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Wordsworth and *The Recluse*: The University of Imagination

> But his mastery
> Left only the fragments found in the grass,
> From his project, as finally magnified.
> (Wallace Stevens, "Two Illustrations
> That the World Is What You Make of It")

WORDSWORTH CRITICISM is haunted by a rhetorical tradition that assumes a connection between the decline in the poet's creative powers and his failure to finish *The Recluse*, his projected masterwork "On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life." The extant parts, however, are longer than *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* combined, somewhat too large to be invoked as evidence of failure. Helen Darbishire's witty dismissal, that *The Recluse* consists of little more than "a Prelude to the main theme, and an Excursion from it," unwittingly suggests that Wordsworth's failure surpasses most writers' successes.[1] Yet, though its size and intention have provoked endless speculation and though parts of it have often been studied—*The Prelude* exhaustively, *The Excursion* less so—the sequential development of all its texts has not, with one partial exception, been critically interpreted.[2]

Like any other text, *The Recluse* has a shape and a dynamic. Analyzed chronologically, its existing segments reveal a series of dialectical movements between Wordsworth's commitment to a public epic of secular redemption (what I shall call "*Recluse* movements") and his fascinated exploration of his own genius as creator of such a poem ("*Prelude* movements"). Heuristically, three main episodes can be identified in this process. The first runs from the inception and first drafts of *The Recluse* project in 1797 to the completion of the two-part version of *The Prelude* in 1799. The second begins with the initial work on "Home at Grasmere" (Pt. I, Bk. I, of *The Recluse*) in 1800–01, includes the completion of *The Prelude* in thirteen books by 1805, and ends with the resumption and conclusion of "Home at Grasmere" in 1806. The third episode starts with the return to *The Recluse* in 1808 ("The Tuft of Primroses"), continues with the inception of *The Excursion* in the story of the Solitary (c. 1809–12), and ends with the completion of *The Excursion* in the five books (V–IX) devoted to the Pastor (c. 1812–14). Each episode is thus characterized by three subsidiary movements: (1) a fragmentary start on *The Recluse*, (2) a recoil into self-examination of the sort associated with *The Prelude*, (3) a return to, and completion of, some section of *The Recluse*. The first episode apparently has only the first two movements, but its third may be supplied, *hors de série*, by the "Prospectus" to *The Recluse*, a thematic overview of the whole poem—"On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life"—probably composed between 1800 and 1802 and published in the Preface to *The Excursion* (1814).[3]

This dialectic provides a vital background to the interpretation of Wordsworth's major poetry. Especially, of course, it shows how the "antechapel" (as Wordsworth styled *The Prelude*) led into the "gothic church," *The Recluse*. Further, the dialogue between self and society opens up the heightened perspective on "Human Life" that Wordsworth wished to interject between "Man" and "Nature" in the rest of his published works, whose focus shifts unsteadily from sheer introspection to mere description. The relation between public intention and private realization is truly dialectical for Wordsworth; and it will not do to say that he created *The Prelude*, the quintessentially romantic masterpiece of self-reflection, almost accidentally while in pursuit of a goal, *The Recluse*, that was somehow unsuited to his talents or less characteristically romantic in its representation of imagination in social forms. Without the ideal of *The Recluse*, there was no need for *The Prelude*.

I. The First *Recluse* and the First *Prelude*

The Recluse, 1797–98

Coleridge's friendship provided confirmation for Wordsworth's growing sense of genius from an equal Wordsworth could respect. He tried to fulfill the promise Coleridge recognized in him by writing the kind of magnum opus that Coleridge always planned but never wrote, a poem that would offer faith and redemption to modern humanity by expressing a vital relation between physical and mental existence, by confirming free will, and (though this purpose fluctuates) by remaining consistent with revelation. Wordsworth set to work immediately on materials most ready to hand, naturalistic narratives in the genre of "Salisbury Plain," which had profoundly affected Coleridge when he first heard it in Bristol in 1796. Thus the first drafts toward *The Recluse* are "The Ruined Cottage," "The Old Cumberland Beggar," and other wayfaring incidents, like the Discharged Veteran episode later worked into *The Prelude*.[4] Wordsworth had these verses in mind in the enthusiastic letters of March 1798, where he first mentions *The Recluse* and the 1,300 lines of it already composed.[5]

These poems can be called social protest poetry, but sensitive readers feel the label's inadequacy.[6] Forced conscription, the Poor Laws, and wartime economic dislocations all contribute to the protagonists' suffering, but Wordsworth's angle of vision on these victims calls more for sympathy than for action, and empathy still more than sympathy. Wordsworth keeps his eye dispassionately on his object, the effect of social ills on the victims' *minds*, including the mind of the observing narrator. In the terms of Wordsworth's philosophic conversations with Coleridge, these poems, which depict the mind stripped down to the minimum physical conditions that the materialist-mechanist hypothesis about the world could adduce, seek to advance the idealist-organic hypothesis by showing the mind's resistance to a solely physical basis. As in the slighter poems written the same year for *Lyrical Ballads*, such as "The Mad Mother" and "The Idiot Boy," Wordsworth describes suffering eroding the mind, notes how mind supports itself in pain, and suggests that, however grotesquely transformed in the process, it remains mind still. If the mind fails, as Margaret's does in "The Ruined Cottage," Wordsworth throws into relief the blessed condition of normal mentality by contrasting it to terrifying abnormal forms, which are mediated to the reader by another character—narrator, interlocutor, or, ultimately, poet—who comes to understand both natural and unnatural forms of mind.

The old Cumberland beggar "moves with thought," but he is not thoughtful; quite the contrary. The very operation of his organism has become the object of his consciousness and will. This kind of attention to oneself as an organism is less than thought, less even than sensory perception; it is what invalids report after critical illness. Wordsworth's injunction "let him be!" signifies, beyond its sociopolitical ring, "let this mind, however reduced, keep moving through this landscape, for it is a type of all human minds' transit of this earth and cannot be ameliorated." In "The Ruined Cottage" (later Bk. I of *The Excursion*), Margaret's mind crumbles like her cottage as both waste away during the years she vainly waits for her sick husband's return from the wars, first not knowing whether he is alive or dead, and finally not knowing whether she herself is dead or alive:

> "and here she died;
> Last human tenant of these ruined walls!"
> (*Excursion* I.915–16)

Human tenancy and that to which it holds collapse together; mind does not always support its antagonisms. Though the Wanderer sees an "image of tranquility" in "the high speargrass on that wall, / By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er," allowing him to walk away "in happiness," the image leaves his interlocutor, the Poet, and many readers in the position of the Wedding Guest who is numbly uncertain that the moral fits the tale the Ancient Mariner has told. Finally, the Discharged Veteran of England's foreign wars has been through it all and lost, rather than gained, a sense of significance in his life's experience:

> 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.
> (1805 *Prelude* IV.474–78)

Thus all the first drafts of *The Recluse* show mind in extremis, worn down to its last recognizably human elements and questioning even these.

Strangely negative beginnings for such an optimistically conceived poem! Its "Prospectus" (c. 1800–02) would celebrate a "great consummation" between mind and nature, but these beginnings seem rather to overemphasize those "ill sights / Of madding passions mutually inflamed" that the "Prospectus" reluctantly acknowledges. Wordsworth was determined to give "authentic comment" to these scenes of "Human Life." The effort to make such authenticity redemptive at once motivates and complicates *The Recluse*'s progress. From it arises Wordsworth's deepening recognition of the need to transform human institutions, a higher activism already present, antithetically, in his oblique recognition of the background social forces that have worn down Margaret, the beggar, and the veteran.

The strangeness of these beginnings acted on Wordsworth's own mind, and by the end of 1798 a crucial dialectical correlation established itself: his attention rebounds from minds in extremis to his own mind in excelsis, and his notebook drafts begin to lead not to *The Recluse* but to *The Prelude*. The psychology of the creative situation suggests that he might have asked himself, "What has kept my mind intact when we see how precarious mental health is? And my mind especially, which projects a poem as grand in scope as any that has been written since the beginning of the world? Mine that until very recently has been despondent about its proper activity to the point of breakdown and total incapacity? Who, in short, do I think I am?"

The Prelude, 1798–99

In the first version of *The Prelude*, the two-part poem written in 1798–99 that corresponds roughly to Books I and II of the final versions, Wordsworth moves to the other end of the spectrum of human consciousness. He leaves mind's affliction with "animal tranquility and decay" and soars toward its godlike independence of material limitation. The substantive answer he gives to the question of what anchors mental health—nature, the very world in which we live—should not wholly divert us from the question's motive: the insubstantiality of thought, especially creative thought. The 1798–99 version of *The Prelude* builds on the implications of the first *Recluse* drafts of 1797–98 and initiates a dialectic that continues through all parts of the poem, between subjective experience of thought and objective location of its effects, between private imagination and public responsibility.

The reason for the division of the first *Prelude* into two parts is easier to grasp than the distinction between Books I and II in later versions. In the first part Wordsworth gives thanks to a highly personified nature for encouraging the growth of his mind, while in the second he gives credit to the social structures that supported his mind: buildings, calendars, and other human organizations of space, time, and action. As the first *Recluse* drafts began with social contexts and moved toward their effects on human minds, the first organized *Prelude* drafts begin with a single human mind and move toward its salutary communication with others through the media of shared institutions. Thus the private-public dialectic that controls and sometimes disrupts *The Recluse*'s development from one section to another figures equally within each of the poem's discrete texts.

