are toned down. Some of the powerful impact is however diluted by the removal of many of the personifications, for example, the Silence, Fear and

Misery that descend eerily as War is declared and the loom and "labour's cheerful hum" come to a standstill (stanzas 33-34).

The new version is a much more carefully documented rendering of the "vices the penal law and the calamities of war". The year 1795 was the year in which Hannah More's Cheap Repository Tracts first appeared. Marlon B. Ross notes that More's The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain was the most popular of the tales in these Tracts and that both Wordsworth's poem and More's tale share "the same issues of homelessness, poverty, war, famine, and the changing relations between the classes" (Contours 210). By July 1795, 700,000 copies of Cheap Repository Tracts had been sold (Jackson 177). Is it not possible that Wordsworth's revisions to his poem were made with the awareness of the popularity of More's tale? Her tale, in Jackson's words, "shows how poverty is a blessing in disguise, for the Christian. It also introduces one nation, England's comfortable classes, to the details of life in a second nation, her poor" (177). Wordsworth's revised poem might well have been intended partly as a calculated antidote to More's version of conditions on her Salisbury Plain. If one considers merely the topics and characters that were added, one finds most of the abuses of the period and the variety of ills consequent on war that were documented by Paine and others. A traveller who is an ex-sailor, originally press-ganged, has been denied his due pay and, destitute, he has robbed and murdered a man. He meets an aged ex-soldier, a discarded person, now no longer of any use. The inn they pass has right of admission reserved against such indigents as they. Further on a hanged man on a gibbet forms part of the landscape familiar in a society in which capital offences numbered in the hundreds (Rud  102-3). The traveller, after parting from the old man, meets and accompanies a widow, bereft of husband and children as a direct consequence of war. In subsequent stanzas there are gypsies, a battered child, and a dying woman being transported back to her place of settlement.

Douglas Hay, in a study of the interconnections between war, dearth and crime in the late eighteenth century, refers specifically to most of these characteristic situations and

persons. Noting the increase in committals of women for petty theft in certain years, he suggests that it had to do with "an increase in the number of abandoned wives and mothers in years of high enlistment" (footnote, 135). Hay also tells of how thousands of men were kept waiting for their pay on discharge from the services, and how the roads were filled with soldiers and sailors returning to their homes on foot who had to survive on the road as best they could. "Rogues and vagabonds" who were punishable with whipping and six months imprisonment in terms of the Vagrancy Act included "[p]ersons wandering abroad, and pretending to be soldiers or sailors, without proper certificates from their officers, or testimonials from magistrates" (Eden 1: 309). Yet in 1792, the clause, allowing properly certificated soldiers and sailors to beg, was repealed and only restored in 1803 (Hay 140). Hay also notes that when demobilization coincided with dearth, levels of theft and more serious crime escalated as significantly large numbers of men were left to try to reintegrate themselves into society. Although Wordsworth's poem was written during the war years, he points to the many ways in which war disrupts society both while it is being waged and long after peace has been signed. The familiarity with the adverse conditions concomitant on war might explain the relatively casual way in which such details appear in writings of the period. In Chapter XLX of Mary Wollstonecraft's Original Stories, "Charity - The History of Peggy and her Family - The Sailor's Widow", Wollstonecraft, in a single sentence, catalogues a horrific set of circumstances each of which is a miniature tragedy: "She had lost her husband, a sailor, and lost his wages also, as she could not prove his death" (73). The helplessness of such people in making sense of bureaucratic red tape is the story of many a poor, semi-literate or illiterate person victimised by the monstrously complex machinery of society. It was all very well for the Bishop of Llandaff to assert in all the security of his status and education that

the equality of men in a state of civil  
society [consists in]...being equally

subject to, equally protected by the same laws. And who knows not that every individual in this great nation is, in this respect, equal to every other.

(Grosart 1: 26)

Those who penned the Declaration of the Derby Society in 1792 knew another set of circumstances:

A criminal code of laws, sanguine and inefficacious; a civil code so voluminous and mysterious as to puzzle the best understandings; by which means, justice is denied to the poor on account of the expense attending the obtaining it.

(qtd. in Cone 227)

The incident of the dying woman carted back to her original settlement in order that her funeral expenses did not devolve on any village other than her legitimate one is, of course, an example of a common practice. Snell documents such "cases of inhumanity" which were not confined to the elderly and sick (106):

Similarly, bastard bearers suffered from the legal stipulation that an illegitimate child be settled in the parish of birth. This led to the removal of mothers before birth (at times by gangs of local men without the warrant of a removal order), sometimes during labour itself, to ensure that birth took place across parish boundaries.

(107)

He reminds us, too, that there was not necessarily gradual improvement over time, for some of the worst cases date from as late as the mid-nineteenth century (107). Henriques points out

that it was "single woman, widows with children, and deserted wives with families [who] were most often removed [and who were the] most defenceless, and the most burdensome" (14).

The revised poem opens immediately with the Traveller on the Plain overtaking an old man who foreshadows those haunting figures from the poems of the next few years - the Old Man Travelling, the Leechgatherer, Simon Lee:

A Traveller on the skirt of Sarum's Plain  
O'ertook an aged Man with feet half bare;  
Propp'd on a trembling staff he crept with pain,  
His legs from slow disease distended were;  
His temples just betrayed their silver hair  
Beneath a kerchief's edge, that wrapp'd his head  
To fence from off his face the breathing air.  
Stuck miserably o'er with patch and shred  
His ragged coat scarce showed the Soldier's faded  
red.

(1-9)

The "glittering" grapes at the "gilded door" of the inn (32) are symbolic of the prizes that the poor will never attain. It is left to the poor and helpless to help each other in a society which generally averts its gaze from the very poverty it guarantees. But the poor are also forced to prey on those weaker, as did this traveller who "met a traveller, robb'd him, shed his blood" (97) - the rapid succession of verbs emphasising the spontaneous and inevitable nature of the act - ever afterwards regretted - a devastating condition elaborated by Oswald in The Borderers (1796-7):

Action is transitory - a step, a blow,  
The motion of a muscle - this way or that -  
'Tis done, and in the after - vacancy  
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:  
Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,  
And shares the nature of infinity.

(Hayden 1: 215)

A major change from the first to the second version is the change in focus from the vagrant widow to this man, a development which will be repeated in The Ruined Cottage which starts as a poem about the widowed Margaret (1797) and is then framed by the introduction of the Pedlar who assumes greater importance and receives greater attention (1798 and subsequent versions). In its final published form, the narrative of Margaret becomes part of The Excursion and the focus moves from the sufferings of the woman to the philosophical problem of explaining the suffering of innocents (see Chapter Five below).

As stated above, the expansion of the female vagrant's story takes the form of altering the generalized statements of Oppression into specific examples of oppressive practices wrought upon the poor and helpless. To take just one example - in stanza 29 (first version) as we have seen, no specific source is given for the wretched fate of the woman's father other than the vague "cruel chance and wilful wrong" (255) and the abstract "Oppression" (257). This single stanza is now expanded into two:

The suns of twenty summers danced along,-  
 Ah! little marked, how fast they rolled away:  
 Then rose a mansion proud our woods among,  
 And cottage after cottage owned its sway,  
 No joy to see a neighbouring house, or stray  
 Through pastures not his own, the master took;  
 My Father dared his greedy wish gainsay;  
 He loved his old hereditary nook,  
 And ill could I the thought of such sad parting  
brook.

But, when he had refused the proffered gold,  
 To cruel injuries he became a prey,  
 Sore traversed in whate'er he bought and sold:  
 His troubles grew upon him day by day,  
 Till all his substance fell into decay.  
 His little range of water was denied;  
 All but the bed where his old body lay,



All, all was seized, and weeping, side by side,  
 We sought a home where we uninjured might abide.  
 (298-315)

Although the personification coupled with the passive verbs creates, in the first version, a powerful sense of the gigantic antagonist against whom the poor are powerless, the revised version chooses, rather, to detail more precisely the processes by which the poor are defeated. Noticeable, too, is the emphasis now placed on the loss of a home, "[h]e loved his old hereditary nook", "through tears that fell in showers,/Glimmer'd our dear-loved home, alas! no longer ours!" or "[a]nd in a quiet home once more my father slept" (305, 323-4, 342). Men with such opposed views as Burke and Paine were in agreement on the importance of personal property to a sense of wellbeing and belonging, a view with which Wordsworth strongly agreed and which he would focus on more directly in "Michael".

Repeatedly Wordsworth details the actual practices of these years. To describe the press gang as "the ruffian press gang dire" (80) was quite dangerously outspoken, for a man had been tried in April 1793 merely for calling the press-gang "a set of oppressors" (Emsley British Society 28). Because "we had no hope, and no relief could gain" (353, with the pun on "relief"), the husband is well-nigh forced to enlist. Snell has pointed out how, "after about 1780", financial strains "produced re-assessments of earlier relief" and "a marked tightening up on relief offered" (108). It was the meat hanging from the door of the conscription office and not patriotic fervour that drew most men to enlist:

The association of the army and militia  
 with the scourings of parochial society,  
 the fear of the press-gang, the experience  
 of recruitment tactics, or of migrant,  
 impoverished, and wounded ex-soldiery  
 contributed to make this occupation a last  
 resort.

(Snell 331)



The succeeding stanzas continue to elaborate the basic outline given in the first version, with increased emphasis on the mental disorder that physical suffering can lead to. She remembers ("crazing thoughts" 445-7) the actual warfare during which she and her child had been the joint prey of Murder and Rape. With those memories, she is, as in the first version, "robb'd of [her] perfect mind" (460). The age-old suspicion with which gypsies are viewed - their very success in surviving through their flexibility always resulting in their being suspected of criminal activity - surfaces in this poem where the vagrant woman, the smallholder reduced to penury, is differentiated from the gypsies who are associated with ill-doing. Wordsworth, although revealing an understanding, in this poem, of the ways in which the poor are criminalized, yet shares with the majority of the settled population, both then and now, deep suspicion of those who are vagrants by choice, be they called "gypsies" or "new age travellers". This attitude will surface most clearly in the 1807 poem "Gipsies". There is further antipathy in the 1842 Guilt and Sorrow where the positive detail of the gypsies sharing equally their spoils is omitted and only the mention of the spoils remains. Finally in this poem, the woman's greatest sorrow is "that I have my inner self abused" (547). Poverty has spiritually eroding effects and it is these that Wordsworth will explore further in subsequent poems.

The dawn breaks and this leads to her rise in spirits. She "did with a light and chearful [sic] step depart" (587). This is a strangely false note, given the intensity of her despair. Wordsworth is, however, more concerned to focus attention on the ex-sailor's depression which leads the man to enunciate the following philosophy:

"Tis a bad world, and hard is the world's law;  
 Each prowls to strip his brother of his fleece;  
 Much need have ye that time more closely draw  
 The bond of nature, all unkindness cease,  
 And that among so few there still be peace:  
 Else can ye hope but with such num'rous foes

Your pains shall ever with your years increase.  
(658-664)

Given this world-view, the only hope lies in mutual succour.

The dying woman carted back by the overseers tells how she had been trying to get back to her father's house, although she "feared to be a burthen to his age" (734). Is this father the aged man whom the sailor first encounters, limping "to meet a daughter driven" (23) and of whom the traveller feels "the creature that had need/Of any aid from him most wretched was indeed" (26-7)? Certainly this daughter turns out to be the wife of the sailor. Whether or not she is linked with the old ex-soldier as well is not as important as the sense given of a whole network of pathetic victims. Fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, husbands, wives, all are affected, and the very relationships between people are shattered by the exigencies of survival. If she is not the soldier's daughter, she is someone else's daughter, someone else just as likely to be suffering and in need. She mentions a former family home near Portland Light-house (745), and her fate foreshadows the fate of the vagrant woman who also once had a family home in Keswick. This woman's husband has been criminalized by society, and is finally hanged - his corpse left swinging from the gibbet. The sailor has earlier passed just such a gibbet and corpse (stanza 13). It had foreshadowed his own fate and we are left pondering on the similar circumstances that might have led to the hanging of that earlier anonymous man. Just as one daughter is like another daughter, one corpse like another corpse, the same conditions lead to the same hideous results in a never-ending cycle of misery alleviated only by tiny acts of mutual kindness, insufficient in themselves to change the system. Burke, in Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), had graphically argued that the "barbarous" and "mechanic" philosophy of the French Revolutionaries was truly fatal: "[i]n the groves of their academy, at the end of every visto [sic], you see nothing but the gallows" (Burke:Raffety 4: 85). In this poem, Wordsworth situates the gibbet centrally in English society.

One of the primary meanings of "adventure" is "that which

comes to us or happens without design" (OED), and the new title (Adventures on Salisbury Plain) given to this expanded work, in the only manuscript which records the poem in this second stage, DC MS 16 (Gill, SP 9), perhaps intended to highlight the helplessness of the characters - things are done to them and even their seemingly deliberate acts (like murder) are forced upon them by circumstance. Yet in a letter to William Mathews (November 1794), Wordsworth writes that "A Night on Salisbury Plain, - were it not so insufferably awkward - would better suit the thing itself" (Early Letters 128). Certainly it is a nightmare world which the poem depicts.

Stephen Gill painstakingly reconstructs a possible chronology of revision (SP, Introduction). Whatever the true sequence of events, the poem which was eventually published in 1842 (not forgetting that "The Female Vagrant" was published in the Lyrical Ballads of 1798 and itself heavily revised in subsequent editions) is quite substantially different in tone and mood. Perhaps this is most immediately evident from the title of the published poem, Guilt and Sorrow; or, Incidents upon Salisbury Plain (Gill, SP). The main title, Guilt and Sorrow, reveals the prevailing fashion for such titles of paired abstractions (cf. "Resolution and Independence", Pride and Prejudice, and Sense and Sensibility). More importantly, it now reveals a moralistic focus, an exposé of human failings rather than an indictment of social conditions. Thus it falls within the tradition of generalized moralizing about the poor, as found in the works of Cowper and Crabbe.

Basically the story line is that of the second version except for two crucial changes. The sailor admits his crime as before, but now he trusts in God, "his fate was pitied", and he is not hanged, a change slightly prepared for by the other change - he is presented throughout as less despairing and is able to comfort the vagrant woman. He still has confidence, despite being "so tried" himself (456), in "social Order's care for wretchedness/Of Time's sure help to calm and reconcile" (453-4). This major change is clearly a combination of the religious optimism of the 70 year old establishment poet, and the need to



The insertion of "life's pilgrimage" suggests that her particular "sad journey" is merely the progress through the vale of tears that we all must endure. She is placed in a wain "there to end life's pilgrimage" as if the transport provided is an aid in this last stage of her life's journey rather than a jolting wagon trip "from stage to stage" because they want to be rid of her.

Pietistic sentiments take the place of harsh realities when this dying woman recalls her youth when "our heavenly Father granted each day's bread" (598), whereas the younger Wordsworth knew, even from his own experience, that only unremitting "labour" gave one bread (Adventures on Salisbury Plain 751).

The final stanza might well have seemed odd to readers who, of course, knew nothing of preceding versions: "Him in iron case/(Reader, forgive the intolerable thought)/They hung not" (658-660). The whole stanza merely negates the details of his fate itemized in the Adventures on Salisbury Plain. Such a fate might well be an "intolerable thought" to readers who, as Dickens knew full well by this date, generally liked an upbeat ending rather than unpleasant facts. Yet, in 1795, Wordsworth had not flinched from depicting the most likely end for the sailor at the risk of disturbing his potential readership.

Salisbury Plain and Adventures on Salisbury Plain each reveal both the political fervour with which Wordsworth returned from France and the emotional trauma of those months. The stridency of the Letter to Llandaff is transformed, in Salisbury Plain, into the rhetorical passion of the stanzas framing the female vagrant's representative history. We must not underestimate the emotional tightrope on which Wordsworth was poised throughout 1793. Filled with his first-hand experience of cataclysmic events which had shaken all Europe, separated from his new-born daughter and his lover who would now be subject to all the hardships of the state of single motherhood in a country at war with itself and its neighbours, he returned unwillingly to England and there found himself alienated from the political views and values of most of his fellow English, with no family home to go to, no job, no sense of direction. 1793 was also the year by which he was expected to have chosen a career. In March



1790 Dorothy had written to Jane Pollard:

I am very anxious about him [William] just now, as he will shortly have to provide for himself: next year he takes his degree; when he will go into orders I do not know, nor how he will employ himself, he must, when he is three and twenty either go into orders or take pupils; he will be twenty in April.

(Early Letters 28)

In this condition he, by a literal accident, endures a solitary walk across the bleak plain of Salisbury. It is not surprising therefore that Wordsworth focuses on and identifies with the outcasts, as he experiences insecurity, loss, and change. Nor is it surprising that the revisions to An Evening Walk, made in 1794, expand and intensify the lines dealing with the abandoned mother or that the depiction of that hitherto conventional figure acquires, in Salisbury Plain, a forcefulness derived from his personal and political experience. Salisbury Plain also first presents the male Traveller over the Plain, rootless and alienated and undoubtedly deriving something from personal experience. The dispossessed, unenfranchised, the politically and economically disadvantaged, were the foci of Paine's attention, the victims of political injustice and the subjects of countless speeches, pamphlets and letters to journals. Tutored by Michel Beaupuy, Wordsworth was interested in the political dimensions of their plight. His own experience of alienation and rejection would have given him a personal interest as well.

Adventures on Salisbury Plain reflects a less emotional, more carefully particularized attack on the various ramifications of the social and political conditions of England. Wordsworth himself is, by the time he writes this version, less fraught, less unsettled, with longer and longer periods of rewarding domesticity with Dorothy.

By the time he wrote again about a solitary indigent female, he could observe the subject from a position of relative

security, in emotional terms at least. McGann writes of the "exuberant atmosphere of Racedown and Alfoxden" in 1797-8 when Wordsworth began The Ruined Cottage (Romantic Ideology 85). Certainly that poem has an air of contemplation about it which speaks of a more detached attitude to the reality of poverty. The traveller has now divided into two figures, an old witness who tells the younger of his encounter with the marginalized other. This now forms the significant experience. No longer is there the urgency to castigate those responsible for Margaret's plight or to investigate the causes of her condition. The interest lies now in the psychological, spiritual and mental damage that is wrought by deprivation. To focus on the effects of poverty, both on the victim and on the observer, is to risk the titillation of sentimentality or the seemingly insensitive objectivity of the "spectator ab extra" (Coleridge, Table Talk 1: 306).

The decrease in the depiction of the injustices that generate poverty might also be explained by the withdrawal from activist politics which was common to many of the middle-class pro-French sympathizers. Wordsworth's focus on the poor, the marginalized, the victimized, the isolated, did not disappear. Rather, as he started to explore what he was later to describe as the "haunt and the main region of my Song" - the "Mind of Man" (Home at Grasmere 793-4), he began to concentrate on the effects of deprivation on the minds of those most vulnerable. Thus it is that those familiar figures from eighteenth-century sentimental verse, the female vagrant, the bereft widows, the abandoned single mothers, yet again occupy his attention. They now reveal more pointedly the mentally and spiritually eroding effects of deprivation. Hints of such an interest have already appeared in both the Salisbury Plain poems, but it is Margaret in The Ruined Cottage who most clearly reveals this change of focus.

## CHAPTER FIVE

RUINED COTTAGES AND NEGLECTED MINDS : WORDSWORTH'S  
INTEREST IN THE ERODING EFFECTS OF POVERTY

The words were simple, but her look and voice  
Made up their meaning, and bespoke a mind  
Which being long neglected, and denied  
The common food of hope, was now become  
Sick and extravagant

("The Baker's Cart" 19-23 c. 1796)

'How writers, professing to be friends to  
freedom, and the improvement of morals, can  
assert that poverty is no evil, I cannot  
imagine.'

'No more can I,' interrupted Maria, 'yet they  
even expatiate on the peculiar happiness of  
indigence, though in what it can consist,  
excepting in brutal rest...I cannot imagine. The  
mind is necessarily imprisoned in its own little  
tenement; and, fully occupied by keeping it in  
repair, has not time to rove abroad for  
improvement.'

(Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Women: or Maria.  
1798)

The years from 1794 to 1797 were years in which Wordsworth's  
political views developed and changed and his personal life



gradually assumed a greater stability.

It has already been noted in Chapter Four how his 1794 letters to Mathews reveal his political position as developing away from the quite extreme radicalism of the Letter to Llandaff to a more considered and sober, though still radical, position. His views, as expressed throughout 1794, a politically tumultuous year, would still have been considered Jacobinical, and far to the left of most middle-class attitudes.

Throughout 1794, until September when he took on the task of looking after the terminally ill Raisley Calvert and settled with him at Windy Brow near Keswick, Wordsworth had been staying with various relatives and friends in North West England, a temporary, and therefore disorienting, mode of existence. In May 1794 the first version of Salisbury Plain was ready for the press (Early Letters 117). On the 23rd of that month habeas corpus was suspended and only restored in February 1795. Five days after this, on 28 May, Dorothy wrote to assure her brother, Richard:

I think I can answer for William's caution about expressing his political opinions. He is very cautious and seems well aware of the dangers of a contrary conduct.

(Early Letters 117)

Certainly, Dorothy might well have been bent on calming her rather conservative brother, but it does seem that, with the first arrests of political offenders on 12 May, the political situation was seen as becoming increasingly dangerous for the "odious class of men called democrats" (Wordsworth's self description to Mathews in May 1794, Early Letters 116). In June, the month in which Wordsworth expressed his political views at

length in a letter to Mathews, there were virulent anti-radical celebrations following an English naval victory (Cone 198). In that same month the terror began in Paris, during the 49 days of which, 14,000 were executed. By July, Robespierre had joined that number. Undoubtedly events across the Channel would have increased fears in England. In Autumn the treason trials began in London. It was in 1794 that the temporary alliance of middle and working class reformers began to dissolve. The treason trials during December led to the severing of the links between the various reform societies as leaders dispersed or resigned. The solidarity of the reform movement crumbled. By November 1794 Wordsworth revealed increasing restlessness in being confined to Keswick and Calvert's bedside and a longing to be in London (Early Letters 128).

After Calvert's death in January 1795, Wordsworth moved to London where he stayed until August. During those months he met William Godwin and visited him frequently. With radical societies numbering over 100 (Goodwin 514), a severe famine causing bread prices to rise by 75% with consequent bread riots (Cone 179), and large open-air meetings organised by the London Corresponding Society revealing popular support for reform, 1795 was to prove a politically decisive year. So seriously did the Government view the situation that two Acts were framed which, in effect, introduced a new law of treason (Cone 218) and limited the right to public meetings. Despite 94 petitions against the Acts, and two huge protest meetings organised by the London Corresponding Society in November and December, the Acts were passed on 18 December. Known popularly as the "gagging acts", they effectively silenced the open expression of protest. Most critics were silenced, some went underground, but the potentially powerful informal coalition between gentlemen reformers and working class

radicals was destroyed.

We have no letters from Wordsworth from December 1794 until a letter to his brother, Richard, about money matters in September 1795. In November 1795 he wrote to Wrangham, and from this letter we can see that the events of 1795 seem to have in no way affected Wordsworth's political radicalism. He sent Wrangham his recent contribution to the translation of Juvenal's Eighth Satire and mentioned his work on the Salisbury Plain poem. Far from toning down any social and political criticism, he had been engaged, since arriving at Racedown in September, in transforming Salisbury Plain into the carefully particularized catalogue of abuses that constitute Adventures on Salisbury Plain which he was to send to Cottle in March 1796.

Wordsworth and his sister remained at Racedown from late 1795 until July 1797, the longest uninterrupted period he had spent anywhere since his university days. The psychological benefits of this rural retreat with a beloved sister cannot be overestimated. Other than a visit of a few weeks to London in mid-1796, during which he also saw Godwin, and his few days in Bristol in March 1797, he remained at Racedown continuously until moving to Alfoxden in July 1797. This rural retreat was also to a large extent a retreat from an active engagement in politics. Wordsworth was not alone in this withdrawal for, all over England, reformers were in retreat. Thelwall was only one of the most famous radical orators to be forced to discontinue lecturing. The most active political society, the London Corresponding Society, was, in Cone's words, "virtually defunct" (222). Napoleon, now Commander-in-Chief of the French army in Italy, was bringing a new spirit of determination to French militarism and, amid invasion scares, England started negotiations for peace. Burke fulminated against such

conciliatory tactics in his Letters on a Regicide Peace (1796), but the negotiations, in any case, came to nought. These twenty months at Racedown Wordsworth spent reading, gardening, observing rural habits and inhabitants, entertaining house guests and writing.

In June 1797 Coleridge paid his first visit to the Wordsworths. "The first thing that was read after he came was William's new poem The Ruined Cottage with which he was much delighted", writes Dorothy (Early Letters 169). This poem, and The Borderers, are the major works from the Racedown period, but it is in some smaller pieces, mainly fragments, which date from late 1796 to the spring of 1797, that we can see Wordsworth grappling with the concerns which received further treatment in The Ruined Cottage, and experimenting with methods of presentation.

The peasants are miserably poor; their  
cottages are shapeless structures (I may  
almost say) of wood and clay - indeed they  
are not at all beyond what might be expected  
in savage life,

writes Dorothy in her first letter to Jane Marshall from Racedown on 30 November 1795 (Early Letters 148). This visible poverty, amid "very pleasant walks" (Early Letters 147), certainly goes some way towards explaining the poems and fragments of poems written while at Racedown. Two short fragments from 1796 reveal Wordsworth trying out a first-person blank verse account of a female vagrant and a third-person Spenserian stanza version. De Selincourt, who first published these fragments in 1940, claims that the Spenserian stanza version is the later version. The two

fragments form a bridge between the Spenserian stanzas of the Salisbury Plain poems and the blank verse of The Ruined Cottage. Wordsworth cast the same material, a vagrant woman wandering alone, in first-person blank verse and third-person Spenserian stanza, presumably to explore the different effects possible and to discover how best to depict interiority. For now it seemed that it was the effects of poverty on the psyche which most fully engaged him when contemplating the poverty that he viewed daily.

In An Evening Walk, the vagrant figure had been viewed wholly from the outside, a method similar in kind to the picturesque portrayals by artists and writers during the preceding decades. The Grison gypsy in Descriptive Sketches is still viewed primarily from the outside but here the landscape and meteorological conditions are used much more to evoke inner states. In the Salisbury Plain poems there was further development. Embedded in a third-person narrative is the first-person account by the woman of her experiences. However, the woman's narration differs little in style or manner from the surrounding material. There is no attempt at verisimilitude in the rendering of her tale. During the next few years, Wordsworth was to experiment with different registers of language and with the effects to be derived from using a variety of tellers and listeners.

Thus it is that, from an initial pictorial presentation of a suffering being whom we and the speaker view as an object of pity and pathos, Wordsworth moves to a mode which allows the suffering being to relate her own story to a companion whose presence and sympathy prompt the telling and whose reaction is often crucial in determining our response. By the time he wrote The Ruined Cottage, he had further complicated the presentation of suffering for in that poem an older speaker tells a younger

listener (himself the initial speaker) the tale of a suffering being who is kept off stage. The tale is told for a purpose and that purpose will become of greater importance and more and more complex and multi-dimensional with each rewriting. In the poems and scraps of poems that follow the Salisbury Plain poems and predate The Ruined Cottage, we see a mind pondering on the consequences of poverty and exploring the mechanics of depicting those consequences.

What is immediately noticeable in the fragment beginning "The road extended o'er a heath" is the competence of the blank verse (Gill, SP 289). Averill, in his introduction to his edition of An Evening Walk, includes a blank verse fragment from DC MS 6 which seems to date from 1788. That fragment depicts a vagrant mother with two children, one of whom holds a glow-worm. The whole is only fifteen lines long, many of the lines being incomplete pentameters. The glow-worm glimmered again in An Evening Walk and reappears in this 1796 fragment. The companion fragment, in Spenserian stanza form, "No spade for leagues had won a rood of earth", starts from the same point - the woman on a bleak common hastening for shelter from an impending storm (Gill, SP 290-2). This fragment is longer and the woman comes to "a dwelling wild" ("their cottages are shapeless structures...not at all beyond what might be expected in savage life"), is welcomed in by a woman almost as destitute as she, who starts to tell the vagrant her tale. From a comparison of the material in common, it would seem that the blank verse of "The road extended o'er a heath" is more suited to the directionless wanderings of the vagrant and to her self-absorbed musings:

Now fast against my cheek and whistling ears  
My loose wet hair and tattered bonnet flapped

With thought-perplexing noise, that seemed to  
make

The universal darkness that ensued  
More dark and desolate.

(19-23)

In addition, the first-person presentation has the advantage of subjective immediacy - mental aberrations can be shown by means of diction, rhythm, and other verbal indicators without any overt signposting. First-person presentation allows for dramatising rather than telling - a mode which seems to have advantages if the purpose is to reveal mental and emotional realities and effects. The difficulty lies in confining the information only to that which can legitimately come from the speaker, and this fragment ends with lines which, although highly atmospheric, reveal an inconsistency in point of view:

nor other living thing  
Appeared through all the waste; only the geese  
Were heard to send from far a dreary cry.

