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ON MAN, ON NATURE, AND ON HUMAN LIFE

By JONATHAN WORDSWORTH

PUBLICATION of the first separate scholarly edition of *Home at Grasmere*, Book I of *The Recluse* (as Wordsworth called it in 1806),[1] seems a good excuse for looking again at accepted views about when and why the poetry was written. To begin at the beginning. It is well known that for most of his life Wordsworth imagined himself to be writing a great philosophical work called *The Recluse*, which was never completed, but which in some way or other included *The Prelude* and *Excursion*. From time to time he made statements about his intentions that sound nice and clear, and show the scheme getting bigger and bigger, less and less probable. The major block to his progress was of course that he lacked a system that could justify his (and Coleridge's) millenarian sense of purpose, and which could provide material for the poem's central philosophical section: *The Prelude* and *Excursion* could be written, but not the centrepiece that they were intended to be supporting.

From the first there is an uncertainty as to what *The Recluse* is really going to be about, a reliance on grandiose phrases that say so much that they say very little. 'I have written 1300 lines of a poem', Wordsworth writes on 6 March 1798, 'in which I contrive to convey most of the knowledge of which I am possessed. My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man and Society.' And as if this were not vague and capacious enough, he feels the need to go on: 'Indeed I know not any thing that will not come within the scope of my plan.'[2] The bulk of the 1300 lines that are referred to must consist of *The Ruined Cottage*, written as the 'Story of Margaret' the previous summer, and now adapted to take in a character-study of the narrator—Wordsworth's first major autobiographical poetry. We cannot know how *The Ruined Cottage* was supposed to fit, or grow, into *The Recluse*, but it is significant that the inserted lines on the Pedlar take over from Coleridge a broadly Unitarian philosophy: 'in all things | He saw one life, and felt that it was joy.'[3] It was this that enabled Wordsworth in March 1798 to talk so pompously of the knowledge of which he

[1] *Home at Grasmere*, ed. Beth Darlington (Ithaca, NY, 1977); referred to in future as Darlington.

[2] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd edn. *The Early Years 1787–1805*, revised by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), p. 212. In future references the edition is cited as *EY*.

[3] *'The Ruined Cottage' and 'The Pedlar'*, ed. James A. Butler (Ithaca, NY, 1979), pp. 176–7.

was possessed, and this that enabled him to believe for a time that he would be able to write *The Recluse.*

Had it been written (or continued) at once, *The Recluse* would have offered a pantheist view not very different from that of 'Frost at Midnight';[1] but Wordsworth apparently thought his major work could wait, and turned to writing copy for *Lyrical Ballads.* 'Tintern Abbey', the last and last-written poem in the volume, of course claims for the individual a power to 'see into the life of things' (l. 50), but after the Alfoxden period such assertions become rare in Wordsworth's poetry. By the autumn, only six months after his first confident statement of purpose, *The Recluse* has become the centre of guilt and self-questioning. In his inability to get on with writing it, Wordsworth, it seems, has betrayed a sacred trust:

> was it for this
> That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
> To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song . . .

The poet could not know when he wrote these lines that they would become the opening of the two-Part *Prelude*[2]—much less that they would lead on to the making of a poem in thirteen Books that would come to be thought of as his greatest achievement. But in fact it wouldn't have cheered him had he done so: *The Prelude* was not *The Recluse*—and if he happened to forget this, Coleridge was at hand to remind him. 'I long to see what you have been doing', he writes to Wordsworth on 12 October 1799, 'O let it be the tail-piece of "The Recluse!" for of nothing but "The Recluse" can I hear patiently.'[3]

Completion of the two-Part *Prelude* in early December 1799 was followed almost at once by the Wordsworths' move to Grasmere. To the poet it seemed a return to paradise; there are few more exultant poems than the Glad Preamble which he wrote on first deciding to take Dove Cottage. Freed from the 'burthen of [his] own unnatural self', he can look forward not just to 'Long months of ease and undisturbed delight', but to performing the 'chosen tasks' that have been left to one side:

[1] See, for instance, 'Frost at Midnight', ll. 58–62:

> so shalt thou see and hear
> The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
> Of that eternal language, which thy God
> Utters, who from eternity doth teach
> Himself in all, and all things in himself.

[2] *Prelude* quotations in this essay are drawn from the forthcoming Norton Critical Edition of *'The Prelude', 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill. The lines quoted were drafted by Wordsworth at the end of *MS JJ* (*DC MS 19*) in October 1798, and became *1799*, i. 1–3.