The first part is noteworthy primarily for the conventional, fairylike appearance given to the spirits of nature, who will be transformed into the more familiarly Wordsworthian brooding "Presences" of the finished *Prelude*; in Part I, they are "Beings of the hills," "Powers of earth . . . Genii of the springs . . . Familiars of the lakes" (ll. 130, 186–88).[7] Part II concentrates on rudimentary forms of civilization, in "the town in which we dwelt a small domain" (note to l. 7). Its entire narrative portion is a connected series of adventures in specific human structures or times—organized sports, holidays, and the "school-time" of the second book's eventual title in the 1805 version. Wordsworth credits his mind's strength to these structures as he did to the less definite, more spiritualized forms of nature in the first part. The youths' games and play are related to human structures as in Part I they were connected with lakes,

mountains, and hills. In the village square the "grey stone of native rock" marking the "centre of these joys" is still remembered even though it is now broken up and gone for the construction of "a smart assembly room" (ll. 31–45). This combination of humanly determined time and space pertains especially to buildings in ruined or "original" form—on the island that was the goal of the youths' boat races, "where remained / An old stone tablet and one mouldered cave, / A hermit's history" (ll. 61–3), and in the object of their long horseback rides:

> a Structure famed
> Beyond its neighbourhood, the antique walls
> Of a large Abbey with its fractured arch,
> Belfry, and images, and living trees,
> A holy scene! (ll. 107–11)

This is Furness Abbey, in whose "sequestered ruin" Wordsworth says he "could have made [his] dwelling-place" (ll. 114, 128–29). The metaphoric "cloister" and "cool piazza" formed by the trees of Coniston Hall branching out over the lake emphasize the human function of this "neglected mansion-house," whose residents supply the boating boys with "fresh butter, tea-kettle and earthen-ware, / And chafing-dish" (ll. 140–56). Wordsworth's architectural metaphor for the trees is important because it was in looking out from the "gloom" of their "covert" that he first realized that these "fair scenes" would remain with him till death. This anticipatory mythicizing of the Lake Country is strengthened in a final episode, bowling at the "splendid" inn, which, although "no . . . Brother of the surrounding cottages," before "the Hall was built . . . had the dwelling been / More worthy of a poet's love, a hut / Proud of its one bright fire and sycamore shade" (ll. 186–89). The conventional picturesque gesture does not make the hut any less a house, only one more fit for poetry, and Wordsworth grants the present inn its due with the same condescending magnanimity he vouchsafed the "smart assembly room": "Yet to this hour the spot to me is dear / With all its foolish pomp" (ll. 195–96). Given this sequence of emphases, Wordsworth's summarizing address, to "thee and thy grey huts, my native vale" (l. 236), becomes a deliberate definition of the double nature of the vale: the geographic form itself and the human buildings it contains.

Wordsworth concludes the first *Prelude* with a long meditation on whether narrative is the appropriate form for representing mental growth in an individual, especially if one desires to show individual growth as representative for all. This meditation takes him into other houses and regions, metaphors for the home he is seeking for himself and his imagination, pointers toward the long-resisted realization that the poem itself will finally be the best place. Rejecting the notion that intellect can be "split like a province into round and square" (l. 244), he essays the famous metaphor of the "Bless'd infant Babe" on its mother's breast (ll. 267–310), which expresses his deepest wish and conviction for the state of mind in this world: "no outcast . . . bewildered and depressed. . . . Emphatically such a being lives / An inmate of this *active* universe" (ll. 291–96). When his own mother died or when adolescent self-consciousness destroyed childhood's naive egoism, Wordsworth's house of intellect was already firmly founded:

> The props of my affection were removed
> And yet the building stood as if sustained
> By its own spirit. (ll. 324–26)

In the first metaphor, nature is the structure, human being the inmate; in the second, mind has begun constructing its own house, the project to which all the sections of *The Recluse* are devoted, a difficult process to sustain, as Margaret's ruined cottage shows. Nature supplies materials, and Wordsworth's solitude among the lakes extends gradually beyond his personal structure to "solitude / More active even than 'best society,' / Society made sweet as solitude" (ll. 343–45). This paradoxical process, socializing solitude and individualizing society, reaches full development, complete with the same Miltonic allusions, in "Home at Grasmere," Book I of Part I of *The Recluse*. In the first *Prelude*, the whole process of developing "creative agency" is portrayed as construction:

> . . . that interminable building reared
> By observation of affinities
> In objects where no brotherhood exists
> To common minds. (ll. 432–35)

Creativity is imagined as essentially social, discovering an uncommon "brotherhood," but also indebted, extrinsically, to "the great social principle of life / Coercing all things into sympathy" (ll. 438–39). Although Wordsworth's language is partly conventional, grounded in associationist psychology, his metaphors are noteworthy because they fit with the actual buildings described in the first half of Part II. He thus concludes his first large-scale examination of his mental fitness to write *The Recluse* by reasserting his imagination's social dimension.

Not coincidentally, he also takes occasion to absolve himself of the charge of escapism that Coleridge had laid on the best minds of their generation in identifying for Wordsworth the primary audience and intention of *The Recluse*:

> I wish you would write a poem . . . addressed to those who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising [it] under the titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophes*. It would do great good, and might form part of *The Recluse*. . . .
> (c. 10 Sept. 1799)[8]

Wordsworth directly paraphrases the letter at the end of the 1798–99 *Prelude* to emphasize his own "Roman confidence . . . in these times of fear, / This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown" (ll. 489, 478–79). But when he returns to *The Recluse* in 1800, he finds, among the "good men / On every side [who] fall off we know not how / To selfishness disguised in gentle names / Of peace, and quiet, and domestic love" (ll. 481–84), none other than William Wordsworth, habituated to Grasmere. The drama of "Home at Grasmere," the first poem Wordsworth explicitly titled as part of the *Recluse* project, arises from Wordsworth's determination to remove himself from that suspect company.

II. "Home at Grasmere," "Prospectus," and *The Prelude*: Place, Person, and Poet

"Home at Grasmere" in 1800

When Wordsworth resumed composition of *The Recluse* in early 1800, he and Dorothy had returned to the Lake Country from Germany to begin the career of full-time poetry Coleridge had initiated them into. The wisdom of this decision was still to be proven by completion of *The Recluse*, so Wordsworth immediately began the poem now known as "Home at Grasmere," which, at its completion in 1806, he would designate Book First of Part First of *The Recluse*.[9] But he could not complete it until he had finished *The Prelude*. This sequence repeats the social-to-personal movement of the first episode of *Recluse-Prelude* composition, with the addition that now, after a much more thorough investigation of his personal imaginative growth, Wordsworth could return to and complete at least a part of the social project.

The five hundred or so lines of "Home at Grasmere" that Wordsworth wrote in 1800–01 are the poetic effusion of a man rubbing his hands together in anticipation of a satisfying piece of work ready to hand.[10] No expression is too exaggerated for his happiness:

> What Being, therefore, since the birth of Man
> Had ever more abundant cause to speak
> Thanks? . . .
> . . . . . .
> The boon is absolute . . .
> . . . among the bowers
> Of blissful Eden this was neither given
> Nor could be given. . . . (ll. 117–19, 122–25)

These are expressions of paradise regained, appropriate to Coleridge's vision of *The Recluse* as a philosophic displacement of *Paradise Lost*. Both self and world seem born again, and Wordsworth sees his experience as archetypal:

> The unappropriated bliss hath found
> An owner, and that owner I am he.
> The Lord of this enjoyment is on Earth
> And in my breast. (ll. 85–88)

He will reconcile the ways of earth to men and men to earth, proclaiming a consciousness of independent intellect that is not alienated from the earth on which it dwells.

Naturally, the poem runs into trouble, and not only because "something must be done" (l. 876). Not only, that is, because a generalized statement must emerge from this individual

ecstasy but also because the ecstasy, being honest, questions itself. At the height of his "O altitudo!" Wordsworth looks down, suddenly recognizes death, poverty, and evil, and plunges to the ground, not to resume the poem for over five years. The immediate cause of the fall is his recognition, amid a celebration of Grasmere's flights of birds as emblems of the valley's spiritual integrity ("As if one spirit was in all"), that "two are missing—two, a lonely pair / Of milk-white swans" (ll. 322–23).[11] He and Dorothy had explicitly identified themselves with these swans. Suppose they are dead; worse, suppose they have been shot by the "deadly tube" of the very shepherds he has idealized? He has pitched his claims for the place so high that this potentially ridiculous literalism spoils it, and he immediately goes on the defensive. He apologizes to both Grasmere and his poem for "harbouring this thought" (l. 359), reassures himself that such untoward ideas need not disturb the "pleasant stream" of his reflections, stoutly avers that he and Dorothy did not come hither "betrayed by tenderness of mind" (l. 398), and finally claims that "extreme penury is here unknown" (l. 444) because charity and need are perfectly balanced in Grasmere. But his protestations fail; he has backpedaled into a corner, out of the poem, and he breaks off.

What has happened? In the sequence of *The Recluse*'s development, Wordsworth has sailed off the top of the scale of mental confidence—the axis of vision—just as in the first drafts of 1797–98 he came close to bottoming out on the axis of things, where mental power dwindles to a mere feature of physical existence. As the first sequence of composition, with its depressed vision of human conditions, pushed him into investigations of his own mental condition (the two-part *Prelude*) in order to raise his sights back to the work at hand, now in this second sequence he is forced to return to his mind because his new start has soared too high. Having cast himself and Dorothy as Adam and Eve in a new Eden, he finds too great the strain of saving the whole world *from this place*. The return to the *Prelude* movement is, therefore, a rebound back not simply to further investigations of his own mind but to investigations of its growth in terms of the *places* in which it prospered, in which it found—or did not find—itself at home.

"Prospectus" (c. 1800–02)

But first, sometime between breaking off "Home at Grasmere" in 1800 and substantially resuming *The Prelude* in 1804, Wordsworth wrote the "Prospectus" to *The Recluse*, directly devoted to identifying "the main region of my song." Everyone knows that this region is "the Mind of Man." But, though it is his "haunt" and "*main* region," it is not the only place located in the "Prospectus," which is at pains to discriminate between proper and improper regions for the new epic song. Wordsworth will "descend to earth or dwell in highest heaven," surpassing, in either direction, the "empyreal throne" of Jehovah and "the darkest pit of lowest Erebus," following the "tents" of "Beauty, whose living home is the green earth," and his "hourly Neighbour." He abandons all places of imagination that are anywhere but here and now and turns, reluctantly but dutifully, toward "the tribes and fellowships of men . . . barricadoed evermore within the walls of cities." His seat of power is the "metropolitan Temple in the hearts / Of mighty Poets," an imaginative see that anticipates the expanded image of the "gothic church" to which he compared *The Recluse* when he published the "Prospectus" lines in the preface to *The Excursion* (1814).[12] With the "Prospectus," the poem starts on the way to becoming its own institution and its creator to becoming the priest within, chanting the consummation of mind and nature. The imaginative power will finally identify its home as the poem it has written, and the redemption it promises will depend on entering its institution, of enrolling in the poem, as it were. But before Wordsworth can concern himself with his matriculants ("to chear Mankind in times to come!"), he must look again to his credentials, and the "Prospectus" ends by turning back from its worldwide scope to its person of origin, from a prospectus to *The Recluse* to a prospectus of *The Prelude*:

> And if with this
> I blend more lowly matter—with the thing
> Contemplated describe the mind and man
> Contemplating, and who and what he was,
> The transitory Being that beheld
> This vision, and when and where and how he lived,
> With all his little realities of life—
> Be not this labour useless.

The Prelude (1805)

A mighty maze is *The Prelude*, yet the poem's grossest feature, the table of contents, reveals a single recurrent element, "residences": "Residence at Cambridge" (Bk. III), "Residence in London" (VII), "Residence in France and French Revolution" (IX–X, 1805; IX–XI, 1850). The thirteen-book *Prelude* of 1805 thus picks up where the two-part *Prelude* of 1799 left off, with an explicit emphasis on the social structures that helped shape the boy's imagination into the man's. The largest organizational units of the poem mark the growth of the poet's mind in terms of the places where his imagination sought a home,[13] or a community of reproductive extensions for what Wordsworth felt the human mind could accomplish: schools, universities, cities, and international revolutionary movements. And they show that he failed in all. These residential failures are critical but not fatal; they reveal antithetically the central message of *The Prelude*: that the human mind grows well in the environment of this world, despite its recurrent feeling of alien identity.