(Gill, SP 295 emphases added)

"No spade for leagues" undoubtedly reveals Wordsworth's facility with the Spenserian form, yet one cannot help feeling that it is really too stylized a verse form to be ideally suited to the rendering of psychological disturbance. Details of landscape and rural living are sharply observed and clearly rooted in Wordsworth's observations in the vicinity of Racedown:

The road's white surface fresh indented showed  
The self-provided waggoner gone by,

Yet oft her eye retraced the backward road  
Some coal-team or night-going wain to spy;  
At last for nearer path she turned aside  
And strayed where numerous sheep-tracks green  
and dry  
The sharp furze thridding did all choice  
divide.  
(10-16)

The "self-provided waggoner" (found in the blank verse fragment as well) evokes the self-sufficient security of one with a purpose and a source of income, in contrast to the vagrant. The desolate woman is welcomed into a hovel by a single mother just marginally less disadvantaged:

Gently she knocked and prayed they would not  
blame  
A Traveller weary-worn and needing rest;  
Strait [sic] to the door a ragged woman came  
Who with arms linked and huddling elbows  
press'd  
By either hand, a tattered jacket drew  
With modest care across her hollow breast,  
That showed a skin of sickly hue.  
"With travel spent", she cried, "you needs must  
be  
If from the heath arrived; come in and rest  
with me".  
(37-45)

Here the remarkable generosity of spirit and responsiveness which



can exist despite material deprivation is evident. This is not the same as the picturesque sentimentalities of traditional depictions of the deserving poor. Here there is none of the patronising attitude of the privileged towards the underprivileged but rather a scene of mutual succour. Wordsworth had already shown, in the Salisbury Plain poems, that the poor and the outcast, marginalized by society, survive only by means of mutual succour, and that this extraordinary capacity to interact humanely does operate despite the temptation to succumb to the endless cycle of mutual exploitation. R.F. Storch argues that

the vital spirit he [Wordsworth] discovered in this world of the poor and neglected was a personal strength and hope in life - personal to them and to himself, for he drew on them for his self-integration and the deep power of joy.

(208)

This points to the personal benefits that Wordsworth seems to have derived from contemplating "the poor and neglected", benefits which became of increasing importance and which "The Leechgatherer" (1802) demonstrates so fully. Such stated benefits must not make us underestimate Wordsworth's ability, revealed in the 1790s, to break through the conventions, "to look at them [the poor] head on, directly and respectfully, to think...into their mind, to find them interesting or complicated or even wonderful" (Ehrenpreis 3). Irvin Ehrenpreis reminds us that such an ability was rare - not even Voltaire, Rousseau or Diderot rose above "shallow generalization" about the poor (18-19): "So long

as poverty seemed a normal part of the divine plan or an essential part of the national economy, how many comfortable men could openly admit what they secretly knew, viz., that it was utterly devoid of benefit to soul or body?" (25)

Such is the woman's isolation and sense of abandonment that only her physical pains enable her to maintain a corporal existence, for she lives alone in a world of dreams and memories, "[a]h but that Nature feels these corporal aches/My life might seem a dream - the thing a vision makes" (53-4). She and her small son live in the "eye of hunger" (49), a strikingly shocking metaphor akin to the "eye of a storm". A few months after the peak famine year of 1795, the words "no bread is nigh" (71) would have rung out with appalling topicality. The fellow-feeling from one who has nothing else to give but her sympathy allows us a glimpse behind the carefully maintained fortitude as tears fill the mother's eyes. The fragment breaks off before we learn how the fields and "little nest" of her youth have become the "bleak common" and "dwelling wild" of her present.

The fact that Wordsworth, having already consigned the revised Salisbury Plain to the publisher (in early 1796), was still working on very similar material, suggests the enduring importance to him of the lonely destitute woman. It might very well be that his interest in this conventional figure was enhanced by the presence of an abandoned woman in his own past. To leave a woman when she is on the point of giving birth to one's child, however practical the reasons for that separation might be and however unexpected the absolute nature of that separation, is to lay oneself open to the possibility of remorse. Yet now he himself is no longer stumbling over Salisbury Plain or moving about without any structure to his life in the North West of England, but rather is ensconced in the comfortable house

at Racedown, "rent free, with a garden, orchard and every other convenience" (Early Letters 138), with the relative leisure and security to ponder on the consequences of poverty, homelessness, isolation, having himself felt a little of their deleterious effects on one's mental and emotional health.

Most of the fragments dating from 1796 to early 1797 are various attempts at expressing the situations and/or ideas that finally appear in the two major works of the Racedown period - The Borderers and The Ruined Cottage. "Argument for Suicide" and "Incipient Madness" might well be tentative drafts for passages in The Borderers and The Ruined Cottage respectively. The tone of "Argument for Suicide" is similar to the pointed social criticism of the Juvenalian stanzas which he was working on for Wrangham at this time, exposing the hypocrisy of a belief in the sanctity of life on the part of those who are instrumental in debasing the quality of life of others (Hayden 1: 161-2). As examples of those whose lives are rendered joyless and degraded, he gives the miner, the soldier and the aged beggar, all of whom are shown to be consigned to a living death. With "Incipient Madness", a fragment of 38 blank verse lines, although the situation is once again that of the first-person speaker seeking shelter on a dreary moor, there is a determined effort to explore the workings of inner disturbance, observed creatures and objects serving as objective correlatives for the unhinged mind (Butler, Ruined Cottage 468-9). The "ruin" that the vagrant speaker enters immediately conveys both material and mental ruin. The broken pane glittering in the moonlight becomes a fixation for the vagrant, symbolising and revealing her fragmented mind. Deepseated grief distorts reality:

There is a mood,  
 A settled temper of the heart, when grief,  
 Become an instinct, fastening on all things  
 That promise food, doth like a sucking babe  
 Create it where it is not.

(7-11)

The metaphors and similes enforce the idea that grief battens on the spirit. Likewise, the "iron links" of the hobbled horse sheltering among the "fractured walls" are credible documentary details and appropriate symbols of the shackled spirit and the ruined mind of the speaker. The fragment ends by focusing on the utter isolation of the speaker as the light of the glow-worm is extinguished, the regular nesting blackbird disappears, and the linnet, a visitor for two successive summers, vanishes. Only the winds and mouldering walls remain. This utter deprivation is the first stage on the road to madness. For an edifice to represent the human mind or body or both has, of course, many precedents, most notably Spenser's House of Alma. Wordsworth is undoubtedly working in this tradition as suggestively as did Edgar Allan Poe in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). Significantly, lines from "Incipient Madness" form part of The Ruined Cottage.

On the reverse side of "Argument for Suicide" in the MS is "Old Man Travelling", a reworking of a brief "Description of a Beggar" which is found in an early notebook DC MS 13 (Jacobus, Tradition and Experiment 178). The latter has echoes of the fragments "The road extended oe'r a heath" and "No spade for leagues". The description of the marks of the vehicle on the white road, "one track/The nails of cart or chariot wheel have left/Impressed on the white road" is reminiscent of "[t]he road's white surface fresh indented showed/The self-provided waggoner gone by" in "No spade for leagues" (10-11). "Old Man Travelling" was first published in the Lyrical Ballads of 1798. The first fourteen lines are descriptive, yet the description is not primarily a physical one, for the speaker makes certain

assumptions about the inner state of being of the old man. He "moves/With thought" not "with pain", he is "insensibly subdued/To settled quiet". Patience has become a part of his being and he seems deeply at peace. If we do not pause to query the validity of the speaker's assessment, it is because the speaker's tone is authoritative - note the force of the oft-repeated verb "he is". Yet twice the impossibility of making such claims about an interior state on the basis of an exterior observation is hinted at - "he is one by whom/All effort seems forgotten" and "patience now doth seem a thing, of which/He hath no need". Both these qualifications should alert us to the subjective nature of the comments. From line 15 to the end, we have one of Wordsworth's favourite situations, the confrontation with the traveller. The speaker asks the old man what he is doing and where he is going, and the final four lines are his reply:

'Sir! I am going many miles to take  
A last leave of my son, a mariner,  
Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth  
And there is dying in an hospital.'

The bleak tragedy and dignified courage of the old man are both beautifully rendered in the simplicity and starkness of the response and in the fact that there is no return to or from the first speaker. Bialostosky reveals the multiple effects possible with this "dialogic" mode in later poems like "The Sailor's Mother" of 1802 (Wordsworth 67). In this poem the old man quite literally has the last word and the particularity of his situation serves to qualify greatly the sentimental universalizing of his state of being in the earlier lines. It seems as if Wordsworth is here very aware of the ease with which we make assumptions about others on the basis of our own experience. These assumptions might well be unsound, especially if there is a gap in the social and economic status between the observer and the observed. The apparently enviable demeanour of the other might well be a veneer, a display of extraordinary self-control, masking pain, loss and misery. Later poems of

encounter reveal more directly the sentimentalizing of the other with less and less irony directed at this tendency. In its first published version the poem was entitled "Old Man Travelling. Animal Tranquillity and Decay. A Sketch". In the second edition of Lyrical Ballads (1800) the words "Old Man Travelling" were omitted. Heather Glen, who rates this poem as "one of the most challenging of the 1798 ballads" (82), argues that even the reduced title, "Animal Tranquillity and Decay: A Sketch", serves to offer an implicit promise which the poem itself then deliberately undermines (234). I would see the omission of the words "Old Man Travelling" in 1800 as of the same order as the change from the MS title "The Leechgatherer" to the published title "Resolution and Independence" of the later poem. What began as a description of a beggar, such a one as might well have been met with on the roads near Racedown (given the proximity of Falmouth), now becomes more generalized and is presented as an illustration of a quality and a universal condition. This universalising tendency was increased when, after 1815, the final six lines were omitted. He is now no longer a particular old man with a particular life story anchored in a particular locality. This changes the poem markedly for, in this later version, the reader has only the speaker's assessment with nothing to qualify it. There is nothing now within the poem which could lead the reader to question the validity of that assessment. The ending of the first version is like a douche of cold water that dispels any incipient sentimentality in our response. In the first version, Wordsworth has succeeded in rendering the vast social and material distance between speaker and old man, as well as the appalling nature of a society in which indigent old men travel laboriously on foot to bid farewell to sons who, as victims of wars perpetrated by their social superiors, predecease their fathers. This version, without resorting to clichéd rhetoric, displays the sort of imaginative response to the poor which E.P. Thompson's "Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon" acclaims in Wordsworth. In 1845, "A Sketch" was dropped from the title, removing the informality of the description and reinforcing the sense that the poem is intended as emblematic rather than as the

description of a unique individual. The poem, as written and published in the 1790s, is a devastating critique not only of the speaker's assumptions but also of contemporary social conditions without the overt castigation found in the 1793 Letter or even in Adventures on Salisbury Plain.

Perhaps the most poignant as well as the most strikingly topical of these 1796/7 fragments is "The Baker's Cart", written, it seems, between late 1796 and March 1797 (Butler, Ruined Cottage 463). Yet again, Wordsworth is reworking material concerned with indigent women and children. During the severe famine of 1795 the bread price had risen by 75% (Cone 179) and bread riots occurred throughout the country. In these riots women were almost always in the majority. Booth notes many contemporary accounts of food riots where women were "both more numerous and particularly active" (98). E.P. Thompson points out that women were consciously enforcing their "particular right, according to tradition and gender role, as guardians of the children, of the household, of the livelihood of the community" (Customs 332). Both Booth and Thompson record incidents involving baker's carts. At Delph in July 1795, "a bread-baker's van was stripped of its contents which were immediately sold at an abated price, the proceeds being returned to the driver" (Booth 93). Two women were sentenced to six months hard labour at Northampton Quarter Sessions in April 1796 "for trying, with a great number of persons, 'principally women', to stop a market wagon" (Thompson Customs footnote 330). Such incidents must have been common and certainly Wordsworth would have been aware of these outbreaks of popular expressions of anger, hunger and despair. The few lines that he writes gain added significance from this context. Given the close association of women and bread riots, the lassitude of the woman in this fragment, when faced with the denial of bread, is particularly revealing. So damaged is she by the physically and spiritually eroding effects of want that she is far too dispirited to reveal the anger of her contemporary sisters. At the beginning of the poem, the action of shunning the indigent is attributed to an impersonal, faceless perpetrator, "when o'er his [the Baker's horse] head/Smack went the whip". It is as if



such an unnatural and inhumane action can only be the work of a dehumanized agent. The horse, in contrast, behaves naturally. The emphatic positioning of "[s]mack went the whip" and the stress on the initial word increase the sense of an unexpected and violent action. The appalling paradox of "as if/You were not born to live" is an indictment of a society which denies to anyone the staff of life, for the country is obviously not literally without bread but only without it for those who cannot afford it. The actions of the little brood, emerging in anticipation and retreating disappointedly, are conveyed in a balanced sweep of verse ("Had all come forth...They all returned" 8, 10), which emphasises the rapidity and conclusiveness of their unsuccessful sortie. The focus then falls on the mother, returning with only water to still the hunger of her little ones. "Tied to dead things" (additional phrase in one of the MSS., Butler 467), her listlessness is conveyed in her laconic "that waggon does not care for us" (16). The synecdoche conveys the inhumanity of the situation. In one sense her words are fantastic; how can wagons care or not care for anyone? and the speaker attributes the oddness of her statement to her "sick and extravagant mind" (21). Yet her words convey the sense of her outcast state. She and hers are abandoned even by the inanimate world. One recalls such phrases from the period as "useless mouths" - phrases which actually appeared in print with no apparent shame (Monthly Magazine December 1796, 859). This abandonment leads inevitably to "misery and rumination deep" (additional phrase, Butler 467) which in turn lead to a loss of a sense of reality, which sense of reality serves to characterize a balanced psyche. Denied the literal bread of life, she is also denied the "common food of hope" (20). Lacking this, the mind becomes "sick and extravagant" (21), suffering "momentary pangs" (22) more damaging than pangs of hunger, and leading inevitably to the distortion of even the laws of nature to fit the template of a disturbed mind.

In the preceding tales, the destitute woman had at least the memory of a happier past, the memory of which proved the possibility of a different order of things. This woman is cut off from her past as well as from any community, and exists only in



a bleak, empty present. This way lies madness. Once again it is Heather Glen who has accorded this fragment its proper due ("one of the most extraordinary poems of these years" 230). Yet I differ from Glen in her reaction to the depiction of the woman's "sick and extravagant" mind. Glen sees the initial speaker as undermining the woman's point of view by considering it "simply a symptom of madness" (231). I would argue, rather, that this fragment is one of the early renderings of what was to become of increasing concern to Wordsworth - the insidious results of deprivation on mental stability. Wordsworth was increasingly exploring the importance that a sense of continuity, a sense of a meaningful context, has to ensure psychic health. Locke had argued that the inability to produce or retain memories marks the state of idiocy (qtd. in Bewell 327). In this fragment, Wordsworth briefly sketches a situation where social conditions can lead to the fragmentation of the human mind and spirit. Here lie the deeper consequences of poverty. Over three years before, Wordsworth had written in the Letter to Llandaff that "extremes of poverty...have a necessary tendency to corrupt the human heart" (Owen and Smyser 1: 43). This fragment makes concrete that theoretical pronouncement: "The rebellious heart to its own will/Fashions the laws of nature" (24-5). Wordsworth shows that in such unnatural distortions lie the seeds of total ruin.

The major extended poem written at Racedown was to be a fuller development of all these fragments. Taking those picturesque props, the ruined cottage and the abandoned destitute mother, Wordsworth would transform their potential sentimental pathos into a chilling study of deprivation.

James Butler, in the Cornell edition of The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar, despite heroic efforts to untangle the complex history of the composition of this work and identify the earliest version, concludes that the "new poem", begun probably in March 1797 and read to Coleridge on his first visit to the Wordsworth's in June 1797, must have been a poem telling the tale of Margaret, "a powerful representation of a domestic tragedy, stark in its bare essentials...with little editorial commentary" (14). In mid-July Dorothy and William moved to Alfoxden and the next record

we have of work on The Ruined Cottage is manuscript evidence suggesting a date in late January 1798. When Dorothy wrote to Mary Hutchinson on 5 March 1798, she told of how the poem "has grown to the length of 900 lines", and she differentiated the part "solely connected with the Cottage" from that concerning the "Pedlar's character [which] now makes a very, certainly the most, considerable part of the Poem" (Early Letters 176). Between 1797 and its first appearance in print in 1814 in Book One of The Excursion, the tale of Margaret as told by the Pedlar underwent many changes. The most important stage of transformation would be the 1799 separation of the tale of Margaret from the biography of the Pedlar (Butler, Ruined Cottage 23). During late 1801 and early 1802, Wordsworth worked doggedly and frustratedly on The Pedlar (now so named in Dorothy's Journal) with one day devoted to The Ruined Cottage - "William worked at The Ruined Cottage and made himself very ill" (Journals 95). The complexities of the poem's compositional history are not the concern of this study. What is important is the fact that what was initially the story of Margaret became increasingly a study of the Pedlar's interpretation of the story of Margaret as communicated to a younger man. The reader's attention is thus increasingly drawn away from the facts of Margaret's story to the question of one's response to such facts and the associated problem of coming to terms with the suffering of innocents. Because it is an old man who tells Margaret's story, we need to recognise the subjectivity of what he selects or emphasises and how he tells her story. Undoubtedly Coleridge's influence was a crucial factor in increasing Wordsworth's interest in such philosophical problems as the explanation for the evil and suffering that beset the innocent. Yet Wordsworth had already revealed himself to be concerned with the effect that the suffering of others has on the observer (whether that observer is within or outside the poem), with the problem of undeserved suffering, as well as with the socio-political causes that lead to such suffering. The fragmentary poems of 1796 had revealed an interest in questions of response and effects over and above the basic facts of suffering innocents.

In his own sheltered haven of Racedown Lodge, he can observe and ponder the various issues which arise when contemplating pain and suffering. As he works on Margaret's story, his own life is largely satisfying and exhilarating. "Indeed William is as chearful [sic] as anybody can be; perhaps you may not think it but he is the life of the whole house", writes Dorothy to Jane Marshall on 19 March 1797 (Early Letters 165-6). The presence of Mary Hutchinson, visiting Racedown from November (1796) till June (1797), no doubt contributed to that pleasure. The contrast between his domestic pleasures and the observable distress of many of those met with on their daily walks must have prompted thoughts about the inequities and the unfairness of life.

Once again, as with former depictions of distressed women, Wordsworth later emphasised the factual basis of her poetic character, writing to Isabella Fenwick:

[these lines] faithfully delineate, as far as they go, the character possessed in common life by many women whom it has been my happiness to know in humble life, and...several of the most touching things which she is represented as saying and doing are taken from actual observation of the distresses and trials under which different persons were suffering, some of them Strangers to me, and others daily under my notice.

(Butler, Ruined Cottage 478)

The "happiness" spoken of here is akin to the observation made (likewise to Isabella Fenwick) that the old Cumberland beggar was "[o]bserved...with great benefit to my own heart" (Butler and Green 393). Wordsworth seems to imply, at least from the vantage point of 1843, that "knowing" or "observing" such figures has been beneficial to his own personal development. The anger and distress at the "distresses and trials under which different persons were suffering" which fuelled some of the writings of the 1790s are, by 1843, no longer paramount in his memory. Elsewhere he writes:

for several pages describing the employment  
and demeanour of Margaret during her affliction,  
I was indebted to observations made in  
Dorsetshire, and afterwards at Alfoxden, in  
Somersetshire, where I resided in 1797 and 1798.

(Grosart 3: 195)

The basic facts of Margaret's story are the familiar ones of a mother bereft of her husband through the agency of war, sinking further and further into indigence until she, too, dies. However, the poem is immediately different from earlier variations on this theme because Margaret is kept off-stage, her story told by another to the speaker. Heather Glen sees this as a distancing ploy, "a complex narrative structure is used to distance the urgency of the story" (385-6). The story is told for a particular purpose with a particular effect and this component is part of even the earliest version. The socio-political facts, the historical conditions which underlie Margaret's fate, are framed within comments on the transience of individual life and the apparent indifference of nature. This can be either a consolatory idea or a deeply depressing one - much will depend on the depicted effect of the story on the teller and the listener and, ultimately, the reader. Although this framework might alter the focus of the poem so that it is argued that this work is not a work of social protest (Butler, Ruined Cottage 4), nevertheless this does not mean that Wordsworth ignores the wretched realities that contribute to Margaret's decline and death.

The speaker, feeling rather sorry for himself after an arduous walk over a "bare wide Common" (MS D 1799, 19) in the summer heat, seeks the shade of a group of trees and is there confronted with "a ruined house, four naked walls/That stared upon each other" (31-32). The hardships that he suffers are as nothing to the hardships that he will learn about from contemplating those four walls with the mediation of the aged man who will tell the tale of that ruined cottage. In later rewritings, the Pedlar was to acquire all the ideological weight of Wordsworth's philosophy of nature to render him fit teacher

but, in the version discussed here, the 1799 version, there is little elaboration of his character other than the acknowledged wisdom gained from age and experience.

Gaining desired refreshment from the well "half choked" (63) in the overgrown garden or the ruined cottage, the young speaker becomes a willing listener to the old man's tale of the cottage and its last inhabitant. The ruin has meaning for the old man because of its associations with Margaret. Its desolation, the weeds that overrun the hitherto cultivated flowers, the poor shelter it now provides, only for beasts, all speak of her absence, for "she is dead" (103, 108). The old man admits to yielding often to the "foolishness of grief" (119), although his lesson will be to resist such a futile and self-indulgent reaction and rather draw strength from a sense of perspective in which the individual is seen as part of a larger process.

The old man relates Margaret's story with perceptive and moving details designed to convey the essence of her wretched decline. She, her husband and her "two pretty babes" (MS D 1799, 131) dwell in a cottage "in peace and comfort" (131), the very epitome of the idyllic picturesque glorified by sentimental writers and aestheticians alike. The title, The Ruined Cottage, would have immediate appeal in a period in which cottages, whether pristine or ruined, were much in vogue (see Chapter 2).

Writing in 1796, mention of the "[t]wo blighting seasons" and the additional "worse affliction in the plague of war" (134, 136) would necessarily reveal the topical relevance of Margaret's circumstances even though the events are displaced to "some ten years gone" (133). The transparency of the device of displacement is proven by Wordsworth's later account that the details do stem from the 1790s:

I was born too late to have a distinct  
remembrance of the origin of the  
American war, but the state in which I  
represent Robert's mind to be I had  
frequent opportunities of observing at  
the commencement of our rupture with

France in '93, opportunities of which  
I availed myself in the Story of the  
Female Vagrant as told in the Poem on  
Guilt and Sorrow.

(Butler, Ruined Cottage 478-9 emphasis added)

Most critics have noted that the treatment of Margaret's sufferings differs from the treatment of suffering in the earlier social protest poetry. Some have followed Moorman's lead in arguing that Wordsworth's lack of resentment of Margaret's sufferings indicates an important stage in his journey from "social reformer" to "poet of the human heart" (Moorman 316). Others have concurred with Chandler that, unlike the clearly articulated demonstration of social injustice in Adventures on Salisbury Plain, suffering in The Ruined Cottage "occurs not at the hands of other human beings but at the hands of heaven" (134). But Wordsworth has here created a pious old man as narrator, one who might typically enunciate such phrasing as "it pleased heaven" (135) and such sentiments as the acceptance of human tragedy as inherent in the nature of things. More recently, critics have argued that Margaret's suffering is used by the Pedlar (and Wordsworth) as a means to teach the younger man (and the reader) "the proper attitude to human suffering" (Manning 20). Certainly later rewritings which focus increasingly on the Pedlar, his youth and philosophy, appear to be concerned to offer consoling ways of understanding such tragic human wastage. Wordsworth did become increasingly sceptical of human capacity to improve conditions but, because he became increasingly disillusioned with political means, it does not necessarily follow that he became blind to the realities of suffering. In the poems which derive from the later years of this decade, he seems rather to be interested in exposing the gap that exists between the one who suffers and the one who observes that suffering, however sympathetic and concerned that observer might be. Certainly his own biographical circumstances might well have led to the awareness of that unbridgeable gap. Although we hear about Margaret from the Pedlar, the details of her story, in the



1799 version, have a force and an effect which outweigh his consolatory teaching. Peter Manning surmises that the decision to separate the Pedlar's story from Margaret's story was taken because "the barren narrative overshadowed the joy in the One Life declared through the Pedlar" (28). I would argue that the 1799 version is undoubtedly still a poem of protest. It contains that juxtaposition of the one who suffers and the one who observes that suffering found in "Old Man Travelling". In the latter poem only an obtuse reading would underestimate the effectiveness of the social protest contained within it. The Ruined Cottage also demonstrates once again Wordsworth's interest in the spiritual and psychological damage resulting from poverty. We learn everything about Margaret through the old man but that does not mean that we judge things only as he does. In the earliest version of The Ruined Cottage, the old man is a sporadic witness of Margaret's decline. Her suffering, her wretchedly abandoned state, and her lonely death are seen at one remove. The old man outlives her; the plants, the winds, the sun and the stars will outlast them both; but to acknowledge that should not blind us to the reality of human suffering which is the core of the early version. No one, however sympathetic, can really experience another's suffering.

Certainly the hopes that accompanied the Revolution, the euphoria of new beginnings which Wordsworth had witnessed during his walking tour through France in 1791, these had not been fulfilled and were being daily rendered less likely of fulfilment, not only by the reactionary forces in Europe and England, but by the vitiated political agendas in France. Wordsworth at Racedown contemplated the fact of suffering, especially the suffering of the poor which was often almost forgotten in the theorising about their condition or the conflicting debates about power and control. The ways in which destitution erodes the family and erodes the individual mind are, in this poem, graphically depicted. Some, under adverse economic conditions, merely "cease to be" (143). Others are forced, demeaningly, "to hang for bread on parish charity" (156). The enforced idleness of the unemployed can undermine self-

confidence. Even William Paley conceded that unemployment is oppressive: "being without work is one thing, reposing from work is another. The one is as tiresome and insipid, as the other is sweet and soothing" (12). Paley's "tiresome and insipid" might seem inadequate terms but, being Paley, he is actually arguing that the rich alone suffer from lack of work. Margaret's husband, Robert, rendered useless, is left to engage in desultory and joyless activities merely to pass the time. Whistling "merry tunes/That had no mirth in them (163-4), carving uncouth figures, idly seeking anything to do around the cottage and garden, his "good-humour soon/Became a weight in which no pleasure was,/And poverty brought on a petted mood/And a sore temper" (172-5). Worse follows, for he takes to wandering abroad, to the town or among the fields, and then begins to turn against his innocent babes, alternating cruelty with disturbingly rumbustious games. At this low point, Part One ends.

Wordsworth has well captured to what extent male self-esteem is linked with being the breadwinner. It is left to Margaret to sustain the family, and Part Two concentrates on the wearing away of even her great reserves of fortitude. As Part One ends, the old man notes the tranquillity of nature which contrasts so markedly with the psychic distress just narrated. He attributes to human weakness the tendency to ignore Nature's wisdom and comfort and to concentrate with "restless thoughts" on "disquiet" (198, 197), even as he recognises his own demonstration of this tendency.

Although it seems that Part One ends on an extremely wretched note, worse is to follow. In Part Two Margaret will be stripped unrelentingly of all that renders her fully human, until she sits, alone "her tattered clothes...ruffled by the wind" (485), her mind unsound, in her ruined cottage.

Despite his momentary signs of weakness, the old man assumes a look of "easy chearfulness" (sic), (201), as yet inexplicable to the young listener who finds himself chilled by what he has heard so far, despite the warmth of the sun. He begs the old man "for my sake" to resume the story, needing as he does to reconcile the "tranquil ruin" (218) which he now views, with the



appalling experiences of its inhabitants. The old man emphasises that merely to indulge a debased tendency for ghoulish curiosity "would demand/Severe reproof" (222), but he is telling this tale which, though outwardly so devoid of grandiose events, has nevertheless within it a meaning for the seriously thoughtful. This is the first statement of an idea Wordsworth was to repeat in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, the idea that it is often in the least dramatic of incidents that the most profound meaning lies, and in the most humble lives that the greatest human truths are manifest: "the feeling therein [in these poems] developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (Butler and Green 746). For Wordsworth, a poet has a duty to enlarge the human capacity for thought and feeling, to develop the moral sense:

O reader! had you in your mind  
Such stores as silent thought can bring,  
O gentle reader! you would find  
A tale in everything.

("Simon Lee" 73-76)

Wordsworth deplores the debased contemporary taste for sentimental voyeurism particularly prevalent when depicting the easily patronised poor in paint or words. Adam Smith had identified a curiosity "to inquire into his [the pitiable one's] situation" as a common accompaniment of sympathy, a curiosity which could and often did become the source of intrinsic pleasure to the viewer (Smith, Theory 11). Wordsworth understands this tendency and makes the old man strongly reject it:

It were a wantonness and would demand  
Severe reproof, if we were men whose hearts  
Could hold vain dalliance with the misery  
Even of the dead, contented thence to draw  
A momentary pleasure never marked  
By reason, barren of all future good.  
But we have known that there is often found  
In mournful thoughts, and always might be

found,

A power to virtue friendly; were't not so,  
 I am a dreamer among men, indeed  
 An idle dreamer. 'Tis a common tale,  
 By moving accidents uncharactered,  
 A tale of silent suffering, hardly clothed  
 In bodily form, and to the grosser sense  
 But ill adapted, scarcely palpable  
 To him who does not think.