[3] *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford, 1956–71), i. 538. The edition is cited as Griggs in future references.

the hope
Of active days, of dignity and thought,
Of prowess in an honorable field . . .
(*1805*, i. 50–2)

By March 1800, *Home at Grasmere*, apparently Wordsworth's first attempt since Alfoxden to achieve prowess in the honourable field of *The Recluse*, was under way. The poem as it survives in *MS B* of 1806 consists of 1048 lines, beginning rather abruptly,

Once on the brow of yonder hill I stopped,
While I was yet a schoolboy . . .

and ending with the sequence,

On man, on Nature, and on human life,
Thinking in solitude . . . (ll. 959–60 ff.)

which has come to be known as the Prospectus to *The Recluse*, because it was published separately in the Preface to the first edition of *The Excursion* (1814) as an advertisement for the poet's over-all scheme.[1] In between come evocations of Wordsworth's pleasure in his new surroundings,[2] and moments of beautiful, tender love-poetry, addressed to Dorothy

Her voice was like a hidden bird that sang;
The thought of her was like a flash of light
Or an unseen companionship, a breath
Or fragrance independent of the wind . . . (ll. 110–13)

And gradually too as one reads one becomes aware of the poet's increasingly desperate attempts to prove to himself that the joy he feels is no merely private emotion:

Joy spreads, and sorrow spreads; and this whole vale,
Home of untutored shepherds as it is,
Swarms with sensation, as with gleams of sunshine,
Shadows or breezes, scents or sounds. (ll. 664–7)

There is no pantheist vision now to proclaim, but Wordsworth has not lost sight of his redemptive purpose. If he can believe that his neighbours

[1] Until the edition of 1836, *The Excursion* bears on its title-page the words, 'Being a Portion of *The Recluse*'. *Home at Grasmere* quotations in this essay correspond to Professor Darlington's reading-text of *MS B* (*DC MS 59*) except that I have not thought it useful to preserve the sporadic original capitalization of Wordsworth's amanuenses. At times I have also preferred an alternative punctuation.

[2] Take, for instance, the exultation of lines 83–6:

This solitude is mine; the distant thought
Is fetched out of the heaven in which it was.
The unappropriated bliss hath found
An owner, and that owner I am he!

are capable of sharing the intensity of his own responses, then Grasmere can be presented as unique—an anticipation of general future happiness—and the realities of his daily life can be a fit subject for millenarian poetry. It is clear as one proceeds that Wordsworth is conscious of his problems; he is also extremely honest about them—sorrow spreads as well as joy, and the peasants whom he needs to see as sensitive by virtue of their favoured lives, have all-too-obvious faults. At some point during the writing of *Home at Grasmere* in 1800 the task came to seem too great; Wordsworth put his pen down, and (but for one or two brief and ineffectual attempts) the poem was shelved for the next six years. But where does he break off? Given the new and different circumstances of his life in 1806, and the surely perceptible changes in his style, one feels it ought to be fairly clear, yet scholars have disagreed very widely.

The Oxford editors, de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, assumed in their edition of 1949 that both the writing of *Home at Grasmere*, and the three manuscripts that survive from the early period, belong to 1800.[1] It was a fair assumption in that the poem is about the Wordsworths' early days at Dove Cottage, and makes frequent references to their new arrival; unfortunately, however, *MS B* (the fair copy of the completed poem) has a watermark of 1801.[2] Pointing this out in a draft introduction to *Home at Grasmere* written shortly before he died in 1967, John Finch showed that the Wordsworths in fact used this paper exclusively in the period 1805–7, and went on to suggest that all three surviving early manuscripts, and most of the actual writing of the poem, belong to summer 1806.[3] A similar position was adopted by Mark Reed in the second volume of his Wordsworth *Chronology* (1975). At one point he writes of 'some scores of lines possibly composed for *HG* as early as 1800',[4] and his conclusion is that:

Some work on *HG* may well have gone on as early as 1800, and various portions

[1] *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (Oxford, 1940–9)—*Oxford Wordsworth* in future references—v. 475.

[2] There are three extant manuscripts of *Home at Grasmere* that date from the early period: *MS A* (*DC MS 58*), containing ll. 192–457 in fair copy, and implying the existence of ll. 1–191 on a missing previous leaf; *MS R* (*DC MS 28*), containing drafts of ll. 469–859; *MS B* (*DC MS 59*), the complete fair copy and the text of *Home at Grasmere* referred to in this essay.