In each of *The Prelude*'s residences, the common element is loss of mental control. Each city (Cambridge, London, Paris) appears as a spectacle; Wordsworth loses his eyes to it and fears for his mind. Unable to maintain his balance, he leaves each succeeding residence in worse shape than he entered, until, returning from France in 1792, he finally "yield[s] up moral questions in despair" (X.901).[14] Implicitly, the moral crisis of each residence is informed by the same question as his lament for the insubstantiality of books: "Oh! why hath not the Mind / Some element to stamp her image on / In nature somewhat nearer to her own?" (V.44–46). The overarching answer of *The Prelude* is, of course, that there is such an element: "Nature." But each residential crisis also produces a more particular answer, a monitory vision of an ideal alternative university, city, or revolutionary movement. Each of these shadowy counterplaces shows that Wordsworth's fascination for residential or institutional construction rivals the strength of his allegiance to nature, as an undertow counterbalances a wave. These ideal alternatives are more "natural" than his unsatisfactory real residence; since they are calm and communal, in contrast to the frantic alienation he finds, he can give them, as he does one of his ideal universities in Book III, "an homage like that he gave to Nature." But this simple naturalization is not all that marks Wordsworth's institution building in *The Prelude*.

In the ideal universities—past, present, and future—imagined in his first residential crisis, "Residence at Cambridge," Wordsworth conveys the idea of tuition as nutrition by comparing his ideal college students to feeding animals (herons, pelicans, or "ruminating creatures"). Though no curriculum can be extrapolated from what he says, the informing spirit of such universities would be the mind's natural reverence for calm "primeval groves" and "undercoverts," a sort of organic garden of the mind. These natural metaphors emphasize the idea of *correspondence* as the sign of what is natural for human beings. The "congregating temper" of young people would be well served in this "midway residence," his university of imagination:

> Toils and pains
> In this recess which I have bodied forth
> Should spread from heart to heart; and stately groves,
> Majestic edifices, should not want
> A corresponding dignity within. (III.387–91)

But the mind-residence correspondence becomes far more problematic in the following books ("Summer Vacation," "Books," "Cambridge and the Alps"), which elaborate the discussion of proper contexts for education begun in Book III. In Book V, the famous dream of the Arab-Quixote is a disquieting answer to Wordsworth's anguished question about the insubstantiality of the elements the mind has "to stamp her image on":

> Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
> Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?
> (ll. 47–48)

He thinks he could devote himself to such a "maniac errand" as the Arab's—that is, to saving poetry and geometry (linguistic and mathematic truth, human truth) from purely natural destruction—whenever he holds in his hands a "poor earthly *casket* of *immortal* verse" (my italics). The question of how and where human

truth can be preserved is inevitably a question of education, and though Book v ends with a saving assertion of "the great Nature that exists in works / Of mighty Poets" (ll. 618–19), much of the book is taken up with a surprisingly savage satire on the "monster birth" that modern educational theories have produced. Wordsworth figures this ambiguous prodigy ("no child, but a dwarf man") first as a decayed institution and ultimately as an alien empire. "The path in which he treads / Is chok'd with grammars" (ll. 324–25); he "can string you names of districts, cities, towns," but the places over which his "Ensigns of . . . Empire" wave are alien because unnatural (ll. 335, 329):

> Meanwhile old Grandame Earth is grieved to find
> The playthings which her love design'd for him
> Unthought of. . . . (ll. 346–48)

When Wordsworth admits, quite rightly, that his "drift hath scarcely . . . been obvious," the immediate cause of his obscurity is the fundamental tension between these "playthings" of nature and "the fleet waters of the drowning world" (l. 136) that threatened the Arab's stone and shell (mathematics and poetry) with nature's destructiveness. At a deeper level, Wordsworth's drift is clouded by the question at the heart of his entire poetic project: what structure—university, book, or theory of education—can properly contain the mind?

In the second residential crisis of *The Prelude*, London, the description of Helvellyn Fair at the beginning of Book VIII is obviously a counterimage to the "blank confusion" of London's Bartholomew Fair at the end of Book VII, "a type not false / Of what the mighty City is itself" (ll. 695–96). Less obviously, all of Book VIII (by common consent the least successful part of the poem) is an imaginative backing up for another run at London, which returns to occupy that book's last quarter. Wordsworth directs his whole effort at assuring us and, patently, himself that he knows a better image of humanity than the depressing one he found in London, and therefore he devotes Book VIII to a determined mythicizing of Lake Country shepherds to heroic stature. But even in the process Wordsworth hints, by denial, that more traditional heroic images attract him. When he says ancient imperial gardens, "palaces and domes, . . . eastern monasteries" cannot attract him like the "severe and unadorned" landscape of his childhood because they are "alas! . . . but a dream," a breath of real loss escapes through the conventional sigh. More important, real poetic power returns to Book VIII only when Wordsworth returns to a London recast as "Preceptress stern" (l. 678), for the city is a seat of power and he is nakedly power hungry: "I sought not then / Knowledge; but craved for power, and power I found / In all things" (ll. 754–56). He recalls the immense impact of his first rite de passage into the city proper: "The threshold now is overpass'd. Great God! / That aught *external* to the living mind / Should have such mighty sway!" (ll. 700–02). In London, the human mind has stamped its image on its element with a vengeance, and Wordsworth's return to London breathes strength because, despite his criticism, London is an image of the cultural edifice he himself wants to be, the imperial center of an imperial imagination:

> [I] afterwards continued to be moved
> In presence of that vast Metropolis,
> The Fountain of my Country's destiny
> And of the destiny of Earth itself,
> That great Emporium, Chronicle at once
> And Burial-place of passions, and their home
> Imperial and chief living residence.
> (ll. 745–51)

Though he returns to London in Book VIII determined to find images of "union or communion," to emphasize "individual sights of courage, and integrity, and truth," and *not* to have anything "overthrow [his] trust / In what we may become" (ll. 839–40, 806–07), these efforts to maintain a high moral plane of imaginative democracy do not obscure the evidence that his own imagination is best able to deal with London when he conceives the city as an equal to the earth center he reserves for his genius and its masterwork.

Wordsworth resolves *The Prelude*'s third crisis, his "residence" in the French Revolution, in three stages, of increasing complexity, corresponding roughly to Books IX–X, XI–XII and XIII. Throughout Books IX and X he scatters ideal alternatives to the actual course of the Revolution: the idealization of Michel Beaupuis as a

romantic knight of modern revolution, the allusions to the philosophers who avenged ancient Sicily (and who recapitulate the roles of the solitary avengers of justice—Mithridates, Sertorius, Wallace—from Book I's list of favorite epic subjects), and the psychological subplot of Book X, a barely submerged fantasy that pits William Wordsworth against Maximilian Robespierre for the championship of the Revolution. Idealized in language refracted from the "Prospectus," the success of the Revolution at its height becomes part of Wordsworth's decentralizing myth. "Not favoured spots alone, but the whole Earth, / The beauty wore of promise" (X.702–03). "The very world which is the world / Of all of us" seems to him as "an inheritance new-fallen / Seems, when the first time visited, to one / Who thither comes to find in it his home" (ll. 726–32). This image expresses the heart's deepest wish in *The Recluse*, but Wordsworth, ever as realistic as he is fantastic, immediately asks himself why, ideal images aside, the earth does not so present itself.

He raises the question directly in the second stage of the third residential crisis' resolution, Books XI and XII, "Imagination, How Impaired and Restored." As we have seen before in *The Recluse*'s development, whenever the poem's social task becomes imminent it sharply challenges the individual imagination's adequacy to meet it. The inherited estate entails a fit heir. The crisis of the Revolution causes a two-part reconsideration of "Nature" and "Man," just as the crises of "Human Life" that Wordsworth explored in his first *Recluse* fragments of 1797–98 occasioned the two-part *Prelude* of 1799. Book XI investigates imagination in the context of nature, Book XII in the context of human social structures; the division parallels the structure of the two-part *Prelude*. Book XII asks, "Why is this glorious creature [the ideal man of political theorists] found one only in ten thousand?" (l. 90). It records the poet's walks in the mid-1790s, "to seek in Man, and in the frame of life, / Social and individual . . . the gifts divine and universal" (ll. 39–42), field trips for specimens of pure humanity. Following the logic of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, he connects epistemology to sociology and pursues his quest down the class ladder to ever more basic specimens, finally reaching those whose "words are but undertagents in their souls" (l. 272). He approaches the impasse of *Lyrical Ballads*' democratic theory of language, since he insists that "my Song" will proceed from this "depth of untaught things," "not like a temple rich . . . / But a mere mountain-Chapel" (ll. 310, 228–31): the imperial genius poet threatens his language by his egalitarian insistence that nonverbal cottagers are the truest types of humanity.

But the one walk he describes in any detail, his momentous crossing of Salisbury Plain, does not, significantly, say anything about poor silent men. Rather, it proclaims the glory of naked human assertiveness. He now returns to the scene of his first efforts toward *The Recluse*, the social protest poetry of "Salisbury Plain," but instead of championing the poor, infirm victims of society, the conclusion of Book XII radically underscores the power of human will in a triple vision of primitive England: the bone strength and "awesome majesty" of the ancient Britons, the thrilling "pomp" of their human sacrifices, and the Druids plotting out their "mystery of shapes" on the plain to "image forth the constellations." These visions seem to celebrate strangely the "ennobling interchange" between humanity and nature, but the strangeness modulates when we recall the similar images of power that accompanied Wordsworth's compositional return to London in Book VIII. Here, as there, Wordsworth attaches power to the assertive creativity he imagines for his poem, whose whole worth rests on the belief that it will discover a new basis for human life on earth:

> I remember well
> That in life's every-day appearances
> I seemed about this period to have sight
> Of a new world—a world, too, that was fit
> To be transmitted, and made visible
> To other eyes, as having for its base
> That whence our dignity originates.
> (XII.368–74)

The famous vision from Snowdon, we usually forget, also occurs "on one of these excursions" (XIII.1) and leads directly into the third and final stage of resolution of *The Prelude*'s third residential crisis. Snowdon functions as a contemporary, personal version of the "ennobling interchange" represented mythohistorically by the Druids' wands pointing back and forth be-

tween the stars and Stonehenge. Wordsworth inserts himself in place of the Druids, directing our attention to moon, cloudscape, and the "fracture in the vapour . . . through which / Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams / Innumerable, roaring with one voice!" (ll. 56–59)—the archetypal scene of imaginative process in his poetry. This rhetorical strategy, of substituting himself in propria persona at critical junctures in a vast cultural continuum, is implicit in his adoption of Adamic enthusiasm in "Home at Grasmere" and in the parallels he suggests between his own poetically outcast situation and the high-minded avengers of liberty he entertains as likely epic subjects in *Prelude* I. It will be made explicit when he recounts his wish to save the abbey of the Grand Chartreuse from revolutionary destruction in "The Tuft of Primroses" (1808). Such cultural egotism, substituting the individual imagination for the vanished or vanishing social tradition, is the central point of *The Prelude* as "ante-chapel" to *The Recluse*'s secular "gothic church." As an intention, it strikes most readers as either too sublime or too ridiculous for argument. The heuristically remarkable characteristic, however, is the instability that begins to affect the structure of *The Prelude* as Wordsworth tries to end the poem, a disequilibrium of conclusion that exactly mirrors not only the more well-known false starts in Book I's overlaid "preamble" and Introduction but also the endings of all the other *Recluse* fragments.