(The Ruined Cottage 221-236)

These lines suggest that self-indulgent sentiment at the contemplation of another's suffering (something which contemporary art and literature was often designed to evoke) is reprehensible. Rather, says the old man, one must build on those potentially positive feelings of sympathy, sympathy which, in Burke's words, is one of the principal links of "the great chain of society" (Enquiry 44). Thereby suffering will not be totally meaningless. In the 1799 version this theory is very much shown to be the old man's lesson to the younger man but, because the specifics of Margaret's fate loom large in this version, because the space given to her is still greater than that given to the frame narrator, her suffering and her fate dominate the poem. We are able to see clearly that there is a large gap between the awful specifics of that suffering and the attempt by the observer, however sympathetic, to make sense of that suffering. In subsequent work, Wordsworth increasingly concentrates on the latter at the expense of the former. It begins as a shift of emphasis but it can lead to an acceptance or displacement of the suffering of another in favour of a focus on the lessons to be drawn for one's own moral upliftment. Here, I would argue, this is not the case, nor is Wordsworth here using the poor figure as marketable subject matter in this decade which spawned so many aestheticised renderings of poverty. Rather his empathy with poverty and deprivation is still sharp, having been forged in his own recent experiences and in his serious engagement with the question of poverty.

The old man tells of visiting the cottage four times over a period of two years since hearing from Margaret that her husband, in desperation, had enlisted to give his family the benefit of the bounty money. He has disappeared without taking leave to prevent her accompanying him into the war zone and sinking "beneath the misery of a soldier's life" (273). We know from the Salisbury Plain poems just what a soldier's wife faces if she follows her husband to the battlefields, but, as Margaret's tale is to prove, the alternative can lead likewise to misery and death. On his second return visit, the cottage "in its outward look appeared/As chearful as before" (305-306), except that the garden shows ominous signs of neglect. Like a lost paradise, this garden is described in negative terms - "worthless stone-crop", "weeds", "unprofitable bindweed". The "unwieldy wreaths [that]/Had dragg'd the rose from its sustaining wall/And bent it down to earth" (315-317) are a perfect objective correlative for Margaret's own deteriorating condition. The hour during which he awaits the return of Margaret and observes this neglect is itself a "wasted" one. His steps are "restless", the neglected infant cries within, the "spot though fair seemed very desolate/The longer I remained more desolate" (328-9). Both inanimate and animate nature have started to infiltrate the human domain, for the old man notices that the sheep are making free with the cottage garden. As Margaret returns, not only does her figure reveal signs of wastage but she admits to what in the earlier fragment was described as a "sick and extravagant mind". She literally wanders too, less and less drawn to return to her home and maternal duties. Her elder child is lost to her - he is apprenticed by the parish as a serving boy. She has passed beyond comfort and hope, "for my hope/It seemed she did not thank me" (391-2). On his next visit, the cottage as well as the garden is showing signs of neglect. In her story, "Black Giles the Poacher", Hannah More castigates "beggary looking cottage[s]" and describes the undeserving Giles as living in such a one:

He lives at that mud cottage with the broken  
windows, stuffed with dirty rags,...You may

know the house at a good distance by the  
 ragged tiles of the roof, and the loose stones  
 which are ready to drop out from the chimney;  
 though a short ladder, a hod of mortar, and  
 half an hour's leisure time, would have  
 prevented all this, and made the little dwelling  
 tight enough.

(397-8)

More's moral point is that such disrepair is the result of idleness and dissipation. She and most others had no understanding of the ease with which destitution wreaks havoc on both the fabric of material possessions, and, more importantly, on the ability to maintain appearances. In a long passage (400-434), Wordsworth focuses on the neglected cottage and garden - each detail of which graphically represents the inner erosion of the will to live. The old man turns "towards the garden-gate" and sees "poverty and grief...come nearer to her" (412-413), like advancing intruders. Eventually Margaret is reduced to sitting in the "broken arbour" (a pastoral haven now destroyed), "the idle length of half a sabbath day" (451) - her uncharacteristic idleness a measure of her despair. Her disturbed mind is busy "shaping things" to suit her desires, making silent enquiries of her husband of any passing horseman. The last glimpse is of "her poor hut", the ruined cottage, which started the old man on his story of her story, now no longer much of a shelter for her:

when she slept the nightly damps  
 Did chill her breast, and in the stormy day  
 Her tattered clothes were ruffled by the wind  
 Even at the side of her own fire.

(483-486)

Although the earliest version had possibly concluded with her death as the "last human tenant of these ruined walls" (492), the earliest known version concludes with the effect on the young listener of the old man's tale. Although moved by the tale, it

is the evidence he discovers of a "secret spirit of humanity" (503) linking him to Margaret which sustains him. This "secret spirit" seems to be akin to the sympathy which Burke applauds (Enquiry 44). There is ruin, there is suffering, often undeserved, but if we focus only on that we will be rendered useless. Earlier in the poem, the old man had confessed to such "yielding to the foolishness of grief" (119) when he looked upon the ruined cottage "as on a picture" (118) and wallowed in the sentimental pity that such pictures are often intended to elicit. A sentimental attitude is invidious, for sentimentality is feeling for the sake of feeling, rather than feeling for the sake of strengthening our powers of humane interaction, strengthening the links that bind us as human beings. The last words are those of the old man by which the young man feels creatively admonished. The old man tells how the "silent overgrowings" of Nature covering the ruins of Margaret's cottage

did to my heart convey  
 So still an image of tranquillity,  
 So calm and still, and looked so beautiful  
 Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,  
 That what we feel of sorrow and despair  
 From ruin and from change, and all the grief  
 The passing shews [sic] of being leave behind,  
 Appeared an idle dream that could not live  
 Where meditation was.

(516-24)

He tells of his feelings of sorrow and despair whereas it is surely Margaret's sorrow and despair that loom larger in the reader's mind. The old man takes such a long perspective that grief at Margaret's fate is reduced to the equivalent of "an idle dream". The continuity of Nature, despite the passing of individual men, women and their structures, is a source of comfort to the old man. Yet the proportion of space devoted to Margaret as compared to that devoted to the old man is so unequal that the old man's lesson cannot efface the haunting glimpses we

have been given of Margaret, nor does it adequately compensate for her suffering. This version is still primarily a depiction of the fate of an abandoned poverty-stricken mother and, as such, yet another manifestation of that favoured Wordsworthian subject. This early version of the poem ends with the "sweet hour" of twilight coming on, the bird song welling up as the air cools and the two travellers resuming their journey towards their "evening resting-place" (538).

Approximately 530 of the 970 lines of the first Book of The Excursion are devoted to Margaret's story as completed in the late 1790s, with only a few, although revealing, changes (Hayden 2: 40-67). The remaining lines give the wanderer's biography and thereby establish the bona fides for his didacticism. The purpose of The Excursion as a whole, and the incorporation of the tale of the destitute woman within it, was not now one of social protest; rather Wordsworth's purpose was primarily to cure the tendency to "languor and depression of mind, from want of faith in the great truths of Religion, and want of confidence in the virtue of Mankind" (Argument of Book Third). Such a cure will be most successfully effected by the "union of the imagination, affections, understanding, and reason" (Argument of Book Fourth). When we look at the relatively few changes made to Margaret's tale as it stood in 1799, we recognise that Wordsworth is revealing the same tendency as found in the transformation of Salisbury Plain into Guilt and Sorrow. A pious optimism displaces the sharper political criticism, and the focus is no longer on specific details of contemporary practices. Rather, the sufferings are presented as part of the immutable woes of fallen mankind and not the result of deliberate and thus potentially alterable human construction. A look at the changes will establish this clearly. "The cumbrous bind-weed, with its wreaths and bells,/Had twined about her two small rows of peas,/And dragged them to the earth" (728-730), is perhaps not so different from the original "[t]he unprofitable bindweed spread his bells/From side to side and with unwieldy wreaths/Had dragg'd the rose from its sustaining wall/And bent it down to earth" (314-317). Yet the "unprofitable", "unwieldy", "dragg'd the rose from

its sustaining walls" of the earlier version have a stronger emotional force, and the associations of "weed" and "rose" inevitably suggest the way Margaret is laid low by inimical circumstances. Such differences do affect the overall mood and tone. In the earlier version, Margaret's elder son is "lost" to her (345) for he is now " a serving-boy/Apprenticed by the parish" (346-7). The double standard which promoted, on the one hand, the advocacy of child labour as a means of increasing the income of a poor family, and, on the other hand, filled the period with society portraits of the children of the wealthy, dressed to perfection and surrounded by pets and toys, is striking. Enough is known of the conditions of apprentices and the rarity of a kind master to fill out the implications of "she had lost her elder child" (345). By 1814 Wordsworth substitutes an entirely different and markedly saccharine course of events, "she had parted with her elder child;/To a kind master on a distant farm/Now happily apprenticed" (760-762).

Where the old man in the earlier version can offer only "the best hope and comfort I could give" (429), which he and we recognise as an inadequate gesture in the face of such an appalling situation, the Pedlar in 1814, in tune with his established philosophy, offers, in what he obviously feels is a fitting gesture,

For her son's use, some tokens of regard,  
Which with a look of welcome she received;  
And I exhorted her to place her trust  
In God's good love, and seek his help by  
prayer.  
(805-808)

This reduces the starkness of the situation and thereby minimizes the despair felt in the earlier version. Once again the effect is likely to be more palatable to a middle class readership and unlikely to shock a reader into an uncomfortable glimpse of the true horrors of destitution and deprivation. Predictably, the penultimate paragraph in which the older man points the moral to





Appeared an idle dream, that could maintain,  
Nowhere, dominion o'er the enlightened spirit  
Whose meditative sympathies repose  
Upon the breast of Faith.

(949-955)

The poem called The Ruined Cottage was never published. By the time the material appeared in The Excursion, it was embedded in a text the purpose of which was neither to explore the material and psychological effects of poverty nor the gap that lies between the one who observes and the one who suffers. Wordsworth was no longer writing about such matters. In the Lyrical Ballads, published in 1798, we can trace both the first stages of the transition from the concentration on poverty per se to a more emblematic use of the poor, and the development of an interest in how to react to and make sense of suffering and deprivation. This latter concern can very easily slide into an acceptance of the existence of suffering and deprivation. Once again both personal and political factors can be seen to influence these developments.

## CHAPTER SIX

ALFOXDEN AND THE 1798 LYRICAL BALLADS

...the poor and vulgar may interest us, in poetry, by their situation; but never, we apprehend, by any sentiments that are peculiar to their condition, and still less by any language that is characteristic of it... it is impossible to copy their diction or their sentiments correctly in a serious composition; and this, not merely because poverty makes men ridiculous, but because just taste and refined sentiment are rarely to be met with among the uncultivated part of mankind.

(Edinburgh Review 1803)

All the authority that they have as poets and men of genius must be thrown into the scale of Revolution and Reform. Their Jacobin principles indeed gave rise to their Jacobin poetry....Poet-laureates are courtiers by profession; but we say that poets are naturally Jacobins.

(William Hazlitt, Political Essays 1819)

In his 77th year Wordsworth recalled the eleven month period at Alfoxden as "a very pleasant and productive time of my life" (Grosart 3: 223). Certainly it was productive, for, besides work on "The Pedlar", almost all the poems published in the first edition of Lyrical Ballads date from the spring of 1798. Dorothy writes on March 5 1797 to Mary Hutchinson:

His faculties seem to expand every day -  
he composes with much more facility than

he did, as to the mechanism of poetry, and his ideas flow faster than he can express them.

(Early Letters 176)

His physical and emotional proximity to Coleridge has long been recognised as partly responsible for this creative spurt. Yet Wordsworth, from the distance of 50 years, has understandably omitted some less pleasant aspects of those months - most particularly the uncertainty about where he and Dorothy would go when their relatively short lease at Alfoxden expired, and the habitual concern about their precarious financial position.

The Lyrical Ballads volume was quite deliberately planned as a means of making money, however much the poems in it might reveal, in concrete form, some of the richness of the symbiotic relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge.

This period was also to prove significant in that it was during these months that Wordsworth began to reveal an increasing self-consciousness, an interest in the workings of his own mind, a concern for understanding his own past, with a concomitant concern with memory as an essential ingredient of psychic wholeness. In March 1798 he mentioned his progress (1300 lines) on the poem which was eventually to be subtitled "The Growth of a Poet's Mind", although at this stage his intention was "to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society" (Early Letters 188). By this stage too (March 1798), Margaret's story was becoming increasingly the Pedlar's story as The Ruined Cottage began its long transformation into its ultimate form as a brief episode of The Excursion (1814). It is not without significance that, two and a half weeks after leaving Alfoxden, he composed "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey", the first published poem to reveal his interest in memory and his own sense of self.

The relationship with Coleridge was greatly influential in the development of Wordsworth's social, political, and literary ideas. Although Coleridge early on declared that he felt himself "a little man by his [Wordsworth's] side" (8/6/1797 Letters I:

325), his influence over Wordsworth was probably more marked during this year than vice versa. Coleridge was in retreat from the political activism of his lecturing days in Bristol (1795). In a letter of 10 March 1798 to his brother, George, he summed up his political position:

I have snapped my squeaking baby-trumpet of sedition and the fragments lie scattered in the lumber room of Penitence. I wish to be a good man and a Christian - but I am no Whig, no Reformist, no Republican....I have for some time past withdrawn myself almost totally from the consideration of immediate causes, which are infinitely complex and uncertain, to muse on fundamental and general causes - the 'causae causarum'.

(Letters 1: 397)

Coleridge encouraged a similar retreat in Wordsworth whom he always saw as a potential philosopher-poet, withdrawn from the pell-mell of political and social action. Looking back from 1832 he reiterated his opinion of Wordsworth:

Wordsworth was always a spectator ab extra [sic] of nature and society; he felt for, but never sympathized with, any man or event.

(Table Talk 1: 306)

Coleridge's distinction seems to involve that between being consciously affected by something (feeling for) and being able or willing to share the feelings or enter into the feelings of another (sympathizing). Certainly many commented on Wordsworth's apparent hauteur, but Coleridge's comment remains an opinion rather than a factual statement about Wordsworth's "real" attitude to the vagrants he met with in the lanes of Dorset,

something which we have little means of accurately assessing. We only know that he treated of them in poems of this period. As soon as a writer starts to write about an actual human being, all kinds of transformation and selective distillations inevitably take place.

Undoubtedly Coleridge's companionship was significant, and, even without his friendly persuasion towards retreat from active engagement, Wordsworth might well have been influenced thereto, as many others were, by the political crises, both national and European.

During 1797 and 1798 the increasingly serious war situation in Europe inevitably resulted in further restrictions being imposed by Pitt's Government to suppress French sympathizers and any deemed to be such. In February 1797, the French landed 1200 soldiers near Fishguard. Although the entire légion surrendered after three days, Emsley emphasises how this event, and subsequent scares, caused an upsurge of paranoia and patriotism, particularly in the west country (British Society 56-57). Certainly the "Spy Nozy" episode was, as E.P. Thompson has argued, a serious affair in the eyes of the Government ("Disenchantment" 156). The fears and suspicions of the local population go far to explain what might seem to a modern reader the embarrassed nature of Coleridge's letters to John Thelwall to persuade him not to settle near Nether Stowey (Letters 1: 343-44). Despite the fact that the Public Meetings Act of 1795 had mentioned Thelwall by name, he had continued giving political lectures under the guise of classical history and had described his intention of evading the Acts in his pamphlet Prospectus of a Course of Lectures...in strict conformity with the Restrictions of Mr Pitt's Convention Act (1796) (Smith, Politics 108). However, by May 1797 he had been forced to abandon public lecturing and in July he had visited Coleridge at Nether Stowey. Coleridge's letters fluctuate between an emphasis on his political differences from Thelwall (1: 339) and deep admiration for his principles (1: 342). Such an ambivalent attitude is an indication of the deep fears that filled many, causing them to distance themselves from any taint of radicalism even if it meant

withdrawing from total commitment to a friend.

Significantly it was in 1797 that the Anti-Jacobin was first published. Certainly the Government must have felt threatened on all sides. In April and May the mutinies at Spithead and Nore, although specifically over pay, were a reminder of the dangers of disaffection. In May 1797 the Venetian Republic was overthrown and in 1798 Switzerland became the Helvetian Republic dominated by France. Although a French attempt to invade Ireland in October 1798 failed, the Irish Rebellion of that year was a clear reminder of the danger of an Irish-French coalition, given Irish antipathy to the English. From 1799 to 1801 counter-revolutionary action reached new heights. A Newspaper Act passed in 1798 increased the Government's powers of supervision. In the spring of that year radicals in North West England and the general committee of the London Corresponding Society were arrested (Goodwin 440, 446). On the 27 March 1798 a Bill was introduced for "various forms of military and non-combatant voluntary service" (Goodwin 446). This was a direct result of the private initiative of William Clavell, the High Sheriff of Dorset, who "directed the county magistrates and constables to make lists of all the men aged between fifteen and sixty capable of bearing arms, with the exceptions of clergy, Quakers, and men already serving in military corps" (Emsley British Society 72). Dundas praised Clavell in the Commons and the Bill that was passed owed much to Clavell's lead. Patriotic fervour was very strong in the west country, and thus it would seem that there is substance to E.P. Thompson's theory that the decision of Wordsworth and Coleridge to leave for Germany was at least partly in order to evade the draft ("Disenchantment" 168). Indeed Coleridge had seen the Unitarian ministry as a hedge against call-up. On the 5 January 1798 he wrote to Josiah Wedgwood:

Add to this, that by Law I shall be  
exempted from military service - to  
which, Heaven only knows how soon we  
may be dragged. For I think it not  
improbable, that in the case of an

invasion our government would serve  
 all, whom they chose to suspect of  
 disaffection, in the same way that  
 good King David served Uriah - "Set ye  
 Uriah in the forefront of the hottest  
 Battle, retire ye from him, that he may  
 be smitten and die".

(1: 367)

There is no doubt that both men, despite their differences in finer details, would have shared antipathy to the jingoism prevalent by 1798. Two poems by Coleridge which date from April 1798 express the kind of attitudes that Wordsworth would share. "Fears in Solitude" reveals the deep distress engendered by a climate of war in a pacifist who nevertheless recognises the need to "repel an impious foe" (139), although his own nation is deeply at fault, "we have offended, Oh! my countrymen!/We have offended very grievously,/And been most tyrannous" (41-43). "The Recantation: An Ode" (published in the Morning Post in April 1798 and subsequently known as "France: An Ode") describes, in its "Argument" summarizing the stanzas, Coleridge's change from active faith in the principles of the Revolution (seen to be betrayed finally by the invasion of Switzerland), to the belief that freedom does "not belong to men, as a society, nor can possibly be either gratified or realized, under any form of human government; but belong[s] to the individual man, so far as he is pure, and inflamed with the love and adoration of God in Nature" (Poems 244).

Yet life at Alfoxden, a place of great beauty, was, with the congenial company of the loved and loving Dorothy, and the added stimulus of Coleridge, indeed "very pleasant" (Grosart 3: 223). Dorothy's description of Alfoxden, in a letter of August 14 1797 to Mary Hutchinson, is of an infinitely pleasing and idyllic place. Four of the nineteen poems by Wordsworth in Lyrical Ballads (1798) express the joys of this rural idyll and his delight in nature. Three further poems treat of man and nature, culminating in "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey",



the last written of the poems in this volume and that which most clearly points to the themes of the future. "Anecdote for Fathers", "We are Seven", and "The Idiot Boy" emphasise most clearly Wordsworth's commitment to the value of the simple and childlike. Of the nineteen poems, nine are recognisably written by the author of the social protest poems of 1793-96, ranging from the depiction of specific social conditions to vignettes of abandoned, destitute persons (usually female), some of whom are based on actual figures encountered near Alfoxden. It is on some of these poems that I will concentrate for, although much has been written about the 1798 volume in terms of the claims in the "Advertisement" that "the poems are to be considered as experiments", not much attention has been given to the extent to which the contents both reflect the themes and concerns that had predominated in Wordsworth's work up to that time and reflect changes in manner and matter.

The poem most obviously connected to previous work is "The Female Vagrant", a thirty stanza extract from Salisbury Plain. As late as 9 May 1798 Wordsworth seemed to be planning to publish Salisbury Plain for he writes to Joseph Cottle, "I say nothing of the 'Salisbury Plain' till I see you. I am determined to finish it, and equally so that you shall publish" (Early Letters 192). The published extract differs from that found in the earliest Salisbury Plain and is part of the expansion of 1795, the Adventures on Salisbury Plain, which is, in most instances, far more specific than the 1793 version or the sanitized published version of 1842. Details like the "greedy wish" (43) of the acquisitive landowner who resorts to "cruel injuries" (47) when he cannot buy out the small farmer with "proffered gold" (46), or the emphasis on the loss of the family home (63,68), the inability to get any "aid" (77) or "relief" (92), the "foul neglect" of the military authorities (100), the stanza of mounting hysteria as the mother recalls the "crazing thoughts" of war, murder and rape (154-62) which leads her to be "robb'd of [her] perfect mind" (172), the gypsies, described here as a "wild brood" (215) who are the only ones to give her food and rest and who live by sharing everything equally (221) - all these



details or emphases are found only in this printed version. Although they might not now seem controversial details, in the context of 1798 they would have revealed the writer as markedly critical of certain practices and open to the possibility of alternative ways of organising society. Critics certainly noticed the political aspects of such emphases. In The Monthly Review, Volume XXIX, June 1799, Dr Burney is uncomfortable enough to assert "as it ["The Female Vagrant"] seems to stamp a general stigma on all military transactions, it will perhaps be asked whether the hardships described never happen during revolution, or in a nation subdued" (Brett and Jones 322). The reviewer in the British Critic, Volume XIV, October 1799 (thought to be Wordsworth's friend and correspondent, Francis Wrangham), after praising the poem as "a composition of exquisite beauty" and admitting that the events are plausible, regrets, however, "the drift of the author in composing it; which is to show the worst side of civilized society, and thus to form a satire against it" (Brett and Jones 325). If this reviewer is indeed Wrangham, these words show, too, the marked change from the one who, in 1796, was collaborating with Wordsworth on Juvenalian satires on the present state of the nation.

Three of the Lyrical Ballads concentrate more fully on the ways in which loneliness, deprivation and trauma can lead to mental fragmentation and, once again, as with Margaret in The Ruined Cottage or the mother in "The Baker's Cart", it is the indigent single mother who is representative of those most vulnerable. From the spring of 1798 we can date "The Mad Mother", which, although obviously bearing traces of literary sources, is linked by Wordsworth with a living person, "[t]he subject was reported to me by a Lady of Bristol who had seen the poor creature" (Butler and Green 353). "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" is acknowledged as having a literary source, Samuel Hearne's A Journey from the Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson Bay to the Northern Ocean (London 1795). "The Thorn", which was written during the same weeks of March and May 1798 as the preceding two poems, also has several literary sources. The poem arose from an attempt to make "permanently an impressive object"

of a thorn tree which Wordsworth had passed frequently but had not noticed until he saw it on a stormy day. Wordsworth's later lengthy note about the poem suggests that another major concern was the presentation of the narrator and the means whereby that narrator will influence the reader to share his passion and curiosity.

It has been noted already (Chapter Five) that in the various fragments written in 1796, such as "The road extended o'er a heath" and "The Baker's Cart", the use of blank verse and plain diction greatly enhanced the sense of realism and with it a sense that the subject matter was not being deliberately tricked out in the more overt aspects of the conventionally "poetic". Indeed, a comparison of the blank verse of "The road extended o'er a heath" and the Spenserian stanza of the fragment, "No spade for leagues had won a rood of earth", revealed that, despite much the same subject matter, the former rendered more powerfully the bleak reality described, whereas the highly literary Spenserian stanza form reduced the impact of the actual situation by drawing more attention to itself as "poetry". Likewise the blank verse of The Ruined Cottage formed a less intrusive medium than the Spenserian stanza of Salisbury Plain. "The Mad Mother" and "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" are written in stanzas of ten lines rhyming a a b b c d c d e e . "The Thorn" is even more complex - eleven lines rhyming a b c b d e f f e g g. Wordsworth was obviously enjoying experimenting with various lyric possibilities, for the volume reveals a variety of rhyming measures - blank verse is used only for "Tintern Abbey". In the 1800 Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth stated:

It was published as an experiment which,  
I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain,  
how far, by fitting to metrical  
arrangement a selection of the real  
language of men in a state of vivid  
sensation, that sort of pleasure and  
that quantity of pleasure may be imparted,

which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart.  
(Butler and Green 741, emphases added)

The effect is often to draw attention to versification and to reduce the impact of the actual situation. Paul D. Sheats notes how Wordsworth "employs lyric forms not to indulge personal feeling...but to discipline it" (187). Discussing "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman", he observes that the pain is "tempered...by purely aural effects" (186). In the 1800 Preface Wordsworth stressed this effect:

Now the music of harmonious metrical  
language, the sense of difficulty  
overcome, and the blind association  
of pleasure which has been previously  
received from works of rhyme or metre  
of the same or similar construction,  
all these imperceptibly make up a  
complex feeling of delight, which is  
of the most important use in tempering  
the painful feeling which will always  
be found intermingled with powerful  
descriptions of the deeper passions.

(Butler and Green 756-7)

Thus it is that, although Wordsworth set out to show that the materials of poetry "are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind" ("Advertisement", Lyrical Ballads 1798) and that "the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society" could be "adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure", nevertheless, by using lyric measures, he reduced the impact of the very aspects of loneliness, deprivation and misery among the poorer classes on which he had hitherto concentrated. Although these three poems all depict wretched women, so lonely, bereft and deprived that they are portrayed in various stages of mental and psychological fragmentation, the

impact of the subject matter is reduced. This occurs either, as in the case of "The Mad Mother", because of the sing-song rhythms and stylized devices ("Suck, little babe, oh suck again!/It cools my blood; it cools my brain....Oh! love me, love me, little boy!/Thou art thy mother's only joy", 31-32, 41-42), or, as in "The Thorn", because of Wordsworth's deliberate focus on the narrator, with the wretched mother as someone rendered obliquely as the object of gossip and curiosity. The mystery surrounding her baby is of primary importance to the narrator and not her present fate or woeful condition. Certainly the poems have rightly been analysed as interesting experiments in point of view, but these three poems are decidedly not poems of social criticism despite the nature of their material. Any potential for concern about the causes of the woman's suffering condition is deflected by the ways the material is presented.

It is perhaps important to remember that the volume was intended to be financially profitable and thus, presumably, popular. By the end of April their plans to go to Germany had crystallized and Dorothy, writing to brother Richard on 30 April, tells of William's plans to publish:

He is to have twenty guineas for one volume, [Salisbury Plain?] and he expects more than twice as much for another which is nearly ready for publishing....Our journey as far as Hamburg [sic] will cost between twenty and five and twenty guineas.

(Early Letters 191)

Wordsworth was dismayed at some of the negative reviews, primarily because of the paramount need to make a profit for, having sold the poems to Cottle for a lump sum, he was "to be paid afterwards in proportion to their sale" (Dorothy to Mrs Rawson, June-July 1798, Early Letters 197). He complained to Joseph Cottle in an undated letter of 1799:

Southey's review [October 1798] I have seen.

He knew that I published those poems for money and money alone. He knew that money was of importance to me. If he could not conscientiously have spoken differently of the volume, he ought to have declined the task of reviewing it.

(Early Letters 229-230)

This extraordinary remark clearly reveals how important it was that the publication was a commercial success. It would also explain the insensitive manner in which Wordsworth wrote to Cottle of Coleridge's ballad:

From what I can gather it seems that The Ancyent Marinere [sic] has upon the whole been an injury to the volume, I mean that the old words and the strangeness of it have deterred readers from going on. If the volume should come to a second edition I would put in its place some little things which would be more likely to suit the common taste.

(Early Letters 226-7, emphases added)

Thus it seems we have, with this publication, both an attempt to experiment and expand the boundaries of the poetic and a concern to be financially profitable. The two are often mutually exclusive and, perhaps, the adoption of lyric measures was a conscious sop to conventional taste, a sugaring of the pill of plain diction and humble topics. To be concerned with financial profit is to risk being overly concerned with the perceived opinions and demands of one's readers.

Humble topics and a consciously simple style of diction were, by 1798, associated by many with radicalism and seditious literature, in the manner of plainly-spoken Tom Paine. In the introduction to the first part of Rights of Man (1791), Paine had asserted (in words which Wordsworth would echo in 1798) that it was intended to test "the manner in which a work, written in a

style of thinking and expression different to what had been customary in England, would be received" (2: 394). Years later, in the summer of 1827, Wordsworth revealed his perennial concern to have been with style:

Now whatever may be the result of my experiment in the subjects which I have chosen for poetical composition - be they vulgar or be they not, - I can say without vanity, that I have bestowed great pains on my style, full as much as any of my contemporaries have done on theirs. I yield to none in love for my art. I, therefore, labour at it with reverence, affection, and industry. My main endeavour as to style has been that my poems should be written in pure intelligible English.