[3] As I made clear when editing it in 1970 ('On the Dating of *Home at Grasmere*: A New Approach', *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies in Memory of John Alban Finch*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Ithaca and London, 1970), pp. 14–28), Finch's essay was left in draft when he died in a fire at Cornell aged 37. Especially in the techniques for dating of the paper used at different periods by the Wordsworth family, it has indeed a new approach; but it was deliberately controversial, and had he gone on to edit *Home at Grasmere* as he intended, he would almost certainly have made adjustments to his final account of the poem's chronology.

[4] Mark Reed, *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years, 1800–1815* (Cambridge Mass., 1975)—Reed, ii, in future references— p. 661.

may have been composed, at least in W's mind, between that time and 1806. But no occasion can be fixed prior to mid-1806, on present evidence, when W can have composed the poem in its basic present form. (Reed, ii. 659)

When reviewing Professor Reed in *TLS*, I accepted the manuscript evidence, but suggested that instead of thinking of what 'may well have gone on as early as 1800', we should be asking what parts of the poem seem clearly to belong to the later period. The answer I gave at the time was a little over a third.[1] Beth Darlington in her recent edition is not prepared to go quite as far, but agrees in regarding the 457 lines contained or implied in *MS A* —almost half the poem if for the moment one leaves aside the Prospectus— as being 1800 in origin. The crucial question is whether the manuscripts are indeed all later.

There is no doubt as to the two fair copies, *MSS A* and *B*; but *MS R*, containing the drafts of *Home at Grasmere*, ll. 471–859, was in use in 1800 as well as 1806, and the evidence that these particular entries belong to the later date needs examining. Finch regarded it as clinching that one of the *Home at Grasmere* drafts is written on top of lines for 'The Waggoner' of January 1806; but, as Professor Darlington points out, the draft in question is a pencil revision and does not help to date other material in the notebook. Despite this, she herself continues to regard 1806 as almost certainly the correct date (1800 is 'conceivable but unlikely') for composition of this section of the poem:

> Present evidence does not enable us to date the major composition in *MS. R* with certainty, but it is apparent that the work moves steadily towards the plan of *Home at Grasmere* in *MS. B.* Had Wordsworth completed this phase of work in 1800 or 1801, the poem would then have attained conceptually almost the final form of *MS. B.* It is difficult to believe that with such a clear design in mind Wordsworth would not have copied the poem out in proper sequence in a single manuscript after drafting *MS. R.* It is also difficult to believe that on 6 March 1804 he could have told De Quincey he had written only 'one Book and several scattered fragments' of *The Recluse* (*EY*, 454). The completed Book was *The Ruined Cottage*, and *MS. R* displays too great a coherence and awareness of the outline of an integral poem for Wordsworth to have described *Home at Grasmere* as mere scattered fragments once *MS. R* had been drafted. (Darlington, p. 11)

Home at Grasmere does not have a plan. It is an important poem and in many ways an impressive one, but in Wordsworth's own terms it is a failure. In one sense no doubt the drafts must show a steady movement towards the form that is reached in *MS B*; in another they show a movement that is steadily *away from* an initial mood of exalted and unjustifiable optimism. It is clear from the fact that Wordsworth in spring 1800

[1] 'Secession at Grasmere', *TLS*, 26 Mar. 1976, pp. 354–5.

was unable to go on to write the central section of *The Recluse* that whatever point his work had reached it was not going well. The drafts of *MS R* continue the pattern set up in *A*, of confident assertions that Grasmere and its way of life offer a basis for millenarian hope, followed by rueful and remarkably honest admissions from the poet that the evidence is against him.[1] The final sequence of *MS R* is especially interesting, and exists in three separate drafts that show clearly what was in Wordsworth's mind just before he gave up. The first is very rough; I give it in an edited form because my concern is with the poet's train of thought, and not his penmanship:

> Dismissing therefore all Arcadian dreams,
> All golden fancies borrowed from the time
> That was before all time—that perfect age
> How dear to think of when we wish to part
> With all remembrance of a jarring world—
> Take we at once this hope unto ourselves,
> This chearful hope
> How goodly, how exceeding fair, how pure
> From all reproach, is this etherial frame
> And this deep vale, its counterpart below,
> By which and under which we are enclosed
> To breathe in peace
> we shall also prove,
> If rightly we observe and justly weigh,
> The inmates not unworthy of their home[2]