His difficulties arise because the great work now looms again before him. The subject is clear: imagination "hath been the moving soul of our long labour" (ll. 171–72). As M. H. Abrams has fully demonstrated, the final ideal alternative to the "residential" crisis of the French Revolution was to have been the imagination's construction of its own best home.[15] But fluctuations between private and public imaginative activity flow in on Wordsworth too thick and fast, and his progress through the last three hundred lines of *The Prelude* causes a series of false endings as he acknowledges how much is left out and how much remains to be done. Whenever he reaches the inevitable point of saying, "we have reached / The time (which was our object from the first) . . . Of building up a Work that should endure," he skirts back into the *Prelude* mode, "that marvellous world / As studied first in my own heart" (ll. 273–74, 278, 308–09). By now, the *Prelude* mode is nearly indistinguishable from doubts-about-*The Recluse*. In a conclusion characteristic of all *Recluse* endings, he defensively gathers about himself a small community—Coleridge, Dorothy, Mary, and Sara—his domestic equivalent to the small bands of followers that Book I's putative epic heroes took with them into creative exile. Wordsworth finds in this "fit audience though few" justification enough for Coleridge and his raising their "monument of glory" even if the world-at-large fails to recognize it:

> Then, though, too weak to tread the ways of truth,
> This Age fall back to old idolatry,
> Though men return to servitude as fast
> As the tide ebbs, to ignominy and shame
> By Nations sink together, we shall still
> Find solace in the knowledge which we have,
> Bless'd with true happiness if we may be
> United helpers forward of a day
> Of firmer trust, joint-labourers in a work
> (Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe)
> Of their redemption, surely yet to come.
> (ll. 431–41)

This construction is the final work of imagination in *The Prelude* and the denouement of the poem's three plot crises. We last glimpse a residence in which the two "Prophets of Nature" dwell as they

> Instruct [others] how the mind of man becomes
> A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
> On which he dwells, above this Frame of things
> . . . . . .
> In beauty exalted, as it is itself
> Of substance and of fabric more divine.
> (ll. 446–48, 451–52)

In the constitutive interplay between the "frame" of earth and the "fabric" of mind, we may see a beautiful tent, reminiscent of "Beauty [pitching] her tents before me when I move" in the "Prospectus"—a residence appropriately fragile for the poet who dreamed of accompanying his Arab-Quixote across the desert of this world to preserve the elements on which the mind stamps its image. In that dream the question that he knows applies most immediately to his own masterwork speeds him on:

> Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
> Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?
> (v.47–48)

"Home at Grasmere" in 1806

The return to *The Recluse* in 1806, to complete the poem begun in 1800 and call it "Home at Grasmere," clearly confirms Wordsworth's dialectical movement between private and public imagination in composing his masterwork. Following *The Prelude*'s investigation of the growth of his mind, Wordsworth resumes immediately with the houses of Grasmere, the stories each cottage could tell to support his claim for the special quality of the place. In the context of the *Recluse* fragments, this shift to the cottages, from the personal ecstasy of the portions composed in 1800, exactly parallels the movement of the two-part *Prelude* of 1799—from the first part's natural spontaneity to the second part's effort to give that spontaneity a social form—and the subsequent (1804–05) completion of *The Prelude* in terms of the "residences" Wordsworth uses to chart the growth of his mind. Indeed, the turn toward social construction is already apparent at the end of *The Prelude*, suggesting that the end of each of *The Recluse*'s compositional movements anticipates the opening of the following one. A similar turning, but from the social back to the personal, occurs at the end of "Home at Grasmere."

"Yon cottage" tells the story of a guilty husband who dies of remorse after committing adultery with his maid, feeling the "reproach" of "yon gracious Church . . . benignant Mother of the Vale . . . amid her brood of Cottages!" (ll. 469, 524, 526–27). Another cottage matches the guilty husband's tale with that of a happy widower, whose comfort from his six daughters is expressed entirely in terms of their house, which they have transformed from a piece of "native Rock" to a uniquely charming "play thing and a pride," with jasmine branches trained up its sides to perfume the bedrooms, a stone fence "curious for shape or hue," a "mimic Bird's nest" in a bush, and other cutely humanized features of home and garden (ll. 560–90). Even a "little grove of firs" turns out to be a human structure of sorts, planted by an old couple to protect their sheep just at the time their first child was born. These obscure suggestions of sympathy between human beings, plants, and animals are made literal in a catalog of animals who both give their identities to and gain their identities from places in Grasmere: an ass that carries a crippled quarry man, the particular thrush, wren, or robin familiar to each cottage, and so on, to "Helvellyn's Eagles . . . ancient Hold" and "The Owl that gives its name to Owlet-Crag" (ll. 739, 742). These homes of Grasmere stand as "fair proof" that "we are not alone" there, that William and Dorothy's return to their imaginative center is not an escapist fantasy, since everywhere here "some human heart has been / Before us with its offering" (ll. 659–60).

The proof concludes with a flock of birds, the same birds whose diminished numbers had, in the 1800 composition, prompted Wordsworth's "two are missing"—and got his poem into trouble. The missing swans opened a crack toward death and isolation into which *The Prelude* was thrust. The scar is healed by a significant change in metaphor, from the birds as wild, free dancers in air to dwellers in "a settled residence" or, at the very least, homecoming strangers. Whereas in 1800 the birds' circular unity in motion had been purely aesthetic, Wordsworth now describes it by analogy to the human community he seeks to establish:

> Whether in large communities ye dwell
> From year to year, not shunning man's abode,
> A settled residence, or be from far,
> Wild creatures, and of many homes, that come
> The gift of winds . . .
> . . . yet shall ye
> Not want for this . . .
> . . . an underplace
> In my affections. (ll. 758–66)

The dialectical motion of Wordsworth's thoughts on solitude and community is particularly notable in his unique definition of wildness as not homeless but "of many homes," pertaining to homes—like Wordsworth's imagination in Grasmere.

This important shift in metaphor characterizes all the parts of "Home at Grasmere" written in 1806, including the title, and caps the "residences" of *The Prelude*. But these metaphors are only natural analogies to human community.

The necessary turn to human action and responsibility comes, not surprisingly, as a violent attack on the city and a reappropriation of images of true civic life to Grasmere:

> Then boldly say that solitude is not
> Where these things are: he truly is alone,
> He of the multitude, whose eyes are doomed
> To hold a vacant commerce day by day
> With that which he can neither know nor love—
> Dead things, to him thrice dead— (ll. 807–12)

The city is by now at least three times worse than the country, in Wordsworth's excited negative hyperbole. But "worse than this . . . and worse than all," the man of the crowd holds vacant commerce with "swarms of life . . . his fellow men," and what should be a concentration of imaginative possibility appears to him "no more / Than to the Forest Hermit are the leaves" of the trees and finally "far less, far less" than that (ll. 813–17). The counteraction is an equally vehement appropriation of political language to Grasmere that resembles the preemption, in *Prelude* VIII, of London's "home Imperial . . . chief living residence"; it is an emphatic consolidation of Grasmere's powers to *oneness*, in diametric opposition to the extrapolating powers of alienation in the city:

> Society is here:
> The true community, the noblest Frame
> Of many into one incorporate;
> That must be looked for here; paternal sway,
> One Household under God for high and low,
> One family and one mansion; to themselves
> Appropriate and divided from the world
> As if it were a cave, a multitude
> Human and brute, possessors undisturbed
> Of this recess, their legislative Hall,
> Their Temple, and their glorious dwelling-
> place. (ll. 818–28)

Critics have long understood such exuberance in "Home at Grasmere" as something specially unguarded in Wordsworth's canon. But it is of a piece with the overall development of the *Recluse* project.[16] It stands out particularly in these moments when Wordsworth attempts to cement the relationship of mind to nature by sociopolitical means and metaphors that—after two hundred years of politicized romanticism—seem inconsistent with our ideas of *both* primary terms, especially with received ideas of Wordsworth's understanding of them.

"Dismissing therefore all Arcadian dreams" of poetry as mere entertainment, Wordsworth hopes to ally this spirit of Grasmere with a new poetry of reality—if only he and his friends can share the place's self-sufficiency, can be "Inmates not unworthy of their home . . . Dwellers of their Dwelling" (ll. 858–59). Such tautological identifications lead, as they do in all *Recluse* endings, back to him and the happy band around him. Having been constituted as the legislative center of an imaginative universe, the population of this Grasmerian commonwealth suddenly contracts to six: William, Dorothy, and John Wordsworth, Sara and Mary Hutchinson, and Coleridge. Then it shrinks precipitously to one, Wordsworth himself, and the basic structural question of *The Recluse* reemerges explicitly: how does imagination exist for others? Wordsworth's very "office" or "gift" sets him apart, even from his immediate circle, and he wonders why:

> Why does this inward lustre fondly seek
> And gladly blend with outward fellowship?
> (ll. 888–89)

He calls this a "strange question" (l. 892), and it is indeed strange for a man who has just substituted Grasmere for London on the basis of "outward fellowship" and who has recently charted the growth of his own mind as a search for its appropriate residence. Now that he has found a home, imagination thrusts itself in and threatens to alienate him all over again. Where does he turn for an answer? Once more to a house, that particularly Wordsworthian house, Dove Cottage:

> That humble Roof, embowered among the trees,
> That calm fire side—it is not even in them,
> Blessed as they are, to furnish a reply
> That satisfies and ends in perfect rest.
> (ll. 893–96)

The dialectical movement of *The Recluse*, from private to communal, grows ever more apparent here, as Wordsworth turns to structures of human habitation to lodge himself in his project. He must decide between self-knowledge in com-

munal terms or community knowledge projected from the self. Whichever he chooses, a gap remains; instead of choosing and developing one term or the other, as later nineteenth-century thinkers (like Marx and Freud) do, Wordsworth favors one and then the other, the spark of his imagination leaping back and forth across the gap throughout *The Recluse*'s life.

