The Idea of Solitude

Studies in a changing theme, from Pomfret to Wordsworth

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This dissertation is the result of my own work, and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

The length of the dissertation does not exceed the prescribed limit of 80,000 words.

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(Dissertation submitted for PhD degree, September 1978. C.R. Smith)

The dissertation identifies two major lines of thought within the idea of 'solitude': the theme of retirement, a concern with social setting and environment, leading to retreat to the country; and the theme of isolation, a philosophical concern with individual identity and relationship with the world. It traces the development, through the eighteenth century and specifically in Coleridge and Wordsworth, from the overwhelming predominance of the retirement theme, to a concentration on the issues of isolation, springing out of but superseding those of retirement. The idea of solitude moves from a concern with physical environment to an inspection of the processes of mind and its interaction with the world.

Four eighteenth-century poets are discussed, and the tensions that develop within their work: Thomson's reconciliation of retirement and action; Gray's concentration on the problem of serviceability in the world; Beattie's Minstrel who moves from isolation to the lessons of social experience; and Cowper's retreat which must yet generate useful employment.

The dissertation turns briefly, for a comparison of differences in approach, to the works of Zimmerman and Rousseau, before focusing on the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth. It explores Coleridge's Conversation Poems, and the Ancient Mariner, referring also to the later prose writing and notebooks, and discusses Coleridge's concern with an individual's attempts to impose his own approach upon reality; the need to learn both individuality and acquiescence; and the search, continually renewed, for a resolving synthesis between them.

Wordsworth's poetry is examined in detail, in particular his approach to the great solitary figures and to his own solitude; his probing of the balance between individual, distinct existence and absorption in the world; his realisation, ultimately, of the need for an understanding, not a resolution, of the tensions within the dilemma of self and relationship.

(C.R. Smith, September 1978)
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Chapter I

Introduction

Retirement and Isolation:
Two Themes, and their changing relationship.

Corin: And how like you this shepherd's life, Master Touchstone?

Touchstone: Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life.

Shakespeare, 'As You Like It'.
David Nichol Smith opens his selection of eighteenth-century poetry in the 'Oxford Book' with John Pomfret's poem, 'The Choice'. Its date stands conveniently at the turn of the century, while its theme, though expressed in an unashamedly forthright fashion, provides an appropriate introduction to one of the central motifs of poetry in the succeeding century. The poet indulges his wish-fulfilling fancies:

Near some fair Town, I'd have a private Seat,  
Built Uniform, not Little, nor too Great:  
Better, if on a Rising Ground it stood;  
Fields on this side, on that a Neighbouring Wood.

And the note of 'not Little, nor too Great' continues, as Pomfret describes the landscaped garden which should surround the house, the books that would be available to read, the amount of money ('a Clear, and Competent Estate'), the food that would be eaten and the wine stocked in the cellar, the company - male and female - to be kept, and the attitude to be cultivated towards the outside world. In all respects, his life in the 'private Seat' will be moderate, restrained, and solidly comfortable.

The tone is dignified, though not sententiously so; at times it even breaks into light-heartedness: for example, Pomfret deliberately holds back the information that he would not have a wife until he throws the news in almost at the end. At only one point does the verse carry
any hint of deep or passionate feeling, where he addresses himself to the influence of the female mind, and sees it as imparting 'Fresh Vital Heat to the Transported Heart'. It represents the only moment where the heart even enters into consideration in the poem; and it immediately dissolves in the face of the sternness of measured restraint: 'I'd have her Reason all her Passions sway'. 3 For the rest, the squire's existence portrayed in the poem deals in the externals of human conduct and position, with the business of eating and drinking, with reading and conversation, with a life of 'Pleasure, Ease, and Plenty'.

The poem won immediate and widespread popularity; there were four quarto editions within a year of publication; and Johnson comments, in one of the briefest of the Lives of the poets, that 'perhaps no composition in our language has been oftener perused than Pomfret's Choice.' 4 The poem could almost have been designed with popularity in mind: it offers a scene of material delight, and the embodiment of a fantasy wish; it provides a vision of Epicurean ease with a virtuous, almost at times moralising, framework that can justify the hedonism. In effect, despite the poem's emphasis on moderation and temperance, it gives respectability to a thoroughly luxurious existence.

Perhaps, in the light of this, it should be hardly surprising that the poem spawned a host of imitations, for over half a century. Christopher Pitt, for example, published a poem in 1750, 'The Student': 'Contented here
my easy hours I spend, / With maps, globes, books, my bottle and a friend...

In the interim, there were many other poets following similar lines - Sir Richard Blackmore, Aaron Hill, Nicholas Amherst, and a number of the bricklayer-weaver-thresher poets of the 1730s. The tradition brought a rejoinder from Swift and Pope, jointly, in the Sixth Satire of the Second Book of Horace. And one of the most interesting successors to Pomfret was Matthew Green, whose poem 'The Spleen' appeared posthumously in 1737. Towards the end of the poem, Green presents a picture, half-bantering and half-serious, of his 'desire':

Two hundred pounds half-yearly paid,  
Annuity securely made,  
A farm some twenty miles from town,  
Small, tight, salubrious, and my own;  
Two maids, that never saw the town,  
A serving-man not quite a clown ...

All the familiar Pomfret trappings are present, with a room to receive a friend, cows and geese around a pond, a landscape of opening views, and the opportunity occasionally to visit town. But, for all the acknowledged unreality of the desire, Green does touch a note of some seriousness:

Thus sheltered, free from care and strife,  
May I enjoy a calm through life;  
See faction, safe in low degree,  
As men at land see storms at sea ...

Green is not simply writing a gentle - and half-approving - satire of the Pomfret tradition; he is expressing at the same time a genuine desire for calm, set in contrast to, and away from, the busy active world of affairs.

This same desire, which motivates Pomfret as well as
Green, has a much wider relevance. For what Pomfret and his fellow-poets are doing is simply seeking - in extreme, and at times absurd, materialistic terms - precisely the same vision of retirement and calm embraced by almost all poets in the early decades of the eighteenth century. As Maynard Mack has shown in discussing the poetry of Pope, for example, 'no polarity is more important for him than that between the life of action and the life of retreat.' The world Pope creates for himself at Twickenham, and which he uses, and sees, as a stable base, a point of reference from which to sally forth against the world, represents simply a less materially conceived version of Pomfret's private Seat or Green's farm twenty miles from town.

The poet from whom much of the desire for retirement over-against the world derives, and in whose shadow many of these poems are written, is Abraham Cowley. His second Discourse, 'Of Solitude', addresses the place chosen for his retirement in remarkably social terms:

Hail, old patrician trees, so great and good!  
Hail, ye plebian underwood!

As Harold Wendell Smith and Raymond Williams have noted, the evocation of solitude here finds in the natural world of retirement at Chertsey the social order which no longer pertains in the world at large. The dominant note here in Cowley - as in Pomfret or Pope - is the search, in retirement, for a perfect social order which stands in deliberate contrast to the chaos and turmoil of the world beyond.

One of the major components of the retirement sought
by all these poets is therefore a sense of calm and, likewise, of social order, unobtainable in the world. One other feature of the retirement sought by later poets also finds expression in Cowley's Discourse:

Now, because the soul of man is not by its own nature or observation furnished with sufficient materials to work upon, it is necessary for it to have continual recourse to learning and books for fresh supplies, so that the solitary life will grow indigent, and be ready to starve, without them. 12

In creating a better social order in retirement, Cowley lays strong emphasis on the necessity of employment, the importance of usefulness, in a retired existence. In other words, in praising and seeking solitude, Cowley does not turn to the idea of a man, alone, indulging his own thoughts, pondering his own existence and the nature of his mind or heart. Far from it; he turns to the idea of a perfect social grouping, in which men busy themselves in virtuous activity, be it gardening or reading or studying. Solitude is seen more as an antidote, a response, to the cruel, ungodly, riotous world, than as a condition virtuous or valuable in itself - a man rather flying the thing he dreads, than seeking that he loves.

The same vision characterizes most of the poetry of the retirement tradition which developed after Cowley. For these poets, 'solitude' and 'retirement' are virtually synonymous, and the impulses to seek Life's cool vale rather than the active world are largely social in origin and in expression.

The history of this tradition in poetry has been well
documented by Maren-Sofie Røstvig, who in *The Happy Man* traces the development of the poetry of retirement through the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries. She identifies the classical origins - the *beatus ille* motif in Horace, the Virgilian *rerum cognoscere causas* - and she analyses the varying forms the English poetry of retirement takes, the varying impulses that lie behind it. Her discussion of the developing retirement theme in the early years of the eighteenth century is of particular interest. She sees a new Shaftesburyan moral purpose entering the poetry, tempering the epicurean delight in ease that had gone before; the growing interest in Milton's poetry; the new intellectual appreciation of nature, following in the wake of Newton and Locke; the growing popularity of physico-theology, its deft linking of science and religion, its emphasis on the virtue enshrined in the process of appreciating God's creation; the development of landscape gardening; the new, more approving attitude to prosperity and commerce, that was beginning to appear with the advances commerce was in fact making.

But at the same time, identification of all the disparate elements that lie behind the retirement tradition betrays, in the very act of so doing, the difficulty of seeing it as a whole, single tradition. And Maren-Sofie Røstvig's one failing lies in exactly this: in her expansive desire to embrace all aspects of, and motivations for, retirement poetry into a single continuously developing tradition, she obscures a number of difficulties and
tensions between different elements within that overall vision. The clearest example is also the most important: her fusion, at the beginning of the first volume, of Puritan individualism, and Anglican retreat, into the same mould. The Puritan sense of an individual approach to, and relationship with, God stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Anglican retirement to the country, in the face of Puritan civil-war ascendancy, seeking above all a social setting in which to preserve a particular vision of civilisation. Although the end result - a departure from the city to seek a retreat in the country - is much the same for each, to see them as part of the same enveloping tradition of retirement is misleading.

Rather, we should see the over-arching principle as being that of 'solitude', embracing within its bounds a cluster of different ideas, continually changing, but amongst which there appear to be two dominant themes: that of 'retirement', and that of 'isolation'. The retirement theme - as we have seen - focuses on a retreat to the country, away from the world of activity and ambition, and seeks both an alternative social order and a setting for virtuous employment. The isolation theme, however, focuses not simply on a man alone, set apart from other men, but more on the nature of the individual mind or soul, its innate qualities and its relationship with the world or God. Such a clear-cut distinction inevitably ignores many of the blurred edges, but it does provide a useful guide for an exploration of the cluster of themes that, brought
together, form the idea of solitude.

The purpose of this dissertation is to carry out an exploration of this kind. Beginning, more or less, at the point where Maren-Sofie Røstvig concludes her tireless search, the discussion will centre on the relationship between the two themes, of retirement and of isolation, and the different concerns raised by each. It will try to identify the movements of thought in the major poetry that marks what we have come to know as the transition from Augustan to Romantic, a poetry which passes from a predominant interest in the retirement motif to an abiding concern with the issues of isolation.

In the poetry of Pomfret, as in Cowley, or Pope, it is retirement that overshadows all else; indeed, in the early years of the eighteenth century, the questions of individuality or identity of one's self- the central problems of the line of 'isolation' - are virtually non-existent. Everywhere the concentration is on retirement, and the creation of the valuable social milieu that entails. As the century progresses, however, tensions begin to develop within the literature of retirement; the ostensible concerns remain the same, but some of the problems and worries raised by the theme of isolation begin to trouble the surface. With the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth, although the retirement debate is still present, the arguments and explorations of that world lead the poetry into, and are subsumed in, more personal, metaphysical concerns. A fusion develops between the components of the retirement and isolation modes of thought unexperienced since the poetry of Marvell and Vaughan.
The movement, from Pomfret to Wordsworth (to identify, as it were, the two extreme ends of the process) is one from the social to the philosophical, from a concern with setting to an interest in the processes of mind, from the establishment of a farm some twenty miles from town to the response of mind to world, from a sense of status to a questioning of identity. Cowley's comment that 'the soul of man is not by its own nature or observation furnished with sufficient materials to work upon' could hardly be further distanced from the troubled, anxious probing of their own - and all men's - souls embarked on, in retirement, by Coleridge and Wordsworth.
'Good company, lively conversations, and the endearments of friendship, fill the mind with great pleasure; a temporary solitude, on the other hand, is itself agreeable. This may perhaps prove that we are creatures designed for contemplation as well as action; since solitude as well as society has its pleasures; as from the former observation we may discern, that an entire life of solitude contradicts the purposes of our being, since death itself is scarcely an idea of more terror.'

Edmund Burke.
The four poets whose work is considered in this chapter all take, as one of their major themes, the idea of retirement from the world of men, and its relationship with action beyond a secluded existence. The simple formula with which John Pomfret, for example, resolves the question, choosing an easily achieved, social form of retirement, becomes more difficult, more problematic, as the century proceeds. The major works of the four poets considered here—Thomson's *Seasons*, Gray's 'Elegy', Beattie's *Minstrel*, and Cowper's *Task*—all found immediate and overwhelming popularity. All discuss and question the issues of retirement, but begin to reveal, and to struggle with, tensions, that lie beneath the surface. A sense of their own personal predicament, as men in the world and as poets, begins to intrude. We find some of the ideas and problems of 'isolation' emerging into the discussion, although always the poets struggle to keep them under control.