As in the Prospectus—about which, more later—Grasmere is to be presented as the paradise of everyday life, distinct in its actuality from the creations of myth and from those of literary nostalgia. The first ten lines of the passage quoted were tidied up on a separate page, bringing Wordsworth once again to his central problem—the 'inmates' (Grasmere peasants), who had for the sake of his redemptive scheme to be shown, at the very least, as 'not unworthy of their home'. No previous attempt in the poem had been a success, but it is a surprise none the less to find him at this stage suddenly inserting lines that suggest that he has given up all hope:

> Dismissing therefore all Arcadian dreams,
> All golden fancies of the golden age . . .
> *Give entrance to the sober truth, avow*

[1] The pattern is discussed at length in Chapter 4, 'Paradise Regained: Spring 1800', of my forthcoming book, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision*.

[2] Wordsworth did not always bother to complete lines—or words, either, for that matter—when he was composing fast; he also crossed out a great deal. My text contains a number of conjectural readings, none of which could materially alter the sense if they were wrong. For a photograph of the original, and an attempted transcript, see Darlington, pp. 252–3.

That Nature to this favoured spot of ours
Yields no exemption, but her awful rights
Enforces to the utmost and exacts
Her tribute of inevitable pain,
And that the sting is added—man himself,
For ever busy to afflict himself.

'Yet temper this with one sufficient faith', Wordsworth goes on, trying for a moment to wrench his poem back into control; but he had—and knew he had—no sufficient faith to offer that could counter his intuition of man the serpent, and after six more lines the drafts of *MS R* come to an end.[1] As Professor Darlington points out, *Home at Grasmere* had at this stage 'attained conceptually almost the final form of *MS. B*', but it is not so clear that the poem had been moving steadily towards such a plan. Her assumptions, (1) that if the drafts of *MS R* had belonged to 1800 (or 1801) Wordsworth would have had the work made into fair copy, and (2) that he would not in his letter to De Quincey of March 1804 have referred to it as 'several scattered fragments', both imply that he would have been contented with his achievement. It seems quite as likely that he laid the poem aside in despair, just as it was, to be taken up at some future time when it might seem more obvious how to bring it to an optimistic conclusion.[2]

Further evidence that might appear to rule out 1800 as a date for the drafts of *MS R* is contained in two Wordsworth letters to Sir George Beaumont of summer 1806. In the first he claims to have returned to *The Recluse* and composed '700 additional lines', and in the second, written five weeks later, the figures have almost doubled: 'You will be glad to hear that I have been busily employed lately; I wrote one book of the Recluse, nearly 1000 lines, then had a rest . . . and have written 300 more'.[3] As with the *Prelude* line-totals of 1804, however, Wordsworth is hoping to impress, and not being at all careful to distinguish between old and new work.[4] The 1,000-line Book that is referred to (*MS B*) includes the 457 lines of *MS A*, most of which have to be 1800, *plus* at least one other *Home at*

[1] See the photographs and transcripts, Darlington, pp. 238–41.

[2] James Butler points out to me that in autumn 1808 *The Tuft of Primroses* (also an attempt on the central section of *The Recluse*) was similarly abandoned in draft. In copying *MS D* of *Home at Grasmere*, Mary Wordsworth broke off at l. 258 in mid sentence, and went on *twenty years later* to complete the transcription (Darlington, p. 29). When Wordsworth became discouraged (as he did periodically with his attempts on *The Recluse*) work simply stopped; in trying to make a new start, however, he always went back to where he had left off.

[3] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth,* ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd edn. *The Middle Years, Part I, 1806–1811,* revised by Mary Moorman (Oxford, 1969), pp. 64 and 79. In future references the edition is cited as *MY* i.

[4] On the difficulties—frequently the impossibility—of assessing the line-totals mentioned in Wordsworth's letters, see pp. 9–10 of my essay on 'The Five-Book *Prelude* of Spring 1804', *JEGP* lxxvi, no. 1 (Jan. 1977).

Grasmere passage (ll. 859-74) and the Prospectus, none of which could possibly be said to have been written 'lately'.[1] In the circumstances the letters can hardly be strong evidence that the 388 lines of *MS R* do not also belong to the early period. Returning to *The Recluse* at all after a gap of six years was an achievement, and Wordsworth is allowing himself to claim to his patron that in resuscitating the old project—putting together the fragments of 1800—he is creating something new.