(Grosart 3: 462)

Only two of the Lyrical Ballads focus on specific contemporary problems, wood stealing and the means test for relief aid. In the context of 1798 the treatment of these topics would have been a litmus test of social and political values and in both cases Wordsworth clearly reveals a critique of the status quo. Wordsworth read of the "true story" of Goody Blake and Harry Gill in Erasmus Darwin's Zoonomia (1794-6). Darwin writes, "I received good information of the truth of the...case, which was published a few years ago in the newspapers" (Butler and Green 344). The incident retains power in the context of 1798, given the continued topicality of its subject. In the 1790s an intense controversy raged around such customary practices as gleaning and woodgathering. The practice of enclosure was widely seen as reducing the means whereby the needy could supplement their income by claiming traditional rights to commonage which would include the gathering of fuel from the common woods and hedges. Sir Frederic Morton Eden takes such rights for granted. He gives a breakdown of a labourer's earnings and expenses in Cumberland

in January 1795 and explains that the figures reflect the situation "in the country, where fuel is to be procured, at a considerable less expense, than in towns; because, in the former situation, the wife and children can, often, collect wood sufficient" (2:107). Although he recognised that this was the practice, he nevertheless deplored such inefficient economics:

The advantages which cottagers and poor people derive from commons and wastes, are rather apparent than real: instead of sticking regularly to any such labour, as might enable them to purchase good fuel, they waste their time, either like the old woman in Otway's Orphan, in picking up a few dry sticks, or in grubbing up, on some bleak moor, a little furze, or heath.

(I: Preface xviii-xix)

Snell quotes a petition of 1785 and another of 1845, each of which deplores the loss of such rights and reveals these losses to be of paramount concern to the labouring poor throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The 1785 petition reads:

That provided the said common be enclosed, many hundreds of poor inhabitants in the said parish will be reduced to distress; as they will be deprived of their present benefit of rearing horned cattle, pigs, etc. and furnishing themselves with fuel in the winter, etc., and the consequences will be immediately felt by the parish at large, by the increase of the poors [sic] rates, the breaking and carrying away hedges and other petty larcenies, that the distresses of the poor will reduce them to; and which is and must always be experienced where the poor have



not commons and wood lands to assist them.

(Snell 179)

As Thompson has pointed out, enclosure meant "controlled access and private space" (Customs 144). As inflation increased and harvests failed in the 1790s, so the need to supplement one's income became more pressing. Peter King has pointed out that in the late eighteenth century there was a growing emphasis on privatization of land which led to a broad movement "to redefine many customary practices as crimes" (117). Much documentation exists on gleaning practices but similar factors operated vis-à-vis woodgathering. The deteriorating conditions and increased economic hardships of the last decades of the century meant that by that period "the medieval practice of restricting gleaning to those too old or too young to reap had long been superseded" (King, footnote 123). Adult women formed the largest proportion of gleaners, seeking to supplement the household provisions. A crucial civil case, dating from June 1788, in which judgement was made against the right at Common Law to glean, meant that, from that date on, gleaning was a privilege granted by a farmer, and not, as hitherto, a customary right (King 117-8). Woodgathering and poaching had long been named in criminal statutes (King 117) although there was room for ambiguity. "Picking up fallen wood was one thing, cutting down green branches or living trees was another" (Emsley, Crime and Society 107). The punishments could be severe. In the year in which Lyrical Ballads was first published, five men were sentenced to seven years transportation for stealing wood from Winchester College, long plagued by damage done to thousands of trees over a period of years (Emsley, Crime and Society 107). As proof was difficult unless the perpetrator was caught in the act, farmers often resorted to keeping watch over their property, be it their reaped crop awaiting transport to market or their hedgerows and trees. Emsley quotes the case of Matthew Munn of Bedfordshire who, on July 31 1790, "hid in a ditch behind a hedge" from which "vantage point he saw Frances Finding and Jane Jinn, the wives of local labourers, enter his field" where they did not confine themselves merely to gleaning



but took some rye "out of the shocks" (Crime and Society 105). Almost without exception it was women who were the gleaners and woodgatherers. Often they were openly defiant, confident in their customary right and in the long tradition of Biblical sanction ("Thou shalt not...gather any gleanings of thy harvest, thou shalt leave them unto the poor" Lev.23.22). King notes that there was a belief, frequently alluded to by late eighteenth-century writers, that ill-luck or divine retribution would strike those who denied the poor such means of survival (143). Keith Thomas emphasises the strength of the belief in the power of the ritual curse delivered by the poor and impotent who had few other means of retaliation or redress:

Yet substitute action though it was, the formal imprecation could be a powerful weapon. It exploited the universally held belief in the possibility of divine vengeance upon human evil-doers, and it could strike terror into the hearts of the credulous and guilty.

(Religion 608, 609)

The increasing militancy of the poor during the 1790s led to instances of incendiarism and animal maiming - closely linked to altercations about property rights and customary rights. Often the confrontations would turn ugly and acts of violence against gleaners were frequently recorded (King 135). Inequalities of class and gender might well add to the animosity as the farmers were usually literate males, the women illiterate and physically vulnerable.

Given this context, one can start to appreciate the details in "Goody Blake and Harry Gill", a poem built up on oppositions neatly divided into the two quatrains of each stanza and heralded by the two juxtaposed names in the title - aurally chiming, yet totally contrastive. Unlike Gainsborough's penchant for the winsome female child models of A Peasant Girl Gathering Faggots (Thos. Agnew and Sons Ltd.), or Cottage Children (The Wood

Gatherers), (Metropolitan Museum of Art), Wordsworth has underlined the appalling gulf between the man and the woman by contrasting the "lusty drover" Harry Gill, with the ill-clothed and ill-fed old dame, Goody Blake. The other major contrast, befitting a poem about the gathering of fuel, is between warmth and cold, both literal and metaphorical. Paradoxical contrasts lie, too, in the power of spirit over matter, the weak over the strong, age over youth, female over male - paradoxes with Biblical-like precedents of the first being last and the meek inheriting the earth.

The quatrains in common ballad metre and the stock epithets and phrasing ("his cheeks were red as ruddy clover"), nicely emphasise the sense of age-old truths which contrast with increasingly prevalent notions of behaviour whereby the young, strong and propertied ride roughshod over the old, weak and poverty-stricken. Despite drawing the incident from Erasmus Darwin, Wordsworth paid tribute to the poor of the west country whom he saw daily. He located the old woman firmly in the Dorsetshire he had known while at Racedown:

This woman dwelt in Dorsetshire  
Her hut was on a cold hill-side,  
And in that country coals are dear  
For they come far by wind and tide.

(29-32)

Dorothy had written to Jane Marshall on 7 March 1796 from Racedown about "a country where coals are so expensive. You would be surprized [sic] to see what a small cart full we get for three or four and twenty shillings" (Early Letters 151). These four lines were removed in 1820 and more generalized natural description substituted (Butler and Green 59). It is emphasised that dire necessity leads Goody Blake to pilfer wood from Gill's hedge (stanza 7). In the coldness of his heart, Harry Gill leaves his "warm fire" (line 69), wrapped presumably in his "coats enough to smother nine" (8), and begins his cold vigil, waiting to spring on the trespassing Goody Blake. When she has "filled

her apron full" of incriminating evidence:

He started forward with a shout,  
And sprang upon poor Goody Blake.

And fiercely by the arm he took her,  
And by the arm he held her fast,  
And fiercely by the arm he shook her,  
And cried, "I've caught you then at last!"

(87-92)

His verbal and physical violence is crudely excessive given Goody Blake's "old bones" (42), and the scene derives a lot from the age-old stories of foxes pouncing on their prey ("He watch'd to seize old Goody Blake" 72). No response does she make except to kneel, raise her "wither'd hand" under "the cold moon" (101), and call upon God for vengeance. Her generic title "Goody" adds to the sense we have of her righteousness. The ritualized manner of her actions would be part of their effectiveness, causing Harry Gill to turn "icy-cold" away (104). Keith Thomas emphasises that "it was above all the poor and the injured whose curses were believed likely to take effect" (Religion 604). Harry Gill's superstitious dread of the efficacy of Goody Blake's curse would be sufficient to explain his subsequent state. He is reduced to an impotent, muttering, shivering being, not unlike the state of the old woman whose condition he had ignored. The poem ends with a warning to all farmers to bethink themselves of Goody Blake and Harry Gill. The poem's success lies in the effective fusion of the ballad rhythm and metre with the folktale-like situation. The kind of story told suits the manner of its telling and yet the topicality of its details gives a truly chilling effect not dissimilar to the same combination of ingredients in Shelley's "The Mask of Anarchy" (1819). In referring to the poem in the 1800 Preface, Wordsworth stated only that his purpose was to illustrate "the power of the human imagination...to produce...changes even in our physical nature" (Butler and Green 757), yet the poem's relevance to current conditions did not

escape Dr Burney who, from the security of his class position, was puzzled by the lack of recourse to funds available from the state:

...if all the poor are to help, and supply their wants from the possessions of their neighbours, what imaginary wants and real anarchy would it not create? Goody Blake should have been relieved of [sic] the two millions annually allowed by the state to the poor of this country not by the plunder of an individual.

(Brett and Jones 322)

"The Last of the Flock" is equally effective as social protest because it, too, focuses on a specific circumstances which affected the poor and is rooted in the reality of the countryside with which Wordsworth was familiar. "The incident occurred in the village of Holford, close by Alfoxden" reads the Isabella Fenwick note (Butler and Green 353), and Wordsworth elaborated on the telling detail that the man is weeping alone in the public road in a letter to John Kenyon in 1836, "a friend of mine did see this poor man weeping alone, with the Lamb, the last of his flock, in his arms" (Later Years 2: 812).

In 1796, in his proposed Poor Law Reform Bill, Pitt argued for the abolition of the law which prohibited giving relief where any visible property remained:

That degrading condition should be withdrawn. No temporary occasion should force a British subject to part with the last shilling of his little capital, and compel him to descend to a state of wretchedness from which he could never recover, merely that he might be entitled to a casual supply.

(Eng. Hist. Doc. 417)

Pitt's omnibus Bill was abandoned, given the strong opposition (Cowherd 14), and in 1798 Wordsworth reminded readers that such iniquitous conditions existed "on English ground" (5). In 1800 William Hale, writing to Patrick Colquhoun, reiterated the absurdity of such a system which affected the poor in both town and country: "Their poverty has descended into indigency, the pride of their independence is broke, and they become paupers of the parish (Eng. Hist. Doc. 421).

The rhyme scheme a a b b c d e d f f determines the predominant shape of each stanza. After the opening quatrain there is a slight change of direction or emphasis in the second quatrain with the final couplet forming an emphatic conclusion often repeated as a significant refrain. The second stanza is a representative example:

He saw me, and he turned aside,  
 As if he wished himself to hide:  
 Then with his coat he made essay  
 To wipe those briny tears away.  
 I follow'd him, and said, "My friend  
 "What ails you? wherefore weep you so?"  
 --- "Shame on me, Sir! this lusty lamb,  
 He makes my tears to flow.  
 To-day I fetched him from the rock;  
 He is the last of all my flock.

The poem has a simplicity derived primarily from the plain diction and the use of understatement. The vulnerable act of a "healthy", "full grown" man weeping alone in the public road is emphasised by the metre and the positioning of the words, "Weep in the public roads alone" (4). The man is given the qualities of a suffering Good Shepherd figure for "in his arms a lamb he had" (10). The speaker addresses the man in stanza two and, unlike the manner of Wordsworth's later rather intrusive interrogators, in this poem the question is delivered simply and with concern and then the shepherd tells his tale uninterruptedly. In his brilliant analysis of the poem, Don

Bialostosky points out the effectiveness of the silence of the interlocutor in the face of the shepherd's story - the appalling psychological distress which has led to the astonishing display of emotion is fully accounted for (Making Tales 121-2). In stanza three the shepherd recounts the parallel growth of his material and spiritual wealth. In stanza four the pivotal fifth line emphasises what Wordsworth would always hold true, that there is an essential relationship between material security and a sense of well-being: "They [the sheep] throve, and we at home did thrive" (36). The rest of the poem details the fall from this secure state to the deep despair which has led to the public display of emotion. With ten children to feed and no ready cash, he swallows his pride and appeals to the parish for relief, "[t]hey said I was a wealthy man" (45). In relative terms this is so, but the bureaucratic incapacity to accommodate individual circumstances which depart from a set pattern, and the smug, self-righteousness of the parish officers are clearly conveyed in the intonations of the direct speech wherewith the stanza ends: " 'Do this; how can we give to you,/They cried, 'what to the poor is due?'" (49-50). He starts to deplete his flock and, with each sale, his psychological state deteriorates. He watches his flock melt away like snow from the green grass - inevitably and irredeemably. The ways in which grinding poverty and the despair it generates can lead even the most upright to resort to crime was something which Wordsworth had pondered at least as far back as Adventures on Salisbury Plain where the sailor "bearing to those he loved nor warmth nor food...met a traveller, robb'd him, shed his blood" (94,97). Such a likelihood, as well as the links between poverty, distress and the erosion of mental and moral stability, which had been the focus in The Ruined Cottage of the preceding months, are the subject of the eighth stanza:

To wicked deeds I was inclined,  
And wicked fancies cross'd my mind,  
And every man I chanc'd to see,  
I thought he knew some ill of me.  
No peace, no comfort could I find,



No ease, within doors or without,  
 And crazily, and wearily,  
 I went my work about.  
 Oft-times I thought to run away;  
 For me it was a woeful day.

(71-80)

The ninth stanza see-saws between riches, material and spiritual, and their erosion. The unpleasant truth that, during times of financial stress, one can begin to resent one's dependents, is openly acknowledged, "every day I thought/I loved my children less" (87-88). The final stanza is in the tradition of a counting song - yet here it is a count down from the final ten sheep (paralleled by his ten children who are inexplicably reduced to six in later versions - thus spoiling the intentional symmetry), to the last of the flock which he is now carrying to market. Thus the poem shows not only the human story behind many a legalistic enforcement of the poor laws, but it also reveals the ways in which poverty can lead to spiritual and mental deterioration. A nation that selfishly ignores its commitment to the wellbeing of all its citizens, sows the seeds of its own destruction in the proliferation of social misfits reduced either to crime or despair.

The subtlety of the understatement led Burney to adopt the myopic view that

no oppression is pointed out; nor any  
 means suggested for his relief. If the  
 author be a wealthy man, he ought not  
 to have suffered this poor peasant to  
 part with the last of the flock.

(Brett and Jones 322)

Burney's suggested solution is no answer to the prevailing conditions which lead to such a sense of shame and self-degradation, for it would only delay the inevitable and increase the man's awareness of his worthlessness. It might well be argued

that the shepherd's situation, although full of symbolic overtones of sacrificial lambs and good shepherds, is economically very dubious. To enlarge one's family when one has limited capital to support it, is irresponsible. One could argue, moreover, that sheep rearing, in this case, is a failure and, given such circumstances, is a welfare system responsible for sustaining a person who continues to try and run a failing business rather than seeking viable alternatives? The poem might well reveal the shepherd's failure to grasp and control the complex market forces that ensure that his economic position is unviable. But Wordsworth is not writing as an economist. He is concerned to present the damaging loss of self-worth consequent on deprivation. For he believes that a sense of security, a sense of belonging, of having some property over which one has independent control, is the source of stability both to the individual and to the nation. It has often been asserted, as recently as 1991 by Patrick Campbell, that Wordsworth's belief in the importance of private property is a measure of his "growing conservatism" (110). However the Right to Property was recognised as an essential right and entrenched in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens (Paine 2: 353). A belief in property was never at this period the preserve of conservatives. Both Roe (140) and Bialostosky (Making Tales 125) argue that the poem is not primarily a poem of protest for the narrator so clearly does not make any gesture towards the shepherd or any condemnation of the situation that has led to his condition. Bialostosky argues that, as in "Old Man Travelling", the narrator does not respond to what he hears for "the answer he received was sufficient" (Making Tales 122). Could it not rather be that the narrator's silence is an effective device to ensure that the stark situation lingers with the reader? There is really nothing that could form an adequate response to this appallingly naked revelation of ruin. One is literally silenced.

Wordsworth, during these months which saw the composition of The Ruined Cottage and these ballads, appears to be interested in exploring the inevitable gap that exists between the one who suffers and the one who observes that suffering. Sympathy is



continually advocated yet sympathy is usually, by its very nature, indicative of unequal experience. From the anger at the facts of poverty that suffused the Letter to Llandaff and the distress at the conditions with which the female vagrant had to contend, Wordsworth, with his own increasing emotional security, now started to contemplate the question as to how such emotionally and materially deprived persons survive at all. As has been suggested above (in Chapter Five), this change of focus may lead to unquestioning acceptance of the fact of poverty, an acceptance which certainly permeated the work of Cowper and Crabbe. From January 1798 dates a fragment known as "The Discharged Soldier" which was finally to become part of Book Four of The Prelude. During these same weeks Wordsworth was expanding the "Description of a Beggar" (mid-1796 to mid-1797) into "The Old Cumberland Beggar". Both poems reveal an interest in the disturbing "otherness" of people, a divide magnified between the materially advantaged and the disadvantaged which no amount of well-intentioned sympathy can ever really close. This theme had already been present in The Ruined Cottage. The ultimate isolation of Margaret remained starkly evident despite the genuine concern of the old man. Likewise, the gap between the speaker and the "Old Man Travelling" is revealed as virtually impassable, the speaker's assumptions being so very little in tune with the old man's reality given his revelation of the purpose of his travelling.

"The Discharged Soldier" appeared in the 1805 Prelude, rendered there in a slightly less impassioned way (See Chapter 8 below). "The Old Cumberland Beggar" was published in the second edition of Lyrical Ballads and it is noteworthy that this published poem expresses a far less troubled, far more assured attitude to the "other". The 1798 "Discharged Soldier" fragment is wonderfully sensitive to the difficulties of understanding another's misery, whereas "The Old Cumberland Beggar" resorts often to dogmatic assertions of opinion. "The Discharged Soldier" (Butler and Green 277-82) bears a superficial similarity to "A narrow girdle of rough stones and crags" (1800) in that both poems open with the speaker sauntering contentedly before

suddenly coming upon someone who completely disrupts the untroubled and relatively blinkered self-satisfaction initially experienced. Yet these poems point to changes in Wordsworth's attitudes between 1798 ("The Discharged Soldier") and 1800 ("A narrow girdle" and "The Old Cumberland Beggar" - both of which will be discussed in Chapter Seven).

The first thirty-five lines of "The Discharged Soldier" portray the speaker walking alone on a moonlight night, in a tranquil mood (12) after mental toil (17), "drinking in /A restoration like the calm of sleep" (22-23). "Peace", "solitude", "harmonious imagery", "self-possession" - all are present and conducive to the "happy state" experienced (28). A "sudden turning of the road" (37) and the speaker is confronted by "an uncouth shape" (38) whose startling presence leads the speaker to conceal himself in order to "mark him well,/My self unseen" (40-41). There follows the speaker's lengthy description of the ex-soldier's appearance. His height and wasted body are emphasised, but what is most remarkable is his abstracted air as if "cut off,/From all his kind, and more than half detached/From his own nature" (58-60). These crucial lines, omitted by 1805, express the essence of that appalling alienation from others and from one's own sense of self which Wordsworth had touched upon already, most notably in Margaret and the mother with mind "sick and extravagant" of "The Baker's Cart". Within the next few years Wordsworth would recall his own wretched condition of 1793 as one in which he had felt "cut off/And tossed about in whirlwinds" (The Prelude 1805, 10: 258-9). He then felt that he was lacking, temporarily, the "saving intercourse/With my true self" (915-6) which lies at the heart of mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

The contrast between the positive solitude enjoyed by the speaker and the solitary desolation of the discharged soldier points to the difference in the circumstances of the two men. To one, solitude is a voluntary and positive state, to the other, for whom the world of man and nature is inimical, solitude is chilling and unchosen isolation.

So troubling is this "ghastly" form ("ghostly" by 1805),

that the speaker spends long minutes voyeuristically scanning him. The eeriness is enhanced by gothic details - the "uncouth shape" with its echoes of Milton's Death (an allusion noted, too, by Jacobus, Romanticism 74); the murmuring groans, the result either of pain or rumination; the still shadow; the fixity of the seeming apparition; the complex evocation in the speaker of both fear and sorrow; the silence of the nearby village, broken only by the howling of a dog - all these are present to the speaker and reader in the silence before the Stranger is hailed (86). The soldier tells "with a quiet, uncomplaining voice,/A stately air of mild indifference" (96-7), the tale of many a soldier no longer of use as a fighting machine, left now to his own meagre physical and material resources. As they proceed to a labourer's cottage, the soldier "appeared/To travel without pain" (121-22) - a perception which reveals the ease with which the thoughtless can mistake dignity and effort for carefree ease, something Wordsworth had already shown in "Old Man Travelling". Further intercourse reveals a demeanour which seemed "solemn and sublime" except that "[t]here was a strange half-absence, and a tone/Of weakness and indifference, as of one/Remembering the importance of his theme/But feeling it no longer" (141-44). The speaker, having led the ex-soldier to the labourer's cottage and arranged to pay for his board and lodging, is filled with an incipient self-satisfaction. This leads him to preach a commonsensical lesson - the man must henceforth not linger in the public roads but rather ask for the "relief or alms" to which he is entitled (160). Douglas Hay reminds us that in 1792 a clause in the Vagrancy Act which had allowed discharged seamen and soldiers to beg was repealed (footnote 140). If Wordsworth was aware of this fact, the seemingly commonsensical advice is designed to reveal the privileged speaker's ignorance of the numerous regulations which complicate the lives of the poor. (If Wordsworth had not remembered or known this, his own distance from the world of the indigent is underlined). Significantly, both the 1805 and 1850 versions of The Prelude omit the reference to asking for "relief or alms" (160) even though permission to beg was restored in 1803 (Hay, footnote 140). The enormous gap in understanding the real

underlying causes of the man's state, the faith of the privileged in the access to, or the efficacy of, state relief, the gulf that separates the mentally sound from the despairing - that is what Wordsworth subtly exposes in the very inadequacies of the speaker's attitude. The fragment ends with multiple ironies - the word "reproof", the soldier's enigmatic statement, the use of "comrade", the speaker's assumption that he has relieved the man materially and emotionally - all these, in the context of the whole poem, point to the inability really to understand the despair of another:

At this reproof,  
 With the same ghastly mildness in his look,  
 He said, "My trust is in the God of Heaven  
 And in the eye of him that passes me."  
 By this the labourer had unlocked the door,  
 And now my comrade touched his hat again  
 With his lean hand, and, in a voice that seem'd  
 To speak with a reviving interest,  
 Till then unfelt, he thanked me; I returned  
 The blessing of the poor unhappy man,  
 And so we parted.-----

(160-70)

When incorporated into Book Four of The Prelude (1805) some of the original lines were omitted. When one looks at the omission, it is those lines which stress the awesome difference of the ex-soldier from the norm. The lines detailing his physical condition, which led to the transfixed stare of the speaker, are much reduced in number and detail. The lines which suggest the man's alienation from "any living thing" ("Discharged Soldier" 57) and, more importantly, his apparent detachment from "his own nature" ("Discharged Soldier" 60) are cut. The atmospheric detail of the howling "chained mastiff", which is later given as the reason why the man did not seek help ("the village mastiff fretted me"), is omitted. Although the details of the encounter are still sufficiently memorable to justify its inclusion in The

Prelude, Wordsworth's purpose there, as elsewhere in that poem, is to reveal his spiritual, intellectual and emotional development ("of my own heart/Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind" 3: 176-7). Therefore less space is now given to detailing the ex-soldier's reduced state or its causes and possible effects on his psyche. Rather, the speaker must necessarily be the major focus. This would explain the addition of the two lines "[b]ack I cast a look,/And lingered near the door a little space,/Then sought with quiet heart my distant home" (502-4). It also might explain why Wordsworth would not have foreseen that these two lines might be judged as smug and self-satisfied, for the quietness of heart that the encounter has evoked is the result of the speaker's sense of having made contact, of having elicited a seeming revival of interest in the apathetic man, of having at least tended to his immediate needs.

Most of the recent critics who have commented most fruitfully on this encounter have discussed these lines as they appear in The Prelude of 1805. Where they have referred to the lines that the two versions have in common, they have seldom stressed the ironies that I see in the presentation of the attitude of the speaker. Where I would see the indifference of the ex-soldier as akin to that of the woman in "The Baker's Cart" fragment or Margaret in The Ruined Cottage - and, as such, evidence of deep alienation - Don Bialostosky reads this indifference as the obverse side of a "radical faith in God and his fellow man which implicitly transforms the situation" (Making Tales 164). The speaker feels that his actions have, in Bialostosky's words, "revived the humanity of a seemingly inhuman figure" (Making Tales 167). Yet we must not ignore the operative word "seem'd" ("In a voice that seem'd/To speak with a reviving interest" 1798 and 1805). This hints, as it does in "Old Man Travelling" of the preceding year, that this might be merely an assumption of the speaker. For all kinds of reasons, the 1850 version removes the potential uncertainty of the "seem'd"; "in a faltering voice,/Whose tone bespoke reviving interests/Till then unfelt" (463-5). Charles Rzepka totally identifies the speaker with Wordsworth and states that "Wordsworth can assume



that the man is interested in all that he was before indifferent to" (Self as Mind 62). This explains, for Rzepka, the "quiet heart" that the speaker enjoys (62). John Williams concludes that "Wordsworth's [sic] charitable response appears sufficient to defuse the situation, neutralizing the soldier's resentment" (24). I would argue for an ironic treatment of the speaker's suppositions because these lines date from 1798 and the poems preceding them have revealed interest in the gap between the sufferer and the observer. Thus the dating of these lines is important and one cannot ignore that dating because the incident is displaced to the Cambridge vacation of 1788 in The Prelude. These lines do not emanate from 1788. This point has sometimes been forgotten. David Simpson suggests that the "somewhat complacent faith in society's ability to alleviate such situations is entirely convincing in a young man [the vacationing student, Wordsworth] struggling with conflicting feelings of his own" (Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 137). More recently, Mary Jacobus has read this episode as an example of the "ideology of transcendence articulated by The Prelude" which transfigures the ex-soldier who derives from a specific historical context into a de-historicized "instance of sublimely self-negligent faith in providence" (Romanticism 73,74). Jacobus argues that this purpose lies behind the displacement of the episode from the year of actual composition (1798) to 1788 (Romanticism 73-4). Her reading is persuasive but it does not address the effect of the lines of 1798 (before they are imbedded in The Prelude). I feel strongly that, because these lines emanate from a period in which Wordsworth had elsewhere been clearly interested in the multiple problems underlying the encounter of the privileged with the distressed, the original effect of the lines is to render the speaker as, at least, limited in his awareness of the whole situation.

It will be salutary to compare this fragment, on the one hand, with "The Leechgatherer", where one sees rather different conclusions drawn from a rather similar encounter, and, on the other hand, with those poems of the next few years which show persons aiding others in distress. This fragment has a freshness

and starkness which still forcibly startle the reader from the complacency of his/her privileged position vis-à-vis a disadvantaged "other". In poems that follow, where the theme and situation are not dissimilar, we will find some disturbing signs which herald Wordsworth's progress away from the raw passion of his youth towards the complacencies of a domesticated and contented middle-age.

During these same Alfoxden months we can trace his growing recognition of the essential place of Nature in his own spiritual development and his belief in the moral force of Nature. This is the overt subject of at least four of the 1798 Lyrical Ballads and his belief in the connection between a responsiveness to nature and one's ability to act morally towards one's fellowmen is clearly surfacing. Fragments in the Alfoxden Notebook (1), which date from the early months of 1798, for the first time articulate this vital connection:

And never for each other shall we feel  
As we feel, till we have sympathy  
With nature in her forms inanimate,  
With objects such as have no power to hold  
Articulate language.

Why is it that we feel  
So little for each other, but for this,  
That we with nature have no sympathy,  
Or with such things have no power to hold  
Articulate language?

(Hayden I: 268-9)

The poems of the 1798 Lyrical Ballads which focus on the poor reveal a variety of emphases which point to important aspects of Wordsworth's changing attitudes to this topic. Some, like "The Mad Mother", "The Thorn", and "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman", are experiments in ways of presenting familiar material rather than direct protests about the conditions depicted. Only two of the poems are direct exposés of

specific contemporary practices. "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" conflates, with wonderful success, social protest and folk myth, whereas "The Last of the Flock" is another demonstration of the moral, emotional, and mental consequences of deprivation. In all these poems, and most obviously in the manuscript version of the "Discharged Soldier", which dates from these same months, there is a greater or lesser emphasis on the daunting difference of the disadvantaged other. Even if one is not prone to make unsound assumptions about the other, those who suffer are a mystery. How do they survive? How does one ever understand an other, especially an other who is so wretched? This would explain the interest in presenting the other through the eyes of the often uncomprehending person who encounters the other, for example, the loquacious ex-captain in "The Thorn", or the interrogator of "The Last of the Flock", or the initially carefree speaker of the "Discharged Soldier". If the material is not filtered through a somewhat uncomprehending speaker, its otherness is foregrounded by emphasising its foreignness ("The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman"), or by depicting actual madness ("The Mad Mother"). Where this technique is used, the result is to emphasise the impassable gap between the observer and the observed, the profound otherness of the wretched.