Towards the end of the century, it is true, the line of 'isolation' breaks through in a much more readily identified fashion than even begins to occur in any of these four poets, in figures such as the Wandering Jew, the landscapes of Ossian, and some of the elements of Gothicism. But there is little sense in those figures and motifs of a personal dilemma of individual action or
morality; there is no interplay of the issues of retirement and action with the problems of individuality, personal position in the world, isolation from men, or the nature of poetry itself.

All of these issues - albeit hesitantly, and handled with suspicion and doubt - begin to emerge in the four poets discussed here, and to emerge within the traditional retirement debate. This does not mean that the two lines of thought, of 'isolation' and 'retirement', find themselves harmoniously fused into one as the century progresses. But the problems struggle to the surface, finding very different expression and handling - different attempts to accept or to subdue the growing tensions - from each of the poets. Their work deserves a new consideration in this light.
In his Preface to the second edition of *Winter*, Thomson writes that 'the best, both ancient and modern, Poets have been passionately fond of retirement, and solitude.' Throughout his poetry, and particularly in *The Seasons*, Thomson himself amply demonstrates the truth of his description. Of the two broad strands of thought within the theme of solitude, his own choice is of the retirement tradition, and he places himself firmly within it.

Oh! knew he but his happiness, of men The happiest he! who far from public rage Deep in the vale, with a choice few retired, Drinks the pure pleasures of the rural life.

The retirement evoked here lies far from the public world, while standing in deliberate contrast to it; but it also embraces 'a choice few' who are going to share the retreat. This is the key to the whole of the ensuing passage. For the poet, in seeking retirement, seeks a small, perfected society in which the evils society presents when formed in the external world of men are transformed into social value and virtue. The passage then presents, successively, two examples of the opposition between the world of action and the world of retirement. First, the poet rejects the lure of flattery, glitter, luxury, and idleness, and sets up
the alternative, life in the lap of nature, where the richness and luxury come from the fruit of the earth and its creatures. After this, the same opposition is repeated, only in stronger and more explicit terms. The quest for destruction and tyranny in the world brings only inhumanity, and extinguishes all 'social sense'; whereas the man wrapped in 'conscious peace' in retirement lives with a blossoming nature and turns to meditation. The culmination of this second vision of virtuous retirement returns us to the sense of community essential to the happy man's retreat:

... the little strong embrace
Of prattling children, twined around his neck,
And emulous to please him, calling forth
The fond parental soul. Nor purpose gay,
Amusement, dance, or song, he sternly scorns:
For happiness and true philosophy
Are of the social still and smiling kind.

The ambiguity of 'still' - 'now, as before' and 'quiet' all at once - reinforces the point. The poet has led us through a detailed contrast, between the follies of society normally adopted by the world, and the virtues - which are nonetheless social virtues, and which correspond to elements of worldly action - of a retired life.

There are a number of similar passages in The Seasons, with the same focus on the valuable society which can be gained in retirement. In Winter, for example, Thomson portrays the warmth of the home community, the faithful family, from which the disastered swain is snatched by the wilderness and the snowstorm. There is a blunt contrast
between the utter, desperate isolation of the dying man and the happy expectant family; and the virtue of the small community shines even more strongly as the picture is immediately followed by an examination of the ways of those who pursue pleasure, power and affluence, which ends, in a further contrast, with an evocation of the 'social tear' and 'social sigh'.

The sense of appreciation does not fall entirely on the small family circle alone. The skating passage, when the Rhine freezes over and the Batavians rush out to circle and wheel about the ice, has an infectious zest:

... and, as they sweep
On sounding skates a thousand different ways
In circling poise swift as the winds along,
The then gay land is maddened all to joy.

The speed and sound of the verse, the consonance of the 's' and the stretching effect of holding back the 'along', impelling the sentence onward, conveys some of the noise and excitement of the scene. The full impact of this comes if we compare the episode with that other great skating passage, in Book 1 of The Prelude. Here in Thomson, the occasion is gay, joyful, foreign, and entirely social; in Wordsworth, it is personal, English, more serious, and less full of the atmosphere of sport. Wordsworth retires from the throng to meditate alone in a silent bay, to let his mind feel the surroundings. To Thomson the surroundings matter little, if at all. The excitement is the important thing:
words such as 'maddened', 'joy', 'pomp', 'eager', 'rapid', 'vigorous', 'manly', 'blooming', 'flushed', and 'glow', follow each other in swift and overwhelming succession. The description ends not with the poet retiring, but with him exalting the beauties of Scandinavia's dames and Russia's buxom daughters, right in at the heart of the crowd. The important point for Thomson is that the exhilaration is in a rural setting; earlier in Winter, he deliberately contrasts the rustic mirth of the village with the falsity of the swarming city.9

The dominant note, however, in Thomson's retirement to the country remains that of the small, quiet community. His early poem, 'Hymn on Solitude', sees solitude itself as a companion, as James Grainger does when he woos the romantic maid Recluse,10 although here the companion takes the form successively of philosopher, shepherd, lover, and Countess of Hertford with the calmness of friendship in her eyes. The traditional contrast follows, viewed from the recess of Solitude:

I just may cast my careless eyes
Where London's spiry turrets rise,
Think of its crimes, its cares, its pain.
Then shield me in the woods again.

Solitude, for Thomson, does represent a shield, behind which it is possible to preserve a social organisation (of a kind) intact, a comparison against which and from within which the disintegrating social world of the city can be apprehended.
The focal point of all Thomson's ideas of retirement is Hagley, where Lord Lyttleton had laid out of the garden and thrown open the hospitality of his house. Hagley forms Thomson's reference point, from which he views the world of nature and of man, and the communities achieved in the midst of cities and of the country, a shielded position (like Norwood in the 'Hymn on Solitude') which acts both as a stance and as a comparison. It is not simply a desire to flatter that leads him to write to Lyttleton, in anticipation of his first visit:

Hagley is the place in England I most desire to see; I imagine it to be greatly delightful in itself, and I know it to be so to the highest degree by the Company it is animated with... I have lived so long in the noise, rattle, and the distant din of the Town, that I begin to forget what true retirement is. With you I shall enjoy it in its highest elegance, and purest simplicity. The Mind will not only be soothed into Peace, but enlivened into Harmony.

A month and a half later, shortly after his arrival at Hagley, he writes to Elizabeth Young:

This is the truly happy Life, this union of Retirement and choice Society: it gives an Idea of that which the Patriarchal or Golden Age is supposed to have been...

The emphasis, as so often in The Seasons, is on the nature of 'true retirement' and the community developed within the retired setting.

Not only does retirement enable a society to be created within its sheltering embrace, but it also enables the virtuous man to prepare for action in the society that lies beyond. The climax of Spring is a picture of Lyttleton at Hagley, straying through
his woods and dales, pensively listening to the birds and streams, in silent meditation. And just as Lyttelton's surroundings move from the embowering woods to the open prospect from the hill, so the meditation presages the movement in turning to wider thoughts:

Planning with warm benevolence of mind  
And honest zeal, unwarped by party-rage,  
Britannia's weal ...

Lyttelton, in creating the perfect social setting at Hagley, is both providing an alternative golden-age world and also attempting to link it, in harmony and as a preparation, with the world beyond; yet that is paradoxically a world which he has implicitly rejected in turning to Hagley in the first place.

Thomson's vision of Hagley, of Lyttelton, and of his own place within the setting, embodies just this double movement, a turning away to an alternative society, while yet wishing to link this to the world from which he has turned. Thomson's wish to fuse the different elements of retirement and public zeal in this way plays an important part in the morality of harmony which underscores the whole of The Seasons. Patricia Meyer Spacks speaks of Thomson's 'realization of the way in which everything in the universe is finally involved with everything else.'15 Thomson's realization of this involvement leads him to spread a harmony through the poem, linking all the elements of nature together amongst themselves, and with God
(what Røstvig expresses as 'the belief in the goodness of Creation' receiving 'its most emphatic expression',\textsuperscript{16}) to link the natural world with men's enjoyment of it, and to link the worlds of retirement and action. Everything, in the world and beyond, moves harmoniously as one.

Let no presuming impious railer tax Creative Wisdom, as if aught was formed In vain, or not for admirable ends.

\textsuperscript{17}

In realizing and appreciating the wisdom of harmonious Creation lies the principal task of the man in retirement.

Hazlitt comments, in his essay on Thomson and Cowper, that 'Thomson always gives a moral sense to nature.'\textsuperscript{18} The natural world of The Seasons is, in fact, so deeply imbued with the philosophy of harmony that this 'moral sense' which does indeed dominate the poem has escaped a number of critics. W. Lamplough Doughty has written of how 'he does not chatter about his ideas or force his interpretation upon us. He shows us each picture and leaves us to do the rest.' Or David Nichol Smith suggests that the 'art of Thomson remains purposely pictorial.'\textsuperscript{19} Thomson's natural world, however, reveals within itself, and in the meditations to which it gives rise, the doctrine of harmony and involvement between all aspects of Creation.\textsuperscript{20}
Man's place within the harmonious whole is to cultivate social feeling for his fellow man, and meditate upon the values of unity enshrined in nature:

Now the soft hour
Of walking comes for him who lonely loves
To seek the distant hills, and there converse
With nature, there to harmonize his heart,
And in pathetic song to breathe around
The harmony to others. Social friends,
Attuned to happy unison of soul ...

At first glance, the insistence on 'converse', 'harmonize', 'social', 'unison', sits uneasily with the man who 'lonely' loves to seek the hills. The duplicate use of 'lonely' as both adjective and adverb encourages the uneasiness, while at the same time drawing further attention to the word itself. The purpose of the passage, however, is precisely that of the set-piece retirement scenes, where social structures or values are created: to point out that, even - or rather particularly - in a state of retired 'loneliness', a man must attune himself to nature and to the society of kindred friends; far from retiring in order to savour a loneliness, he should develop the social feeling that comes from an appreciation that all things and all beings have a common source, and act in common.

At the close of Summer, Thomson turns to Poetry, and the influence she exerts on man. He contrasts the savage man, roaming the wilds, unaffected by the tenderness of poetry, with the civilized men who are taught by the Muse to live like brothers. Again, he emphasises the
development of social feeling; he describes the savage:

Nor happiness
Domestic, mixed of tenderness and care,
Nor moral excellence, nor social bliss,
Nor guardian law were his ...

Just as the disastered swain engulfed by snow is set
against the warm community of the home, so here, in more
doctrinal terms, the isolation of the savage has been
set against the moral warmth of true social involvement.

Man can partake of the harmony of God's world by
retiring in order to develop social feeling and create
a virtuous society. He can also, however, partake of
the harmony, as Lyttleton can in planning for Britain's
future, by immersing himself in the world's activity.
Such immersion depends largely on the importance, for
Thomson, of work and industriousness. In developing
his comparison between the savage and the civilized man,
he identifies other virtues the savage lacks:

nor various skill
To turn the furrow, or to guide the tool
Mechanic; nor the heaven-conducted prow
Of Navigation bold ...

Thomson is continually opening his letters to his friends
with apologies for indolence and delay; and the belief
in the virtues of work and industrious application to the
tasks of the world finds an extended formulation in
The Castle of Indolence. For all the seductive attractions of the indolence portrayed in Canto I, the explicit moral of the poem lies in the industry advocated in Canto II. Through industriousness, the spectrum of harmonious nature will lead to happiness:

Then hear how best may be obtained this fee,
How best enjoyed this nature's wide desire.
Toil, and be glad! let Industry inspire
Into your quickened limbs her buoyant breath!

Akenside expresses the same belief in the values of work and fulfilment of duties in the world, in both versions of The Pleasures of the Imagination, where he identifies the different labours appropriate to the powers of different men, and the way in which Nature has 'Decreed its province in the common toil' to each. By fulfilling his appointed and appropriate occupation in the world, a man will have taken his place in the unified scheme of things.

Thomson takes the value of work and industry further, and embraces the global processes of trade and mercantilism within his inclusive harmony, processes expressive of valuable work and productive of national prosperity. And as the hub and creator of trade, London - albeit a city, albeit far from the retired vales of Hagley - becomes itself part of the harmonious whole:

Then commerce brought into the public walk
The busy merchant; the big warehouse built;
Raised the strong crane; choked up the loaded street
With foreign plenty; and thy stream, O Thames,
Large, gentle, deep, majestic, king of floods!
Chose for his grand resort.
All this is the 'gift of industry', and where elsewhere the luxury and pomp of the city and its activities are condemned, rejected for the alternative of retirement, here the luxury bedecks a magnificent dome, the pomp leads a great British ship to the sea, and the busy world of merchants and trade unites all in a happy society.