The gap threatens to widen as the poem ends. The *Prelude* theme will not diminish; his "something within, which yet is shared by none" (l. 898), will out. He fantasizes about "one, sole keeper of his own intent, / Or . . . a resolute few, who for the sake / Of glory fronted multitudes in arms" (ll. 927–29), and we recognize again the little band and its heroic leader, the Wordsworth circle of all the *Recluse* fragments. It derives from *Prelude* I's introduction of likely epic heroes, mostly northern figures (Odin, Gustavus, Wallace) who wreak the revenge of the philosophic mind on the misunderstanding, unjust, and tasteless civilizations to the south that have cast them out. A subconscious, selfish motivation of Wordsworth's ostensibly educative epic threatens to break into view: vengeance for London's less than triumphal reception of *Lyrical Ballads*. But Nature hushes these imaginative fantasies, promising Wordsworth another "office" with a different glory: by reconciling all humanity to its earthly home, Wordsworth will rise beyond politics into metaphysics, beyond "Jehovah . . . and the quire of shouting angels" into "the Mind of Man."

The "Prospectus" lines fit neatly into place at the end of "Home at Grasmere," once the redefinition of places and persons has been accomplished, however rapidly and awkwardly. And the "Prospectus," as we have seen, opens up all three regions of Wordsworth's song: "On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life." The last concern, although the least attractive to him, is always honestly present, despite the problems it introduces into each poem that tries to give those sad urban sounds "their authentic comment." The "Prospectus" ends with an invocation to the muse to enter its "metropolitan Temple in the hearts of mighty Poets"; the next *Recluse* poem, "The Tuft of Primroses" (1808), discovers such a temple of the spirit in the ruined abbeys of Christendom and tries to transfer its power to modern secular man via William Wordsworth, again with the result that the little band at Dove Cottage must write the poem of the replacement civilization.

III. "The Tuft of Primroses," the Solitary, and *The Excursion*

"The Tuft of Primroses" (1808)

When Wordsworth returned to *The Recluse* in 1808, he sought to establish more clearly the connections between his private life and his life's work and to indicate the impact he and his supporters hoped that work would have.[17] The structure of "The Tuft of Primroses" thus describes a circle, beginning and ending with scenes of everyday life in Grasmere but expanding in between over time and space to the origins of organized Christianity in the monastic hermitages of Asia minor. The disproportion between these two focuses explains Wordsworth's failure to complete the poem, but he wrote enough (594 lines) for us to see that he intends this analogy between spiritual brethren. More important, we can see that by insisting on the disproportion in favor of himself and his "female Votaries," as the community most fit to nourish imagination, he causes the self-destruction of his poem.

"The Tuft of Primroses" broods over change, death, and dissolution: "best Friends dead, or other deep heart-loss / Bewail'd with weeping" (John Wordsworth's drowning and Coleridge's growing estrangement).[18] This sense of loss, generalized, threatens to engulf the poem: "How many mute memorials [have] pass'd away!" (l. 77).[19] In defense, Wordsworth makes the perennial primrose a synecdoche for the creative spirit of Grasmere and allies this natural symbol to a social one, Grasmere chapel, by the oblique suggestion that the primroses might console the chapel for the loss of its screen of fir trees, cut down while the Wordsworths were away, to their great dismay. "Now stands the Steeple naked and forlorn . . . the 'last Central Home,' / To which all change conducts the Thought" (ll. 127–29). The church, thus exposed to change —and change in the function of the Church is the imaginative fulcrum of the poem—can nevertheless now see the valley more clearly, more humanistically. What it sees immediately is the

ruined cottage of the Sympson family, "Laid open to the glare of Common day," because all five members of the family died within two years, their intricate landscaping gone for naught. Wordsworth mourns not for the death of the family—"all was gentle death"—but for the loss of their imaginative product, their flowers and shrubs and bowers, "creeping into shapelessness . . . like a neglected image / Or Fancy which hath ceased to be recalled" (ll. 203–05). Uncomfortable as this apparent misplacement of grief may make us, for the poet whose key definition of the creative process was "emotion recollected in tranquility" the double destruction of an "image" (i.e., in literal fact and in memory) is a great loss indeed. Primrose and chapel, natural phenomenon and social spiritual institution, together counterbalance, temporarily, the ruined image of the Sympsons' cottage and unsteadily bridge the "gulf . . . which renders nothing back" (l. 215).

But since the poem is a draft, Wordsworth does not noticeably control his levels of discourse, and he wanders off from this temporary symbolic resolution into wishful thinking about "some wardenship of spirits pure" (l. 249) that would protect places like Grasmere, and all that they represent for him, from despoliation. The wish to conserve trees links with a deeper wish that such places could be established as preserves for another endangered species, imagination:

> . . . to protect
> Here, if here only, from despoil and wrong
> All growth of nature and all frame of Art.
> (ll. 252–54)

The desperate singularity of the wish is of a piece with the radical rhetoric of "Home at Grasmere"; the Lake Country begins to emerge as, more than a picturesque spot, a cultural shrine. Writing randomly past forest wardens, bandits, and hermits, Wordsworth hits on the idea that a holy place needs a body politic commensurate with its "frame," and he enters the heart of his poem, over two hundred lines on Saint Basil of Caesarea's "delicious Pontic solitude." These lines expatiate on the first monastic brotherhood of the Church as an imaginative surrogate for Wordsworth's "Wardenship of spirits," on the principle of *organized solitude.* That Wordsworth identified himself with Basil as the orchestrating leader of this strategic retreat is strongly suggested by the similarity between his flocking-bird metaphor and the metaphor from "Home at Grasmere." People came from all over Asia Minor to follow Basil's example:

> Men of all tempers, qualities, estates,
> Came with one spirit, like a troop of fowl
> That single or in clusters, at a sign
> Given by their leader, settle on the breast
> Of some broad pool, green field, or loftiest tree
> In harmony and undisturbed repose.
> (ll. 435–40)

The lines continue the crucial transformation of the flock metaphor that provided a fulcrum to the completion of "Home at Grasmere," from abstract aesthetic unity to organized social form. This flock seeks meditation, undistracted by Athens' "civil faction" and "religious broils," "Her throng of Sophists glorying in their snares, / Her Poets, and conflicting Orators," or by "Alexandria's splendid Halls" (ll. 299–302). Wordsworth uses the same imagery for these fourth-century world centers as he did for the early nineteenth-century cities in *Lyrical Ballads*, its Preface, and *The Prelude*: "blind boisterous works / In Paris and London, 'mong Christians or Turks, / Spirits busy to do and undo" ("Rural Architecture," ll. 19–21). He makes exactly this expansion of focus as he soars over the "vast regions of the Western Church," past the monasteries of the Loire and Rhone, to

> . . . the Piles that rose
> On British lawns by Severn, Thames, or Tweed,
> And saw their pomp reflected in the stream,
> As Tintern saw; and, to this day beholds
> Her faded image in the depths of Wye.
> (ll. 474–78)

But, having got his vision into one of its most holy places, he approaches a critical point where spiritual power must be transferred from this historical sketch to his own poem, which has analogous redemptive intentions and increasingly similar establishmentarian ambitions. The "faded image" of Tintern Abbey reflects the

"neglected image" of the Sympsons' cottage, but together the images only remind us that Wordsworth has thus far proposed merely analogical consolations for the loss of human spiritual potential.

He tries three times to bridge the "gulf" of death and dissolution in the last hundred lines of the poem, failing each time but each time exposing more clearly the heart of his matter, the relation of private imagination to public intention. The first attempt is the signature of High Romanticism, a substitution of nature for Revelation in a new secular dispensation. Wordsworth avers a tradition of "nature's pure religion" parallel to Christianity's:

> . . . in line
> Uninterrupted it hath travelled down
> From the first man who heard a howling storm
> Or knew a troubled or a vain desire,
> Or in the very sunshine of his joy
> Was saddened at a perishable bliss
> Or languish'd idly under fond regrets
> That would not be subdued. . . . (ll. 487–94)

As soon as we ask who might be a contemporary avatar of this "first man," the poem breaks open, and so it did for Wordsworth: these very words mark the point at which the continuity of the manuscript breaks off into fragmentary drafts of shorter passages (*PW*, v, 360).[20] The entire *Recluse* project has here reached its thematic nadir. There lie the abbeys, "crush'd and buried under weeds and earth" (l. 470), while here stands a Last Man very like that implacable "first man," and the dying spirit of the old orders does not leap the gap to kindle him anew.

Wordsworth's second attempt to close the distance between the old dispensation and the new is a brief, wild swerve to a more sunshiny band of recluses, Robin Hood and his Merry Men (ll. 494–508). The impulse to seek a communal image is entirely consistent with the structural principles of *The Recluse* as we can now see them, particularly with the recurring image of the little band of friends that appears at the end of each section. The Merry Men also structurally resemble the outcast avengers of poetic justice from *Prelude* I's list of epic subjects. But these outlaws will never do as heroes for serious civic poetry; when Wordsworth says, "let them on / I love them better when at ease" (ll. 507–08), he is in dead earnest.