On the 13 September 1798 the Lyrical Ballads "are printed, but not published" (Early Letters 199). On the 16 September Wordsworth, Dorothy, Coleridge and Chester, a young acquaintance of Coleridge's, set sail from Yarmouth for Germany, where William and Dorothy were to remain until late April 1799. These few months were to prove something of a watershed. Writing to Cottle at the end of May 1799, Wordsworth remarks "[w]e have spent our time pleasantly enough in Germany but we are right glad to find ourselves in England, for we have learnt to know its value" (Early Letters 224). By mid-December 1799 he and Dorothy had settled in the Lake District which was to remain his home for the fifty years remaining to him. By the time Wordsworth next published any poems his personal circumstances had changed markedly. He had endured the emotional exile of Goslar and had "come home", both to an England whose value was heightened by his



brief and problematic sojourn abroad, and to the landscape of his childhood. It is not surprising that his interests and attitudes show a change, a change which also affects his depiction of the vagrant poor, who were as prevalent in the environs of Grasmere as in the west country where he had first contemplated them.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

'TIS PAST, THAT MELANCHOLY DREAM'

WORDSWORTH'S HOMECOMING - THE RETURN TO THE PAST

"...society has become a matter of great indifference to me - I grow daily more and more attached to Solitude - but it is the matter of utmost Importance to be removed from seeing Suffering and Want."

(Coleridge to Poole 1801)

It is desirable that such persons [wandering beggars] should be permitted to roam through our land of plenty, scattering the seeds of tenderness and charity - as birds of passage bear the seeds of precious plants...without ever dreaming of the office which they perform.

(Nathaniel Hawthorne, American Notebooks 1842)

The proposed two years in Germany (Early Letters 189) dwindled to not quite eight months during which Wordsworth and Dorothy endured an icy winter, isolation bordering on ostracism because of suspicions as to their true relationship to each other, worries about making ends meet, and little progress in their primary plan of learning the language. The initial plan "to settle, if possible, in a village near a University" had to be abandoned for, "we find that the price of lodgings etc. is much greater in the towns where there are universities" (Early Letters 189-90, 194). Thus, separated from Coleridge and deprived of intellectual stimulation in the "lifeless" town of Goslar (Early Letters 203), William and Dorothy were left to their own resources. "As I have had no books I have been obliged to write in self-defence", Wordsworth wrote to Coleridge in December 1798

or January 1799 (Early Letters 206), but writing was significantly associated with "uneasiness at my stomach and side, with a dull pain about my heart" (206), an early instance of the psychosomatic ailment that was to flare up whenever Wordsworth was at all tense or ill-at-ease. In this very letter appear the first compositions from Goslar. They are two of the "Lucy" poems and 134 lines of what were later to be identified as significant "spots of time" - the nutting episode, the skating episode and the stolen boat episode, selected and copied out by Dorothy "from the mass of what William has written" (209). She tells Coleridge that these scenes are "laid in the North of England, whither, wherever we finally settle you must come to us at the latter end of next summer, and we will explore together every nook of that romantic country" (210). It is significant that their thoughts were turning to the landscape of their childhood and that, at Goslar, there began that journey into his past which forever after proved to be Wordsworth's quintessential region.

This sojourn on the Continent was so very different from that first extended stay in 1791-2 in France when his facility in acquiring the language was indicative of how much more immersed he was in the community, an involvement strengthened by the relationship with Michel Beaupuy and Annette Vallon. Of course, then, too, he witnessed, and for the most part shared, the euphoria of the early months of the Revolution. This had all changed utterly. The invasion of Switzerland had finally convinced him that the ideals he had subscribed to were being trampled under the feet of Bonaparte's invading armies. He always dated his change of heart towards the French from that act of aggression - as traumatic in 1798 as was the invasion of Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968. On 4 December 1821 he wrote to James Losh:

I abandoned France, and her Rulers,  
when they abandoned the struggle for  
Liberty, gave themselves up to Tyranny,  
and endeavoured to enslave the world.  
I disapproved of the war against France

at its commencement, thinking, which was perhaps an error, that it might have been avoided - but after Buonaparte [sic] had violated the Independence of Switzerland, my heart turned against him, and the Nation that could submit to be the Instrument of such an outrage.

(Later Years 1: 56-7)

It is not surprising that the homesickness that he and Dorothy suffered in Germany, combined with the sense of loss at the betrayal of previously held political ideals, led him to see change as deeply destructive and a sense of continuity as essential to psychic and national health. E.J. Hobsbawm, in his study of Europe between 1789 and 1848, has identified "the most serious intellectual effort of the anti-progressive ideology" as going into "historical analysis and the rehabilitation of the past, the investigation of continuity as against revolution" (Age of Revolution 246-7). Certainly, from 1799 onwards, we see Wordsworth not only abandoning his earlier quite radical political views, but becoming more concerned with recovering his roots and emphasising the continuity in his personal development. There are a number of possible reasons for this. His Englishness would have become more apparent to him in the uncongenial surroundings of Goslar and, with this, a surge of patriotic feelings about his homeland and its most favoured landscapes. Feeling miserably cold, able to communicate on neither a mundane nor an intellectual level with the citizens of Goslar, separated from Coleridge, worrying about money, depressed by the betrayal of the hopes of the new dawn of 1789, we find Wordsworth both contemplating mortality and trying to maintain a sense of self by recalling the happiness of childhood and tracing his own present self in his past experiences. The short lyrics to be known afterwards as the "Lucy" poems, the extended blank verse paragraphs which came to form the 1799 Prelude, these works are saturated with both a sense of loss and an effort to pick out the

threads which make up his sense of self. Certainly he had suffered severe depression in 1793, but it would seem that, despite those intense feelings of alienation from his fellow countrymen, he was filled at that time with righteous indignation at what he saw as the wrongs of his society. Profoundly distressed at his own ideological distance from most of his peers, one could argue that, at least, he was still convinced of the validity of his position and the ideals to which he had adhered. However, by 1799, those ideals had been betrayed by a nation which seemed merely to have substituted an aggressive despotism for the ancien régime.

Stephen Gill emphasises that the "Lucy" and "Matthew" poems of Goslar present loss as a constant of human existence (Wordsworth 161). This is a marked change from a position which sees certain persons as victims of loss or deprivation - caused by specific social and political practices. Holding the latter view, one can still hope and strive for the abolition of the damaging social and political practices and the amelioration of conditions. By emphasising the universality of loss, Wordsworth is no longer focusing on suffering and loss as direct human consequences of a stated or implied social context. Perhaps it is not without significance that, in a letter to Coleridge (27 February 1799), he refers to the woman's plight in the seriously-minded Salisbury Plain in a decidedly nonchalant manner: "Now by way of a pretty moving accident and to bind together in palpable knots the story of the piece I have resolved to make her the widow or sister or daughter of the man whom the poor Tar murdered. So much for the vulgar....I regard [the piece] as finished minus 24 stanzas, the utmost tether allowed to the poor Lady" (Early Letters 223). In the very next year, in "Hart-Leap Well", he is adamant that his "trade" is not the "moving accident" (line 97), these latter two words suggesting a contrived appeal to sentiment alone.

Critics have often noted that Wordsworth originally seemed to hold that the environment is the determining factor in human development, whereas towards the end of the 1790s he begins to hold organic views of human development (Grob 55), clearly

evidenced by 26 March 1802 when he wrote "My heart leaps up". Organic views are inherently conservative in their determinism. Grob suggests that Wordsworth came to believe that "the essential components of the self are present in embryo, in beginnings that are, however, ultimately determining" (52). Memory would thus become increasingly important as a mode of self-discovery. Wordsworth's own emotional and poetic development becomes increasingly his primary topic, displacing what was arguably his major topic in the 1790s - the vagrant poor. The depiction of the poor is scarcely to be found in the publications of 1800 and 1807 and, in the few major treatments of the topic, "The Old Cumberland Beggar", "A narrow girdle" and "The Leechgatherer", to be discussed below, we will see that what he sees when contemplating those marginalized, poverty-stricken figures has changed as his own needs and interests have altered. He now contemplates them to understand himself, and no longer either to attempt an understanding of how they survive, or, to deplore the socio-political causes of their indigent state. He increasingly sees their presence as part of an organic whole, part of the varied landscape of life.

Marlon B. Ross has argued that Wordsworth chose

lower-class, downtrodden men, children,  
or women: [because] he wants to accentuate  
the difference between their pitiable  
condition of inarticulate inactivity and  
his own situation as a discursive subject  
who must consider their pain and contemplate  
ways of dissolving that pain into the aesthetics  
of self-possessing poetry.

(Contours 309)

While Ross's argument is unfair to Wordsworth's presentation of social outcasts in his poems before 1798 (witness the fervour displayed in the Letter to Llandaff, a fervour that fuelled these poems), it makes a lot more sense for the poems written after 1800 when Wordsworth contemplated the figure of the vagrant for

what he (more often now than she) can teach him (Wordsworth) about human endurance, resolution and independence. Undoubtedly such subjectivity is, in retrospect, judged as the quintessence of romanticism and Wordsworth's most characteristic poetry is seen as most representative of what William Walling has described as "the major psychological event of the age: the growing self-consciousness of the individual sensibility" (Reiman 350). Coleridge was certainly one of the catalysts for the growing importance to Wordsworth of organicism. Mary Jacobus has pointed out that, in Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight", written in that vital year 1798, "the familiar themes of loss and renewal are subsumed into a new concern with the power of the mind to link past, present, and future in organic relationship" (Tradition 118). Jacobus' remark might as easily describe Wordsworth's trajectory of the next few years.

In January 1799 Bonaparte was proclaimed first Consul. In a planned coup d'état, he abolished the Directory and assumed control of France's new Republic. England was Bonaparte's only formidable opponent and the war assumed even greater intensity during this year. The debates in Parliament and the bills passed during 1799, most notably the bills to continue the suspension of habeas corpus and to suppress certain radical societies, passed in May and July (Goodwin 454), reflected a more stratified society and a government reacting to threats from without and perceived threats from within. So great was Wordsworth's aversion to Bonaparte's aggressive policy that he could no longer disagree with the Government about the need to wage war against France. In the 1821 letter to Losh he stated:

In a determination, therefore, to aim  
at the overthrow of that inordinate  
Ambition by War, I sided with the Ministry,  
not from general approbation of their  
Conduct, but as men who thought right on  
this essential point.

(Later Years 1: 57)

Once again Coleridge and Wordsworth were of a mind for, by September 1802, Coleridge was advocating, in the Morning Post, the resumption of war (Liu 420). By October 1803, Wordsworth, writing to Sir George Beaumont, reveals himself to be a willing volunteer:

At Grasmere, we turn out almost to  
a man. We are to go to Ambleside on  
Sunday to be mustered, and put on, for  
the first time, our military apparel.

(Early Letters 341)

Yet Frida Knight emphasises that, by this date, even the vehemently pacifist William Frend "thought the measures for national defence necessary" (234). Frend wrote an essay on the history of patriotism and concluded with a poem appealing for volunteers to the militia (233). Knight also quotes a representative statement of 1804 from the antiquarian Godfrey Higgins:

You talk of Volunteers: damn it Sir  
I have been encamped upon Elmstead  
Heath all Summer and am now in Winter  
Quarters in Colchester Barracks...  
would any man ever believe it but it  
is true. I took arms the moment the  
Consul overran Switzerland....

(235)

The deeper significance of such attitudes is emphasised by H.T. Dickinson:

It demonstrated the willingness of the  
propertied classes to fight to preserve  
their privileged position....The willingness  
to serve at any level became a political test  
of loyalty to the existing regime. The parades,



the military exercises and the patriotic speeches at celebration dinners were all designed to demonstrate the strength and commitment of the propertied classes.

(36)

It is also likely that Wordsworth, and many like him, would have felt increasingly distanced from a working class which, by the early 1800s, was markedly more radicalized than before. K.D.M. Snell quotes extensively from documents that reveal an increase in anger and class estrangement throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. He notes that such sentiments are "rarely found before 1780" (101). He also notes that, from 1795 onwards, there was a tightening up on relief payments (108-9). Alan Booth stresses that food rioting became politicized by the turn of the century particularly in the North West of England which, from 1796, was

the home of the United Englishmen,  
who offered a particularly vigorous  
brand of political radicalism, and  
of a militant trade unionism which  
was briefly to rear its head from its  
subterranean existence in 1799-1800.

(101)

He points out that, whereas the political element was "almost non-existent" in the food riots of 1795 (101), by 1800 "the food riot became an integrated part of a wider conception of working class protest" (107). Increasingly the war was named as the cause of the literal starvation of the poor during the winter of 1800 and the early months of 1801 (102-3). Thus Wordsworth's change of opinion about the need to wage war with France coincided almost exactly with the increasingly vociferous anti-war movement among the lower classes, documented by Booth. It is not surprising that Wordsworth's conservative tendencies of these months would be reinforced and that his whole attitude to the

poor might be affected.

The tensions and the divisions in British society were made concretely manifest by the execution, in February 1803, of seven radicals - the first political executions for at least a century (Goodwin 468). The climate was certainly unfavourable for any radical publications and Olivia Smith has argued that by 1800 very little radical material was being written (Politics 108). It is not at all surprising that the publication of the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads dated 1800, but actually appearing on January 25 1801, would reflect some of these personal and political changes.

A few days after returning from Germany, Wordsworth wrote to his brother, Richard, telling him of the plans to publish a second edition of Lyrical Ballads expanded into two volumes (Early Letters 243). By September 1800, Dorothy, writing to Jane Marshall, commented that she thought the new volume "is much more likely to please the generality of readers" (Early Letters 250). This volume contained 37 poems never before published and almost all written either in Germany or during 1800 when the Wordsworths were ensconced at Grasmere. A number of poems deal directly or indirectly with death. Others are poems about specific spots near Town End associated with dear ones. There are quite a few light ballads on relatively trivial and often sentimental topics (e.g. "The Pet Lamb"), and two set-pieces which were later to be included in The Prelude. Only six poems focus on the indigent. The overall impression of volume two is of a substantial number of poems treating of domestic trivia, an impression which certainly struck a number of contemporary critics. The desire to please the public in order to achieve good sales might explain the inclusion of these slight poems which might well appeal to readers if not to critics. Wordsworth obviously anticipated criticism on the grounds of perceived triviality and he attempted to forestall such in his Preface:

From such verses [verses displaying  
"triviality and meanness both of thought  
and language"] the Poems in these volumes

will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy purpose.

(Butler and Green 744)

Certainly 36 out of the 42 poems are not remotely like his previous work.

Of the six poems on poverty, two are only nominally so. "Andrew Jones" is an example of inhumane behaviour, although the "poor crawling helpless wretch" of a cripple is merely the trigger for the boorish behaviour of Jones. "Poor Susan" has far greater resonance in as much as it potentially raises the question of the fate of the many young women in the city - trapped in urban squalor, and a prey, because of gender and youth, to manifold iniquities. Yet the focus of the poem is rather on the transient evocation of a paradise lost. The final stanza (later omitted), with its sentimental apostrophe to Susan, posits a happy-ever-after ending which undermines the bleak exposé (just discernible between the lines) of the appalling gap between dream and reality in the lives of young girls who seek their fortune in the city.

"Ruth" is a poem which, in summary, might appear to bear a close resemblance to those earlier poems treating of abandoned women, half-crazed by unhappiness and destitution. Despite the various possible literary sources mentioned by Butler and Green (389-90), the Isabella Fenwick note does emphasise a specific documentary reality, "Suggested by an account I had of a wanderer in Somersetshire" (Butler and Green 389). In the light of this documentary claim, it is striking to see how differently the topic is treated in "Ruth" compared, for example, with its treatment in "The Female Vagrant". "Ruth" is in the same metre as "The Mad Mother" of 1798. In both these poems the impact of the actual circumstances recounted is reduced by the choice of metre. A major change, however, lies in the emphasis on Ruth's positive relationship to the natural world - a relationship which gives her comfort. Although this is not dwelt upon, it does reflect the same emphases on the need to recognise and nurture

mankind's place in the natural world which forms the subject of "There was a Boy" or the "Lucy" poems or "Nutting". "Ruth" thus ends up as having a very different effect to that of "The Female Vagrant", despite the similar situation of the two women.

"A narrow girdle of rough stones and crags", despite being grouped with four other poems "on the Naming of Places", is, unlike them, also a depiction of a disturbing encounter in the manner of "The Discharged Soldier" (see Chapter 6 and below). Poems and prose accounts describing a speaker encountering someone less fortunate were extremely commonplace in the 1790s although often, as in the hands of Hannah More, the purpose was to admonish the fecklessness of the victim as much as to render some prudently measured-out aid. More's The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain contains perhaps the most blatant example of insensitive and intrusive questioning (More 1-68). The combination of a pious sense of superiority with a patrician forwardness in prying is also nicely illustrated by the behaviour of Mrs Mason in Wollstonecraft's stories:

I walked thoughtfully along, when the appearance of a poor man, who did not beg, struck me very forcibly....I stretched out my hand with some relief in it, I would not enquire into the particulars of such obvious distress.... His attitude, for I cannot bear to see a fellow-creature kneel, and eager thanks, oppressed my weak spirits, so that I could not for a moment ask him any more questions; but as soon as I recollected myself, I learned from him the misfortunes that had reduced him to such extreme distress....

(Original Stories 73)

Yet such behaviour was not the reserve of fiction, for in Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal (1801), kept at Grasmere, we read:

As we came up the White Moss, we met  
 an old man, who I saw was a beggar by  
 his two bags hanging over his shoulder;  
 but, from a half laziness, half indifference,  
 and a wanting to try him, if he would speak,  
 I let him pass. He said nothing, and my heart  
 smote me. I turned back, and said, "You are  
 begging?" "Ay", says he....William...joined  
 in, "I suppose you were a sailor?" "Ay",  
 he replied...."Why have you not a pension?"  
 (Journals 93)

Wordsworth had already worked both in and against this genre in "Old Man Travelling" and "The Discharged Soldier". Of the five "naming" poems, four associate a place with a person, although "To Joanna" is less biographically accurate than the poems about William, Mary Hutchinson and Emma (Dorothy) (Butler and Green 398-9). "A narrow girdle" justifies its place within the group of "naming" poems because it explains the name "Point Rash-Judgment" given to a spot on the eastern shore of Grasmere where William, Dorothy, and Coleridge had actually encountered the frail fisherman (Butler and Green 399). Yet it undoubtedly differs from the companion poems because it memorializes a shameful lapse in sensitivity and not a person. A brief analysis of the poem will reveal it to be a complex exposé of the disturbing tendency of the privileged to make assumptions about the unprivileged "other" in the manner of "The Discharged Soldier". The poem falls into four parts. The apparently neutral natural description in the first five lines is, in retrospect, as symbolically suggestive as the opening lines of "Michael". There is a "narrow girdle of rough stones and crags/A rude and natural causeway" near the "privacy" of the "eastern shore/Of Grasmere" (1-2,4-5). These contrasting natural details - the smooth and the rough - foreshadow that major opposition in the poem between the leisured and the unemployed. Lines 6-40 describe the speaker and his "two beloved Friends" (6), who "saunter'd on this retir'd and difficult way" (9), which reiterates the

suggestive contrast between leisure and effort. The lexical set of these 34 lines is primarily one of carefree play - "we/Play'd with our time" (10-11), "vacant mood" (16), "sportive" (24), "playmate" (27), "trifling" (28). Yet interspersed is another lexical set, which hints at aspects which work against this overtly holiday mood. The waves have "toss'd ashore" (13) certain items, like a "wither'd bough", which lie "heap'd along the line/Of the dry wreck" (15-16). Likewise the "dead calm" lake (the phrase appears twice) will assume an ominous resonance. There is also the generalization, "trifling with a privilege/Alike indulg'd to all" (28-9), for within a few lines, the distinction between those privileged enough to indulge themselves and be indulged and those who labour and toil will be sharply drawn. Coleridge, in his Notebooks, had recorded the incident as having occurred during his July - August visit:

"Poor fellow at a distance idle? in  
this haytime when wages are so high?  
Come near - thin, pale, can scarce speak  
- or throw out his fishing rod".

(1. n. 761)

According to Dorothy's Journal, Coleridge arrived at Grasmere on 31 July and left with William for Keswick on 2 August. The weather was "very hot" (Journals 53). It was most probably on 1 August that the incident occurred, for we read in Dorothy's entry for that day:

Coleridge and Wm. went down to the lake.  
They returned, and we all went together to  
Mary Point, where we sate [sic] in the breeze  
and the shade, and read Wm.'s poems"

(53, emphasis added)

Yet the poem is set on a "calm September morning" (7). This change is possibly made to suggest a pleasant autumnal day ("the busy mirth of reapers" 42-3). By a strange coincidence, during

these very weeks, Dorothy had written to Jane Marshall of their lifestyle at Grasmere:

With respect to passing our time....  
 We walk [every] day and at all times  
 of the day, we row upon the wate[r],  
 and in the summer sit a great part of  
 our time under the apple trees of the  
 orchard or in a wood close by the lake-  
 side. William writes verses, John goes  
 fishing, and we read the books we have  
 and such as we can procure.

(Early Letters 253)

In lines 41-47, we have an example of the familiar pastoral fantasy beloved of eighteenth-century writers - the happy reapers, young and old, whose "busy mirth" delights the ears of the sauntering trio who are "feeding unthinking fancies" - the latter two words pointing to the thoughtless romanticisation of the arduous labour of reaping. Throughout, one is reminded of John Barrell's point that "we should look twice at a notion of nature by which it seems 'natural' that some men should work while others do not" (164).

From line 47 to the end, the mood changes as "suddenly" the threesome are confronted with

The tall and upright figure of a Man  
 Attir'd in peasant's garb, who stood alone  
 Angling beside the margin of the lake.

(50-2)

The man is first viewed in these terms - apparently of strong physique, "attir'd in peasant's garb" (51, emphasis added), as if in holiday casuals, "angling" (52), another word which connotes Isaac Walton-like leisured hobby. During 1800 when the poem was composed, Dorothy refers a number of times in her Grasmere Journal to William fishing:

[June 19th] Thursday. A very hot morning.  
 W. and I walked up to Mr. Simpson's. W. and  
 old Mr. S. went to fish in Wytheburn water....  
 W. caught a pike weighing 4 3/4 lbs.

(Journals 49)

The trio initially view the angler through "a thin veil of glittering haze" (48), another example of suggestive natural description. Wordsworth then manages to convey the shocked intonations as the idling threesome deplore the time-wasting pursuit of the "idle man":

Which when we saw, with one and the same voice  
 We all cried out, that he must be indeed  
 An idle man, who thus could lose a day  
 Of the mid-harvest, when the labourer's hire  
 Is ample, and some little might be stor'd  
 Wherewith to chear [sic] him in the winter time.

(55-60)

Having stated already that the man "stood alone" (51), the phrase is repeated but now in a prominent initial position in the line (63) where it invests the man with increased impact: "we saw...The tall and upright figure of a man/Attired in peasant's garb, who stood alone/....Thus talking of that Peasant we approached/Close to the spot where with his rod and line/He stood alone...." (48-51, 61-3). He turns in greeting and

we saw a Man worn down  
 By sickness, gaunt and lean, with sunken cheeks  
 And wasted limbs, his legs so long and lean  
 That for my single self I look'd at them,  
 Forgetful of the body they sustain'd. --  
 Too weak to labour in the harvest field,  
 The man was using his best skill to gain  
 A pittance from the dead unfeeling lake  
 That knew not of his wants.

(64-72)



The "tall and upright figure", on a closer look, is seen to be merely thin and wasted - his legs elongated by his thinness, a detail on which the speaker fixes his eyes - the sustained gaze suggesting the power of the unexpected to rivet attention. The "dead calm" lake is now seen to be a "dead unfeeling lake" (71) - a chilling reminder of Nature's indifference to man's fate - a nature seen initially by the speaker in terms of "lovely images" (75). Immediately the trio are conscious of their rash judgment. Their self-admonishment however takes the form of reminding themselves "to be reserv'd in speech" and to "temper all our thoughts with charity" (78-9). There is no concern with the peasant's condition per se, nor any recognition of the need of those apparently merry reapers to endure endless labour in order to avoid the destitution of the unemployed. The trio determine to think charitably hereafter but there is no charity (whether in the form of amiably expressed concern or concrete monetary aid) directed at the peasant himself. Such reactions were not uncommon. In The Young Ladies' Faithful Remembrancer of Obligations, Responsibilities, and Duties, published in 1848, we read:

In your intercourse with the afflicted you will soon discover that the balm of genuine pity, flowing from a tender heart, and the rays of sensibility, beaming from an expressive countenance, are often more effectual in allaying human misery than any gift or service you could render.

(qtd. in Tobin 137).

The trio name the place as an enduring reminder to themselves of both their thoughtlessness and their timely self-admonishment. The peasant has served his purpose. This is far removed from the indignation of the Letter to Llandaff and is almost indistinguishable from the majority view of the privileged that poverty is a social given. John Weyland, in 1807, expressed the sentiment with unabashed tautology: "the poor must always undergo

a certain degree of privation, or they would not be poor" (qtd.in Hilton 100).

The poem does expose the insensitivity of the privileged in jumping to conclusion... about the condition of someone less privileged. The fisherman is described perceptively, with chilling detail. Yet his plight is not the focus of attention nor does Wordsworth see fit to question the justice of a situation in which some can saunter, others must labour daily, and a peasant, too ill to work for wages, must stand for hours trying to ensure his next meal. Such dimensions seem no longer to be Wordsworth's concern. Although bearing a strong resemblance to "The Discharged Soldier" (1798), this poem shows a significant change between the Wordsworth of 1798 and the Wordsworth of 1800. In the earlier poem, the speaker's certainties and assumptions are treated with irony whereas here, although the initial assumptions about the fisherman are shown to be unfounded, the poem does not treat ironically the trio's subsequent concentration on their situation rather than on the fisherman's needs. The final lines added to "The Discharged Soldier" for The Prelude of 1805 make it more akin to this poem's concern with the emotional and moral state of the speaker and friends. The poem's inclusion among the four adulatory naming poems serves to emphasise that its real object is the moral upliftment of the trio - an essentially self-serving purpose.

"The Old Cumberland Beggar, a Description" is undoubtedly a seminal poem in any study of Wordsworth's presentation of the vagrant poor. It is also a poem that has received much attention and my purpose here is not to give yet another reading but to point to certain aspects which I feel to be illuminating in Wordsworth's presentation of the vagrant figure, and to indicate where I differ from some major commentators on the poem.

It has long been recognised that the lines "Description of a Beggar" which, like "Old Man Travelling", date from between the latter half of 1796 and early June 1797, are an early version of "The Old Cumberland Beggar" (henceforth referred to as "OCB") which was written between 25 January and 5 March 1798. Significantly, the earlier lines are simple description; the

later poem has developed into an ideological statement. "Description of a Beggar" remains just that - a sharply perceptive rendering of the exterior appearance and manner of the aged old traveller (Butler and Green 273-4). He is oblivious to "nature's fair variety" (5), for his eyes are cast down, seeing only what is immediately before him. He sees, for instance, "marks which, in one track,/The nails of cart or chariot wheel have left/Impress'd on the white road" (15-17), a detail similar to that found in both "The road extended o'er a heath" and "No spade for leagues" of the same months. No assumptions are made about his emotional and psychological state. Other than a few markers of sympathy, "weary journey" (13), "Poor Traveller" (18), the description is largely objective. These 25 lines are expanded into 189 lines in "OCB".

One critic to raise questions about the implications of the poem is James Chandler, who disagrees with Harold Bloom's interpretation published in The Visionary Company (1971). Where Bloom had argued that "Wordsworth is not preaching the vicious and mad doctrine that beggary is good because it makes charity possible" (191), Chandler (1980) argues that this is precisely what Wordsworth is doing ("Wordsworth and Burke" passim). This poem has, it seems, always elicited differences of opinion. For Jacobus (1978), the old man is freed from the "urgency of human existence" (177). Friedman (1979) accepts Wordsworth's argument that beggars perform a "moral function" and sees Wordsworth as pleading for the "right to feel pity and give charity" (101). Since 1980, critics have tended to follow Chandler's lead in finding the sentiments of the poem, to a greater or lesser degree, questionable. Glen (1983) feels that the poem is "uneven" (83) and that it, perhaps unconsciously, presents a world of "exclusion and division" (84). Chandler, writing on the poem again in 1984, reminds the reader of Wordsworth's contrasting attitude to beggary in the Letter to Llandaff (87). Yet the sentiments of the poem have still found apologists. Sampson (1984) concentrates on the worse loss of the old man's "vital anxiety" were he to be incarcerated in a workhouse (40). Turner (1986) argues persuasively for the humanity of the sentiments.