Similarly, at the end of Liberty, Thomson's wide-spreading patriotic dream of Britain's future scoops up the cities, roads, canals, and ports - the public works which form the basis of a prosperous trading nation - into the triumphant vision of a perfect social order, where all men relate to all others, and to their nation, in entirely virtuous and appropriate ways.27

Thomson's acceptance of trade and the city does not go as far, however, as John Dyer's complete union, in The Fleece, of the pastoral and the mercantile into a continuous and interdependent process. As Francis Klingender has pointed out, 'Dyer was ... excited by the technical improvements which were beginning to transform the economy',28 and the process which brings the fleece from shepherd to woollen mills and then to spread throughout the globe portrays that excitement. The morality of work, of commercial toil - the message that 'each on each depends',29 - are all spelled out more actively than in Thomson's vision of nature embodying values to which man attunes himself; but, as in Thomson, the values do find expression in the great trading market of London.30
Thomson finds the welcoming-in of the city more difficult, fraught with greater problems, than does Dyer. Frequently, in spreading his eye across the nation and around the globe, he expresses a patriotic wonder at Britain's strength and prosperity, and at the men who have made her so, rather than attributing success specifically to trade and to action in the world of men, of crowds and cities. Nonetheless, he does reach out to find the unity of which retirement is part, in the world at large. As the landscape viewed from Hagley contains spires and villages and towns, so the harmony experienced in the society of Hagley spreads over into the outside world—a world seen, in other respects, with caution if not distaste.

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tensions at work, and the poet - half-consciously perhaps - reveals some of the difficulties he faces in resolving the contradictions.

Raymond Williams provides a clue to this, in describing the poet's approach to Nature:

Nature, represented hitherto as social order, a triumph of law and plenty, is being seen, alternatively, as a substitute order; lonely, prophetic, bearing the love of humankind in just those places where men are not;... Thomson is especially interesting because, in The Seasons, both versions of Nature, both attitudes to the country and the land, are simultaneously present.

Simultaneously present: not two terms of a dualism resolved into one, nor a set of contradictions faced and reconciled, but views held at one and the same time, side by side. The same applies to Thomson's vision of retirement from, and action in, the world, to his view of the life of men beyond the garden's boundaries as full of evil, and as expressive of harmony.

The linking of different forces is achieved by progression, not by fusion; by moving the focus of the poem from one theme to another, from one state of life to another, in a progressive or alternating process. No one aspect or object of study is allowed to deny, or to call into question, the validity of any other that went before or that is to come. If we look again, for example, at the passage towards the end of Summer, where the soft hour of walking comes and man learns to harmonize his heart, we can observe just such a process in
action. The lonely man dissolves into the man who finds harmony in nature; then, in turn, he spreads the harmony to others, and friends enter the picture. The movement in these few lines, in microcosm, is matched as we read further by the movement of the two hundred lines that follow. The man of secluded society, sharing with a few friends, fades into a picture of lovers, although these are still stealing 'from the world'. The focus then changes dramatically, to the country houses of great men that surround the capital. The moment of change comes almost without our noticing it; the lovers are wondering where to direct their steps:

Which way, Amanda, shall we bend our course?  
The choice perplexes. Wherefore should we choose?  
All is the same with thee. Say, shall we wind  
Along the streams? or walk the smiling mead?  
Or court the forest glades? or wander wild  
Among the waving harvests? or ascend,  
While radiant Summer opens all its pride,  
Thy hill, delightful Shene? Here let us sweep  
The boundless landscape ..

Shene and the sweeping landscape prospect provide the opportunity to range around the world of public poets and virtuous statesmen. Almost with a shock, we look back, just three lines, to be told that 'Now from the world ... lovers steal'. The series of questions carried by the poetry hints, itself, at the diffidence with which the poet glides through the change of focus: expressing uncertainty, as well as concealing the drama of the alteration in the scale of vision. But the crux of
of the transition lies in one question and its rhetorical answer: 'Wherefore should we choose?/ All is the same with thee.' Because the question of choice has been specifically laid aside, the poem can slide on into a wider prospect, without any need to deny or supersede the perspective of retirement that went before.

The passage moves further, beyond even the country houses and their statesmen, to the cities themselves, the embodiment of patriotic prosperity, the centres of trade, joy, crowded ports, busy sailors, and full of commercial activity. As Ralph Cohen points out, the praise of Britannia 'follows the inserted passage of Thomson's friends and their stately homes, relating national attachment to love of landscape.' Again, however, the relation is achieved by a movement in focus. The prospect of the stately homes decays into smoke, vanishing for a fragile moment from sight, and immediately Happy Britannia is invoked. The momentary transition enables the previous prospect to provide the excuse for, but not intrude upon, the succeeding national panorama.

These moments of transition from one perspective to another are vitally important for Thomson's poetry. John Dixon Hunt has noted, in another context, the demands Thomson can impose on a uniting word, yoking together two alternate interests, divine meditation, for instance, and humanist
sentiment; but the same stress - and fragility - are true of the shifts in perspective, the movement from retired vale to world-embracing prospect. The process occurs again in Autumn. As evening draws in, at that time of day set aside for walking in Summer, the poet's thoughts run in a similar vein here:

Then is the time
For those whom wisdom and whom nature charm
To steal themselves from the degenerate crowd,
And soar above this little scene of things -
To tread low-thoughted vice beneath their feet,
To soothe the throbbing passions into peace,
And woo lone Quiet in her silent walks.

The passage has an unusual flavour for Thomson, with its strong emphasis on the solitariness, the distance from social order, of the retirement sought. Not only is Quiet 'lone' and 'silent', but the process becomes one of soaring, a positive, almost moral, value being attained in reaching away from the 'little scene of things'.

As the passage develops, however, the perspective changes. First, the poet wanders in sadness; he then thinks of the possible intrusion of the destructive world from outside; he returns to the grove, but in gentler mood, beginning to turn his eye to a study of the natural world, and seeing a process of destruction occurring within that world, in a shower of rain. He then seizes on a spirit of Philosophic Melancholy, and his mind begins to stir beyond nature to the human race, and even to a 'throb for virtue and for fame'; the focus changes back to the grove, but in gloomier and vaster and more
overpowering form; and finally, the poet bursts out, completely free from the dusky groves at last, and expatiates on the blessings of Britannia, and especially 'the majestic paradise of Stowe' which fires Pitt to serve his country well.

Throughout this progression from lone quiet to blest Britannia, the description has alternated, from grove to world and back to grove again, with the scale heightened or the gloom deepened on each occasion, until the final transition to the national prospect seems almost inevitable. Again, the moment of transition is accomplished with a question:

Or is this gloom too much? Then lead, ye Powers...

There is no explicit rejection of the previous experience, more a decision simply to move on and leave behind the past.

In passing at times from retirement to world without a rejection of either, and yet elsewhere condemning other forms of 'world', in observing cities that reek of luxurious evil and yet elsewhere bustle with commerce and virtuous, if luxurious, prosperity - Thomson rolls his disparate visions together, sees a reconciliation, if anywhere, simply in an all-covering harmony. The only real attempt at a fusion of contrasted opposites is the traditional one, of retirement which yet forms a perfect society. Yet even in the small community, the social order preserved in a retired place, the retirement often yields to wider concerns again. The society which
Lytton creates at Hagley gives place, meekly, to the problems of the nation, the wider society, that Lytton can help to solve; in the same way, Pitt's retirement at Stowe can be seen as a social structure in retirement or an existence that simply gives way to the public forum where senates decide the fate of thousands.

William Shenstone makes the point more baldly than Thomson, yoking together somewhat harshly the spheres of retirement and of statesmanship - as indeed he attempted to do, in life, at the Leasowes. In his 'Pastoral Ode, to the Hon. Sir Richard Lytton', he portrays retirement as shining specifically because men of fame and action have graced it with their presence:

    Lo, Dartmouth on those banks reclined,
    While busy Fancy calls to mind
    The glories of his line!
    Methinks my cottage rears its head,
    The ruin'd walls of yonder shed,
    As through enchantment, shine.

Thomson attempts no such open resolution of public virtue and private retirement. Rather, he allows the two spheres to exist, side by side or sometimes one within the other, without really questioning their relationship.

The delicacy with which he glides from one to the other, however, reveals an awareness of problems that needed to be evaded. Perhaps he realized the fragility of the
social order in retirement, and of the virtuous action in the wider world, that form the two poles of his poetry. In the letter to Elizabeth Young written on his first visit to Hagley, he not only praises the Union of Retirement and choice Society; he also refers to the 'Patriarchal or Golden Age', that pastoral ideal whose relevance had recently been fiercely debated by Pope and Tickell, and which carried connotations of both relevance and unreality. Perhaps the fragile world of Hagley had to be grasped, for all it was worth, while at the same time it had to yield to the world beyond.

In Thomson - for all that the retirement he portrays falls readily within the traditional mould, with its resonances from Cowley, of a true society found in retirement, in contradistinction to the active world - there is nonetheless a developing sense of the oppositions set up within, and beyond, this mould. The poet has to work hard to smooth the relationship between different modes of existence. Paradoxically, the poetry reveals difficulties in achieving reconciliations between retirement and action, private man and the public world, at the very moment when it is expressing ever more emphatically the resolutions brought about by social feeling and harmony.

The tone throughout The Seasons is public; the poet speaks with a public voice, and perhaps in this lies the necessity for such a mellifluous flow from one sphere of life to another within the poetry. The more private difficulties or doubts cannot be allowed to interrupt the progress of the poem, and the poet must remain firm.
lead smoothly from one scene to another, without any disturbance at the poem's public level.

At one point, however, the public tone drops for a moment, and we glimpse - briefly - a concern that is to dominate later poetry, especially in Gray and Cowper. It deals with the problem of the poet himself, his place in the world, his own response to the modes of retirement and of action. When Thomson places himself in the Castle of Indolence- perhaps persuading Lyttelton to write most of the stanza for him - he is not only bantering; the idea expresses a real concern for the nature of poetry, the attractions of indolence and ease, the problem of whether life in a succession of retired country-houses is not perhaps too idle to be virtuous. Yet he nonetheless feels a need for repose, and strives for calmness and peace from the world. In Summer, the ancient poets speak to their successor in words that have a remarkably personal impact:

Once some of us, like thee, through stormy life 
Toiled tempest-beaten ere we could attain 
This holy calm, this harmony of mind, 
Where purity and peace immingle charms.

For one moment, we feel that Thomson has lifted the curtain on the striving forces of peace and activity, of indolence and industry, of retirement and the world, that are the components underlying a seemingly unproblematic poetry. The moment passes, however, and the problems retreat beneath the surface once again; the fragile balance between
social retreat and virtuous action can yet be preserved.
II

Thomas Gray: Some use in the world

Thomson's poetry has an imperturbable surface texture that nonetheless conceals problems skilfully evaded. Gray's poetry, similarly, flows with a calm and stately manner; at times Gray's own personal concerns and doubts begin at times to break through the surface - though still couched in careful and decorous language - and to impinge on the more public context of the poetry. As Pat Rogers describes it, 'It is as though he had to satisfy the confessional urges of a Rousseau within the bland social register of a Prior.'

The combination is a strange one: Tennyson spoke of divine truisms that made him weep, and the poetry has a surface calm and assurance coupled with a more private, emotional questioning. The private concern, while restrained, nonetheless finds its way into the public poetry in a much more specific manner than is the case with the faint hints we come across in Thomson.

Gray's life at Cambridge had what George Saintsbury calls a 'quasi-monastic' flavour to it; by choice, he withdrew from the world of affairs to a life of seclusion and study. But he continually worried about the choice he had made, and he expresses his fears in a number of letters:

To me there hardly appears to be any medium between a public life and a private one; he who prefers the first, must put himself in a way of being serviceable to the rest of mankind, if he has a mind to be of any consequence among them... if not, his ambition ought to give place to a reasonable pride, and he should apply to the cultivation of his own mind those abilities which he has not been permitted to use for others' service.
The absence of any medium troubles Gray; it seems that the choice must be one between being serviceable to the rest of mankind, and cultivating his own mind; they are exclusive alternatives. He tries to escape from the dilemma by positing a distinction between the activity of youth and the appropriateness of seclusion in old age. Such a division of roles follows in this letter to West; it also finds expression in the Latin 'Alcaic Ode' he wrote at the Grande Chartreuse, on his return alone from Italy: if he cannot enjoy the monastic repose in youth, and must be swallowed back into the world, let his old age at least be led in some secluded corner. 53

The distinction between youth and age does not resolve the problem, however; there remains his perennial worry about being 'serviceable' to the rest of mankind, in seclusion, before old age has bestowed dignity on that condition. Scattered through his letters, are comments such as 'To find one's self business (I am persuaded) is the great art of life'; 54 and with an exclamation of joy he comments to Wharton on Voltaire, 'you see a Scribbler may be of some use in the world! 55 The desire for seclusion for the mind to cultivate itself, and yet the worry about usefulness to the world, form part of the debate between opposites that runs through much of Gray's poetry.

A series of oppositions lies at the heart of the poems: between innocence and experience, 56 activity and seclusion, quietness and fame, the individual and the community, between the role of the poet and the world of
men. The public tone mixes with the private, imaging and expressing some of the contradictions within the poetry, and adding, itself, a further opposition.