The poet's situation in summer 1806 was very different from that of 1800. Dorothy was still there, still tenderly loved, but Wordsworth had now been married nearly four years, and she had taken on the role of second mother to the children. Dove Cottage had become too small, and it seemed out of the question that they should spend another winter there (*MY* i. 38). From Wordsworth himself a new voice had been heard in 'Ode to Duty' (spring 1804), and confirmed two years later in 'Peele Castle': 'Not without hope we suffer and we mourn' (l. 60). In general, things were recovering again after John Wordsworth's death in February 1805—*The Prelude* had been completed and tidied away in fair copy, and 'The Waggoner' written—but there could be no return to the passionate optimism of 1800. In taking up *Home at Grasmere* the poet had no new thoughts, just the obligation to get on again with *The Recluse* now that *The Prelude* was done, and before Coleridge could get back from Malta. At such a period, and in such a mood, how likely is it that Wordsworth could have written the drafts of *MS R*? Even if he had thought it appropriate to do so, could he have recalled so exactly the tones and rhythms and aspirations of 1800?

> No, I am not alone; we do not stand,
> My Emma, here misplaced and desolate,
> Loving what no one cares for but ourselves.
> We shall not scatter through the plains and rocks
> Of this fair vale, and o'er its spacious heights,
> Unprofitable kindliness, bestowed
> On objects unaccustomed to the gifts
> Of feeling—that were cheerless and forlorn
> But few weeks past, and would be so again
> If we were not. We do not tend a lamp
> Whose lustre we alone participate . . . (ll. 646–56)

Not all the poetry of *MS R* is of this quality, but there is none that couldn't have been written in 1800,[2] and a great deal that would have

[1] The received dating of the Prospectus is now *c.* April 1800–April 1802 (Darlington, p. 22); I argue below that it should in fact be moved back a little further.

[2] It is a point on which I have changed my mind. At the time of writing 'Secession at Grasmere' I thought of the pious and sentimental stories of village life in the middle of *Home at Grasmere* (ll. 469–645) as definitely in Wordsworth's later idiom (two of them

required in the poet of 1806 an extraordinary ability to relive the past—not in his customary elegiac tones, but in terms of vivid immediacy. One could no doubt argue that the experience of rereading the 1800 drafts that lie behind *MS A* enabled him to think himself back into the earlier period; but, when all is said and done, the evidence that the drafts of *MS R* belong to 1806 is not very strong. The manuscript, though we tend to think of it as a separate entity, consists of three gatherings from an interleaved copy of Coleridge's *Poems* 1796. The two other gatherings from the volume that survive (D and E, catalogued as *DC MS 30*) contain surplus material from 'Michael'; and at the end of *R* comes a draft for the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. In terms of the original volume, the work on *Home at Grasmere* is thus both preceded and followed by materials from 1800. Two pages of gathering K hold drafts of 'The Waggoner', and show the volume (or this part of it) to have been in use in 1806; but instead of thinking of *MS R* as a separate manuscript we should regard it as one of the two surviving sections of what may well have been Wordsworth's chief working-notebook of 1800. It was the practice of the poet's amanuenses to cut poems out of the notebooks while making fair copies, and the Coleridge volume was very probably disbound in autumn 1800 during the copying of material for the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads*. We cannot know what it originally contained, but in addition to work towards the published texts of 'Michael' and the Preface, the eight missing gatherings (A–C, F–J) and their blank interleaves could have held the drafts that precede *MS A* of *Home at Grasmere*, and much else. Why *MS R* was not destroyed after the principal contents had been reworked and transcribed in 1806 one cannot say. Perhaps these gatherings contained just enough unused material for Wordsworth to think them worth keeping as a quarry.[1]

Between the material drafted in *MS R* (ll. 469-859) and the Prospectus, with which *MS B* concludes, there is a sequence of a hundred lines for which no drafts have been preserved. The sequence opens, however, with a paragraph (ll. 859-74) including tender references to the presence of John Wordsworth at Dove Cottage (January–September 1800), and looking forward to the first visit of Coleridge (6 April). The fact that these lines, though not found in either of the other two manuscripts, undoubtedly belong to 1800 raises the question as to whether the whole sequence may

were finally embedded in *Excursion*, Book VI). In fact, however, the idiom is present already in the Matron's Tale (*1805*, viii. 222–311) and the more priggish early section of 'Michael'—both of course 1800.