He feels that Wordsworth "sets out to reconstitute the language of natural law - a natural law stating that good and evil were to be found intermixed in all things earthly" (205), arguing that Wordsworth pleads for the old rural economy upon whose charities the beggar depended, a rural economy he later felt existed still in the idyllic Grasmere where "they who want are not too great a weight/For those who can relieve" (Home at Grasmere 447-8). Rzepka (1986) introduces a rather new approach by arguing that the old man is "less a person encountered than...something quite close to visionary" (44) - a line of argument which can lead to dehistoricization. Simpson (1987) acknowledges a "confusion in the writing" (173) which leaves the poem "somewhat open and unresolved" (174). Harrison (1988) accepts that the beggar is "useful" (25) and emphasises (pace the Llandaff Letter) that Wordsworth's poetry about the poor "is based upon the acceptance of poverty as a social given" (29).

Like Burke, Wordsworth indicates in "OCB" a belief in the possibility of a society continually renewed by a voluntary "subordination of the heart", an innate moral sense which Burke called the "moral constitution of the heart" and associated with natural impulses (Burke:Raffety 4: 89). Also following Burke, Wordsworth pleads for the old traditions and continuities which sustain a moral community, rather than a society constituted in the name of abstract principles where reason is divorced from moral principles. But the old traditions and continuities were disappearing, and Wordsworth was closer to perceiving the reality of England when he wrote in the Letter to Llandaff, "the extremes of poverty and riches have a necessary tendency to corrupt the human heart" and "necessity reduces the sad relicks [sic] to owe their very existence to the ostentatious bounty of their oppressors" (Owen and Smyser 1: 43). What is clear from two of Wordsworth's comments on the poem is that he is no longer deploring the very fact of poverty or saying, as he had done in the Llandaff Letter, that "we should be just before we are generous", or that he has a hope that "the class of wretches called mendicants will not much longer shock the feelings of humanity" (43). Rather, his two statements on the poem suggest



a nostalgic affirmation of the beggar's place in the system. The note heading the poem reads:

The class of Beggars to which the old man here described belongs, will probably soon be extinct. It consisted of poor, and, mostly, old and infirm persons, who confined themselves to a stated round in their neighbourhood, and had certain fixed days, on which, at different houses, they regularly received charity; sometimes in money, but mostly in provisions.

(Butler and Green 228)

In the 1843 Fenwick note he stated:

Observed and with great benefit to my own heart when I was a child....The political economists were about that time beginning their war upon mendicity in all its forms and by implication, if not directly, on Alms-giving also.

(Butler and Green 393)

His capacity for feeling was nurtured by the beggar. As in "A narrow girdle of rough stones and crags", the needs of the other are not the focus of interest.

Bentham's plan at this time was that Poor Law officials be authorized to apprehend and incarcerate beggars in the grim workhouses he envisaged (Cowherd 94). Wordsworth, on the contrary, felt that from such beggars others

have perchance receiv'd,  
(A thing more precious far than all that books  
Or the solitudes of love can do!)

The first mild touch of sympathy and thought,  
In which they found their kindred with a world  
Where want and sorrow were.

("OCB" 103-08)

One might ask what that sense of "kindred" amounts to - it seems restricted to an ability to gain some awareness of "a world/Where want and sorrow" are. Once again, attention is directed only at the self, not at the other.

"The Old Cumberland Beggar" falls into two quite dissimilar parts. The first 66 lines, incorporating the 25 lines of the earlier description with some minor alterations, remain an external description, obviously sympathetic but attributing no particular feelings to the old man. He is seen to be aged, helpless, his eyes turned downwards as he shuffles along at snail's pace. From line 67 onwards, the speaker justifies the usefulness of the beggar to those who would remove him and his kind from the public ways. Firstly, the old beggar evokes "sympathy and thought" (106) and disposes the community to "virtue and true goodness" (97). Furthermore, he, as one of the most reduced of creatures, allows the "poorest poor" (140) to feel beneficent and to feel that, by being charitable, they are laying up treasure in heaven. She who gives, "press'd herself/By her own wants" (149-50) with "exhilarated heart,/Sits by her fire and builds her hope in heav'n" (153-4). Whereas Adventures on Salisbury Plain and "No spade for leagues" had also highlighted the mutual sympathy found among the poor, here the focus is on the self-satisfaction to be gained by showing sympathy. Wordsworth attributes the pleasures of beneficence to natural bonds of sympathy because "we have all of us one human heart" (146). Such views were common to both radicals and conservatives. Burke famously talked of the "little platoon we belong to in society" which is "the first link in the series by which we proceed to a love to our country, and to mankind" (Burke: *Raffety* 4: 50), while Paine in The Age of Reason argued that the "moral duty of man consists in imitating the moral goodness and beneficence of God, manifested in the creation towards all his creatures" (4: 83). The popularization of such sentiments and their association with questions of charity is nicely captured in Wollstonecraft's stories about Mrs Mason:

One being is made dependent on another,

that love and forbearance may soften  
the human heart, and that linked together  
by necessity, and the exercise of the social  
affections, the whole family on earth might  
have a fellow feeling for each other. By  
these means we improve one another; but there  
is no real inferiority.

(51)

And again:

we are all dependent on each other;  
and this dependence is wisely ordered  
by our Heavenly Father, to call forth  
many virtues, to exercise the best  
affections of the human heart, and fix  
them into habits.

(71)

Ann Bermingham reminds us that pictorial depictions of cottagers giving food to beggars were common in the 1790s. They "suggested that the rural poor could still be cared for within a self-sufficient system of individual acts of charity" (82). Certainly the old caring ways could still be found, as witness Dorothy's Journal entry for 22 May 1802:

We drank tea at a farmhouse. The woman was very kind. There was a woman with 3 children travelling from Workington to Manchester. The woman served them liberally. Afterwards she said that she never suffered any to go away without a trifle "sec as we have".

(Journals 149)

Yet Wordsworth had shown himself equally aware of the increasingly uncaring society he lived in, where one can stand "homeless near a thousand homes" or pine and want for food "near

a thousand tables" (Salisbury Plain 386-7), where a baker's cart passes one by, indifferent to the hunger of children (the "waggon does not care for us"), where famine and war cause many of the poor to "cease to be" (The Ruined Cottage 143). In the light of his former obvious awareness of the reality of such conditions, one can only conclude that, although properly averse to the very real horrors of the workhouse, Wordsworth is finally sentimental about the alternative of laissez-faire social welfare. A noticeable change from earlier poems lies in the unequivocal attribution of feelings of peace and calm to the old man. In Adventures on Salisbury Plain, "The Baker's Cart" fragment, The Ruined Cottage and "The Discharged Soldier", it is suggested that what might appear to be peace and calm, might more probably be disinterest and alienation. What begins as a sensitive description of an aged beggar, becomes a justification for his continued presence in society on the grounds that he benefits others - although he may well be incapable of enjoying the self-satisfaction which generally accompanies beneficence. The definite article in the poem's title points to an individualized portrait but the poem itself becomes a generalized plea on behalf of all such beggars.

The final two lines of the poem read:

As in the eye of Nature he has liv'd,  
So in the eye of Nature let him die.

(188-90)

In repeating "the eye of Nature", Wordsworth puts his faith in a benevolent omniscience aware of the existence of the indigent old man. Yet the phrase calls to mind less pleasant situations like the "eye of hunger" in "No spade for leagues" (or the "eye of a storm"). It can suggest a sense of merely being in Nature (rather than being cared for in Nature) which, in the old man's case, might be a mixed blessing. Wordsworth has such faith in the moral and spiritual benefits of being in Nature that the practicalities of enduring "frosty air and winter snows" (167) or the wind "that sweeps the heath" (168) are not addressed. The



plea to allow the Beggar to roam freely in the countryside is quite deliberately blurred with the impression that his well-being is guaranteed by the beneficent presence of nature, for the "eye of Nature" takes on slightly different implications by means of its repetition. At first it is seemingly literal (in the sight of Nature), but on repetition, the metaphorical overtones deepen (in the care of Nature). During the same months of early 1798 that he was composing "OCB", he composed "The Discharged Soldier", which was never published independently although it was worked into Book Four of the 1805 Prelude (see Chapters 6 and 8). The ex-soldier, having been reproved by the beneficent speaker for not actively seeking relief, "with the same ghastly mildness in his look" (the oxymoron pointing to the ambiguity of the ex-soldier's words), replies: "My trust is in the God of Heaven/And in the eye of him that passes me" (162-3). Beyond the trust in God, the practical onus is placed squarely on the conscience of those who encounter the ex-soldier. In addition to the major irony of "OCB" (the plea to allow an old man, who is also a beggar and thus dependent on the beneficence of others, to retain his independence) this poem, "The Discharged Soldier", serves to highlight another irony in "OCB" - the uncertainty of guaranteeing that those who are brought face to face with the needy will necessarily respond adequately. It is almost as if the ex-soldier is posing a challenge to the pieties of an age which asserted the need to discriminate, by minute observation, between the deserving and the undeserving of charity. It is in these ambiguities that the difference between the two poems lies. The poem Wordsworth chose to publish in 1800 was the less troubled, more generally acceptable "The Old Cumberland Beggar".

The final poem that I will look at from this volume is "Michael, a Pastoral", which was the poem that Wordsworth chose to conclude the volume (Early Letters 257). This is significant for, like "Tintern Abbey", which concludes the first volume, "Michael, a Pastoral" is a poem which consciously and unconsciously points the way forward.

It seems that Wordsworth was determined to counter the absurdities of conventional eighteenth-century pastoral. Butler

and Green publish early stanzas related to the poem (319-20):

That pastoral ballad is sung far and near.  
 So thoughtless a falsehood it grieves me to hear  
 And therefore I now will relate  
 What old Michael once told while on a loose stone  
 One sweet summer's morning depress'd and alone  
 By the side of his sheepfold he sat[e].

Such a forthright statement about the falsity of conventional pastoral is omitted in the final version which restricts itself to the pointed subtitle "a Pastoral" and reveals its serious nature in the unconventional choice of blank verse for such humble subject matter rather than the earlier anapaestic tetrameters (Butler and Green 466).

It has long been recognised that, in Jacobus' words, Wordsworth moved away "from the social victim...towards the human being and his individual capacity for suffering" (Tradition 147-8). One is puzzled by Jacobus' distinction between the "social victim" and the "human being", and by her privileging of the "human being". Jacobus further argues that "it is not that he has become a less humane poet, but that his vision is directed beyond topical issues to the permanent themes of loss, change and mortality" (Tradition 159). She tends to see this development towards "permanent themes" as a positive one. More recently, critics have noted with some disapproval the fact that Wordsworth seems no longer concerned to emphasise flaws in the social system that lead to the predicament of, for example, Michael, or, later, the Leechgatherer (Simpson Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 145, Patterson 275, Sampson 50). This deliberately apolitical stance is apparent in a revealing letter that Wordsworth wrote to Longman on 18 December 1800, when it was clear that Coleridge would not complete "Christabel" and more copy was needed to flesh out volume two:

I had other poems by me of my own which  
 would have been sufficient for our purpose

but some of them being connected with political subjects I judged that they would be injurious to the sale of the Work.

(Butler and Green 30)

His newly written work ("Michael") he was sure would be "highly serviceable to the Sale" (Butler and Green 30). Yet Wordsworth felt that "Michael" was sufficiently topical a work to draw to the attention of Charles James Fox as being comparable in kind, if not in degree, with his (Fox's) efforts to stem certain evils "with which the country is labouring" (Early Letters 262). According to Wordsworth, "Michael" demonstrated how a "little tract of land serves as a kind of permanent rallying point for their [proprietors of small estates] domestic feelings" (262). With the loss of this means of maintaining "the blessings of independent domestic life" comes the loss of that essential "spirit of independence", than which "no greater curse can befall [sic] a land" (261). On 18 May 1800 Dorothy had noted in her Journal:

He [John Fisher] talked much about the alteration in the times, and observed that in a short time there would be only two ranks of people, the very rich and the very poor, "for those who have small estates," says he, "are forced to sell, and all the land goes into one hand".

(Journals 40)

The belief that a stake in the country, however small, was the source of pride and contentment was frequently expressed. Arthur Young, in "An Inquiry into the Propriety of Applying Wastes to the Better Maintenance and Support of the Poor" (1801), states:

Nothing can be clearer than the vast importance which all these poor people, scattered as they are through so many

counties...attach to the object of  
possessing land, though no more than to  
set a cottage on.

(qtd.in Snell 213)

As late as 1852 Somerville can still attest to the vital importance of even access to land, although this is stated in slightly more pugnacious terms:

In my travels, whenever I find a common...  
I talk to the people living on and around  
it of the benefit they would derive from its  
enclosure and careful cultivation: and in all  
cases they reply with a bitterness expressive  
of no milder belief than that they think me an  
agent of some one about to robb [sic] them,  
about to invade their little privileges, and  
despoil them of an independence which, even if  
not worth a penny, they would still cherish,  
merely because it was a soil other than the  
bare highway, on which they could set the soles  
of their feet in defiance of the rich man, their  
landed neighbour.

(qtd.in Snell 227)

Certainly, it is in order to secure the land for his son, Luke,  
that Michael sends this beloved and only child to the city:

if these fields of ours  
Should pass into a stranger's hand, I think  
That I could not lie quiet in my grave...  
.....  
.....the land  
Shall not go from us, and it shall be free,  
He shall possess it free as is the wind  
That passes over it.

(240-2,254-7)

Yet the poem does not elaborate on the causes of the threat to the land, nor why the fields that Michael inherited from his parents were "burthen'd" (384). It must be emphasised, too, that Michael is not an indigent vagrant. He is, initially, and however precariously, a small landowner (a Lakeland "statesman"). Only the most reactionary would find the sentiments in the poem radical. Because Wordsworth is not concerned to explore the causes of Michael's economic problems and because Michael dies before there is any need to show the probable state of indigence he would have descended into, the interest is quite clearly not on dispossession per se or in the situation of the hopeless and helpless of former poems. Rather, the emphasis lies on the extraordinary capacity to endure the loss of all that one holds dear, be it child or patrimonial lands, "[t]here is a comfort in the strength of love;/ 'Twill make a thing endurable, which else/ Would break the heart" (457-9). This is something relevant to all, regardless of financial status. The poem itself is a tribute to Michael, it gives permanence to the transient - be that the ownership of land or human life. Like the unfinished sheepfold, it remains, however inadequate, as a testimony to the human spirit. The poem also implies that Michael's strength of love is linked inextricably with his closeness to nature - that strength of such a kind is to be found where and when one lives the One Life, working in unison with the rhythms of nature, rather than resisting them. In the words of the 1802 Addition to the Preface, man and nature are "essentially adapted to each other" (Butler and Green 752).

These lyrical ballads are also distinguished from the earlier poems about the marginalised poor by the growing importance of the subjective. The "I" that appears in The Ruined Cottage is in many respects a convention. There is not much sense of an individualized personality and certainly not much evidence of autobiographical confession. The "I" of "Old Man Travelling" and "The Last of the Flock" is merely the one who questions. In the poems added in 1800 one begins to detect a change. Undoubtedly, "A narrow girdle" is autobiographical, and the focus is as much on the speaker and his companions as it is on the

wasted peasant whom the trio encounter. Because of the polemical nature of "The Old Cumberland Beggar", the speaker, although initially a relatively conventionalized "I" who technically introduces the topic ("I saw an aged Beggar in my walk"), assumes the force of personality of someone speaking in his own voice, not unlike the clear sense of an individualized speaker in "Tintern Abbey". By the time of "Michael, a Pastoral", there is further development. For the speaker in this poem is a poet, and the first 39 lines are an explanation of the importance to the speaker as poet of what he is about to relate. What some person or incident means to him is what will increasingly become the raison d'être of Wordsworth's poetry. In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800) he spells this out:

I should mention one other circumstance  
which distinguishes these Poems from the  
popular Poetry of the day; it is this,  
that the feeling therein developed gives  
importance to the action and situation, and  
not the action and situation to the feeling.

(Butler and Green 746)

From this statement we can see that his interest is going to be less an attempt to understand or articulate the situations and concomitant feelings of the persons in his poems than to observe or analyze his own feelings about what he observes and experiences. This self-consciousness is, of course, the essence of what has been categorised as the romantic mode. In the work of David Caspar Friedrich, some of whose paintings are often considered ideally illustrative of Wordsworth's poetic mood, we can observe the same device rendered pictorially. John Updike has noted how Friedrich frequently includes in the foreground of his landscapes, a Ruchenfigur (a "back figure", a figure seen from behind) which "inserts the act of viewing into the picture, and weaves mood and reflection into the natural reality" (11). The "I" in many of Wordsworth's poems functions in much the same way for we, the readers, are implicated in the reactions and feelings

of the speaker who is reflecting upon a viewed object, whether person or scene. In a number of the poems published in 1807, we will see that this tendency to use the observed "other" (often still a poverty-stricken figure) in an emblematic way in order to understand the self, increases.

The Preface published with the 1800 edition tends to substantiate these claims of crucial changes in Wordsworth's interests and attitudes. The 1798 Advertisement stresses aspects of language and style that might seem unconventional:

The [majority of the following poems] were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure.

(Butler and Green 738)

The first paragraph of the 1800 Preface subtly alters this class emphasis:

It [the first Volume of these Poems] was published, as an experiment which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart.

(Butler and Green 741)

Barbara Johnson calls this "a gesture of dehistoricization and universalization" which replaces the class-specific "language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society" with "the real language of men" (92). Such a change of emphasis would be in keeping with other emphases in the Preface on the common denominator of human lives rather than on any specific experience



of particularized groups (e.g the vagrant poor). Focus on questions of language (now the "real language of men" or the "very language of men", Butler and Green 741,747) itself changes to a focus on questions of topic and, in most of the Preface, the subject matter and not the style is emphasised. The major shift between the Advertisement of 1798 and the Preface of 1800 can be seen as a shift from the claim that the poems are experiments in language and style to a claim that the poems experiment with the presentation of the potential interest of apparently ordinary incidents. At least this was the stated reason (stated by both Wordsworth and Coleridge), although Wordsworth's surprise at the taunt of triviality might have led to his repeated articulation of the necessity of bringing the proper feelings to bear on the incidents. Coleridge, in a letter of 9 October 1800 to Humphry Davy, writes about the decision to exclude "Christabel":

the poem was in direct opposition to  
the very purpose for which the Lyrical  
Ballads were published - viz - an  
experiment to see how far those passions,  
which alone give any value to extraordinary  
Incidents, were capable of interesting, in  
and for themselves, in the incidents of Common  
Life.

(Letters 1: 631)

Wordsworth in the Preface which Coleridge "pressed" him to write (Butler and Green 28), concurs:

The principal object then which I proposed  
to myself in these Poems was to make the  
incidents of common life interesting by  
tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously,  
the primary laws of our nature.

(Butler and Green 743)



Terms such as "common life", "primary laws of our nature", are as indeterminate as "real [or very] language of men". Does "common" mean "common to all" or "low and rustic"? Wordsworth seems to fluctuate between the two possible meanings although "primary laws of our nature" seems to emphasise our common humanity. The phrase "low and rustic" is itself superseded by the phrase "rural occupations", a less patronising, more descriptive phrase (Butler and Green 743). The emphasis falls increasingly on what we all share. The purpose of the poems is "to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature" (Butler and Green 745). He then refers to specific poems, poems like "The Mad Mother", "The Poem of the Forsaken Indian" (sic) and, most telling, "The Old Man Travelling", which might be thought to exemplify particular socio-political experience, and emphasises instead the ways in which these poems demonstrate general laws of our human nature (Butler and Green 745-6). Towards the end of the Preface he points out that he has explained "why I have written in verse, and why I have chosen subjects from common life, and endeavoured to bring my language near to the real language of men" - repeating those slippery terms "common" and "real" (Butler and Green 757).

Certainly the emphasis on a shared humanity was in itself an unusual one in a period when the gentleman was to be clearly distinguished from the common man, and one must acknowledge how much Wordsworth's views would smack to many of Jacobinism. Cone points out that it was a mark of English Jacobinism that men were important because they were men (214). Yet one must be wary of confusing the nineteenth-century use of "man", "men", "people" with modern notions of democratic equality. Henry Brougham in 1831 distinguishes between the "people" and the "mob":

If there is the mob there is the people  
also....By the people, I repeat, I mean  
the middle classes, the wealth and  
intelligence of the country, the glory  
of the British name.

(qtd.in Dicey 185)

However, Wordsworth obviously adhered to the notion, which was to become the mark of most Romantic writers, that pre-industrial peasants or craftsmen exemplified uncorrupted virtues, and that their language, customs, stories were "the true repository of the soul of the people" (Hobsbawm Revolution 266). Both idealising the peasant and stressing our common humanity tend to conflict with an attempt to expose particular socio-political practices which are detrimental to the well-being of groups or individuals. Certainly an interest in what links us rather than in what divides us became of increasing importance to Wordsworth. Years later, writing to Allan Cunningham in November 1823, he was to identify this as an abiding interest:

I have endeavoured to dwell with truth  
upon those points of human nature in which  
all men resemble each other, rather than on  
those accidents of manners and character  
produced by time and circumstances.

(Later Years 1: 127)

This must not be confused with egalitarianism. Wordsworth writes this some years after his categorical statements about the advantages of government being in the hands of the landed aristocracy rather than there being any "flaming democracy" (Second Address to the Freeholders of Westmorland (1818), Owen and Smyser 3: 183). In these two addresses it would seem that "accidents of manners and character" are of vital importance in differentiating people. Yet, in the 1823 letter quoted above, he highlights his interest in those aspects of human nature "in which all men resemble each other", which could merely end up being those things that make us all human rather than animal. To emphasise that we are all basically the same can be a radical idea in a hierarchical society, but to do so at the cost of ignoring socio-political inequalities can also be deeply insensitive. To avoid acknowledgement of the very real differences created by political practices can be to do a grave injustice to the oppressed. To explain away all differences as

"accidents of manners and character produced by time" with only the word "circumstances" vaguely alluding to actual political practices, is to fail to acknowledge the manifest inequalities which override any sense of shared humanity in the lived experience of the majority of people.

It would thus seem as if the years 1798-9 were in many ways a watershed for Wordsworth as a variety of conditions produced changes in his personal and poetic life. The demonstration of Napoleon's imperialist designs following the invasion of Switzerland, the wretched months of "exile" in Goslar, the increase in working-class radicalism and anti-war fervour just as Wordsworth was discovering the need to support the idea of war against Napoleon, the tightening up of controls against radical publications - all these apparently diffuse factors might well have contributed to his changing attitudes. His own past, present and future become of absorbing interest as he enters his third decade. As for his hitherto paramount subject, the poor and marginalized, it becomes less frequently the subject of his poetry and, when treated, the approach is very different (e.g. "Ruth"), or markedly the result of a very different set of values (e.g. "OCB"). From the emphasis in 1793-5 on the causes and iniquities of their indigence, he starts to ask questions about how such deprived persons survive at all. Finally he is seen to be most intrigued by what he can learn from such examples of extraordinary endurance and resilience. For, although he now emphasises how we are all subject to loss and change, this is a condition most worrisome to the poet who, he feels, is extremely vulnerable and marginal in a world of "getting and spending". It is such thoughts that most often beset him as the new century begins and it is these concerns that form the basis of his poetic dialogue with Coleridge during the years 1802-4, a dialogue which spawned, among other poems, the one which most reveals the distance he has travelled since first documenting poverty - "Resolution and Independence".

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE PLENITUDE OF GRASMERE 1802 -1807

I now see no newspapers, not even a weekly one, so that I am in utter ignorance of what is doing in the world.

(Wordsworth to Sharp, February 1805)

...but I think it worthwhile to tell you that the Wife of the Tenant now in the Cottage adjoining the High Road, I was informed, bears a bad Character: she was tenant to a person at Stainton under somewhat similar circumstances, and he discharged her because she was accustomed to harbour Potters and Vagrants and turn her beasts into his Fields. She is now more conveniently situated for a repetition of like offences, and there appears to be reason to tremble for your Haystacks as any Depredations thereon will be laid upon the sheep in the field.

(Wordsworth to Richard Wordsworth, November 1805)

Dorothy Wordsworth's Grasmere Journal, which covers the period from May 1800 to January 1803, is peppered with references to the vagrant poor whom she and William encountered and to whom they gave alms, generally after eliciting some information about their circumstances. It is clear that the fact of poverty was constantly before their eyes. Yet these years are also the years of Wordsworth's diminishing interest in treating the topic of poverty, a topic which forms less and less the subject of the many lyrics he wrote during this period, most of which appeared in the important two volume Poems of 1807 which, according to Curtis, is the "last independent collection of new short poems"

that he published, and the result of his "new experiments since the time of Lyrical Ballads" (39). These volumes contain 115 poems, only six of which have any reference to poverty. During these same years he completed the 13 books of The Prelude (1805). I will look, in this final chapter, at the treatment of poverty and the individual poor in these two major productions. During these years Wordsworth became both husband and father and achieved a modicum of financial security through the long-delayed settlement of the money owing to the Wordsworth siblings from the Lowther estate. In many ways Wordsworth's friendship with Sir George and Lady Beaumont, which began in 1803, is a telling demonstration of the changes that we see in him and his mode of living during these years (Gill, Wordsworth 218).

1801 was so filled with visitors and visitings that it is small wonder that during this year Wordsworth did not compose any new work but, rather, tinkered with the Pedlar and worked a little on adding to the passages which form what we now call the 1799 Prelude (Gill, Wordsworth 192-3). This fallow period probably contributed to the rich harvest of 1802, an annus mirabilis filled with both professional and personal achievements. It was on the propitious day of 14 February that Wordsworth apparently saw Mary Hutchinson and their decision to marry was made (Gill, Wordsworth 204), for ten days later, Coleridge writes to his wife about the forthcoming marriage as a certainty (Letters 2: 788). Perhaps it was this that contributed to Wordsworth's creative output during these months for, by the time he and Dorothy left Grasmere en route for France on 9 July, he had written the Addition to the Preface, and 30 lyrics which include some of his most central works. Two other events were to be of major significance. The first was the signing of the Peace of Amiens on 27 March which would enable William to visit France and, in person, sort matters out with Annette Vallon and their daughter Caroline, in all kinds of ways a vital preparation for marriage to Mary. The second event was the fortuitous death of Sir James Lowther in May. His heir, Sir William, was, in Dorothy's words, "a just man and disposed to repair as much as lies in his power, the damage done by his

predecessor" (Early Letters 311). When the Wordsworths' claims were presented on the 8 October, four days after William married Mary, they amounted to £10,388. 6s. 8d. (Gill, Wordsworth 207). This promise of financial reimbursement would certainly have further eased the path to marriage and all the responsibilities that it entailed, for Mary's relatives were inclined to feel that she was marrying someone without any real prospects, no better than a "vagabond" (letter of Mary, qtd. in Gill, Wordsworth 206).

The marriage and the inheritance might well have lain behind the sense one gets of Wordsworth becoming increasingly comfortable, conservative and conventional. Coleridge, although by this time a rather erratic and envious witness, might well have detected this as early as October 1803 when he writes in a letter to Thomas Poole:

I saw him more and more benetted [sic]  
in hypochondriacal Fancies, living wholly  
among Devotees - having every the minutest  
Thing, almost his very Eating and Drinking,  
done for him by his Sister, or Wife - and I  
trembled, lest a Film should rise, and  
thicken on his moral Eye.

(Letters 2: 1013)

Certainly the moments of terrifying alienation of the 1790s were, thankfully, in the past, and yet it was perhaps those that had sharpened Wordsworth's empathy with the outcasts of society. Wordsworth seems to reveal an increasing distaste for what Boyd Hilton, in discussing the Evangelicals, has called "the loneliness of liberty, [and instead displayed] a craving for authority and obedience" (205). In late 1802, in his sonnet in praise of the sonnet form, which was to form the Prefatory Sonnet to his sonnet selection in 1807, he speaks feelingly of those who "have felt the weight of too much liberty" (14), a sentiment echoed in "Ode to Duty" which, according to Curtis, was probably basically composed early in 1804 (104):

Me this uncharter'd freedom tires;  
 I feel the weight of chance desires:  
 My hopes no more must change their name,  
 I long for a repose which ever is the same.

(37-40)

After a decade of debate over the respective merits of rights and duties, it is impossible not to acknowledge the significance of this paean to duty for it would tend to reveal an ideological position. By 1809, in a letter to Poole, Wordsworth judges Coleridge as wanting in this essential moral ingredient:

In fact he has no voluntary power of  
 mind whatsoever, nor is he capable of  
 acting under any constraint of duty or  
 moral obligation.

(Middle Years 321)

As the majority of Wordsworth's poems of these years reveal, he becomes absorbed in the personal, the family, the immediate community of Grasmere. This nest-building tendency is a completely predictable part of being a new spouse and parent, and it is much apparent in the plethora of poems in the 1807 volumes which document the minutiae of private life. A whole section is entitled "Moods of my own Mind", and poems like "The Kitten and the Falling Leaves", three poems on "The Small Celandine", two poems addressed "To a Butterfly", were the very poems castigated by the reviewers as trivial.