There is a similar interplay of public and personal in Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, overtly describing the destruction of the village community, but in which the poet also includes himself as part of the scene. Early in the poem he takes his 'solitary rounds', carrying the epithet 'solitary' that he shares only with the hollow-sounding bittern and the almost-Wordsworthian figure of the widow beside the spring. The poem conveys a sense of these remaining pieces of village life as somehow the flotsam, the debris, of a departing tide. The poet's solitary status, specifically identified at the end with poetry, remains; but we are left with an unresolved doubt over the role poetry plays, or should play, amid the departing villagers. For Gray, the concerns are very similar, but the questioning of the position of poet and poetry is more personal, more insistent, than in Goldsmith, identifying the poet more with himself than with a public face, more worried by the relationship between public face and private self.

Morris Golden has pointed out that the 'Ode on the Spring' has 'the air of being on a set debating theme, and an old one at that, "whether it be better to observe life or engage in it."' For ten lines at the opening of the poem, setting the scene, Spring comes to provide
the context for the debate - and does so with a cluster of busy, active verbs: 'wake', 'pours', 'fly', 'fling'. The poem then moves to the shady oak and beech, the classical portrait of the poet beneath the tree, introducing a contemplation on the foolish ways of the busy world. Gray emphasises the stasis here ('sit', 'At ease', 'reclin'd'); he also tells us that it is not the poet, but the Muse - poetry itself - that does the thinking, that turns to condemn the crowd, the great, the proud; it is the Muse, rather than the poet, that reclines at ease:

With me the Muse shall sit, and think
(At ease reclin'd in rustic state)...

The picture causes deliberate confusion between the poet and the Muse, as our assumptions, together with resonances of the classical poet-picture, lead us to expect that the poet will in fact be the one who does the reclining and thinking.

The scene moves now to the picture of the insect youth, the transition effected by two lines that evoke activity while overtly denying it. The first of these, 'Still is the toiling hand of Care', brings into the poem for the first and only time the idea of toil: the busy, active verbs of the first ten lines were full of the sense of pleasure; here, for a brief moment, the activity becomes serious, though burdensome. The insect youth
themselves (and, temporarily, we are unsure whether they are insects, or—picking up the sense of 'peopled'—human youth) are introduced as producing a 'busy murmur'. Yet when the nature of their activities is described more fully, though the sense of busy-ness remains, the activities themselves tend to belie the overall impression. They are 'eager', but wish to 'float amid the liquid noon'; some skim the current—though lightly—while others simply 'shew their ... trim', albeit quick-glancing. 63 Some of the components of the scene carry a connotation of activity, but others do not; the overall impression, however, remains one of commotion, conveyed by the momentum of the verse and the power of the introductory adjectives.

The contemplation on man which arises from the insect scene focuses on both 'the Busy and the Gay', both those who rush about in the active world in seriousness (those who toil, or in a different way those who have a busy murmur) and also those who strive for pleasure (the cool zephyrs of Spring, the skimming or eager insects). The alternative forms of activity that have been set up in the poem, in the description of Spring and of the insects, with all their complexities and differences, are reduced to two categories, thrown together, and all are shown to be ephemeral.
Immediately, however, the poem turns to the figure outside the active world - to the poet himself - and brings him, too, into the process. The transition to the poet is achieved by bringing the contemplation on the evanescence of activity to a close - in death - with the word 'rest', which leads us to the poet whom we last saw with the Muse, at rest, beneath the shady beech. Now, for the first time, the poet as 'I' enters the poem. Previously, it has been the Muse who has meditated on the scene - or at least the Muse has initiated the meditation, and we cannot know, for certain, whether the poet has participated or not, though we tend to assume that he has. In other words, there is a doubt running through the condemnation of the busy activity of the world as to whether this is the poet, the reclining man observing the world, speaking, directly representing one side of the debate between observation and activity - or whether it is the Muse speaking, with the poet standing somehow outside the debate altogether. At the end, however, whether he takes his stance within the debate or not, the poet finds himself nonetheless dragged into it.

As Roger Lonsdale puts it, 'in the final stanza the facade of this comfortable traditional moralist suddenly collapses to reveal the lonely and frustrated private self which lies behind'. The traditional moralising has not been quite as comfortable or as uncomplicated as Roger Lonsdale assumes, but the barriers do all break down in the last stanza:
Methinks I hear in accents low
The sportive kind reply:
Poor moralist! and what art thou?
A solitary fly!

However quietly the poet hides behind the Muse, attempts to distance himself from the debate between meditation and action, he finds himself drawn in, one with the insects— and less golden, less appealing than they. At the end of the poem, all handholds have gone. Busy or pleasurable activity in the world have come to dust; meditation has had to face the same fate, deprived of the pleasure and totally alone; awareness must come to all. Yet even the state of awareness, represented by the sportive kind, accepting man's fate and deciding to plunge into activity despite it all, even this provides no respite. The poet's spring may already have passed, but the sportive kind's is almost over: for them, too, May will soon lead out the rosy-bosom'd Hours. Gray has been examining different modes and states of activity, different stances of meditation, and finding them all wanting; his own personal solution, as poet conflated with poetry, has been dragged savagely into the light, a solitary state no more secure, no more purposeful, than the frolick of activity.

The 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College' develops further the problems raised by the state of awareness at the end of the 'Ode on the Spring'. The poem takes the form of a balanced antithesis of carefree joy and woeful experience, and their corresponding states of
innocence and awareness, with the nodal point coming at the poem's centre. Explicitly, the poet examines the happy carelessness of youth, contrasts it with the inevitable ills of age and experience, and concludes that awareness of what experience will bring can do no good — that the innocence of youth should after all be preserved.

The two terms of the opposition, however, are more complex. The innocence portrayed in the first half of the poem — the children playing beside the river, dwellers in the 'thoughtless day, the easy night', carries haunting memories for the poet himself, and brings him in to the poem. His own mixture of remembered innocence and present awareness suddenly forms part of the scene which, ostensibly, he has been viewing from a distance:

   Ah, happy hills, ah, pleasing shade,
   Ah fields belov'd in vain,
   Where once my careless childhood stray'd,
   A stranger yet to pain!
   I feel the gales, that from ye blow,
   A momentary bliss bestow,
   As waving fresh their gladsome wing,
   My weary soul they seem to soothe,
   And, redolent of joy and youth,
   To breathe a second spring.

The stanza combines the personal and the general. The hills and shade lead us in from the outward scene the first stanza has portrayed, referring specifically to elements ('shade', 'heights') which have been stressed, but adding to them the connotations of 'happy' and 'pleasing', introducing these ideas to the poem. From this general picture the poem turns to Gray's own childhood, carried into this by the initially disturbing 'belov'd in vain'. And, having moved
from present outward scene to past personal childhood, the stanza moves back to the present again, but this time to reveal the poet himself, here and now. The gales bestow a 'momentary bliss', which yet appears to be real, until we are told that the gales only seem to soothe. Even the rediscovered happy moment has a flaw. The poet's soul is weary, old and tired, and joy and youth cannot be truly recovered. The prospect remains distant, a vision from which breezes can blow but which cannot be directly experienced. And with this, the focus starts to move away from the 'I' of the poet again. By the end of the stanza the personal feeling has begun to reach into generality, the second spring having both a private and public significance, preparing us for the renewed concentration on the scene of happy innocence.

The poet's inclusion of himself and his own memories, while restrained, and leading back into generality, nonetheless clouds the contrast between innocence and awareness that forms the central theme of the poem. Memory is itself a primary form of awareness (and both constitute elements of experience) - and yet it reaches out towards the world of innocence, seeming to capture for a moment some of its joy, even while being by its very nature inimical to the joy it perceives. Awareness can search for an understanding, though not a recapturing, of innocent joy, as well as for a realization of the difficulties of experience. As for the state of innocence itself,
though it continues more or less happily after the poet and his memory have withdrawn from the scene, it can never be seen in quite the same light again. Already, before the sprightly race have even been mentioned, we have been made aware of some of the heartache of experience, some of the complex nature of human knowledge.

At the end of the poem, having contrasted the effects and appearances of youth and age, of the joy and pain that come with each, Gray addresses himself again to the question of awareness. Awareness - knowledge - is in itself destructive of innocence, tarnishing the joy and leading us into pain. The explicit moral of the poem states, quite simply, that:

\[ \text{... where ignorance is bliss,} \]
\[ \text{'Tis folly to be wise.} \]

But, taken in its context as the close of a detailed exploration of antitheses, this does not represent the sole conclusion of the poem. As Morris Golden says,

Gray foreshadows the complex maturity of Blake, who incomparably sings the dewy joys of childhood in his "Songs of Innocence" but fashions a world in which man must progress beyond them. Unlike Blake, however, Gray sees no fruitful outcome for the adult. The development into the ills of growth is seen as absolutely inevitable.

But the inevitability of development and of the destruction of innocence is not the only shadow cast over the explicit and seemingly simple morality of the ending. The states of awareness and of innocence
have already been complicated by the poet's own introduction of himself into the beginnings of innocence. By this process, he has revealed some of the weaknesses, and the recompenses, of both states of existence. In retrospect, for instance, the loving of the fields, even though in vain - like the tenderness that can suffer for another's pain - is seen as a feeling that can only come in the light of experience; both are products of that experience, as are pain and the destruction of joy. Ignorance - the desperate preservation of innocence - may be the publicly announced choice, but it is no easy decision, and remains fraught with complexities.

The 'Ode on the Spring' presents a debate between meditation and action in which the alternatives end in doubt, dragging the poet in with them; the 'Eton Ode' presents an opposition of joy and experience, questioning through this the value of awareness, finding an uneasy answer in the preservation of innocence, and yet at the same time throwing into uncertainty the nature of the poet's own experience and knowledge. In both poems, the poet finds himself being drawn into a debate or an antithesis that is overtly public. In the 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', the same process occurs, but the focus is more directly and more explicitly on the poet himself.

On this point there has been much heated critical debate, largely centering on the changes brought about by Gray between what we know as the Eton MS and the later, published version. Frank Ellis has claimed that 'in his
revision of the Stanza's what Gray did was to depersonalize them entirely', and has introduced the idea of the village Stonecutter into the critical argument, to illustrate the point. On the other hand, Ian Jack believes that 'While it might be an overstatement to say simply that the later version is more "personal", it certainly tells us more about the poet', a thesis almost entirely contradictory to Ellis's. And Patricia Meyer Spacks sees the struggle in the poem as taking place 'mainly within the sensibility of the poet; it is primarily a psychic conflict, not an economic or philosophic one.'

All critics seem to agree that the poem opens with the poet (or narrator) identifying himself, observing the scene around, and then moving on to a generalised analysis of the fortunes of the humble, the vagaries of fame, the way in which the humble are denied the opportunities to achieve fame, and the blessing that they are also denied the crimes that accompany it. It is at this point, more or less, where the final version departs from the Eton MS, that the critics begin to diverge, to argue whether the choice of obscurity is made by the poet or not, whether the focus in the closing lines of the final version is on the poet or on someone else, whether in the end fame is sought or rejected.

A perennial dilemma has been posed by the word 'thee' in line 93. Suddenly, after many lines of dignified, general discussion, the poem rounds on an individual person: but on whom? The last we saw of the poet-narrator was in line 4, and there the reference was to 'me' rather than 'thee'. Herbert W. Starr has identified the person
here as 'a young rustic versifier, a poetic ideal of a sort', an idea with similarities to Frank Ellis's Stonecutter. Bertrand Bronson sees the pronoun as referring both to the poet and to the reader, bringing the reader in because the intensely private nature of the poem's conclusion would otherwise have breached decorum. Roger Lonsdale believes Gray is, quite simply, addressing himself, 'the use of the second person perhaps betraying the split between the judicious and problematic selves'. In a way, all these views contain an element of truth. When, as readers, we meet the second-person pronoun, we believe at first, with a slight shock, that it does refer to ourselves; only when we come to the end of the succeeding line, with 'relate', do we realize that it must after all refer to the poet. The effect has been to include us in the poem, to draw us into the poet's problem, so that we become more aware of the different levels of perspective from which the poet's position will be seen. For the closing lines of the 'Elegy' raise the problem of being a poet in the world, and the question of who will be there to appreciate the poetry.

The debate through the poem, between the great and the good (the opposition made specific at the end of 'The Progress of Poesy'), between fame and humility, now presents the same dilemma, one of action and position, to the poet. It is the dilemma embodied in the
'Ode on the Spring', between retirement and action; the same problem overshadows much of the opposition between innocent happiness (as yet in obscurity) and experience (in and of the world) in the 'Eton Ode'. Here in the 'Elegy' the debate focuses specifically on the role of the poet, and his place in the world.

Cleanth Brooks has pointed out that the poet, having necessarily gained wisdom and forsaken ignorance, chooses the neglected spot after all, adopting by choice what naturally, unknowingly, belongs to the villagers. In interpreting the poem's debate in this way, Brooks identifies the major choice offered as one between fame - impact in the world - and obscurity. There is, however, one other strand of thought in the 'Elegy', allied to the fame-obscurity antithesis, but one which fewer critics have noted. It refers specifically to the role of the poet, and takes us back to the problem of being 'serviceable to the rest of mankind' that Gray mentions in his letter to West: the challenge of being, as a poet, of some use in the world.

When, early in the poem, Gray describes the rude Forefathers of the hamlet, he emphasizes the usefulness of their work:

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!
Let not Ambition mock their useful toil ...