[1] Seven pages of *MS R* (reproduced Darlington, pp. 186–99) carry material written for *Home at Grasmere*, but discarded during the copying of *MS B*, and later used to form *Excursion*, iv. 332–72. In fact there is no answer to the question why some Wordsworth manuscripts survive and others don't. Chance has a lot to do with it; and after a certain stage the poet became fond of his early notebooks.

not be early. The muted and often very moving section on the poet's vocation (ll. 875-909) could easily result from a moment of chastened reassessment in late spring 1800;[1] the section that follows (ll. 910-33), concluding in the 'two brave vessels matched in deadly fight', could have been written at any time, but seems on stylistic grounds more likely to be early than late;[2] only the lead-in to the Prospectus (ll. 934-58) seems fairly certain to be 1806. Even here it is questionable whether the whole passage is late, or merely the last few lines, 'Then farewell to the warrior's deeds . . .'. At times one catches the tones of 1804–6—in the reference at l. 942, for instance, to the 'sanction' of reason—but this part of *MS B* is in Wordsworth's own hand, and he would certainly have been revising early material as it went in. As regards this section of the poem there are no safe conclusions to be drawn.

Because of the resemblance of its opening words—'On man, on Nature, and on human life | Thinking in solitude . . .'—to Wordsworth's statement of his plan for *The Recluse* in March 1798, the Prospectus was assumed by the Oxford editors to have been written at Alfoxden.[3] A similar link, however, occurs at 'Michael', l. 33, 'On man, the heart of man, and human life', and pointing this out in *The Music of Humanity* (1969) I suggested that in terms of both style and content 'Michael' (autumn 1800) seems a far more likely companion-piece for the Prospectus than 'The Pedlar' (February–March 1798).[4] With the publication of Finch's views in *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies* (1970), the pendulum swung towards 1806—which was where Professor Reed, though impressed by different kinds of evidence, was content to hold it at the time of his *Chronology* (1975).[5] More recently, though, he has given his support to Professor

[1] See, for instance, the quiet resolution of the final lines:

> I would not wholly perish even in this,
> Lie down and be forgotten in the dust,
> I and the modest partners of my days
> Making a silent company in death.
> It must not be, if I divinely taught
> Am privileged to speak as I have felt
> Of what in man is human or divine. (ll. 903–9)

The dating of this passage is a further question on which I have changed my mind since writing 'Secession at Grasmere' in 1976.

[2] The only period between 1800 and 1806 when any significant progress is likely to have been made on *Home at Grasmere* is late March–early May 1801. It is worth bearing in mind that pieces of blank verse were switched from poem to poem; passages such as this need not originally have been written for *Home at Grasmere.*

[3] *Oxford Wordsworth,* v. 363–4.

[4] Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* (London and New York, 1969), p. 213.

[5] Finch never stated that the Prospectus must be 1806, but it was the implication of his argument (*Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies,* pp. 24–8). Professor Reed in 1975 was swayed chiefly by the view that if the Prospectus had been written before March 1804 it

Darlington in swinging the date of the Prospectus back to the period between the *Home at Grasmere* drafts of spring 1800 and the writing of Coleridge's 'Dejection' in April 1802.[1] A small further swing is all that is needed.

Nothing is less likely than that the Prospectus should belong to early spring 1802 (the time of Wordsworth's fanciful bird and flower and butterfly poems, and the least Miltonic of all his major periods); 1801 seems almost as improbable (little poetry of any kind was written, and there was no evident cause for exalted millenarian claims); and the last half of 1800 was taken up with preparing copy for the new edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (first mentioned on 10 April).[2] In practice the two years' bracket suggested by Professors Darlington and Reed implies that the Prospectus was written very soon after the early drafts of *Home at Grasmere*. If one asks why after, and not before, the answer is presumably that because in *MS B* the Prospectus is used to form the conclusion to *Home at Grasmere*, there is a tendency to think of it as written later than the bulk of the poem.[3] It is surely quite as significant that in *MS 1* (*DC MS 45*), which is clearly the earlier text, the Prospectus stands on its own. There is every reason to think that like the Glad Preamble of November 1799 (finally *1805*, i. 1–54), it was written as a separate effusion, and in response to a particular moment of exalted confidence. Once one begins to ask questions, it becomes obvious that the Prospectus looks forward and not back. The poet announces his chosen theme (deliberately echoing the words used in his first announcement at Alfoxden), invokes his muse, challenges his great precursor, outlines his intentions, and prays for the future success of his work. It seems inconceivable that he should have written in such tones—

> Jehovah with his thunder, and the choir
> Of shouting angels, and the empyreal thrones,
> I pass them unalarmed . . .[4]

would be found in *MS M* (*DC MS 44*), the collection of Wordsworth's unpublished verse transcribed for Coleridge to take with him to the Mediterranean (see Reed, ii. 664–5; and, for a countering argument *TLS*, 26 Mar. 1976, p. 355).