Finally, in his third attempt, biography comes in aid of feeling, and Wordsworth writes the first draft, later incorporated into *Prelude* VI, of his visit to the abbey of the Grand Chartreuse in 1790. Though he was mistaken about the destructive intentions of the revolutionary troops he saw approaching the abbey, he imagines that he and his companion may be "the last, perchance the very last, of men / Who shall be welcom'd here" (ll. 515–16). He hears the "sighs and whispers" and "Voices" of the place, yet he attributes them not, as he does in the *Prelude* version, to "Nature's voice" but to "the parting Genius" of the place: "Unheard till now and to be heard no more" (ll. 526–27). On examination, this suggestion seems amazing, even after we make allowances for hasty composition; nevertheless, it fits perfectly with the direction *The Recluse* has been taking. We know why the whispers may soon "be heard no more," but why "unheard till now"? Who has *not heard* them? If no Christians, even the "blameless priesthood" of the Carthusians, have heard them till this moment, they are evidently not a usual epiphany of the divine voice. Rather, they seem to be special voices saved for eschatological emergency. Taken probably from Milton's "Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," the voices of "the parting Genius" seem to be the actual *pass*words of transition from the old religious order to a new one, the departing effluence of Christianity heard by William Wordsworth, Last Man/First Man, who will translate them to a new world building itself on the ruins of the old. In this moment of Parousia, the Christian spirit passes to the one revolutionary sympathizer who is yet attuned to the ancien régime of consciousness.[21]

Wordsworth generalizes his averral in a way that confirms this interpretation. He says, "I was moved and to this hour am moved" (l. 528), as anyone would be at the idea of an entire species of "insensate life [or] natural power or element" being extinguished. The "species" he sees endangered is nothing less than imagination, since men performed socially in abbeys like Chartreuse and Tintern—"so consecrated . . . that transcendent frame of social being"—what Wordsworth and Coleridge theorized poets

doing verbally and symbolically: "Humanly clothed the ghostliness of things / In silence visible and perpetual calm" (ll. 542–43). In his plea for the abbey, Wordsworth inserts, as he did in the "Prospectus" ("the Mind of Man, my haunt"), the enduring power of human subjectivity [3] between heavenly [1] and natural [2] eternities:

> Let it be redeem'd
> With all its blameless priesthood for the sake [1]
> Of Heaven-descended truth; and humbler
> claim [2]
> Of these majestic floods, my noblest boast,
> These shining cliffs, pure as their home, the sky,
> These forests unapproachable by death
> That shall endure as long as Man endures [3]
> To think, to hope, to worship and to feel;
> To struggle,—to be lost within himself
> In trepidation,—from the dim abyss
> To look with bodily eyes, and be consoled.
> (ll. 559–69)

This most literal epiphany in all of Wordsworth's writing says, of course, far too much, as Wordsworth well understood. But it gives a reassurance so powerful that it enables him finally to bridge the gap between the history of revelation and an ahistorical continuum of human subjectivity and thus to lead his "unwearied Song" to a "lonely Vale the mild abode / Of female Votaries," where a "humbler task awaits us" (ll. 571–74). In an unmistakable parallel to other *Recluse* conclusions, the poem rounds itself off with the need to begin the great work; the epic venture rebounds again on its creator. The turn from abbey to cottage is too quick to be plausible, but Wordsworth makes his transition with a rigorous honesty that simultaneously reveals and threatens his imaginative structure, the hallmark of his greatest meditations, "Tintern Abbey" and the Intimations Ode. He abandons the whole poem he has built up behind him. He points out the obvious, that the "lonely Vale . . . this chosen spot" is not like Saint Basil's retreat, "Nor can it boast a massy structure huge / Founded and built by hands with arch and towers" (ll. 579–80). The poem whose design will in a few years be likened to a Gothic cathedral denies all relation to the very structures it has invoked. The force of these negative truisms depends on Wordsworth's tacit prior assumption of fundamental similarity between the monasteries and his "mild abode." His "lowly Edifice" is unlike these great places, not because it in fact differs from them, but because it does not *need* to be like them! This domestication of the sublime is literally egotistical, since the poetic self is being substituted for the history of Christianity. "Contented" by their own cottage he and his companions "require not" such "signs . . . tokens, admonitions . . . curbs . . . stays."

The institutional inclination of *The Recluse* assumes its most acute angle in "The Tuft of Primroses," only to be toppled at the last moment. It goes farther toward imaginative establishmentarianism than "Home at Grasmere" 's "legislative Hall," but the same intertwined questions of personal and cultural inspiration and death rise again to break it off. Wordsworth rejects, not the epic task, only the terms in which it has been framed, as a magnitude of tradition unnecessary, offensive, or otherwise inconsistent with the "gentle Beings" who would undertake the task. Wordsworth rejects his own cultural parallels, deconstructs his own poem, in order to confront directly the responsibility to create a poem that can be the redeeming structure rather than a mere analogy. The reiteration of the *Prelude* mode once more baffles the forward motion of *The Recluse*. Having raised up an institutional structure of imagination from himself and having razed it again back down to himself, he now returns to the individual personality, not his own but an only slightly displaced version thereof: the character of the Solitary.

The Solitary (c. 1809–12)

The resumption of *Recluse* work in the following year (1809)[22] created the Solitary, the political and religious apostate whose renovation eventually becomes the motive force of *The Excursion*. Though the Solitary has both literary and historical models,[23] his biography sufficiently resembles Wordsworth's for us to recognize in the books of *The Excursion* devoted to him (II–IV) a return to the poetry of the growth of the mind that characterizes the second, or *Prelude*, phase of each of *The Recluse*'s compositional episodes. This recoil has already begun at the end of "The Tuft of Primroses," but as an implosion that destroys the poem.

Wordsworth takes up the creation of the Solitary as a deliberately distanced reconstruction of a personality that has been damaged by the loss of loved ones, of religious faith, and of revolutionary and humanitarian idealism—all conditions that Wordsworth knew intimately as he entered his fortieth year.

The Solitary's mental despondency arises directly from the failure of social institutions to support his ideals, exactly the situation Wordsworth had reached at the end of "The Tuft of Primroses," where he introduced it by images of the decay and decline of civilizations. When two other characters, the Wanderer and the Poet, come to the Solitary's dwelling, the first human-made object they see—the first "stamp" of the human mind—is a miniature ruined city, built by children with the Solitary's indulgent help. Out of it they fetch a damp copy of *Candide*, which "had lent its help to raise / One of those petty structures" (II.435–36). It supports a ruined civilization, foundered on "no better stay" than the rationalism with which Voltaire punctured the benign necessitarianism of the eighteenth century, which, in more abstract Godwinian form, Wordsworth temporarily embraced in his own moral despondency of the mid-1790s. Inside the Solitary's cottage, things are the same, only worse:

> What a wreck
> Had we about us! scattered was the floor,
> And, in like sort, chair, window-seat, and shelf,
> With books, maps, fossils, withered plants and flowers,
> And tufts of mountain moss. Mechanic tools
> Lay intermixed with scraps of paper, some
> Scribbled with verse: a broken angling-rod
> And shattered telescope, together linked
> By cobwebs, stood within a dusty nook;
> And instruments of music, some half-made,
> Some in disgrace, hung dangling from the walls. (ll. 660–70)

Behind the Solitary's messy housekeeping we see the decay of a highly civilized mind that has neglected all the arts and sciences; his self-indulgent depression ruins all that makes the individual humane. But his decrepit condition is later countered by evidence of his imaginative potential in a vision he has of a heavenly city up among the mountain vapors:

> . . . a mighty city—boldly say
> A wilderness of building . . .
> . . . . . .
> With alabaster domes, and silver spires,
> And blazing terrace upon terrace . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . marvelous array
> Of temple, palace, citadel, and huge
> Fantastic pomp of structure without name. . . .
> (II.835–36, 840–41, 857–59)

The urban rhetoric resembles both "Home at Grasmere" and the "Prospectus" and for all its technicolor splendor contains the seed of their difficulties: it is a "structure without name." A sense of purpose in individual life should ideally provide the name or identity of that life's social structures. The failure of this process for Wordsworth in Cambridge, London, and Paris motivates the plot of *The Prelude*. By contrast, the ensuing discussion throughout *The Excursion* tries to convince the Solitary to link his visionary susceptibilities to "the little Vale, a dwelling-place of Man," lying right at his feet though he does not recognize it.

In Book IV ("Despondency Corrected"), private myth making is offered to the Solitary as an antidote to mental depression brought on by public disappointments. Its habit-forming side effects appear in the question of the identity of the spirits he seemed to see in his heavenly city. Are they spirits or figments, and can they be trusted? At the end of Book IV's 1,325 lines it still seems possible to say, despite the Wanderer's orthodox intentions, that they are any spirits we want them to be, in any imaginative construct we choose to build on nature's materials—so long as we do choose.[24] True, he offers special remedies because the Solitary's disaffected idealism is a case of the epidemic disease that Coleridge wanted *The Recluse* to counteract: "a Tartarean darkness overspreads / The groaning nations" (IV.297–98). But what results is the most radically private imagining in all of Wordsworth's poetry, an extreme effort to resolve *The Recluse*'s public/private dilemma, structurally counterequivalent to, and as transparently simple as, the reconstitution of Grasmere as capital city.

In a passage reworked from "Home at Grasmere," the Wanderer proposes to show the Solitary "the mighty commonwealth of things" in

"this sublime retreat" and not in "the obstreperous city" (ll. 342, 369–72). Thus Book IV's famous lines about primitive myths—that led Keats to declare *The Excursion* one of the "three things to rejoice at in this age"—concern not merely seeing human shapes in natural forms but specifically creating *orders* of being, particularly social order. The Wanderer recommends ants to the Solitary's attention, "tiny creatures strong by social league," building up "thousands of cities in the desert place" (ll. 432–37). This low-key beginning rapidly crescendoes to drawing out "shapes / And phantoms from the crags and solid earth / As fast as a musician scatters sounds / Out of an instrument" (ll. 522–25), and for over two hundred lines the reader suddenly experiences a poetic energy unlike anything else in the poem. The ancient myths show, in very simple terms, how human consciousness invested the earth with plan, transforming it from the nothing that was there to the world that is the world of all of us. The conclusion, "solitude was not . . . solitude was not" (ll. 633, 650) in the primitive world of human consciousness, is repeated as insistently as the peroration of "Home at Grasmere": "Say boldly then that solitude is not / Where these things are." The Babylonians reared their tower of Babel to overlook an ideally—for *The Recluse*—mixed economy: "Winding Euphrates, and the city vast / . . . with grove and field and garden interspersed; / Their town, and foodful region" (ll. 689–92). The "lively Grecian," Keats's favorite, "could find commodious place for every God" (l. 721),

> in despite
> Of the gross fictions chanted in the streets
> By wandering Rhapsodists; and in contempt
> Of doubt and bold denial hourly urged
> Amid the wrangling schools— (ll. 731–35)

This creative perseverance strongly suggests that the Grecian sees the same debased cultural conditions in his central cities as Wordsworth and his alter ego, Saint Basil, saw in theirs: low appeals to fancy, philosophic disputations without soul, and constant mental flux.

The Wanderer argues so unguardedly that the Solitary twits him with aiding the return of Catholic superstition. But the Wanderer angrily accepts the consequence, that superstition would be better than the alienating condition in which modern science has placed the world, "Viewing all objects unremittingly / In disconnection dead and spiritless" (ll. 961–62). The central image the Wanderer selects to depict sarcastically the folly of modern rationalism's murdering to dissect is none other than a national celebration of a poet in the capital city: "the laughing Sage of France. / Crowned was he, if my memory do not err, / With laurel planted upon hoary hairs" (ll. 996–98). The image returns us to the Solitary's abused copy of *Candide*, but far more important for an overall reading of *The Recluse* fragments is the recognition of Wordsworth's own motive, antithetically presented, to gain his nation's honor, a motive similarly revealed yet disguised in his simultaneous introduction and rejection of those philosophical avengers in *Prelude* I who return from northern exile to destroy or otherwise purge the corrupted capital.