At this stage, the questions of use and purpose are relatively untroubled ones. When the poem moves to a
discussion of the lack of opportunity for the villagers, however, the issue becomes more problematic. The famous image of the flower that will 'waste' its sweetness (and thereby its usefulness) on the desert air leads us into the lines on the village-Hampden and his fellow-citizens.\(^{84}\) The theme of talent and virtue suppressed by situation begins to break down here. The village-Hampden has actually accomplished a useful feat within the circumscribed world of the village, withstanding a 'little tyrant' - and his virtue has thus not gone completely unseen. On the other hand the 'Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood'\(^{85}\) is probably better off with his talents buried than if he were to be given the opportunity to practise them, as Cromwell was. The question of whether talent has been - or should be - suppressed and usefulness curbed by obscurity is thrown into doubt here by the three conflicting figures; and the doubt increases as we read through the succeeding four lines wondering why success in the outside world has suddenly been achieved before lighting on 'Their lot forbad',\(^{86}\) which sets us back into the context of obscurity again.

Against this background, the poem moves to its conclusion - first of all drawing our attention to the poet, and linking our concerns with his in 'thee' of line 93. Ironically, the poet has found a useful role for himself in the very process of introducing the general problem:

For thee who, mindful of the unhonour'd Dead, Dost in these lines their artless tale relate..
In relating their tale, he has brought honour to them. The poet's own tentative version of his role in these two lines rapidly gives way, however, first to the account given by the hoary-headed swain, and then to that given in the Epitaph.

The swain shows the poet in three guises: hastily stepping, on the upland lawn; listlessly stretched under the tree by the brook (as he was in the 'Ode on the Spring'); and roving, muttering, in the wood, smiling or forlorn. To the swain, the poet is purely a figure in the landscape, nothing more. His poetry forms no part of the account, he makes no contribution to the community. When the swain misses him, it is in terms of place that he expresses his loss, patterning the hill, tree, lawn, and wood of the previous pictures. Even the echoing of the first stanza in the funeral winding through the churchyard shows us simply a figure moving, as through a picture.

The epitaph reveals more, specifying that the youth was 'to fortune and to fame unknown', but when it begins to describe his contribution to life, his purpose in the world - albeit in an unknown setting - it simply states:

He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear ...

And then the Epitaph suddenly breaks off, abjuring any further information:

No farther seek his merits to disclose ...
We are not allowed to know - or to tell - more about the function and purpose of the poet. Perhaps all he gave was a tear, and that is what Gray finds frightening. At the end of the poem, we are left with a poet's account of himself that finishes almost as soon as it has begun, a swain's account that sees simply a figure moving through a countryside, murmuring mysteriously in the distance, and an Epitaph that breaks off and refuses to discuss the question further.

Just as, in the 'Ode on the Spring' and the 'Eton Ode', the problems carefully balanced through the poem conclude in doubt, so here in the 'Elegy' the poet's questioning of his own position, within the general framework of a debate between fame and humble life, retirement and action, wasted talent and flawed achievement, ends in unresolved silence. Perhaps for Gray the position of the poet had either to be too totally immersed in society, or too isolated (as in 'The bard', leading to ultimate isolation in death). Perhaps there really was no medium, no way of being serviceable while yet remaining distant.
III
James Beattie: Fitting for the business of life

When the First Book of Beattie's poem, The Minstrel, appeared in March 1771, it gained - as had Thomson's Seasons and Gray's 'Elegy' - overwhelming popularity. By the end of the year, it had been re-issued twice. Lord Lyttleton spoke of how it seemed 'that my once most beloved minstrel, Thomson, was come down from Heaven refined by the converse of purer Spirits'. But it is of Gray and the themes of the 'Elegy' that we are reminded at the opening of The Minstrel:

Ah! who can tell how many a soul sublime
Has felt the influence of malignant star,
And waged with Fortune an eternal war;
Check'd by the scoff of Pride, by Envy's frown,
And Poverty's unconquerable bar,
In life's low vale remote has pined alone,
Then dropt into the grave, unpitied and unknown!

The position of a young man of genius and talent, the conflicts brought about by development in obscurity and later exposure to a sense of the world, will form the dominant theme of The Minstrel; and in the process the poem will move, ultimately inconclusive, from rural society, to isolated poet, to the challenges and dangers of worldly society, from artlessness to art, from wildness to civilization, from native fancy to the science of experience, from an instinctive rapture in song to a reaching for the problems and standards of Minstrelsy.
The poem announces that it will tell of the 'poor villager', and the first portrait it gives is of the shepherd-swain and his faithful wife who are Edwin's parents. The swain works hard at being a shepherd, the sheep lend their fleeces to keep him warm, the couple form a small contented rural society - the valuable retirement of which Thomson speaks, or which the rude Forefathers of the hamlet have for Gray. They are sheltered, retired from the evils of the world, and are sufficient unto themselves:

Beyond the lowly vale of shepherd life
They never roamed; secure beneath the storm
Which in Ambition's lofty land is rife ...

The same belief in the value of retired society can be seen in other of Beattie's poems, where he identifies Albion itself as a retreat - the 'once-beloved Retreat' of Peace - or speaks of Britannia as a glorious isle 'from a base unthankful world exiled'. The isle embodies the same virtues of innocence, freedom, serenity and security from the world that characterize the retirement of the shepherd couple.

The portrait of Edwin which immediately follows, however, is much stranger. He is fixed in deep thought, silent, shy, and above all set apart from his fellows:

The neighbours stared and sigh'd, yet bless'd the lad:
Some deem'd him wondrous wise, and some believed him mad.
The neighbours express even greater incomprehension than does the hoary-headed swain describing the figure of the lost poet at the end of Gray's 'Elegy'. But, still more remarkable, Edwin himself forsakes all society:

Concourse, and noise, and toil, he ever fled;  
Nor cared to mingle in the clamorous fray  
Of squabbling imps; but to the forest sped,  
Or roam'd at large the lonely mountain's head;  
Or, where the maze of some bewilder'd stream  
To deep untrodden groves his footsteps led,  
There would he wander wild, till Phebus' beam,  
Shot from the western cliff, released the weary team.

The language places strong emphasis on the isolation of the scene (‘lonely’, ‘bewilder’d’, ‘untrodden’, ‘wild’). What Edwin grasps here is something very new in eighteenth-century poetry: total isolation, sharply distinguished from the rural retirement of his parents, and revelling in a direct sensuous contact with the natural forces of the world.

The stanzas which follow trace Edwin’s experiences of the wilderness; they resemble, but outshine, the word-patterning of Ossian. Although they deal in the same verbal currency, they convey a sense of a real person, a figure in a wild landscape whose position in it, while immediately appealing, will have a wider relevance—rather than a mystic entity whose presence provides an excuse for reverberations of sublimity and a patterning of fine, though ultimately unconvincing, moods. Edwin is here totally alone, and close
to the natural uncultivated world. The description of his stance, 'sublime', above the sea of vapour\(^9\) reminds us of that passage on the ascent of Snowdon in *The Prelude*: indeed, Dorothy Wordsworth, wrote of the stanza, 'In truth he was a strange and wayward wight', that it 'always reminds me of him, and indeed the whole character of Edwin resembles William much'.\(^{100}\) It was these three stanzas particularly, the portrait of Edwin, untutored inexperienced youth of genius totally alone and revelling in the manifestations of sublime nature, that haunted the early Romantics.

We should note, however, that for the isolation embraced by Edwin, the poem does not focus on the nature or content of that isolation, on the intellectual or emotional stresses it generates, or on the impositions his relationship with the world within it place upon him. We are shown a picture, very little more: a young poet seeking solitude, a figure in the landscape, like the poet at the end of the 'Elegy', moving through but offering little felt relationship. The description of Edwin in solitary contact with nature concentrates here on his position in, rather than his perception of, the setting; the solitude is - almost - a fact rather than an experience. It will be this question of position that Beattie pursues as the poem moves on, and as he begins to discuss Edwin's further development.
Edwin does not only live in sublime landscapes, but finds his way also into the midst of the beautiful, roving from isolation to retired community. There are times when the young poet descends from the rugged mountains into a landscape of lowing herds and sheepfolds, where cottage-curs bark, milkmaids sing, and plowmen whistle, the populous landscape of retirement poetry. At one point the ancient Dame gathers shepherds round her 'social hearth'. Edwin, however, though passing through these settings, hastens away from society, back to his lonely isolation far from men, to a scene full of the imagery of the sea that recurs so often in Beattie's poetry.

Here, at the end of Book I, and for the first time in the poem, we begin to see stirrings of music and poetry in Edwin. Only after initial, tentative experiences of rural society, does Edwin begin to sing, to formulate his genius into expression:

At last, though long by penury control'd,  
And solitude, his soul her graces 'gan unfold.

The process of unfolding, and the problems that it will bring, trying to come to terms with life in the world, forms the central theme of the Second Book.

The poet, bringing himself explicitly into the poem, announces that 'without reluctance' he will change his theme, and move away from the flowery paths of childhood, leaving behind the wildness and artlessness of Edwin's
Edwin himself begins to choose 'walks of wider circuit', the first movement towards fuller experience that will spread further as the poem continues. In the process he stumbles on the secluded vale, where he encounters the hermit. The poem does not here expose Edwin wholly, all at once, to the ways of the world; it hints at them, sketches some of their woes, but only as an overheard monologue. Edwin does not at this first hearing confront the news, does not discuss or question, rather he flies the scene - as he did the social landscapes of Book 1 - and melts again into a natural landscape environment.

He cannot forget, however, the brief glimpse he has been given of the problems and pains of the world, and he returns to the vale, to meet the hermit, to question him, and to listen. Edwin's quest is for knowledge ('teach a simple youth this mystery to scan') or alternatively for calm unknowing contentment; he cannot rest happily in the half-glimpsed knowledge which he has thus far gained. The hermit at first argues that ignorance is much the happiest choice, in a line again reminiscent of Gray:

Be ignorance thy choice where knowledge leads to wo.

Then, however, the hermit changes his mind - and insists, after all, that Edwin should be informed about the world.
This moment when the hermit decides to reveal the nature of experience to the young man is crucial in the poem, for it provides the turning-point wherein Edwin's withdrawal from isolation and gradual induction into experience, his move from nature to civilization, begins. The passage - and the precise reasons why such a revolutionary turning of the poem occurs - bear closer examination:

Yet leave me not. I would allay that grief,
Which else might thy young virtue overpower;
And in thy converse I shall find relief,
When the dark shades of melancholy lower:
For solitude has many a dreary hour,
Even when exempt from grief, remorse, and pain;
Come often then; for, haply, in my bower,
Amusement, knowledge, wisdom, thou may'st gain;
If I one soul improve, I have not lived in vain.

There are two main reasons here for the decision to instruct Edwin after all. First, the hermit wishes to relieve his own solitude, an odd motive for destroying innocence, but in itself indicative of the need to move from solitude to companionship. Second, the hermit intends to 'improve' Edwin's soul, by bringing amusement, knowledge and wisdom to him: all three of which are won only in a life of society or experience. Great weight is placed on his last line of the stanza, for none of the previous lines has sufficiently convincing power to carry with it the revolution in the poem's direction which occurs at this point. The 'improvement' of Edwin's soul, however,
provides (along with the improvement of his poetry) the reason and theme for the rest of the poem.

Over the succeeding two hundred lines, we see this process of 'improvement' beginning to work. In the dialogue between hermit and young poet, we are at times uncertain which one of the two is speaking; perhaps there is a deliberate confusion. Beattie certainly makes no attempt to establish a relationship between them. This section of the poem focuses purely on the nature of the instruction given, not on the two figures themselves. Fancy (native exuberance of mind) must give way to truth and reason (more painful, more real, more conditioned by the dictates of circumstance):

... the real ills of life
Claim the full vigour of a mind prepared,
Prepared for patient, long, laborious strife,
Its guide Experience, and Truth its guard.

110

The delighted, immediate absorption of nature must yield to the more difficult lessons of Experience, must be humanized. The untaught mind, which envisages all manner of unreality (as Edwin himself had, in stanzas XXXV to XXXVII of Book 1) should learn the true nature of the world, through the aid of Science and Philosophy. The still-remembered beauty of Edwin's former isolation is caught, briefly, in snatches of phrasing ('Many a long-lingering year, in lonely isle, /Stun'd with the eternal turbulence of waves') only to be dismissed. Beattie's 'message' in the final stages of The Minstrel is that Edwin's former state, for all its attractions, is ultimately flawed, and must be put by.
The movement from isolation to civilization, from the power of Fancy unrestrained in the lonely mind to the restraints brought by contact with experience, which is the movement of this final portion of The Minstrel, reflects many of the concerns of Beattie's prose writing. Beattie stresses that every man possesses, within himself, a power of conscience, of soul, from which spring immediately apprehended intuitions about the nature of moral conduct. It is an individual power, but held in common with all men - the 'common sense' that gives its name to Beattie's, and Thomas Reid's, brand of philosophy, and which forms the chief ground of their onslaught on Hume:

Every man is conscious, that he has within him a thinking active principle called a soul or mind.