[1] Darlington, pp. 21–2.

[2] Griggs, i. 585.

[3] In his review of Darlington (*Wordsworth Circle*, ix, no. 3 (Summer 1978), 214–21) Kenneth Johnson hints at the possibility of the Prospectus having been written before the 1800 drafts of *Home at Grasmere*, but feels that it must always have been regarded as a climax: 'In effect, the Prospectus is the visionary conclusion to the poem, as Snowdon was to *The Prelude*, written as a conclusion before the end (perhaps even at the beginning), but always reserved for the end wherever and whenever it might fall.' It is a rare occasion on which I can't agree with Professor Johnson. It seems to me that it was probably not till towards the end of his work on *Home at Grasmere* in 1806 that Wordsworth thought of using the Prospectus as the climax of his poem.

[4] ll. 21–3 of Prospectus, *MS 1* (*Home at Grasmere*, ll. 982–4).

—after he had discovered, as he did at a very early stage in the writing of *Home at Grasmere*, how difficult it was in practice to show the personal happiness he shared with Dorothy as looking forward to the millennium.[1]

There seems to be little doubt that the Prospectus was written *c.* January 1800, before the confidence of the Preamble had worn off, and while Grasmere for the poet still had the full savour of paradise.[2] In fact the Preamble and Prospectus—the first no doubt revised after the Wordsworths' arrival at Dove Cottage[3]—must surely be the 'prelusive songs' which the poet was heard to mutter during the 'Two months unwearied of severest storm' with which the valley tested its new inhabitants (*Home at Grasmere*, ll. 269–74). Each was originally a poem about writing *The Recluse*, rather than a part of the work itself; the Prospectus, however, would naturally lead into work on *Home at Grasmere*, and there is evidence to suggest that at an early stage it was used to form an introduction, just as the Preamble became (in January 1804) the opening of *The Prelude*. *MS A* of *Home at Grasmere* is an exceptionally large single sheet, containing 266 lines (192–457) in six columns of fair copy (three per side). It is hardly likely that the missing previous sheet was a different size, but scholars have been unable to explain why it should apparently have contained only 191 lines.[4] If, however, these were prefaced by the seventy-seven lines of the Prospectus in its earlier form, the total would be 269—almost exactly the same as *MS A*.

Home at Grasmere is, almost in its entirety, a poem of 1800—which after all is what one would expect. Wordsworth frequently wrote about the past, but never in the present tense. The poem was written about the early days at Dove Cottage, during the early days at Dove Cottage. The drafts of *MS R* show that it was abandoned when the poet's initial confidence in portraying Grasmere and its inhabitants as a type of future happiness, gave way to despair in the face of man the serpent, 'For ever busy to afflict himself'—forever destructive of the millenarian possibility by

[1] See Chapter 4 of *The Borders of Vision* for a critical case which I think greatly strengthens the arguments put forward in this essay; and for a more general discussion of the poet's aspirations and disappointments apropos of *The Recluse* see also the Epilogue.

[2] See especially Prospectus, ll. 30–5 (*Home at Grasmere*, ll. 991–6)

> Beauty, whose living home is the green earth,
> Surpassing far what hath by special craft
> Of delicate poets been culled forth and shaped
> From earth's materials, waits upon my steps,
> Pitches her tents before me as I move—
> My hourly neighbour.

The sequence, 'Dismissing therefore all Arcadian dreams' quoted above, should be seen as originally looking *back* to these lines (and those that follow) in the Prospectus.

[3] As implied, Reed, ii. 629.

[4] Most recently, Darlington, pp. 16–17.

which alone *The Recluse* could be sustained and justified. In 1806 the abandoned poem was taken up again; there was no doubt a good deal of minor revision, but the only major change seems to have been that the Prospectus was moved to the end. Not of course to form a conclusion to the separate poem that now exists as *Home at Grasmere*, but to form a climax to the introductory first Book of a work that could never be written.