From superstition therapy for individual depression, this *Prelude* phase of *The Recluse* soon turns back toward public affairs, toward an idea that has since become a thunderous truism, that modern society needs a new kind of church. The Solitary, unaware, already occupies one such church, his valley: "A temple . . . of dimensions vast, / And yet not too enormous for the sound / Of human anthems" (ll. 1161–63). The Poet elaborates this balanced, Grasmerian quality of the place at the beginning of Book V (composed during the 1809–12 period). What seems to him "the fixed centre of a troubled world" (v.16) provokes a wish reminiscent of "The Tuft of Primroses":

> Knowledge, methinks, in these disordered times,
> Should be allowed a privilege to have
> Her anchorites, like piety of old. (ll. 29–31)

For an example of these modern anchorites, prototypes of Coleridge's clerisy, the discussants in this philosophic walking tour depart to the Pastor, whose tales of dead parishioners in his mountain churchyard are the final statement, in some five thousand lines, of the principle of democratically decentralized imagination that controls the final stage of *The Recluse*'s composition.

The Last *Recluse* (c. 1813–14)

Wordsworth finds the controlling metaphor of the last five books of *The Excursion* by reaching back over his investigation of an individual, solitary mind to his previous point of departure, the abbeys and hermitages of "The Tuft of Primroses," just as in the 1806 conclusion of "Home at Grasmere" he reached back over the intervening *Prelude* to transform the image of the bird flock in "Home at Grasmere" 's 1800 beginning from a free-floating aesthetic form to a social, communal one. The framework of these five books is praise of the "solemn institutions" that support the human mind, accompanied by increasingly explicit wishes to see these institutions (primarily educational) expanded and diversified till even "the smallest habitable rock" might enjoy the benefits of "culture unexclusively bestowed" (IX.387, 392). This movement toward institutional forms of mental discipline cannot simply be called evidence of Wordsworth's conservative apostasy, or growing religiosity, or flagging imagination unless we are willing to see the aptness of such labels as far back as the two-part *Prelude* of 1798–99. In the light of the entire *Recluse* project, we can only say that by the time Wordsworth drew *The Excursion* to a close, he was more willing to attach his imagination to institutions consecrated by agencies other than his own memory.

Books VI and VII inaugurate a process that leads finally to Book IX's "smallest habitable rock" and completes the deep intention of *The Recluse*. That process decentralizes imagination from its traditional location in capital cities and privileged classes and—though here is the rub—from the mind of the poet who proposes such decentralization as his mode of triumph over established imaginations. The true, blind sublimity of Wordsworth's egotism was its wish to ignore the prerogatives of individual genius in order to write the requisite redemptive poem for a modern, democratic, and, by necessity, unheroic society incapable of admiring traditional genius. This decentralized imagination motivates the sixteen poetic short stories told in Books VI and VII. They demonstrate mental fortitude under stress, but they represent, more importantly, significant imaginings in insignificant places. They are, in addition, mental tragedies in varying degrees, harking back to the very first *Recluse* drafts of Margaret, the old Cumberland beggar, and the Discharged Veteran. Wordsworth repeatedly describes the deceased in structural metaphors of mental growth—or lack of it—like the tall intellectual woman's life (VI.675–777), "a pile constructed [without] . . . the contentment of the builder's mind." "From their lowly mansions hither brought" (V.652), the deceased have graves like their earthly homes; Ellen, the village Magdalen, built her "nest" too near passion's edge, and her "secret oratory" could not bear the load of grief that broke her down. Wordsworth establishes connective parallels between these little lives and the larger institutions of the world. Most obviously, the paired story of the old Jacobite and the old Whig (VI.392–521) makes the huge political distance between them the object of the friendly bickering that gave meaning to the ends of their lives, which they themselves memorialized in "yon structure," a sundial raised to commemorate the old yew by which they daily met and argued. The stories of young Oswald and Sir Alfred Irthing, with which the graveyard series ends, represent together the spirit of New and Old England, Oswald's being the most recent death and Irthing's the most ancient. Oswald is a village athletic hero, a modern knight called to take up arms in his country's defense against Napoleon. Wordsworth, sparing no comparison, paints him as a potentially worthy antagonist of the dread Bonaparte: he is "Pan or Apollo, veiled in human form," "No braver Youth / Descended from Judean heights, to march / With righteous Joshua" (VII.730, 811–13).

> England, the ancient and the free, appeared
> In him to stand before my swimming eyes
> Unconquerably virtuous and secure.
>
> (ll. 856–58)

Irthing, Wordsworth's knight, comes last where Chaucer's came first, and the placement has a significance that the Solitary elaborates by comparing the disappearance of knightly orders to the disappearing "errantry" of the Wanderer's former occupation of peddling. Sir Alfred is the Wordsworthian hero par excellence, because he is the hero come home, having acted in the large

world of Reformation and Renaissance and retired to this "sequestered vale." Though only a gateway remains of "the ruins of his stately lodge" (l. 969), it is potentially the portal of a new foundation, depending on how one interprets it.

Interpretation is all; leaving the knight's grave at the beginning of Book VIII, the Solitary and the Wanderer get into a heated argument over the progress or decline of civilization that threatens the poem's structural decorum, just as Wordsworth's arguments with himself fractured "Home at Grasmere" and "The Tuft of Primroses." The knight's name (spelled "Erthing" by some editors),[25] with its typically heavy Wordsworthian symbolism, makes his tale the more pointed. Is the individual more or less than an earth thing? Launching off from the decay of old orders and institutions represented by Irthing's "foundation," the Wanderer laments the double bind of "decay restless and restless generation" and apparently longs for the good old days yet comes out for "progress in the main"—a phrase exactly repeated from "Home at Grasmere" 's ideal vision of human moral growth. He generalizes from the decline of knightly orders to all traditional organizations of life, in a nightmare vision of so-called progress in contemporary England: villages bypassed and isolated by new highroads, towns erupting over the countryside, homes empty all day because their inhabitants work in factories that are brightly lit and busy—the final perversion of natural order —at night! What hope, he demands with assured desperation, for "manhood raised on such foundations?" (ll. 333–34). "None!" the Solitary shoots back, painting an equally deranged landscape of "crazy huts and tottering hovels" in which the poor and ignorant in olden times lived out their less than human lives, long "before . . . these [industrial] structures" rose, and daring the Wanderer to say what these unfortunates have gained from the vaunted development of British civil, religious, and educational liberties.

Just when the argument reaches an interesting impasse between the decline or the progress of civilization, in terms of technology versus politics, the Pastor invites everyone to tea. Well, sterner climaxes have been averted by even simpler means. But Wordsworth tries to make a high tea indeed by elaborately describing the house in which it is laid; the parsonage, almost like a new character in the poem, gives its title to Book VIII. Although the parsonage's symbolic function does not succeed, we can interpret its significance in the *Recluse* context established thus far. Wordsworth presents the parsonage as a blending or combining of contrasts: an "image of solemnity, conjoined / With feminine allurements soft and fair" (ll. 459–60). Comparable in this respect to the ideal residences of *The Prelude* and Grasmere's "household . . . for high and low," it is the culmination of all the architectural details and metaphors in the sixteen graveyard stories. The description ends—"the picture else were incomplete"—with

> . . . a relique of old times
> Happily spared, a little Gothic niche
> Of nicest workmanship; that once had held
> The sculptured image of some patron-saint,
> Or of the blessèd Virgin, looking down
> On all who entered those religious doors.
> (VIII.485–90)

Though empty, the niche "happily" remains, to be filled by the reflections of the Poet now entering the parsonage, who had stood before the abbey of the Grand Chartreuse and wondered wildly if he might not somehow fill such empty religious spaces under threat of modern destruction and ignorance. The parsonage is in effect the institutional renovation of all *The Recluse*'s ruined cottages.

Such an interpretation remains only a possibility in *The Excursion*. The Pastor has the last word in Book IX, but not before the Wanderer's vision of a world redeemed by "culture, unexclusively bestowed," appropriately concludes the overall tendency of *The Recluse*. His vision makes public the private wish of "Home at Grasmere," that imagination, civilized and institutionalized, might extend its sway from one remote spot to another:

> Change wide, and deep, and silently performed,
> This Land shall witness; and as days roll on,
> Earth's universal frame shall feel the effect;
> Even till the smallest habitable rock,
> Beaten by lonely billows, hear the songs
> Of humanised society; and bloom
> With civil arts, that shall breathe forth their
> fragrance,
> A grateful tribute to all-ruling Heaven.

> From culture, unexclusively bestowed
> On Albion's noble Race in freedom born,
> Expect these mighty issues: from the pains
> And faithful care of unambitious schools
> Instructing simple childhood's ready ear:
> Thence look for these magnificent results!
> (IX.384–97)

Centers of power seem bypassed in this extraordinary sweep of ordinariness, but unlike "Home at Grasmere" these lines realistically acknowledge that poetry alone cannot make things happen: "—Vast the circumference of hope—and ye / Are at its centre, British Lawgivers; / Ah! sleep not there in shame!" (ll. 398–400).

Reach the circumference from grasp of the center; this is imagination's mode of operation in *The Recluse*. Explicit in this poem, it is implicit in the "Madras system" of school reform that was Wordsworth's immediate inspiration for the Wanderer's vision of an imperial education system.[26] The brainchild of one Andrew Bell, this method of using pupil tutors displaced the teacher's authority to the background in a way analogous to the displacement of special genius that we can now see as both motive and stumbling block of *The Recluse*. The inauspicious title of Bell's work, *An Experiment in Education Made at the Asylum of Madras* (1797), combined provisional, psychological, and colonial qualifiers that did not deter the author of the experimental poem written in the cottage at Grasmere; quite the contrary. Dr. Bell was invited to the Lake Country, where a local school temporarily adopted his system, and for a period in the fall of 1811 the poet himself served as a practice teacher, though he soon left such chores to his "female Votaries." The idea of an open, pupil-centered education controlled almost invisibly by a master intelligence, though it might seem to unsympathetic political analysis a convenient means of colonizing the natives on a slim budget, touched deep chords in *The Recluse*'s author, harmonizing with his theory of democratic imaginative hierarchies in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

Wordsworth was not the first but he was of the first generation to propose long-term educational solutions to the political crises of mass democracy—against Napoleon and the threat of invasion, begin "Instructing simple childhood's ready ear"—and one can call him either liberal or conservative for doing so. The vision of humanistic education stemming world chaos is still the bedrock of modern educational institutions, however deeply stratified, ignored, or scorned it may be. The gap that *The Recluse* exposes—that widens in each of the poem's attempted bridgings—lies not between William Wordsworth and Napoleon Bonaparte but between the ends and means of imagination. It lies between the nearly empty minds of the first *Recluse* drafts of 1797–98 and the overflowing mind of the first *Prelude* of 1798–99, between Grasmere as mountain village and as world center, between the real universities, cities, and revolutions of *The Prelude* and their idealized counter-residences, between mind as wreck or as source of the Solitary's civilization.