Beattie's principle of the individual 'soul or mind' can perhaps best be clarified by examining his attitude to that most potent of all eighteenth-century solitaries, Robinson Crusoe. His approach to Crusoe also throws light on the position of Edwin as isolated individual, early in The Minstrel. Beattie writes:

... in the deepest solitude we are not exempted from religious and moral obligation ... [Robinson Crusoe, on a desert island] would, according to the measure of rationality that had been given him, be as really a moral being, and accountable to God and his conscience for his behaviour, as if he were in the most crowded society.
For Beattie, though Robinson Crusoe inhabits a stark solitude, as Edwin did, and though he possesses a power of individuality within himself, the focus is entirely on moral duty, and also on resultant social action. As he writes elsewhere on the same figure, Crusoe represents 'the sweets of social life, and ... the dignity of independence.' The elements of an isolated state that concern Beattie are those which lead to virtuous action. Edwin's isolation should end, because, especially as an untutored youth, he should learn the needs and opportunities for moral behaviour and duty in society; Crusoe, of course, had experienced society before he was faced with solitude; Edwin has not, and the necessity to adopt the new order of experience becomes stronger as a result.

In Beattie's poem, 'Ode on Lord H -- 's Birthday', an even more explicit rejection of solitude occurs:

Know happiness for ever flies
The cold and solitary breast;
Then let the social instinct glow,
And learn to feel another's woe,
And in his joy be blest.

Tenderness, moral worth, and even blessedness are directly linked with social 'instinct'; the coldness that stands opposed to these is firmly joined to solitude. The poem sets up, as an alternative to the solitary state, and as generative of moral action, the peace of rural retirement - the very kind of retirement which the shepherd and his wife enjoy at the opening of The Minstrel, and from which Edwin has always shied.
As The Minstrel moves to a close, all the oppositions which have been introduced, all the choices urged and made, begin to draw together. Edwin learns to temper his former actions in, and responses to, the world: civilization begins to grow from wildness, Philosophy from Fancy, reasoned appreciation of the world from pure revelry in beauty. The focal point for all these changes is Edwin's poetry, which now begins to develop from artlessness into art.116 His first attempt at improvement had resulted in flowery, cumbersome adornment to the verse. But:

... Nature now
To his experienced eye a modest grace
Presents, where ornament the second place
Holds, to intrinsick worth and just design
Subservient still. Simplicity apace
Tempers his rage: he owns her charm divine,
And clears th' ambiguous phrase, and lops th' uwieldy line.

Edwin's verse develops from rage into temperance; and the responsibility lies with his 'experienced eye': an eye experienced not simply in poetry and music, but experienced now in a response to the world of men and a soberer appreciation of nature.

Beattie identifies the origin of this theme, of the poet moving from isolation to experience, in a letter to Dr. Gregory of January 1768: the 'hint of the subject was taken from Percy's 'Essay on the English Minstrels''.118 Percy's 'Essay' makes an important distinction between the Poet and the Minstrel: the Poet withdrawn and solitary,
the Minstrel roving the world, 'earning his livelihood by singing verses to the harp at the houses of the great.' And the Minstrel's songs will be as different from the compositions of the 'sedentary composer' as the 'rambling Harper or Minstrel was remote in his modes of life and thinking from the retired scholar, or the solitary monk.'

To be a Minstrel, a man must abandon solitude and become a bard in the world outside. As E.H. King puts it, Edwin's problem in becoming a Minstrel - in adapting his verse to the world - foreshadows 'the great Romantic dilemma of being a poet among men'. Thomas Gray, who knew and liked Beattie, pointed to a kindred problem - and one dear to his own heart - when he commented on a first sight of part of the manuscript:

Why may not young Edwin, when necessity has driven him to take up the harp, and assume the profession of a minstrel, do some great and singular service to his country?

At the end of the poem, however, Edwin does not so much strive towards service to his country, as towards the simple role of Minstrel, the turning of artlessness into art. The very title of the whole poem has been impelling him towards this point; but the position of Minstrel was specifically eschewed in the third stanza of Book 1, and only here, right at the end, does it begin to stir again. Even so, there is no specific mention of the Minstrel, or Minstrelsy, in the closing section of the poem. The description of Edwin's new 'artful' strain suddenly breaks
off, abruptly, in the presence of the funeral procession. We are told that the man who has died was a 'Friend, teacher, pattern, darling of mankind' - all qualities associated with Minstrelsy. Yet whether the dead man is Edwin, or the hermit, or even simply Gregory, addressed in the final stanza, we do not know. The poem that was beginning to draw us towards Edwin as Minstrel, spreading his art wider than himself, suddenly collapses in confusion and silence.

We know that Beattie identified Edwin with his own younger self, informing Lady Forbes that her suspicion in this regard was 'not groundless'. And in a letter to Mrs Montagu in 1773, he writes:

In my younger days I was much attached to solitude, and could have envied even 'The shepherd of the Hebride isles, placed far amid the melancholy main'. I wrote odes to retirement; and wished to be conducted to its deepest groves, remote from every rude sound, and from every vagrant foot. In a word, I thought the most profound solitude the best.

Later, however, he had learned to control these 'solemn and incessant energies of imagination', to fit himself 'for the business of life'. The parallel with Edwin is exact. Beattie himself - the boy roaming the hills above Laurencekirk, and the man tasting the social delights of London - still perhaps felt himself deeply attracted by the youthful solitude of Edwin, while consciously knowing that the business of life, the serious morality of the world, had to supersede; perhaps it was because of this that Edwin's transition from one sphere
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to the other had to break off, abandoned, before it could be fully effected.

Beattie nonetheless knew, intellectually, the necessity -especially for a poet - of achieving art and civilization, rather than remaining reliant on artlessness. In portraying Edwin as a powerful, attractive, solitary figure, Beattie grasps at some of the personal, emotive components of solitude and sensory absorption in nature that are among the central preoccupations of Romanticism. But though he depicts the condition of solitude, he does not examine it, or question it, or study the feelings and responses it evokes. And in the end, he shrinks back from it, and begins to lead both himself and his hero out into the wider social world again.
William Cowper was introduced to Beattie's poetry by William Unwin, and commented in a letter, 'Beattie is become my favourite author of all the moderns; he is so amiable I long to know him.' Three weeks earlier, he had given rare instructions to Unwin for the purchase of a copy of The Minstrel. Much as he admired Beattie, however, Cowper's own poetry is very different: the manner more intimate, the tone more private. Unlike Beattie, who in The Minstrel modulates his thoughts and feelings through the figure of Edwin, controlling them by giving them public form in his hero, Cowper writes in his own person, speaking his own, frequently rambling, thoughts. Yet hardly anywhere does the figure of Cowper himself intrude; we have the sense of a poet who writes of personal concerns but withdraws from the poetry in the very act of writing, seeking the shadows rather than the bright light of public self-revelation.

As in the famous image of the stricken deer in Book III of The Task, Cowper's poetry is continually striving for peace, for shade from a cruel world. Speaking of seclusion and retreat, and the peace they afford, he contrasts the ravages of sin in the life of men outside:

When fierce temptation, seconded within
By traitor appetite, and arm'd with darts
Temper'd in hell, invades the throbbing breast,
To combat may be glorious, and success
Perhaps may crown us; but to fly is safe.
The use of 'fly' and 'safe' conveys much of the nature of Cowper's retreat: the sense of desperation, the longing for security and solidity, and yet the fear that perhaps there is something inglorious about the whole struggle towards a protected environment. Frequently, Cowper expresses his longing as a 'panting' for the shade; the Olney Hymns, too, are full of the search for peace in a distressing world; and his language of retirement is filled with words like 'hide', 'refuge', or 'shelter'. These motifs of flight or of the hunt, which run through many of his poems, betray something of the sense of urgency, and of necessity, which infuses his retreat from the world. No longer does a man take a cool, considered decision to visit Hagley (as, on the surface at least, does Thomson): for Cowper he has no option but to retire.

In Book III of The Task, the poet mirrors his own flight into security in the life of one of his hares, 'One shelter'd hare' at least who is safe from the hunt. This passage, and the account of hunting that accompanies it, follow immediately on a description of the country as a repository of 'silence' and 'shade'. Cowper sets up an opposition between the country and the town as being one between peace and turbulence, shelter and sin; in flying into security and peace it is to
the country that the flight must lead. Accordingly, it is akin to sacrilege for the very process of hunting that stands as the clearest analogy to the forces that drive him into flight in the first place, to find itself propagated in the country, precisely the environment that should both image and provide his security.

The contrast between city and country gives rise to Cowper's best known aphorism:

God made the country, and man made the town.
What wonder then that health and virtue, gifts
That can alone make sweet the bitter draught
That life holds out to all, should most abound
And least be threaten'd in the fields and groves?

The addition of the phrase, 'least be threaten'd, demonstrates again Cowper's ever-present awareness not just of the necessity for peace and refuge, but of the fragility of the condition when achieved. The contrast between city and country does not simply provide an analogy for peace and turmoil; it represents a very real set of personal alternatives. In the closing lines of Book III of *The Task*, Cowper turns on London, with a condemnation much more complex than Cowley's vision of 'the monster, London', and - although the pull of the verse is to generality - a more personal response than Thomson's or Dyer's:
O thou, resort and mart of all the earth,
Chequer'd with all complexions of mankind,
And spotted with all crimes; in whom I see
Much that I love, and more that I admire,
And all that I abhor ...

135.

Cowper's shrinking from the world, seeking refuge and shade, goes even further than a rejection of the town in favour of the country. He does not choose the country, or nature, in general, but rather a very limited and restricted sphere within it. For most of the time he retreats behind garden walls, into a hortus conclusus where he can while away his time in gardening, or let himself through the orchard to the vicarage. If he does venture out into the countryside, it is over a small and intimately known neighbourhood. Yet Hazlitt is not entirely fair in identifying this restricted seclusion as evidence of 'effeminacy', shaking hands with nature 'with a pair of fashionable gloves on'. Nor does Kenneth MacLean do Cowper justice when he asks, 'Aren't we always retreating from the fresh open scene where Wordsworth keeps us into weather-houses, greenhouses, alcoves, colonnades?' Cowper's retreat may be into an enclosed, fragile corner, his walks may be over a restricted area, but his appreciation of the details of that environment - the knowledge of all the intimacies of an area - demonstrates a perception far more acute than Hazlitt or MacLean would have us believe.
Cowper does, however, establish his home community, and live out most of his life, in an enclosed setting characterized above all by a sense of peaceful domesticity. All critics agree on this point: 'he was emphatically the poet of home and of the domestic affections'.\textsuperscript{139} Cowper has given us a vivid picture of the home life which means so much to him, of stirring the fire, closing the shutters, and welcoming evening in with a bubbling urn ready to fill the tea-cups.\textsuperscript{140} The principal amusement of the evening, for Cowper himself, is the reading of the newspaper; after describing, at length and with humour, the vanities of the world revealed within its pages, he tells of his own pleasure in reading it:

\begin{quote}
'Tis pleasant through the loop-holes of retreat
To peep at such a world; to see the stir
Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd;
To hear the roar she sends through all her gates
At a safe distance, where the dying sound
Falls a soft murmur on th' uninjur'd ear.
Thus sitting, and surveying thus at ease
The globe and its concerns, I seem advanc'd
To some secure and more than mortal height,
That lib'rates and exempts me from them all.
It turns submitted to my view, turns round
With all its generations; I behold
The tumult, and am still.
\end{quote}

The passage reveals something of Cowper's view of the world from the enclosed setting of his retirement. The use of 'loop-holes' and 'peep' suggests a fortress,
as if strong walls surround the secluded poet, shutting out the fretful world: a fortress and walls, however, that can not only strengthen him but imprison too. The sense of the outside world grows more distant as we read on: the noise subduing from roar to dying sound to soft murmur to uninjur'd ear, increasingly developing into silence and stillness. That sense of distance allows an easy transition to the 'more than mortal height', the man contemplating from afar, and from a lofty stance set beyond space and time, the revolving globe. The passage in this way presents a double movement. Not only does it describe an opposition between tumult and stillness, noise and silence. It also suggests a choice between imprisonment and freedom, total seclusion and complete liberation in the heavens. The language here has led us to an idea of fortified retreat, hearing the outside world distantly beyond the walls; it has also led to an idea of the man contemplating the globe, free and almost god-like, set far beyond all the constraints imposed by life. Cowper's secluded existence, viewing the world through the mediating link of the newspapers, becomes thus both an enclosed retreat and also a liberated triumph which surveys the condition of life from a stance far beyond it. The choice between imprisonment and liberty has been well expressed by William Free,
in speaking of the paradox in Cowper's of a mind which seeks security in a confined domestic environment, yet longs for the freedom of endless space. 142

The paradox of seclusion and freedom remains relatively untroubled and easily accepted in the passage on the reading of newspapers; but the two conditions call each other into question, and place a strain on Cowper's domestic retirement, elsewhere in The Task. He longs for repose, for certainty and security - yet strives at the same time for freedom, troubled by the confined nature of his repose, and seeking an escape from the walls he has himself sought to establish.