Another trait which becomes noticeable during these years is Wordsworth's increasing sensitivity to criticism. W.J.B. Owen argues that this sensitivity "begins to make itself felt in 1802" and he refers to the June 1802 letter to John Wilson justifying "The Idiot Boy" (103). There is the letter of the same month to Mary and Sara Hutchinson in which Sara is roundly admonished for her criticisms of "The Leechgatherer", both by William and Dorothy, "everything is tedious when one does not read with the feelings of the Author" (Early Letters 306). Yet Wordsworth's



sensitivity to criticism cannot easily be separated from his conviction that his ideas about poetry were as valid as they were unfamiliar. Much of the fervour of the additions to the Preface for the 1802 edition of Lyrical Ballads stems from this conviction:

But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men. And with what are they connected? Undoubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations of the elements and the appearances of the visible universe; with storm and sun-shine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow.

The poet thinks and feels in the spirit of the passions of men. How, then can his language differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel vividly and see clearly?

(Butler and Green 753-4, 754)

Besides this hammering home of his poetic programme, one senses in these additions a change in emphasis from rustics to "men" and, more particularly, to the poet himself:

...the language of such Poetry as I am recommending is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men; that this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself form a distinction far greater than

would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind.

(750)

What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men.

(751)

The poet is a representative man and thus, plausibly, his own subject. This was yet another aspect of his increasing subjectivity. Linked to this concern for the self are indications of Wordsworth coming to the belief that self-correction is the necessary precondition of any social amelioration. Instead of castigating the socio-political conditions which create distress, one should recognise one's own need for personal improvement. Alan Liu detects this belief at the heart of the "Ode to Duty"; "How can Man make the world more secure? The answer is that he - and first of all the poet - must correct himself personally" (444). Such views were certainly in the air and form the basis of much Evangelical thought (Boyd 8). Instead of seeking the perfect structures in which one might find perfection, there is an interest in perfecting the individual so that the structures will become perfect. A concern for self-correction was apparent in both conservatives and radicals. Whereas the conservative would probably argue the need for self-correction before one demands that the structures are reformed, for one ought not to blame the structures for one's own faults, radicals (like Shelley) would argue, in 1821, the need to rule the "empire of himself" in order to free oneself from the "herds whom tyranny makes tame" (Shelley "Political Greatness", Complete Works 642) - self-improvement as an empowering rather than a humbling mode.

The settlement of the claim on the Lowther estate must undoubtedly have had some effect in making life a little more comfortable, even though the birth of five children within seven years meant that economies had long to be practised. Benjamin Robert Haydon, although a witness prone to dramatic exaggerations, notes in his Diary on 16 May 1845:

The great change took place in Wordsworth when Lord Lonsdale paid him 10,000 [sic] he owed his [Wordsworth's] Father, who had been a Steward to his Lordship or his father [sic]. Hazlitt used to say this too.

(5: 443)

In a letter of 20 February 1805 to Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth summarized the facts of his financial position to date:

Lord Lonsdale then died, and the present Lord Lowther paid to my father's estate £8500. Of this sum I believe £1800 apiece will come to my sister and myself; at least, would have come: but £3000 was lent out to our poor brother, I mean taken from the whole sum, which was about £1200 more than his share, which £1200 belonged to Dorothy and me. This £1200 we freely lent him: whether it was ensured or no, I do not know; but I dare say it will prove to be the case; we did not however stipulate for its being insured.

(Early Letters 450-1)

W.W. Douglas maintained that "Wordsworth's interest in money was one of the determining factors in his life" (qtd.in Mellor 54), although Mellor qualifies this by suggesting that "actual property" was the Wordsworths' greater concern (54). Certainly a poem like "Michael, a Pastoral" reveals the intensity of the

belief in the value of owning one's own property, although the Wordsworths would never technically "own" any of their homes.

The friendship with the Beaumonts perhaps most clearly demonstrates that the Wordsworths were acquiring conventional respectability. Sir George Beaumont was a generous patron of the arts but also very much a conservative Tory in his politics. The first letter we have from Wordsworth to Beaumont dates from 14 October 1803, and it is a painfully awkward thank-you for his gift of a small estate at Applethwaite near Keswick and two of Beaumont's own paintings. In the same letter, Wordsworth mentions donning his "military apparel" with the Grasmere volunteers. This detail demonstrates both Wordsworth's keenness to come to the "defence of the country" and his awareness of the sort of topic which would be of interest to Beaumont (Early Letters 338-42). A gift of money early in 1805 produced another stilted thank-you letter in which Wordsworth takes great pains to justify the acceptance of patronage, and gives, among other reasons, this revealing one, "I am strangely unfit for exertion as far as it is mere labour in the way of [a] job for money" (460). The chasm between the relatively privileged Wordsworth and the indigent labourer could not be more evident. Although Dorothy kept up a regular correspondence with Lady Beaumont, William's often expressed dislike of letter writing means that there are fewer letters between him and Sir George, although the tone of these becomes progressively more relaxed and confident as he shares his views on matters literary and aesthetic. From October 1806 till June 1807, the Wordsworth household lived at Hall Farm on the Beaumont's Coleorton estate in Leicestershire. In October 1805 Wordsworth had written a meandering letter accepting this invitation and discussing the aesthetics of landscaping and building in the light of Sir George's plans to build on the Coleorton estate. In this letter we find the following remarks which show a strangely insensitive privileging of the aesthetic and a lack of concern for the realities of forced removals:

I was glad to hear from Lady Beaumont  
that you did not think of removing your

Village. Of course much here will depend upon circumstances; above all, with what kind of inhabitants, from the nature of the employments in that district, the Village is likely to be stocked. But for my part, strip my Neighbourhood of human beings, and I should think it one of the greatest privations I could undergo. You have all the poverty of solitude, nothing of its elevation.

(Early Letters 527-8)

This passage has some very revealing expressions. He talks of "your village", which, of course, is an accurate reflection of the power wielded by the aristocracy over the villagers. The word "stocked" is a revealing choice when referring to people. Finally, the idea that those who remove the inhabitants from their homes will feel "privations" and suffer "poverty" rather than that the forcibly removed inhabitants will suffer such, is, if nothing else, extraordinarily thoughtless phrasing. It is clear that Wordsworth is now moving in circles far removed from the plight of the indigent, or the frustrations of the unenfranchised, powerless, and unemployed.

Yet, as recently as the winter of 1798/9, he had composed six fragments, two of which meditate on the eroding effects of poverty on the mind and spirit (Butler and Green 307, 311). The 43-lined "There is a law severe of penury" posits the belief that penury destroys the joie-de-vivre ("terminates the hour of careless joy", 9) and, more damagingly, results in a subsequent loss to the adult of even the memory of what should have been "that sweet season" (16). The second extract, a mere 24 lines, "For let the impediment be what it may", treats of another less obvious but nonetheless damaging consequence of poverty, the inability of the poor to give succour to others and thereby participate in the natural bonds of sympathy which, Wordsworth feels, ideally link us all. "Is the name of friend/Known to the poor man? Whence is he to hear/The sweet creative voice of

gratitude?" (22-4). Some months earlier, "The Old Cumberland Beggar" had suggested that the poor man has an important role to play as a catalyst for others' generosity but, in this poem, the damaging feeling of being useless is seen to be a possible consequence of indigence. The freedom of voluntary action is denied to the very poor and, with it, that psychologically desirable control over one's own life. Both these fragments reveal an unusual and perceptive insight into some of the more hidden costs of poverty, and it is insights like these, which found their place in The Excursion Book Eight and The Prelude Book Twelve respectively, that reveal the seriousness with which Wordsworth viewed poverty. A paragraph of approximately 30 lines, in Home at Grasmere, echoes these insights that "extreme penury" is "[m]ortal to body and the heaven-born mind" (Darlington 444,446). Yet, Wordsworth in this predominantly celebratory poem, asserts that "extreme penury is here unknown" (444). This conclusion must be set against the continuous mention in Dorothy's Journal, kept at Grasmere during the years 1800-1803, of vagrant beggars. Certainly she and William gave alms, but how can one thereby conclude that "they who want are not too great a weight/For those who can relieve" (447-8)? The deep-seated and unsolved problem of poverty is manifest rather in the glimpse of endemic malnourishment in one of Dorothy's entries:

When I asked him if he got enough  
to eat, he looked surprized, [sic]  
and said "Nay". He was 7 years old  
but seemed not more than 5.

(Journals 49)

It is in no way to undermine the seriousness with which Wordsworth habitually treated poverty to note that the lyrics written during the spring of 1802 do reflect, as had the lyrics of the 1800 Lyrical Ballads, some crucial changes in the handling of the topic of poverty. Of the five poems in the 1807 volumes which have even a tangential link with poverty, all, except "Gipsies", were written in 1802. Three of the poems, "The Sailor's

Mother", "Alice Fell", and "Beggars", were written within four consecutive days (11-14 March). The Isabella Fenwick note to "The Sailor's Mother" tells that Wordsworth encountered this woman in 1800 and stresses the accuracy of the details. "Her appearance was exactly as here described, and such was her account, nearly to the letter" (Curtis 404). The poem is reminiscent of "Old Man Travelling" in that both poems involve the speaker encountering another, and, having asked a question, receiving a reply which will undoubtedly necessitate some kind of rethinking of the initial assumptions revealed. In neither poem, however, is there a focus on the speaker's likely reassessment of the validity of his initial assumptions. Instead, the crucial information drawn from the traveller lingers with us beyond the poem's actual ending. In previous poems about the poor, it had been their destitute or aged or helpless state which attracted the attention and sympathy of the speaker. Here it is the appeal which the figure makes to the speaker's aesthetic sensibilities which is focused upon. The sailor's mother displays stoicism and dignity in the way she copes with the loss of her beloved son and cares for his one remaining possession. The speaker compares her to a strong and dignified Roman matron because of her "mien and gait" (6). This aesthetic judgement, based on externals, is shown up as facile, not by being proved untrue, but by the revelation of a far deeper strength and dignity in her coping with the depths of loss and loneliness unguessed at by the speaker. The critique of the speaker's tendency to be attracted by aesthetic factors is subtly conveyed. In the first stanza, aspects of her appearance are related apparently objectively. It is in the second stanza that subtle pointers are given to the speaker's limitations and pomposity:

The ancient Spirit is not dead;  
 Old times, thought I, are breathing there;  
 Proud was I that my country bred  
 Such strength, a dignity so fair:  
 She begg'd an alms, like one in poor estate;  
 I look'd at her again, nor did my pride abate.

(7-12)



Phrases like "[t]hat ancient Spirit", "[o]ld times", "my country bred", enhance the sense of facile generalizations. The crafty placing of "thought I" prepares us for a likely need to rethink the situation. The strange use of "like" (11) points up the speaker's tendency to sentimentalize the woman - to him she is like one merely assuming the role of a beggar woman, like the beautiful society ladies whom Gainsborough posed as beggar women. The begging does however seem to jolt him ("I look'd at her again") but he is reassured in his "pride" - another telling word revealing the "feel-good" feelings she inspires in him rather than any adequate understanding of her plight. Further irony is directed at the speaker in stanza three:

When from these lofty thoughts I woke  
 With the first word I had to spare  
 I said to her....

(13-15)

The phrase "lofty thoughts" underlines the self-satisfaction of those thoughts. From such satisfying musings the speaker returns to reality ("I woke") but only to compound his insensitivity by giving her, not any coins, but merely words that he "had to spare" (14). Her response is immediate and frank and totally without self pity (17). Her concern and care are for her son's singing bird, not for herself. Coleridge, in Biographia Literaria, noted the difference between the style and tone of the first two and a half stanzas and that of the stanzas in which the woman speaks ("an abrupt down-fall" 210). He does not, however, notice that this difference is crucial - the simplicity of the woman's words shows up the self-regarding pomposity of the speaker. The honesty with which Wordsworth exposes the propensity we have to judge others worthy because they appeal to our sensibilities is particularly noteworthy when we realize that he very probably discerned such tendencies in himself and his circle. An entry in Dorothy's Journal for 28 November 1801 reads:

I should have mentioned that yesterday

when we went with Wm. to Mr Luff's we  
 met a soldier and his wife, he with a  
 child in his arms, she carrying a bundle  
 and his gun - we gave them some halfpence,  
 it was such a pretty sight.

(85)

In this poem the appeal is quite openly that of female beauty. John Barrell notes that George Morland's biographer, William Collins (Memoirs of a Painter 1805), "throws an interesting doubt on the submerged sexual implications of painting the deserving female poor...as 'appealing' in both senses of the word" (100).

The two other poems written within these few days, and "Resolution and Independence" written in May, appear in a group of five "Poems Composed During a Tour, chiefly on Foot" which formed the second section of the first volume of 1807. Curtis points out that this tour "is an imaginary one... made up of bits and pieces of many literal walks and encounters on familiar soil...the climax of this internalized journey is 'Resolution and Independence'" (38). The pedestrian nature of the tour prepares one for the encounters with humble travellers.

In her entry for Friday 12 March 1802, Dorothy writes, "William finished his poem of The Singing Bird....In the evening after tea William wrote Alice Fell" (122). On the next day, "William finished Alice Fell, and then he wrote the poem of The Beggar Woman" ("Beggars") (122). "Alice Fell" was the versified account of an actual incident which had befallen Mr Graham who "urged me to put it into verse, for humanity's sake" (Curtis 408). Dorothy's retelling of Mr Graham's account, which appears in her Journal on 16 February 1802, focuses, as Graham himself must have done, on the loss of the cloak as the cause of the child's grief:

She was crying after it. Poor thing.  
 Mr Graham took her into the chaise,  
 and the cloak was released from the  
 wheel, but the child's misery did not

cease, for her cloak was torn to rags;  
 it had been a miserable cloak before,  
 but she had no other, and it was the  
 greatest sorrow that could befall her.

(114-5)

Mr Graham ensured that her cloak was replaced by leaving "money with some respectable people" in the next town (115).

Perhaps it is the proximity in composition to "The Singing Bird" and "Beggars" that makes one look more closely at some tiny additions and altered emphases in Wordsworth's poem which tend to problematize the paternalistic certainties of the Graham figure. Increasingly, the tendency has been to note the ambiguities of the poem and the ironies directed against the speaker rather than to read it at face value. David Simpson and Don Bialostosky are two recent commentators who have emphasised such ironies and ambiguities. Bialostosky notes the "narrator's blindness" (Making Tales 143), while Simpson feels that there is a "tentative though arguable gap...between poet and speaker" (Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 182). However Simpson argues that charity does produce "a new dignity of spirit; but not because it is charity, so much as for the fact of its material content" (Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 180), whereas Bialostosky stresses that not only is the self-satisfaction of the speaker emphasised, but also the resourcefulness of the "self-sufficient gamin" (Making Tales 143). For me the poem is far bleaker. Given the ironies directed at the speaker in the poem written on the preceding day, it would seem feasible that Wordsworth, despite writing the poem "to gratify Mr Graham" (Curtis 408), might well be consciously putting forth the view of the benefactor while undermining that very assured view of the adequacies of the beneficent deed.

The first four stanzas stress the tempestuous weather, a night of rain and wind:

And soon I heard upon the blast  
 The voice, and bade him halt again.

Said I, alighting on the ground,  
 "What can it be, this piteous moan?"  
 (15-18)

There is a faint echo, perhaps, of Macbeth's "Pity, like a naked new-born babe, /Striding the blast" (1. 7. 21-22) in the unusual use of "blast" and the collocation of lack of clothing and pity. The speaker stresses his perception of the worthlessness of the cloak as if unable to comprehend why the loss of such a rag could possibly cause such distress: "A weather-beaten Rag as e'er/From any garden Scare-crow dangled"....Together we released the Cloak;/A wretched, wretched rag indeed" (27-28, 31-32). The distance between privileged adult male and indigent, orphaned female child is underlined by his perception of her as "half wild" (34), and the rather patronising and surprised tone in which he comments on her apparent inability to be comforted:

She sate [sic] like one past all relief;  
 Sob after sob she forth did send  
 In wretchedness, as if her grief  
 Could never, never, have an end.  
 (37-40)

The simile in the first line suggests that she is not (cannot be) really "past all relief". One recalls the similarly problematic simile in "The Sailor's Mother": "She begg'd an alms, like one in poor estate" (12). The simile in the third line works to the same effect. She responds to his paternalistic "[m]y Child, in Durham do you dwell?" (41), with not so much an affirmative as an alternative. Far from "dwelling" anywhere (and we should recall the resonance of "dwell" in the "Lucy" poems), she, "fatherless and motherless", merely "belongs", technically, to Durham:

And I to Durham, Sir, belong."  
And then, as if the thought would choke  
 Her very heart, her grief grew strong;

And all was for her tatter'd Cloak.

(45-8, emphases added)

It is the fact of belonging to no one as much as to everyone (Durham town) that strengthens her grief, although the cause of the renewed grief is misinterpreted by the speaker (as the non-sequitur of line 48 emphasises). To "belong" to a town also underlines the invidious dependence on that parish and the power the parish authorities could thus wield over one. Another simile, "[a]s if she'd lost her only friend" (50), indicates that the speaker is once again incapable of comprehending a level of deprivation that can make a mere tattered rag of a cloak one's "only friend". Yet how psychologically true that a child's cloak might well be her "comforter", her "pacifier", her "security blanket", deprived of which "[s]he wept, nor would be pacified" (51).

The final two stanzas have an assertive, confident tone, emphasised by exclamation marks and the imperative mood, and appropriate to the sense of control over circumstances revealed by the speaker as he tells the Host of Alice's grief, gives money for a new cloak, and issues orders as to its quality and colour:

Up to the Tavern-door we post;  
Of Alice and her grief I told;  
And I gave money to the Host,  
To buy a new Cloak for the old.

"And let it be of duffil [sic] grey,  
As warm a cloak as man can sell!"  
Proud Creature was she the next day,  
The little orphan, Alice Fell!

(53-60)

The fact that the speaker would not be there the next day to see Alice's demeanour emphasises that her likely pride is his surmise just as his own pride in his beneficence is clearly revealed by the tone. Pace Simpson, I would argue that, far from a "new

dignity of spirit" (Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 180), no mere material covering can hide the metaphorical nakedness of belonging to no one but merely the civic authorities. The likely fate of those Bentham termed "children of the public" was to be put "to work in factories from the age of four" (Himmelfarb 81, qtd. in Simpson Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 178). In 1791 Joseph Wright of Derby painted Three Children of Richard Arkwright with a Kite (Collection - Colonel Peter Arkwright). These three little boys in their silk hose, waistcoats and frilled shirts are the children of the cotton mill owner who, when he died in 1792, was one of the wealthiest commoners in England. The difference in dress between the Arkwright children and one who might well be sent to work in an Arkwright mill, little Alice Fell, is indicative of the chasm between rich and poor in Wordsworth's England. The addition, from 1815 onwards, of the subtitle "or Poverty", besides being simplistically obvious, serves to cast the particular incident (something which really happened to real people) as a generalized illustration of an abstract condition.

Dorothy writes in her Journal for [13 March 1802] Saturday morning:

William finished Alice Fell and then he wrote the poem of The Beggar Woman, taken from a woman whom I had seen in May (now nearly two years ago) when John and he were at Gallow Hill.

(Journals 122)

By the next morning: "William had slept badly - he got up at nine o'clock, but before he rose, he had finished The Beggar Boys...." (123) - the change in the title given by Dorothy points to the bi-partite division of the finished poem. Dorothy's entry on 10 June 1800 refers to the incident which happened on Tuesday 27 May (1800) (Journals 47-8). Although Dorothy does not mention that the woman poured forth a lengthy begging story, she does, in her

account, twice refer to the ploys of beggars:

They [the two boys] continued at play  
till I drew very near, and then they  
addressed me with the begging cant and  
the whining voice of sorrow....and creeping  
with a beggar's complaining foot.

(47)

Yet it is quite clear that the family is legitimately in need, despite the high spirits of the youngsters, for Dorothy ends with the information, gleaned from the mother, "that she had lived (I think) at Wigton, that they could not keep a house and so they travelled" (48).

The poem falls into two parts (Curtis 113-5). The first three stanzas are concerned with the beggar woman, the last four with her two sons. Both parts tell of deception. In the first, the speaker thinks that the woman is exaggerating her woes but he gives her "a boon" because she is so beautiful. In the second part, the speaker catches the boys out in a lie but they are not at all abashed and run off in high spirits. The poem seems strangely lacking in irony for it is obvious that the reader is meant to accept the sentimental motive for giving alms as valid. It would appear that the reader is also meant to accept the speaker's disbelief in the truth of the beggar woman's plea:

Before me begging did she stand  
Pouring out sorrows like a sea;  
Grief after grief: on English Land  
Such woes I knew could never be;  
And yet a boon I gave her; for the Creature  
Was beautiful to see; a Weed of glorious feature!

(13-18)

In "The Last of the Flock" (1798), Wordsworth had reminded readers that there were poor and despairing people to be found "on English ground". In the light of that, the lines "on English



Land/Such woes I knew could never be" sound strangely sanguine. Yet we must remember that during these months Wordsworth is also penning his patriotic sonnets which were published in the 1807 Poems and which have been described, by Peter Manning, as together comprising "a conservative mythmaking narrative" (260).

Editors, obliged to pause at line 18 to explain the strange choice of phrase, "a Weed of glorious feature", have reminded readers that it is a borrowing from Spenser's "Muiopotmos: or The Fate of the Butterflie", a poem which presumably suggested the butterfly chase in Wordsworth's poem. Yet, whatever the credentials of its provenance, to appropriate this phrase in order to describe a living person, is wholly insensitive and underlines the impression given that the begging woman is a creature of a different species.

Despite the speaker being cut short in his attempt to moralize to the boys or undermine their joie-de-vivre, there seems to be no intention on Wordsworth's part of problematizing the speaker's attitude. Rather the emphasis is on the spirited energy of the boys' vitality.

Written, as it was, immediately after "The Sailor's Mother" and "Alice Fell", one is at first a little surprised at the poem's apparent lack of irony. Yet, in entitling the poem "Beggars", Wordsworth seems to be intent, not on exposing the difference between assumptions made and actual conditions (as in the earlier two poems), but on acknowledging beauty and vitality despite indigent circumstances, even when it is suspected that those circumstances are not quite as bleak as claimed. From Dorothy's Journal entry of 10 June 1800 (Journals 47) we know that she, and presumably William too, often felt suspicious about the motives of beggars. Subsequent changes in phrasing, and a stanza added in 1827, enhance the sense that the mendicant condition is neither the focus nor the concern of the poem. Indeed, the sentiments of the additional stanza, significantly rendered in conventional poeticisms, reinforce the comforting assurances with which the speaker views the beggars:

Yet they, so blithe of heart, seemed fit





surmised about the likely deceptions inherent in "the begging cant and the whining voice of sorrow" is, with great heavy-handedness, termed "moral depravity" (Curtis 407).

This tendency to abstract from a whole set of circumstances those aspects that the viewed object seems to emblemize for the speaker (here "physical beauty and health and vigour"), lies at the heart of "The Leechgatherer", begun in early May and completed in July. The fact that both "Beggars" and "The Leechgatherer" take as their subjects poverty-stricken vagrants is noteworthy for, hitherto, Wordsworth had shown an interest in the facts of poverty, in how the poor manage to survive. In these two poems, this is no longer the focus of interest. Of course, "The Leechgatherer" appears to be concerned with the question "[h]ow is it that you live, and what is it you do?" (126), but it has long been noted that Wordsworth's interest is primarily in the old man as displaying resolution and independence which are qualities needful to the poet-speaker (an emphasis underlined by the change in title), rather than in the reality of the old man's daily life. Indeed all the changes to the poem, both during composition and in subsequent printings, are designed to reduce the old man from an individual (actually encountered by William and Dorothy) to a type or emblem.

"Resolution and Independence" (the title under which the poem was published in 1807) was obviously a poem on which Wordsworth devoted much thought and care and which he considered fittingly placed, in this "deliberately shaped" collection (Curtis 35) as the climax of the internalized journey "Poems Composed During a Tour, Chiefly on Foot" (Curtis 38). This poem has rightly been considered one of Wordsworth's major poems, revealing both the anxieties with which he faced the responsibilities of marriage as well as forming part of his ongoing dialogue with Coleridge on the topics of despair and loss and dejection. The poem also reveals clearly an alteration in his handling of the topic of poverty. It has received a lot of attention, yet few critics have concentrated on it as a poem focusing on a poor man, in the light of all Wordsworth's previous treatments of such a subject. Nor has much comment been made on

the significance of Wordsworth's "avoiding" so deliberately the known facts about the old man on whom the poem is based. David Sampson notes, as do most readers, the elusiveness of the old man and sees that as "part of his very being" rather than the result of Wordsworth paying "insufficient attention to him" (49). Yet this is to ignore the fact that the figure was based on a real person of whom we have a detailed and poignant account in Dorothy's Journal. Most critics of the past decade have concentrated on how Wordsworth has used the figure rather than on what this reveals about Wordsworth's current attitude to the poor given the preceding poems. Certainly the poem can be read as demonstrating Wordsworth's "fear of poverty" (Friedman 37), or as a "meditation upon poetic labour" (Simpson, Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 38), or as teaching the lesson of "the stoical calm of discipline, renunciation, and acceptance" (Lockridge 215), or as depicting the value and meaning of independence (Harrison "Wordsworth's Leech Gatherer" 331). The critics who have noted the elimination of the documentary details have spoken of an aesthetic perception of nature being "predicated upon a privileged transcendence" (Cottom 44) for, "the more particularized the description...the harder it becomes to maintain nature as a coherent aesthetic object" (42). This is exactly the kind of practice that art historians, like Michael Rosenthal, have noted in the work of Constable (see Chapter 2 above). Others have noted how the beggar (of Dorothy's account) is transformed into a "figure of strength rather than of submission" (Rzepka, "Poverty in Wordsworth" 241) and of the new deference in the speaker towards the other who is apparently less privileged (Bialostosky, Making Tales 155), for the poem demonstrates the "high value emanating from the most improbable possible source" (Lindenberger 52) and is, as such, another example of a quintessentially Wordsworthian valuing of that which ordinarily is little valued. These readings are often illuminating and rewarding and there is little need to reiterate what have become accepted ways of interpreting the poem. I wish rather to raise some points about how the old man, documented in Dorothy's Journal and in the first drafts of the poem, is

increasingly occluded in the interests of Wordsworth's own perceived needs.

What is clear is that from the first drafts, based quite closely on the account of the encounter with the old man in Dorothy's Journal entry for 3 October 1800, through the first published version of 1807, and through subsequent revisions, we see a transformation from a documentary focus on the old man to the presentation of an Old Man as a kind of elemental power, hovering between reality and symbol, and of interest in so far as he is an apt lesson in resolution and independence for the anxious poet. Rzepka suggests that the indigent figure as elemental power was already a feature of "The Old Cumberland Beggar" (Self as Mind 45). Yet in "Resolution and Independence" the elemental power of the poverty-stricken figure is the primary focus. Wordsworth is not now entering into any debate as to the pros and cons of mendicancy, or charity. The old leechgatherer is now present as the exemplar of resolution and independence by which the speaker-poet feels both admonished and strengthened.

Dorothy's account is quite long and detailed. "His trade was to gather leeches" but he "lived by begging" - a nice indication of the difficulty in making a living from one's trade. His other attempt to gain an honest living, independent of charity, by selling "a few goodly books", is merely a proposal which seems to have small chance of being either very viable or lucrative. The shocking details of his physical injuries are entirely omitted in the poem:

He had been hurt in driving a cart, his  
leg broke, his body driven over, his skull  
fractured. He felt no pain till he recovered  
from his first insensibility.

(Journals 63)

Omitted too is the appalling glimpse of one bereft of all to whom he was ever linked. He "had had a wife" and ten children. "All these were dead but one, of whom he had not heard for many years, a sailor" (63). We are not told how William and Dorothy and John,

"who afterwards met him at Wytheburn", reacted to him or what alms they gave (details often related by Dorothy elsewhere), but the length of the entry and its introduction by "N.B." suggest that the encounter was affecting. Wordsworth's use of the incident 19 months later, further emphasises its deep impact.

On 14 June 1802 Wordsworth wrote to Sara Hutchinson about "The Leechgatherer" (Early Letters 305-7). On 2 July Dorothy transcribed the alterations to the poem (Journals 166). On 5 July she copied out the poem "for Coleridge and for us" (166-7). This version, copied out by Coleridge on 13 August 1803 in his letter to the Beaumonts (2: 966-70), differs slightly from the 1807 version. William's remarks to Sara refer to yet another version (obviously one of the earliest). Thus we have the means of gauging something of the transformation of this poem (to be still further altered after 1807), from one which bore a closer resemblance to the more socially specific poems of the 1790s, to a poem about an Old Man largely abstracted from a specific social context (Bialostosky Making Tales 148). In 1816 Wordsworth commented on the liberties he had taken with the truth. Henry Crabb Robinson mentions that Wordsworth told him that "he did actually meet [the Leech - Gatherer] near Grasmere, except that he gave to his poetic character powers of mind which his original did not possess" (qtd. in Curtis 408). Are these "powers of mind" such as would enable the leechgatherer to attain stoical endurance? The old man, encountered by William and Dorothy, might not necessarily have had those strengths which makes his poetic counterpart capable of heroic fortitude. Perhaps such inner strength, in such distressing conditions, is only possible in a poet's fancy. From the remarks made to Sara Hutchinson, it is clear that Wordsworth had expected her to be startled by the

impressive...survivor of a Wife and  
ten children, travelling alone among  
the mountains and all lonely places,  
carrying with him his own fortitude,  
and the necessities which an unjust  
state of society has entailed upon him.