Is imagination a means to an end or an end in itself? *The Recluse* keeps asking this unanswerable question. Since the answer is both or neither, the question remains viable only insofar as the claims of means and ends are vitally asserted against each other, which happens in the best parts of the poem as in the best parts of subsequent literary history and critical practice. The poem flags, as does our work, when any end term determines its means too finally. "Human Life," although a comprehensive enough term, is a condition, not a predicate; Wordsworth's efforts to bring his epic round to that subject, through "Man" and "Nature," are both the glory and the defeat of *The Recluse*. In his 1814 preface to *The Excursion* he likened *The Recluse* to a "gothic church" and claimed that all the rest of his poems, "when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices." Few readers have been attentive enough to discover this cathedral, partly unfinished and partly ruined. One good reason may be that when Wordsworth brought out his complete poems in 1815, he changed his metaphor, from "the body of a gothic church" to the body and life of an individual person, in the categorization of his works that he used thenceforward: poems "written in youth," "referring to childhood," "founded on the affections," inspired by "Fancy," "Imagina-

tion," "Sentiment," and "Reflection," "referring to the period of old age," and interspersed with the "memorials," "tours," and "epitaphs" of the same person.[27] In this shift of metaphor we see once again the continuing dialectic of *The Recluse*, moving from public structure to private person. More important, we witness the last turning of *The Recluse*, its transformation into William Wordsworth. The cathedral becomes the man. At about this time, Wordsworth recognized himself as an institution of imagination, and we can chart much of the remaining thirty-five years of his life as a consistent effort to extend the sway of this institution and all it stood for.

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Notes

[1] Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950), p. 90.

[2] The exception is John Alban Finch's "Wordsworth, Coleridge, and 'The Recluse,' 1798–1814," Diss. Cornell 1964, a valuable beginning cut short by Finch's untimely death. Finch examines the sequence of *Recluse* texts primarily in terms of compositional problems and biographical data. Other important statements about *The Recluse*'s contents and intentions are Ernest de Selincourt, "*The Prelude* and *The Recluse*," in his ed. of *The Prelude* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), pp. xxxii–xl; Mark L. Reed, *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years, 1800–1815* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 656–86 (hereafter *CMY*); Beth Darlington, ed., *"Home at Grasmere": Part First, Book First, of "The Recluse"* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 3–32; Lionel Stevenson, "Wordsworth's Unfinished Gothic Cathedral," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 32 (1963), 170–83; William Minto, "Wordsworth's Great Failure," *Nineteenth Century* (Sept. 1889), rpt. in part in *Wordsworth's Mind and Art*, ed. A. W. Thomson (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), pp. 10–27.

[3] The dating of the "Prospectus" is perhaps the most vexed of *The Recluse*'s many textual cruxes. Darlington, the definitive authority, identifies "the period between spring, 1800, and early spring, 1802" as "the likeliest time" but cautions that exact pinpointing is not possible (p. 22) and assigns an all-but-complete version to early spring of 1800 (p. 13). Reed concurs, adding that "no evidence . . . absolutely precludes composition—and such a speculation remains persistently appealing on the basis of content—between 1798 and 1800" (*CMY*, p. 665). Most recently, Jonathan Wordsworth has argued for dating the "Prospectus" January 1800, principally on the basis of its very close similarities in spirit to the "Glad Preamble" of November 1799 ("On Man, On Nature, and On Human Life," *Review of English Studies*, NS 31 [1980], 26–28). The January date would place it exactly in the sequence I am proposing: after the completion of the two-part *Prelude* of late 1799 but before, or simultaneous with, the inception of "Home at Grasmere" in early 1800.

[4] Finch, pp. 32–64; Reed, *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Early Years, 1770–1799* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 215, 225, 337–39 (hereafter *CEY*); and de Selincourt and Darbishire, *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, v (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 363–64 (hereafter *PW*), establish the likelihood that these texts formed the first drafts of *The Recluse*; definite proof will probably remain impossible, given the volatile nature of Wordsworth's composition and conception of the poem. For purposes of clarity, I am ignoring "The Pedlar" as a separate version of "The Ruined Cottage" and as the main tributary whereby autobiographical elements from *The Recluse*—the many similarities between the Pedlar's boyhood and Wordsworth's—filtered into *The Prelude*; see Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1969), pp. 157–241.

[5] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787–1805*, ed. E. de Selincourt, rev. Chester Shaver, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), pp. 212, 214.

[6] Stephen Gill, " 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain' and Wordsworth's Poetry of Protest 1795–97," *Studies in Romanticism*, 11 (1972), 48–65.

[7] All line citations for the 1798–99 *Prelude* are to the Reading Text of *"The Prelude," 1798–1799*, ed. Stephen Parrish (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977).

[8] *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 527.

[9] Finch, "On the Dating of 'Home at Grasmere,' " in *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 14–28. Finch's reassignment of portions of "Home at Grasmere" to 1806 from the traditionally accepted 1800 date is substantially endorsed by Reed, *CEY*, pp. 656–57.

[10] My identification of the portions of "Home at Grasmere" composed in 1800 and those from 1806 is based on Darlington's tentative conclusions in the introduction to her edition, pp. 8–22; all line numbers refer to the MS. B Reading Text of this edition. Jonathan Wordsworth, in his essay in *Review of English Studies*, disputes her findings in favor of an 1800 date for all but a few connective passages of the poem. This view, if established, would damage the symmetry of my argument but not its substance, since my interpretation of the lines Darlington assigns to 1806 (principally ll. 469–859 of MS. B) is essentially the

same as his, i.e., that the lines show Wordsworth consciously trying to rectify problems created by his excessively optimistic celebration of Grasmere. I find Darlington's postulated division of the poem (which follows Finch and has been corroborated by Reed) persuasive because in the portions she assigns to 1806 Wordsworth writes primarily about others—the people and animals of Grasmere—while in the 1800 portions he focuses much more on himself.

[11] I develop this interpretation in " 'Home at Grasmere': Reclusive Song," *Studies in Romanticism*, 14 (1975), 1–28.

[12] The comparison of long poems to large buildings is a rhetorical tradition of ancient date. Stuart Peterfreund identifies some of the immediate influences of this tradition on Wordsworth in his " 'In Free Homage and Generous Subjection': Miltonic Influence on *The Excursion*," *Wordsworth Circle*, 9 (1978), 173–77.

[13] I am indebted to Karl Johnson's study *The Written Spirit: Thematic and Rhetorical Structure in Wordsworth's "The Prelude"* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1978) for stimulating my thoughts on the "homing" pattern of Wordsworth's imagination.

[14] All line references to the 1805 *Prelude* are from the de Selincourt edition.

[15] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), esp. pp. 17–32, 65–70, 325–72.

[16] For varying interpretations of the exceptional nature of "Home at Grasmere" see Abrams, pp. 288–92; John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954), pp. 133–37; Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787–1814* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 171–74; William Heath, *Wordsworth & Coleridge: A Study of Their Literary Relations in 1801–1802* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), pp. 11–16; and Karl Kroeber, " 'Home at Grasmere': Ecological Holiness," *PMLA*, 89 (1974), 132–41.

[17] Heath, pp. 11–19, makes the point with reference to "Home at Grasmere," but it applies equally to "The Tuft of Primroses."

[18] De Selincourt and Darbishire, *PW*, v, 483; all line numbers refer to Appendix C of this edition. Another edition, in *Late Poems for "The Recluse,"* ed. Joseph F. Kishel, is forthcoming from Cornell Univ. Press.

[19] For further interpretation of the dirgelike qualities of the poem, see James Butler, "Wordsworth's *The Tuft of Primroses*: 'An Unrelenting Doom,' " *Studies in Romanticism*, 14 (1975), 237–48.

[20] I have confirmed the poem's appearance by examination of the manuscript in the Dove Cottage Library.

[21] I interpret this passage further in "Wordsworth's Last Beginning: *The Recluse* in 1808," *ELH*, 43 (1976), 316–41.

[22] The image of Wordsworth sitting down to resume work on *The Recluse* in 1809 is a tidy critical fiction imposed on a vastly complicated textual history, much of which will be elucidated for the first time in Michael Jaye's forthcoming edition of *The Excursion* in the Cornell Univ. Press series. At present, it is difficult to say when Wordsworth's composition of the poem began to proceed toward the final form as we know it. Recent scholarship has, however, moved the likeliest early date of sustained composition of Books II–IV from the 1806–07 date cited by de Selincourt and Darbishire (*PW*, v, 415, 418–19, 423) to 1809 (Reed, *CMY*, pp. 23–24, 666). Although some drafts of passages in *The Excursion* can be dated as early as 1797–98, the essential evidence for the present argument is that major, conscious composition of *The Excursion* postdates "The Tuft of Primroses" and that the sections devoted to the Solitary (Bks. II–IV) antedate those devoted to the Pastor (Bks. V–IX). Reed's summary (*CMY*, pp. 23–24) shows the composition of Books II–IV falling primarily between 1809 and 1812, that of Books V–IX primarily between 1813 and 1814.

[23] John Thelwall, the political speaker and writer, is usually considered the likeliest model for the Solitary, and, as author of *The Peripatetic*, the influence nearest Wordsworth in the loco-meditative poetic tradition. Alan G. Hill has also shown persuasive similarities between the characters and plan of *The Excursion* and those of the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix (2nd–3rd century A.D.), an urbane dialogue between a skeptical pagan philosopher and a Roman Christian lawyer that Wordsworth borrowed from Coleridge's library ("New Light on *The Excursion*," *Ariel*, 5 [1974], 37–47). Of course, Coleridge, Hazlitt, and other contemporary friends and reviewers immediately recognized Wordsworth's personality in all *The Excursion*'s characters: "three persons in one poet," as Hazlitt put it.

[24] Book IV's open-ended theology has been variously interpreted by Judson S. Lyon, The Excursion: *A Study* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1950), p. 80; Hartman, p. 316; Enid Welsford, *Salisbury Plain: A Study on the Development of Wordsworth's Mind and Art* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), 77–91; and this author, in "Wordsworth's Reckless Recluse: The Solitary," *Wordsworth Circle*, 9 (1978), 131–44.

[25] *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), p. 680 (l. 971). Wordsworth changed the name from Knott, "a gentleman (I have called him a knight) concerning whom these traditions survive" (de Selincourt and Darbishire, *PW*, v, 468, quote the Fenwick note).

[26] De Selincourt and Darbishire, *PW*, v, 473; Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: The Later Years, 1803–1850* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), pp. 178–79, 340.

[27] See James A. W. Heffernan, "Mutilated Autobiography: Wordsworth's *Poems* of 1815," *Wordsworth Circle*, 10 (1979), 107–12.