One of the great anxieties running through his poetry and his letters is the fear of idleness: the hope that, resting in seclusion, he will not lose all his usefulness to the world, that his actions may fulfil a purpose; that his seclusion will not, in fact, become too constricting, and lead to absence of activity as well as absence of impact in the world of men. 143 He refers to the problem, in a characteristically half-bantering way, in writing to Joseph Hill, describing the evenings spent in seclusion at Olney, 'by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it'. One of the ladies plays a harpsichord, the other, with Cowper, plays at battledore and shuttlecock. And Cowper adds: 'I know you love dearly to be idle ... I thought it possible that a short description of the
in speaking of the paradox in Cowper's 'of a mind which seeks security in a confined domestic environment, yet longs for the freedom of endless space'.

The paradox of seclusion and freedom remains relatively untroubled and easily accepted in the passage on the reading of newspapers; but the two conditions call each other into question, and place a strain on Cowper's domestic retirement, elsewhere in The Task. He longs for repose, for certainty and security - yet strives at the same time for freedom, troubled by the confined nature of his repose, and seeking an escape from the walls he has himself sought to establish.

One of the great anxieties running through his poetry and his letters is the fear of idleness: the hope that, resting in seclusion, he will not lose all his usefulness to the world, that his actions may fulfil a purpose; that his seclusion will not, in fact, become too constricting, and lead to absence of activity as well as absence of impact in the world of men. He refers to the problem, in a characteristically half-bantering way, in writing to Joseph Hill, describing the evenings spent in seclusion at Olney, 'by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it'. One of the ladies plays a harpsichord, the other, with Cowper, plays at battledore and shuttlecock. And Cowper adds: 'I know you love dearly to be idle ... I thought it possible that a short description of the
idleness I enjoy might give you pleasure.'

There are continual references, throughout The Task, to the dangers of idleness and of sloth, the importance of industriousness, and the need for occupation. In Book IV, he complains of those 'Whose only happy are their wasted hours', and later juxtaposes 'lewdness, idleness and sabbath-breath' - contrasting all with man's faculties expanding and reaching 'their proper use'. In Book V, he connects a life spent 'in indolence' directly with sadness; and in his poem 'Retirement', he speaks of the 'toils' encountered in retirement.

A passage in Book III of The Task demonstrates an anxiety to re-order the terms of idleness and industry as they are normally conceived - and to avoid at all costs the stigma of slothfulness which might otherwise be attached to the life of a man in retirement:

How various his employment, whom the world
    Calls idle; and who, justly, in return,
Estems that busy world an idler too!
Friends, books, a garden, and perhaps his pen,
Delightful industry enjoy'd at home,
    ...
Me, therefore, studious of laborious ease,
Not slothful ...

In his letters, he frequently speaks of the necessity of amusement and employment, to fill the vacancy that could exist for the secluded man, cut off from all the comings-and-goings of the world: 'I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed.'
The fear of lapsing into idleness that haunts much of Cowper's writing - and it forms one of the dominant notes of *The Task* - expresses itself in the famous passage where the poet gazes into the fire of a winter evening, and watches - in a manner, as Humphry House among others pointed out, reminiscent of Coleridge in 'Frost at Midnight', the 'sooty films that play upon the bars'. Cowper writes of how Fancy begins to create shapes and anticipations in the grate, but he goes on to comment, very clearly, on the mood in which his thoughts have arisen:

'Tis thus the understanding takes repose
In indolent vacuity of thought,
And sleeps and is refresh'd. Meanwhile the face
Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask
Of deep deliberation. ...

The mood lethargic described here is strikingly different from Cowper's usual sense of struggle towards industriousness, but the poet states its idle nature boldly, in language that stresses 'indolent vacuity', 'sleeps', and 'lethargic'. Yet at the same time, the waking dream has great attractions for him - emphasized by the fact that nothing, at all, intrudes on the fireside scene from outside (unlike Coleridge's poem, where the outside world is ever-present). Nothing can disturb the train of thought Fancy sets in motion, and the state of fanciful contemplation becomes almost a world in itself, one in which we ourselves become totally immersed, and happily so. Only at the end does the freezing blast from outside enter the poem,
and recall the poet and readers back to reality. There are powerful attractions in the dream-world created by Fancy. But the danger, for Cowper, is that the state of fanciful contemplation may be too similar to indolence to be altogether happily embraced.

At the end of the fireside passage, the old opposition of calm and storm reasserts itself, the peace and silence of the poet's 'recess', and the frost 'Raging abroad', with a rough wind, outside. Cowper's major choice, in The Task and throughout his life, is a movement towards stillness and away from turmoil and roughness and forces that rage abroad. Yet that very stillness, if it becomes too completely still and silent, can itself be as threatening as commotion. By his continual emphasis on the states of indolence and employment, Cowper seeks to set up - within the context of the opposition of stillness and turmoil - a further contrast that will place a restraint on the extremities of stillness and inactivity.

As William Free has noted, 'The emphasis on keeping busy gives a strong personal meaning to the praise of work in the first book of The Task ... The title of The Task is an important personal revelation ...', It is no accident that Cowper's greatest poem carries the title it does. Having been given the subject of a sofa by Lady Austen's suggestion, and set out to
ramble (as Wordsworth does in The Prelude) in search of a theme, Cowper continues rambling for six books, discovering in the end that he has settled on his themes, has written his poetry, while searching for them. But there remains a slight sense of doubt at the close of the poem: whether the task accomplished in the end has been a worthy one, whether it represents a full and justifiable product of activity in retirement. That the question should even be raised betrays an anxiety over the achievement of objectives:

It shall not grieve me, then, that once, when call'd To dress a Sofa with the flow'rs of verse, I play'd awhile, obedient to the fair, With that light task; but soon, to please her more, Whom flow'rs alone I knew would little please, Let fall th' unfinish'd wreath, and roam'd for fruit...

The 'light task' has, of course, been that heralded in the first line of the poem: 'I sing the Sofa.' The self-deprecating irony with which Cowper begins his poem, and introduces his initial theme, nonetheless points to an important concern. The sofa represents leisure, ease, and idleness; it also sits, enclosed, in a confined room; and it finds itself deliberately mentioned in the opening pages of all but one of the books of The Task. The problem - the task - Cowper sets himself is that of developing from a song about a sofa to a song of greater moral worth and weight, of moving from idleness into virtuous
(though not turbulent) activity, and of creating a retirement where the degree of seclusion will not become excessive, and will refresh rather than constrict. The theme of the sofa, and the title of the 'Task', become major motifs in this process.

Cowper began writing poetry, as a form of therapy in assisting his recovery from one of his tormented periods of total despair, but also as contributing to that measured activity he sought in retirement, to relieve the pressure of idleness and vacancy. Indeed, the two impulses are connected: one of the horrors of vacancy, for Cowper, is that it lays open the mind for despair to enter once again. Poetry thus begins to form one of the activities, along with gardening or carpentry, that fill his retirement, a source of the constant employment on which he depends. Cowper outlines this at the end of his poem on 'Retirement':

Me poetry (or, rather, notes that aim
Feebly and vainly at poetic fame)
Employs, shut out from more important views,
Fast by the banks of the slow-winding Ouse;
Content if, thus sequester'd, I may raise,
A monitor's, though not a poet's praise,
And while I teach an art too little known,
To close life wisely, may not waste my own.

The emphasis here is entirely on Cowper himself, and his own position as poet: the standard of his verse, the
need for employment, the sequestered vale of the Ouse in which he lives, the response to his work, and the desire not to 'waste' his life.

Yet the adoption of poetry as therapy, engagement in composition to combat idleness, to keep vacancy at bay, presents Cowper with the problem of theme and of relevance. As in the attempt to address poetry to the sofa, which must lead out into a wider conception of poetic task, so in his general approach to poetry he must both satisfy his own need to be employed in composition, and also make the poetry relevant to the world beyond his personal seclusion. In Book II of The Task, he speaks of the 'pleasure in poetic pains/
Which only poets know', and describes his own processes of composition, and the delight derived from them. The occupation this gives the mind is so pleasing,

That, lost in his own musings, happy man!
He feels th' anxieties of life, denied
Their wonted entertainment, all retire.

Referring to the whole process as a 'task', he then turns from the effect of composition on the poet to its relevance to an audience, and the wide-spraying purpose of poetry:

But is amusement all? Studious of song,
And yet ambitious not to sing in vain,
I would not trifle merely, though the world
Be loudest in their praise who do no more.
The same feeling, that poetry must not be simply therapeutic for the poet, but must reach out to a seriousness for the world, can be found again in Book VI, where he describes his contentment 'with an humble theme', with a secure / And unambitious course', a roving among poetic flow'rs, that must however light at last upon 'some theme divinely fair'. 160

Just as, in his longing for peace in a troubled world, Cowper seeks a secluded retirement which yet worries him that it may constrain too greatly, and as in the stillness of his retreat he yet fears the dangers of idleness and vacancy - so in poetry he concentrates on the processes of composition, the pleasure derived by the poet himself, the local themes, and yet wishes to spread his voice abroad, does not wish to sing in vain. The contradictory impulses to seclusion and to poetic impact are well expressed in a letter to Walter Bagot in 1791: 'Here sit I, calling myself shy, yet have just published by the by, two great volumes of poetry.' 161 For Cowper, poetry, which began as part of an attempt to make seclusion tolerable, must - in order to be of worth and of value - issue out of the seclusion in order to find (even if unwittingly, as in The Task) a theme and purpose.

These tensions all centre on the nature of Cowper's retreat, and the doubts to which it gives rise. The
fear that it may constrain, the dangers of indolence, the need for poetry to find a theme: Cowper feels a desperate need to shut out the world, and yet fears the consequences of so doing. As Lodwick Hartley points out, Cowper has a 'pervading conviction of singularity', an acute sense of his own position and problems that leads him to seek retreat; he gains a precious retired existence, but he also sees the fragility of its enclosing boundaries. He seeks seclusion, but he sees its fragilities, and he feels its limitations.

Although Cowper has an acute sense of his own life, it is a sense of position rather than of being. The texture of his own heart and mind remains, for him, dark and unknown. When he speaks of the 'heart's dark chambers', and yearns for the divine light which alone can illuminate them, he expresses some of this sense of the strange and unfathomable quality of thought or feeling. In an all too personal way, Cowper fears the unknown parts of the mind; he does not wish to probe too deeply; his solitude must not lead to too great a concentration on the individual. From this stems his concern to create a fireside community at Olney and later at Weston, his need for employment, his worry about constraints, his search for poetic theme. From this, too, stems the private - but usually moderate - tone of his poetry. He speaks of his own
experiences and thoughts, but wishes to extract his own personality from the picture; so, for instance, in the passage on the musing by the fire, the concentration is entirely on the purpose and result of the musing, the question and degree of indolence, its attractiveness and dangers, rather than on the musing mind itself, its processes or the relationship it sets up with the world.

For Cowper, already convinced of his isolation from God, complete seclusion - and total concentration on self - is a terrifying prospect. As David Cecil notes, 'Through these quiet verses trembles the true voice of despair.' While he flies anxiously from the world, he dares not adopt too deep a privacy, in poetry or in life. In his 'Verses, supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk', Cowper's rejection of solitude - although the metre is jaunty and the immediate impression one of banter - is nonetheless very definite. He longs for 'Society, friendship, and love', links them to the idea that they are divinely bestowed, and invokes them as a safeguard against the problems of being 'out of humanity's reach'. At the end of the poem, Alexander Selkirk can say, albeit with a heavy heart, that mercy 'reconciles man to his lot'; this state of reconciliation, however, is something Cowper himself could never attain. He is always flying from one existence towards another - from the world into retreat or from the depths of retreat towards the values of the world again.
Cowper's most terrifying rendering of the perils of solitude, however, is 'The Castaway', one of the two poems written, right at the end of his life, after a long silence, and in the midst of blackest despair. The castaway is washed overboard, bereft of friends and of hope, and dies deserted and totally alone. We are told that his friends try to stop the boat, but the wind drives them onwards; yet we also sense that they could have tried harder, that their 'flight' from their drowning colleague was perhaps a decision, of choice rather than necessity, to save themselves. And Cowper concludes with a directly personal reference:

No voice divine the storm allay'd,
No light propitious shone;
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perished, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulphs than he.

All possible sources of help are gone; the castaway, and even more so the poet himself, are isolated from God, from the world, from friends. For the first time, right at the end of his life, Cowper portrays, with terror, a state of total, absolute, solitude; he looks it, as it were, in the eye—whereas before he has always turned away. And for the first time, too, his poetry becomes directly personal, reaching for the depths of personal feeling as well as the problems of personal position.
Five years before, he had written to Lady Hesketh, telling her of two visits he had made, alone, to gaze at a 'solitary pillar of rock' standing off the Norfolk coast. In it he sees himself and his own future: 'Torn from my natural connections, I stand alone and expect the storm that shall displace me.' For Cowper, the final years of complete isolation - the spectre which he had previously always struggled to avoid - are gradually, increasingly, accepted; and in the process of acceptance, the isolation itself becomes the storm that will prove his prescience all too painfully acute.