## (Early Letters 306)

He is astounded by her criticism of the tediousness of the old man's speech: "But Good God! Such a figure, in such a place, a pious self-respecting, miserably infirm, and [ ] Old Man telling such a tale!" He is concerned that, even if indifferent to "this Poem", she be not indifferent to "this figure and his employment" (306). Yet it is contemplation of the "fortitude, independence, persevering spirit, and general moral dignity of the old man's character" which ought to have given her pleasure (306).

From the very first drafts, it is clear that the poem was to be about the poet-speaker and the effect on him of the encounter. If the old man does not sufficiently affect Sara, how will he affect less personally sympathetic readers? Thus Wordsworth reduced the "tedious" speech to a few lines, with the rest of the old man's words being mediated by the poet-speaker. We are told that, although the old man's voice is feeble, his words are "choice", his phrase "measured", "each in solemn order followed each,/With something of a lofty utterance drest" (100-101). In early 1798 Wordsworth had described the speech of the discharged soldier rather differently:

He all the while was in demeanour calm,  
 Concise in answer: solemn and sublime  
 He might have seemed, but that in all he said  
 There was a strange half-absence and a tone  
 Of weakness and indifference, as of one  
 Remembering the importance of his theme,  
 But feeling it no longer.

(140-46 emphases added)

Wordsworth also cut out everything except the man's increasingly futile attempt to gather leeches - all that ties the old man to a specific world of mundane reality - relationships, manner of dress, physical details. Furthermore, no allusion is now made to the "unjust state of society" which Wordsworth referred to in his letter to Sara. The version transcribed for Coleridge differs

little from the 1807 version except that the latter further reduces individualistic details by removing the whole stanza descriptive of what the old man wore and carried (Coleridge, Letters 2: 968). Other changes from this version point to attempts to raise the level of the diction; thus, " 'twas his calling, better far than some" becomes the more formal "[e]mployment hazardous and wearisome" (108). Even the tiny alteration from "[a]nd so his means of life before him died away" to "[y]et still I persevere, and find them where I may" (133) is designed to present the old man as resolute perseverer rather than indigent victim. Changes made in 1820 substitute the more unusual for the commonplace, for example, "warbling" replaces "singing" (29). Further changes render the old man more meaningful and enigmatic. A whole stanza elaborating, in rather meandering, banal fashion, the first sighting of the old man is cut in 1820, and the suggestive line placing the man "[b]eside a pool bare to the eye of heaven" is inserted. Similarly, "[u]pon the margin of that moorish flood" (1820) is far more allegorically suggestive than "[b]eside the little pond or moorish flood" (1807). Most indicative of Wordsworth's distance in 1820 from his earlier pursuit of simple language is the change from "[h]e answer'd me with pleasure and surprize; [sic]/And there was while he spake, a fire about his eyes" (1807, 97-8) to "[e]re he replied, a flash of mild surprise/Broke from the sable orbs of his yet-vivid eyes" (1820, 90-1). Certainly some of the platitudinous phrasing of 1807 is improved upon, as when "[a]nd now, not knowing what the Old Man had said" (1807, 124) becomes "[p]erplexed, and longing to be comforted" (1820, 117). Certainly, too, as Rzepka points out, these changes and other selective choices were, for the most part, "aesthetically" right ("Poverty in Wordsworth" 237). Yet the poem is undoubtedly no longer one of those bare and forceful documents about poverty and its appalling effects which Wordsworth had written earlier. Perhaps it is significant that in "Resolution and Independence" the formality of the Rime Royal stanza does not seem inappropriate whereas, as noted above, the similarly formal Spenserian stanza appeared too mannered when Wordsworth's focus



was on the actualities of poverty in some of the 1790s fragments. Herbert Lindenberger makes the excellent, although obvious, point that Wordsworth's evaluation of the old man is independent "of the latter's narrative" (50). Similarly, the Old Man of the poem is independent of the individual old beggar met with at Grasmere. Wordsworth is not, here, interested in the old beggar; rather he is interested in transforming the actual old beggar into a type and symbol. The Leechgatherer has become an exemplum of resolution and independence and the title given the published poem reflects this focus. To recognise that such displacement of the horrific details of an actually encountered old man in favour of a carefully selective and idealizing portrait of a resolute and independent figure of endurance bears considerable similarity to the more obvious aestheticization of rural poverty documented by Ann Bermingham (Landscape and Ideology), is not to deny the qualities of the poem. It is, however, to acknowledge that Wordsworth's purposes were no longer to present some of the consequences of poverty. Given Wordsworth's intensely committed championship of the poor figure during the 1790s, it is troubling to realize that he is now engaged in a manipulation of the actuality of that very figure for his own edification. As early as Goldsmith's The Deserted Village, one had seen the comparison being drawn between the precarious position of a poet in a philistine world and that of the dispossessed poor. Yet this comparison is, in most cases, rather strained, given the vastly different problems faced by (gentlemen) poets and those literally struggling to maintain the slenderest links with life. Wordsworth, unlike Goldsmith, had looked on the harsh realities of poverty steadily and unflinchingly. Now he writes a poem which totally occludes those disturbing biographical details in the interests of the poet's own needs. Had we no hard evidence about the old man from Dorothy and the manuscript versions, we would perhaps not see this as an example of literary appropriation. Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" would not ruffle the sensibilities of polite society as his more naked treatments of poverty might well have done. Although we might recognise and understand what Wordsworth was about in this transformation from



the source detailed by his sister, the finished presentation of the poor vagrant figure is as aesthetically acceptable and unconcerned with realities as any of the picturesque paintings which expressed what the painters or their customers wished "to believe was true about the rural poor and their relations with nature and the rest of society" (Barrell 18).

In the light of the proliferation of pronouncements during this period on what constituted independence (see Chapter 1), it would seem that Wordsworth's presentation of independence is here very close to the kind of independence that the privileged classes valued in the poor. This old man reveals the most remarkable resolution and independence in the face of appallingly unfavourable conditions. He is neither assertive, nor complaining. His livelihood is precarious, his survival cannot be realistically guaranteed. The specific details of the actual old man would too nakedly demonstrate this. Wordsworth, by abstracting this man from his actual context and eliminating the details documented in Dorothy's Journal, has been able to laud the two qualities which he sees as essential for his own mental and spiritual survival. Those two qualities do not however guarantee physical survival for the indigent of Wordsworth's England.

It is interesting to move from "Resolution and Independence" to "Gipsies", which was written in February 1807, for David Simpson, in his elaborate defence of the latter poem, argues that it displays the tensions of the "embarrassment and guilt of dependence, and...the insecurity of his vocation as an unestablished writer" which beset Wordsworth while staying at Coleorton, where he was benefitting from the patronage of the Beaumonts (Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 36). By 24 November 1806 the idea of filling two volumes instead of the intended single volume is mentioned by Dorothy (Curtis 12), and "Gipsies" is one of a number of poems written during the winter of 1806-7 specifically to flesh out the two volumes. Although not directly about poverty, it is worth considering here because it is very revealing about Wordsworth's attitudes towards a group, continuously persecuted, as marginalized and suspect as the

"Rogues, Vagabonds, or Sturdy Beggars" among whom they were included under the Elizabethan Poor Laws (Eden 1: 308). Gypsies were generally impoverished even if they consciously chose their vagrancy, a choice inexplicable to a settled population. This in itself would constitute proof of their criminal tendencies in many eyes although Simpson has reminded us that John Clare revealed a rather different and non-judgemental attitude to gypsies (Wordsworth's Historical Imagination 45-6). Living on the Beaumont estate at Coleorton, William was "very happy in his employment" of designing a garden for the Beaumonts and (says Dorothy to Lady Beaumont in the same letter) "you need not give yourself a moment's care about interrupting him in his poetical labours" (Middle Years 1: 117). Such happy busyness, together with the increasing intimacy with such privileged landowners as the Beaumonts, might help explain the vehement outcry in the poem against the overt idleness of the gypsies. Yet Wordsworth had shown himself, in the 1805 Prelude, to be averse to what E.P. Thompson has categorised as the growing "Time and Work-Discipline" mentality of this period. Thompson quotes the following "polemic" from Book Five of The Prelude as an indication of Wordsworth's plea for the unhassled temporal space needful for the full development of the personality:

The Guides, the Wardens of our faculties,  
And Stewards of our labour, watchful men  
And skilful in the usury of time,  
Sages, who in their prescience would control  
All accidents, and to the very road  
Which they have fashion'd would confine us down,  
Like engines....

(377-83 qtd.in Customs 403)

By February 1807, as evidenced in "Gipsies", it would seem that such liberty to "waste time" is not the prerogative of everyone. Wordsworth's discrimination between those who are entitled to leisure and those who are not, and his attitude to the gypsies, could have easily come from the pen of Cowper.

Although subsequent changes and additions increased the moral outrage and vehement denunciation of idleness found in the poem, such aspects are already present and indeed form the whole point of the 1807 poem. The peripatetic speaker deplores the paradoxical fixity of the gypsies which indicates to him that they have wasted "twelve bounteous hours" (9). The initial rhetorical question, the exclamation marks scattered throughout, ensure a tone of shocked astonishment. Having seen them in the morning, he finds them still in the same spot in the evening or, in words which would have been anathema to the earlier Wordsworth, when "Vesper [issued] from the fulgent West" (14). Now "their fire seems bolder" (5), just as their idleness itself appears brazen to the speaker. They are not even abashed, it seems, by "the mighty Moon" which, in the speaker's eyes, looks at them as if to remind them of time passing (19-21). The poem ends with an embarrassingly pious judgement which shows total insensitivity to the reality of a gypsy's life, " - oh better wrong and strife/Better vain deeds or evil than such a life!" (21-2). To explain away such sentiments as the predictable views of one who, that same year, published an "Ode to Duty", is not to remove the overpowering sense of self-righteous bombast. The poem appears rather oddly among the butterflies, sparrows, celandines, daffodils and cuckoos of "Moods of My Own Mind", a category which openly acknowledges subjectivity as a legitimate mode. In the 1815 collection of his poems, he classed this as a "Poem of the Imagination". In Biographia Literaria (1817), Coleridge quotes from this poem as an example of "thoughts and images too great for the subject" (258). He also, very sharply, exposes the inappropriateness of "our tourist" deploring the gypsies' day of inactivity:

...the poet, without seeming to reflect  
that the poor tawny wanderers might probably  
have been tramping for weeks together through  
road and lane, over moor and mountain, and  
consequently must have been right glad to rest  
themselves, their children and cattle for one

whole day; and overlooking the obvious truth that such repose might be quite as necessary for them as a walk of the same continuance was pleasing or healthful for the more fortunate poet; expresses his indignation in a series of lines, the diction and imagery of which would have been rather above than below the mark, had they been applied to the immense empire of China improgressive [sic] for thirty centuries....

(259)

One cannot deny the force of both Coleridge's technical and moral objections. Hazlitt reiterates the moral objections:

Mr. Wordsworth, who has written a sonnet to the King on the good that he has done in the last fifty years, has made an attack on a set of gypsies for having done nothing in four and twenty hours....We did not expect this turn from Mr. Wordsworth, whom we had considered the prince of poetical idlers, and patron of the philosophy of indolence, who formerly insisted on our spending our time "in a wise passiveness".... We did not look for this Sunday-school philosophy from him. What had he himself been doing in these four and twenty hours? Had he been admiring a flower or writing a sonnet?

(45-6)

Keats, having read this footnote of Hazlitt's to an essay "On Manner" (1817), tries rather feebly to defend Wordsworth's poem as a demonstration of the value of the picturesque. Yet this special pleading is less convincing than his concluding comment:

it seems to me that if Wordsworth had  
though[t] a little deeper at that Moment  
he would not have written the Poem at all -

I should judge it to have been written in  
 one of the most comfortable Moods of his  
 Life - it is a kind of sketchy intellectual  
 Landscape - not a search after Truth...

(Letters 1: 174 emphasis added)

Wordsworth might well have read Hazlitt's views, he would certainly have pondered Coleridge's opinion. When he next published the poem, in 1820, it concluded with the following lines:

Yet, witness all that stirs in heaven and earth!  
 In scorn I speak not; they are what their birth  
     And breeding suffers them to be;  
     Wild outcasts of society!

(Curtis 212)

Appended as an "apology", it serves only to underline a class snobbery which would have been alien to the poet of 25 years earlier. As late as 1828 he considered cancelling this "concluding apology" but never did so (Later Years 1: 311).

Mellown points out that the few examples of social outcasts that do appear in the 1807 volumes are, despite their poverty and suffering, "alleviated by communal sympathy" for they are "active members of a vital community" (166). Alice Fell, articulating her grief, gets a new cloak (167). The Leechgatherer exercises "mental control which makes him independent of his circumstances" (169). Mellown does not see anything problematic in the tone of these poems. He feels that the prevailing mood is "one of happiness or at least peace" (166). He has certainly identified a crucial feature of these poems. There is no longer outrage or horror or a meditation on the hidden as well as the visible consequences of poverty, all of which appeared to some degree or other in the work of the 1790s. Indeed, Peter Manning argues forcefully, in his analysis of "The Solitary Reaper", that Wordsworth eliminates "politically charged sentiments" from the 1807 volumes (254). Perhaps Wordsworth's own sense of homecoming

in Grasmere led him to have faith in "communal sympathy" and he felt himself, after 1800, to be increasingly an "active member of a vital community". Dwelling in Dove Cottage, he has the more discriminating attitude of the propertied to the poor vagrants who pass the cottage. As he becomes more established, both materially and emotionally, he looks upon them increasingly as "other"; some might be deserving, some merely charlatans. With domesticity and relative financial security he can counterpoise himself to the vagrant poor. They might retain his interest by virtue of their particular histories (although "The Leechgatherer" reveals how that particular history is occluded in the interests of the poet's own obsessions), but they exist in his experience as the appropriate objects of his almsgiving, as a cosmic necessity without whom charity would be impossible for a person like himself who can now afford to give alms. Hitherto, in the years of his relative insecurity, uncertainty, radicalism and mobility (akin to vagrancy), his meaningful experiences were of people with whom he could more easily identify than counterpoise himself. The meaningful experiences of his life now become the discovery of the pleasures of domestic trivia. His observation of international affairs has led him to place the endurance of suffering above clamorous complaints and demands for change. As his own material comforts increase, he is more prone to trust in the willingness and ability of the privileged to succour the truly deserving. Like many who advocated charity rather than more formal welfare schemes, he judged others by his own acute sense of obligation to the deserving poor, forgetful of most people's propensity for selfishness. Thoughtful and essentially sympathetic, he would never succumb totally to the blinkered views of his class and by many he would always be regarded as slightly suspect, "strongly disposed toward Republicanism" or holding "terrific democratic notions" (qtd.in Coleman, footnote 160). Of course these latter descriptions, the first made by an acquaintance in London in 1806, the second being Sir George Beaumont's reaction to the Cintra pamphlet in 1809, tell us more perhaps about the reactionary views of the speakers than about Wordsworth's true



position. Yet Wordsworth was destined always to be subject to such reactionary suspicions about his bona fides. Stephen Gill quotes an 1844 letter of John Keble's in which Keble hesitates about dedicating his lectures to Wordsworth because his wife had "started a doubt on account of his having begun life as a Radical" (Gill, Wordsworth footnote 396).

Finally, lying buried in the manuscript of The Prelude, awaiting posthumous publication, are those striking insights into poverty, all penned by May 1805, which Wordsworth was honest enough never to alter substantially in his decades-long tinkering with the poem. Jonathan Wordsworth points out that the 5-book Prelude was started in January 1804 in order that Coleridge might take it with him on his departure for the Mediterranean. By March Wordsworth had planned to extend the work further and, by May 1805, the 13-book Prelude was finished (Jonathan Wordsworth xi). After John Wordsworth's death on 5 February 1805, Wordsworth did not resume composition until the final week of April (Early Letters 489). On 3 June 1805 he wrote to Sir George Beaumont: "I have the pleasure to say that I finished my poem about a fortnight ago...the reality so far short of the expectation" (Early Letters 497). Although the references to the vagrant poor in this long poem are few, they reveal, in brief, a number of the different ways in which Wordsworth presented the indigent during the 1790s and early 1800s. Wordsworth commemorates a vital component of his life in the West Country and at Grasmere as he describes how

lonely roads  
Were schools to me in which I daily read  
With most delight the passions of mankind,  
There saw into the depth of human souls -  
Souls that appear to have no depth at all  
To vulgar eyes.

(The Prelude 12: 163-8)

The watching and questioning of those he met with on the public roads had to be mentioned in this poem if it was to be at all an



honest attempt to trace his development. From such encounters he had become "convinced at heart/How little that to which alone we give/The name of education hath to do/With real feeling and just sense" (12: 168-71). From such encounters, too, he had discovered that virtue and intelligence and the capacity for strong affections are not the preserve of the leisured and privileged, for he had found such qualities among those "by doom of Nature yoked/With toil" (174-5). The phrase "doom of Nature" is noticeably the commonplace phrasing of those who, whether sympathetic or not, feel that such a lot in life is preordained and thus irreversible. In lines that follow, Wordsworth reiterates a firmly held belief that severe penury is damaging to the mind and soul. These very lines date from a late 1800 MS. where they are, according to Jonathan Wordsworth, "surplus material written for Michael" (448):

True is it, where oppression worse than death  
Salutes the being at his birth, where grace  
Of culture hath been utterly unknown,  
And labour in excess and poverty  
From day to day pre-occupy the ground  
Of the affections, and to Nature's self  
Oppose a deeper nature - there indeed  
Love cannot be.

(194-201)

Cities, "where the human heart is sick" (202), are likewise destructive. To be destitute in a city must therefore be a most appalling fate. In the "London" section of The Prelude (Book Seven) Wordsworth describes a blind beggar who would lack even the natural and communal benefits that the Old Cumberland Beggar is granted. This passage is prefaced by Wordsworth's articulation of that extraordinary sense of isolation one experiences within crowds, so that "the face of every one/That passes by...is a mystery" (The Prelude 7: 597-8). Wordsworth notes how London has become a place where men would live "[e]ven next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still/Strangers, and knowing not each other's

names" (The Prelude 7: 119-20). Filled with such disturbing thoughts, Wordsworth is

abruptly...smitten with the view  
Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,  
Stood propped against a wall, upon his chest  
Wearing a written paper, to explain  
The story of the man, and who he was.

(611-15)

Certainly this sight encapsulates the sense of alienation and objectification that Wordsworth has identified throughout this book as the particular preserve of the city. Yet the fact that he does not dwell on the appalling personal situation of this discarded person is worth noting. I would not go as far as Geraldine Friedman in arguing that Wordsworth has here "aestheticized a social problem into an occasion for a sublime experience" (137, emphases added). It would seem, rather, that Wordsworth is profoundly struck ("My mind did at this spectacle turn round/As with the might of waters", 616-7) by the symbolic appropriateness of this sight to his view of the alienating effects of city life. Even more generally he considers this sight "a type/Or emblem of the utmost that we know/Both of ourselves and of the universe" (618-20). This leads him to feel "admonished" by the "shape of this unmoving man,/His fixed face and sightless eyes" (621-2). The admonishment is presumably associated with a sense of mankind's littleness and unimportance and profound ignorance in the face of the mysterious universe. Wordsworth has emphasised the emblematic view of the beggar by the insertion of the words "type/Or emblem" (618-9), for the original version read thus:

and I thought  
That even the very most of what we know  
Both of ourselves and of the universe,  
The whole of what is written to our view,  
Is but a label on a blind man's chest.

(Jonathan Wordsworth 260)

It is noteworthy that mention of the affecting sight of a destitute blind man "propped against a wall" elicits a generalization about mankind's blind state rather than any comment about the personal situation of this person. We know how strongly Wordsworth had absorbed the passion of Michel Beaupuy who had railed against the fact of such destitution. He is honest enough to record, as late as 1804, his identification with Beaupuy's "agitation" (9: 519) as he and Beaupuy "chanced" upon the "hunger-bitten girl" near Blois in 1792. This passion had fuelled the presentation of poverty in the poems of the 1790s. Yet it is the inclination to abstract the figure of the poor person from the socio-political context and see such a figure as emblematic of a universal human condition that is evident in this particular London passage and was to become an increasing tendency in Wordsworth's work.

Another instance in The Prelude of the portrayal of a poor figure comes as early as Book Four where it forms the conclusion to that relation of his revelling in his familiar landscape during his first vacation from Cambridge. It is by far the longest treatment in The Prelude of this topic. Wordsworth tells of his meeting with the discharged soldier as an example of "[r]emembrance[s] not lifeless" (4: 362). (The original fragment has already been discussed in Chapter Six and, more briefly, in Chapter Seven). By incorporating the fragment into this book, we are led to assume that this encounter took place during that first summer vacation in 1788 and that Wordsworth was already by then someone who took an interest in the histories of those he encountered on the public roads.

Yet of all these passages, it is a passage in Book Nine which most reveals the passion with which he opposed poverty in the formative decade of the 1790s. It is an extraordinarily courageous admission in 1804 of the fervour of 1792 and it remains the most fitting exemplar both of Wordsworth's presentation of poverty during the decade of the 1790s and of his commitment, at that time, to egalitarianism and democracy. Wordsworth and Beaupuy are walking near Blois. The year is 1792:

And when we chanced  
One day to meet a hunger-bitten girl,  
Who crept along fitting her languid self  
Unto a heifer's motion, by a cord  
Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane  
Its sustenance, while the girl with her two hands  
Was busy knitting in a heartless mood  
Of solitude, and at the sight my friend  
In agitation said, ' 'Tis against that  
Which we are fighting', I with him believed  
Devoutly that a spirit was abroad  
Which could not be withstood, that poverty  
At least like this would in a little time  
Be found no more, that we should see the earth  
Unthwarted in her wish to recompense  
The industrious, and the lowly child of toil,  
All institutes for ever blotted out  
That legalized exclusion, empty pomp  
Abolished, sensual state and cruel power,  
Whether by edict of the one or few;  
And finally, as sum and crown of all,  
Should see the people having a strong hand  
In making their own laws; whence better days  
To all mankind.

(1805, 510-533)

## AFTERWORD

Two extracts from Conversations and Personal Reminiscences, collected by Grosart, will best illustrate the survival into his old age of feelings of immediate and sincere sympathy for the poor and the marginalized, however much these feelings were by then tinged with patrician beneficence. The Bishop of Lincoln records an incident from the 1820s:

Walked home with him in the evening to Rydal. It rained all the way. We met a poor woman in the road. She sobbed as she passed us. Mr. Wordsworth was much affected with her condition: she was swollen with dropsy, and slowly hobbling along with a stick, having been driven from one lodging to another. It was a dark stormy night. Mr. Wordsworth brought her back to the Lowwood Inn, where, by the landlord's leave, she was housed in one of his barns.

(Grosart 3: 463)

An American's reminiscences, communicated in September 1850 to Professor Henry Reed, recall "a trifling incident, which may yet be worth noting":

We were standing together in the road, Wordsworth reading aloud, as I have said, when a man accosted us asking charity - a beggar of the better class. Wordsworth, scarcely looking off the book, thrust his hands into his pockets, as if instinctively acknowledging the man's right to beg by this prompt action. He seemed to find nothing, however; and he said, in a sort of soliloquy,

'I have given to four or five, already, to-day,'  
as if to account for his being then unprovided.

(Grosart 3: 483).

Neither the American, nor Professor Reed, felt the need to explain the term "a beggar of the better class". They obviously shared with Hannah More the opinion that "it is neatness, and a decent appearance, which draw the kindness of the rich and charitable [who]...turn away disgusted from filth and laziness" (398).

A third extract exposes the tortuous justification of his later firmly-held paternalist and inegalitarian attitudes. Although he is obviously considered unusual in the attention he pays to the poor (for it seems that "sympathies" here implies not much more than awareness rather than crass indifference), he is said to judge the poor as necessarily inferior, for else they will not maintain their "well-being" and "true dignity", puzzling words, indeed, to describe the condition of abject poverty. The extract comes from Aubrey de Vere's recollection of the last eight years of Wordsworth's life:

The more impassioned part of his nature connected itself especially with his political feelings. He regarded his own intellect as one which united some of the faculties which belong to the statesman with those which belong to the poet; and public affairs interested him not less deeply than poetry....Till disenchanted by the excesses and follies of the first French revolution, his hopes and sympathies associated themselves ardently with the new order of things created by it; and I have heard him say that he did not know how any generous-minded young man, entering on life at the time of that great up-rising, could have escaped the illusion. To

the end his sympathies were ever with the cottage hearth far more than with the palace. If he became a strong supporter of what has been called 'the hierarchy of society,' it was chiefly because he believed the principle of 'equality' to be fatal to the well-being and the true dignity of the poor.

(Grosart 3: 490)

On 5 July 1844, in a letter he wrote to Henry Reed describing his 74th birthday, he reveals his concern for closer relations between what Disraeli was soon to describe as the "two nations":

It is melancholy to think how little that portion of the community which is quite at ease in their circumstances have to do in a social way with the humbler classes. They purchase commodities of them, or they employ them as labourers, or they visit them in charity for the sake of supplying the most urgent wants by alms-giving. But this alas is far from enough - One would wish to see the rich mingle with the poor as much as may be upon a footing of fraternal equality. The old feudal dependencies and relations are almost gone from England, and nothing has yet come adequately to supply their place. There are tendencies of the right kind here and there, but they are rather accidental than aught that is established in general manners. Why should not great land-owners look for a substitute for what is lost of feudal Paternity in the higher principles of christianized humanity, and humble-minded Brotherhood.

(Hill 7: 561)



There is an expressed desire for brotherhood ("fraternal equality") but, because differences between the rich and the poor (and this is almost wholly a class division too) are accepted unquestioningly ("the humbler classes"), this can only be a superficial matter of "manners". Paternalistic sentiments like this had long before appeared in The Convention of Cintra (1809) where his casual equation of democracy with paternalistic government goes far in explaining his later ability to reconcile hierarchies with a professed desire for brotherhood:

the cause of the People...is safe while it remains not only in the bosom but in the hands of the People; or (what amounts to the same thing) in those of a government which, being truly from the People, is faithfully for them.

(Owen and Smyser 1: 318)

By 1833 he would write: "It is a fixed judgement of my mind, that an unbridled Democracy is the worst of all Tyrannies [sic]." (Hill 5: 588). Yet, undoubtedly, Wordsworth, in the letter of 1844 quoted above, is fully aware of the disappearance of the old caring ways, failing only to recognise the impossibility of establishing that dream of benevolent paternalism in the England of the mid-nineteenth century.

In the Postscript to the 1835 edition of his Poems, Wordsworth had felt himself duty bound to comment on the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. Although arguing in favour of the supervision of monies by "gentlemen and substantial proprietors, acting in vestries, and as overseers" (Owen and Smyser 3: 244), he shows throughout the Postscript his fundamental and abiding commitment to the individual and to the right of the needy to claim support from the state (Gill, Wordsworth 381-2). The Act, he argues, "proceeds too much upon the presumption that it is a labouring man's own

fault if he be not, as the phrase is, beforehand with the world" (Owen and Smyser 3: 246). Far from approving the rigours of a means test, he argues "that it is better for the interests of humanity among the people at large, that ten undeserving should partake of the funds provided, than that one morally good man, through want of relief, should either have his principles corrupted, or his energies destroyed" (3: 246). The poems of the 1790s are inevitably brought to mind in his insistence on the psychologically eroding effects of poverty:

Despondency and distraction are no friends  
to prudence: the springs of industry will  
relax, if cheerfulness be destroyed by anxiety;  
without hope men become reckless, and have a  
sullen pride in adding to the heap of their own  
wretchedness. He who feels that he is abandoned  
by his fellow-men will be almost irresistibly  
driven to care little for himself; will lose  
his self-respect accordingly, and with that loss  
what remains to him of virtue?

(3: 245-6)

In this fervent essay, written by the 65 year old establishment figure, there ring out those striking lines written during his most radical and disaffected year - 1793 - taken from Salisbury Plain, his most impassioned presentation of wretchedness and poverty and alienation. These lines seem, assuredly, to have had an enduring significance for him:

But neither of these [the famished Northern  
Indian or the savage Islander] is in a state  
of wretchedness comparable to that, which is  
so often endured in civilised society: multitudes,  
in all ages, have known it, of whom may be said:-

'Homeless, near a thousand homes they stood,  
And near a thousand tables pined, and wanted food.'

(3: 243)

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