Like the other three poets on whom this chapter has concentrated, Cowper seeks retirement from the turbulent world of men and affairs. The search for peaceful retreat forms, indeed, the predominant theme among several in The Task. As in Thomson, Gray and Beattie, Cowper's poetry also reveals some of the tensions underlying that choice. Thomson attempts to reconcile retirement with action, Gray attempts to find a means of preserving innocence while acquiring experience, of choosing obscurity while yet being of service to mankind; Beattie portrays a hero who is sublimely isolated and yet must come to know and undergo the experiences of
society; and Cowper desperately searches for a retirement that will not become too dangerously isolated and solitary, always fearful of too intimate a knowledge of self, always hoping to make sweet life's bitter draught in achieving the right balance between seclusion and society.

These four poets, in their own ways, begin to reveal the tensions and difficulties in the cluster of retirement and solitude themes that are adopted so unquestioningly in the early years of the century. Their poetry develops a more personal relevance, although they try hard to preserve its public voice. The idea of isolation, of complete alone-ness, is considered, even if it is only to be rejected or desperately put by. There is a growing awareness of the role of the poet, the stresses between private experience and public expression imposed on him. There are stirrings of concern for the problems of awareness and experience, and their impact on the individual. The debates between retirement and action, country and city, private and public, become more complex, the answers are shrouded in doubt or uncertainty.

The poetry concentrates, however, on the position of a man in retirement, the social or moral setting of his life; it does not seek to explore the workings of his mind or the nature of his relationships. It
analyses the effects of experience, its impact, but not the content of the mind's response. It fights shy of isolation, fearing the consequences and revelations it will bring. Neither are these tensions within the traditional retirement debate, the struggle between private and public, fully integrated parts of the discussion; they are fighting beneath the surface, breaking through from time to time, but not as expressions of the debate itself, rather as a separate part of the argument. The problems of 'isolation' are beginning to disturb the presentation of the issues of 'retirement', but the two strands of thought are not yet fused into a unified whole. Nonetheless, by the last decade of the century, the discussion of solitude and retirement as poetic themes has changed almost beyond recognition. The publication of 'Lyrical Ballads', two years before the writing of 'The Castaway', will herald a further, and yet more dramatic, transformation.
Chapter III

Measures of Transition

Zimmerman and Rousseau

'We went to Vevey; I could not keep back the tears when I looked across to Meillerie and the Dent de Jamant and had before me all the scenes that the eternally lonely Rousseau peopled with animated beings.'

Goethe
In exploring the work of four poets of the eighteenth century, individual but in their own way representative, we have examined the different approaches they bring to the themes of solitude and retirement. They concentrate largely on the 'retirement' issues, of place and conduct in the affairs of men, of withdrawal from or participation in society, but they also touch on more private dilemmas, of personal position and virtue, which issue out of - and stand in counterpoint to - the more explicit attitudes of the poetry. Their interest, however, is on the whole in the social questions generated, for themselves or for men in general, by the retired setting. We must now begin to trace the momentous change in the idea of solitude, a change hinted at in the four poets of the preceding chapter, but coming to fruition with the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth. There is a move towards a poetry of greater psychological and philosophical questioning; solitude becomes a state and a component of mind, generated by and relating to the physical setting of retirement, but leading us into a very different order of experience.

Before examining the work of Coleridge and Wordsworth in detail, it may be useful briefly to stand aside from the flow of English poetry, and to sketch something of the nature of the change involved here by reference to two writers who, though European, had a profound impact in
Britain. They provide good measures of the transition: John George Zimmerman, the Swiss-born physician to George III, whose work on *Solitude*, published originally in 1784-1786, ran into many editions and earned from Hazlitt a reference to 'Zimmerman's celebrated treatise';¹ and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose writing and personality dominated the thinking of many of the early Romantics.

The process of change bears similarities to some of the distinctions drawn by Schiller between the naive poet and the sentimental. In accepting the limits of the retirement tradition, and assuming their continued primacy, earlier poets are akin to Schiller's realist, who accedes to what exists, who 'is' nature; later poets are more like the idealist, who possesses 'a restless spirit of speculation that presses on to the unconditioned', who 'seeks' nature.² The comparison is not exact, but serves perhaps as a reminder that the later poets begin to examine the problems raised by a philosophy of solitude, to present the lonely man and lonely setting and to question the nature of his mind's experience as well.³

Zimmerman's treatise seeks to preserve a careful balance between approbation and hesitation in its view of 'solitude'. He subtitiles the first part, 'The influence of occasional Retirement', and the second, 'The pernicious influence of a total seclusion from Society'; but the two
parts are not in fact contrasted so strongly as is implied by the titles. The balance runs throughout both sections. Zimmerman stresses that 'Extremes, both in Solitude and in Society, are equally baneful', and that 'Alternate Society and Solitude are necessary to the full enjoyment both of the pleasures of the world and the delights of retirement'. In seeing value in both the social principles and those of retirement - if wisely used - and in arguing against extremes of either (reminiscent of Goethe's 'mässigen Sie sich') - Zimmerman asserts the need for an alternating pattern of retirement and society in a man's life. In youth and old age, and occasionally during adult life, retirement may be an ideal; it becomes, for example, the training-ground and the resting place of statesmen, such as the two Pitts. Zimmerman emphasises constantly that it is 'occasional' retirement that he advocates.

The words 'solitude' and 'retirement' are used almost interchangeably throughout the work, and this in itself is indicative of Zimmerman's central concerns. For his theme revolves around the question of man's conduct and behaviour, and the influence a retired life can have upon him in this respect - rather than, as the title would have us believe, the question of influence 'upon the mind and heart'. The mind and heart are only really of concern insofar as they issue forth into manners and into action.
At times, the work seems to be taking us into deeper regions of the mind. At the very beginning, for example, he speaks of solitude as not necessarily implying a total retreat, but rather an 'intellectual state'. This concern with the content of the mind, however, soon lapses into a concern with its effects, and discussion of the superior pleasures of the country. Similarly, he writes later of how solitude can strengthen the processes of the mind, sharpening the faculties, rendering the mind 'more clear, luminous, and extensive'. But immediately the picture of the mind dissolves into a discussion of why a man in retirement must not yield himself up to idleness and vacancy. The same movement - beginning by focusing on the idea of solitude as both encouraging and imaging a mental state, but then lapsing back into a sense of retirement as physical setting - is paralleled in the chapter on 'Retirement'. The passage opens with remarkable strength: 'The powers of the human mind are of greater extent than is generally imagined... the highest felicities of which our nature is capable reside entirely within ourselves.' But as we read on, we find the description modulating into an analysis of the luxury, honour, fame, and amusement involved in worldly conduct.

The same impulse, to merge 'solitude' into 'retirement', and to concentrate on its effects in action rather than its nature, gives rise to a continual emphasis in the treatise on the need for the worthy use of a retired life.
If the hours of retirement are given up to idleness and vacancy, Zimmerman fears the pernicious strains of melancholy, the dangers glimpsed by Burton a century and a half before. Instead, the retired man must apply himself to employing the mind, cultivating manners, preparing his faculties for a busy life, studying, and learning his duty to the rest of humanity. One of the lessons solitude teaches us is the vanity of our own reasoning powers, and through humility, it brings us nearer to God.\textsuperscript{10} The stress, again, is on the conduct of the man of retirement, the happy ease that can be gained in this way, rather than the 'multiplicity of absurd pursuits' of the world.\textsuperscript{11} As well as tempering his demand for solitude with the epithet 'occasional', Zimmerman also emphasises, at several points, the need for it to be 'rational'.

He points out that retirement simply reinforces tendencies already present in the mind and heart (and the difference between the two is indistinct) in any case. The wise man will benefit from using retirement wisely; the foolish man will lay himself open to its worst, melancholic, intemperate influences. He outlines, for example, the dangers of solitude to 'minds pre-disposed, by accident or nature, to indulge a misdirected imagination';\textsuperscript{12} and near the end of the work, he returns to the idea, commenting that 'Virtue will always be happy, and Vice for ever miserable'.\textsuperscript{13} This provides a clear indication that solitude does not represent in itself a state of mind; it is a state of
actual social existence, in a retired location, which acts upon the mind, which encourages certain worthy or unworthy forms of behaviour. For Zimmerman, 'the actions of men ... are nothing more than their thoughts embodied',\textsuperscript{14} and in his analysis of retirement and solitude alike, the converse process - of writing about thoughts as if they are indistinguishable from actions - runs throughout the work.

There are strong similarities in this with the writings, around the turn of the century, of Charles Bucke, and especially his Amusements in Retirement. He, too, uses 'solitude' and 'retirement' almost interchangeably; he stresses the need for activity in retirement, and inveighs against idleness; he wishes to create a perfect, small-scale society, away from the bustle of the world; and - like Zimmerman - he seeks to balance the values of solitude and society: 'Society engenders a love of retirement, solitude and partial appetite for society: the one is a corrective of the other, and the union of both operates, as an antidote to misanthropy'.\textsuperscript{15} These themes, which dominate Zimmerman's and Bucke's writings - both authors of considerable popularity - are remarkably familiar. In Zimmerman, we begin at times to glimpse a movement towards concerns other than those of the purely social impact of 'retirement', but always he falls back, readily and quickly, into the traditional patterns.
Retirement and the world must balance each other; retirement can be wise or dangerous, and in order to produce the former state, must be used virtuously. Zimmerman, in fact, provides us with a valuable summing-up of the lines of thought on solitude and retirement that run through most eighteenth-century poetry. In the major poetic figures of the latter part of the century, as we have seen, there are signs that their thinking is more troubled, more questioning, than might be found in the traditional forms of retirement literature. But, at heart, Thomson's ideal of preparation for statemanship, Gray's probing of the useful rural community, Beattie's sense of action in the world, and Cowper's stress on employment and usefulness, all reflect traditional issues which receive clear – and less anxious, less rich – expression here in Zimmerman.
II

Zimmerman speaks warmly of Rousseau, although it is the man of the table spread on the lawn, and the cheerful meal with the small household, to whom he refers. Rousseau pre-dates the Swiss writer by several years; but their visions of solitude are radically different, and belie the dating. Zimmerman sums up, with some enlargement, the mainstream themes and motifs of the retirement tradition of the previous hundred years; Rousseau, on the other hand, foreshadows many of the central preoccupations of later writers.

In his Confessions, Rousseau tells of his own desire for solitude. He is frightened, and repelled, by the conventions of society; he finds conversation intolerably difficult, and as a result remains totally silent or commits unimaginable blunders; he hates the gossip and idleness of polite company; he dislikes, intensely, residing in Paris. He speaks of his 'humeur solitaire', and when he describes a visit to the Pont du Garde, 'au milieu d'un desert', it is the solitude of its situation, alone in a waste, rather than surrounded by other buildings like the amphitheatre at Ni\(\text{mes}, that he finds particularly striking.\)

Yet, paradoxically, friendship and affection, and the search for a community, also play an integral part in his life. He forms a succession of retired communities
around himself, at Chambéry, at the Hermitage, or on the Ile de St. Pierre. He falls in love easily: with Mme Basile, the traveller's affair with Mme de Larnage, with Mme d'Houdetot or Mme de Luxembourg; above all, with Mme de Warens, of whom — along with the setting of Les Charmettes — he writes, 'Nous commençâmes, sans y songer, à ne plus nous séparer l'un de l'autre, à mettre en quelque sorte toute notre existence en commun ...' And right at the end of his life, opening the final part of the Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire, he still remembers her with haunting affection after fifty years.

He is a man who longs to be alone, to flee the society of mankind, and yet he needs affection from, and dependence on, others. These seeming contradictions express themselves, in the Confessions, in what Munteano has called a pendulum motion, oscillating between 'sociabilité' and 'solitude'. The solution lies in the cultivation of a small society within retirement, on the same principles — but born out of a different class background — as that sought by Thomson. On the shores of the Lake of Geneva, he expresses a wish, almost in the Pomfret tradition, for 'ami sur, une femme aimable, une vache, et un petit bateau'. We face a danger, however, in accepting the 'sociabilité', and the society within retirement, too readily at face
value. For, as L.A. Bisson has pointed out, in drawing a comparison between Cowper's Olney retreat and Rousseau's retirement, there is a sense in which Rousseau's 'dog, his 'vieille chat', his Therese exist only to minister to Rousseau's needs, to fulfil his existence.\(^{22}\)

This note of qualification serves to highlight the crucial difference between Rousseau's adoption of retirement and Cowper's, or that of any of the other preceding poets. The retirement sought by other writers had always centred upon the social or at times moral purpose of the activity — always the comparison was with the world outside. For Rousseau, retirement centres upon himself, and his own being. It forms one — but not an exclusive one — of the attributes of his 'solitude', which becomes a state adopted by the mind, arising from — and in relationship to — the retired physical setting.

At Montmorency, for example, Rousseau withdraws even from the retirement group, to work alone on *Emile*:

> C'est dans cette profonde et délicieuse solitude qu'au milieu des bois et des eaux, aux concerts des oiseaux de toute espèce, au parfum de la fleur d'orange je composai dans une continuelle extase le cinquième livre de l'Emile ...

But the withdrawal into self does not only manifest itself in the lonely poet composing *Emile*, or wandering at large in the forest, conjuring the figures of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* into his imagination. At Les Charmettes, the withdrawal into self occurs naturally, as part of the retired setting, not as a special artistic effort:
... j’aidois au menage, et le bonheur me suivoit par tout; il n’étôit dans aucune chose assignable, il étôit tout en moi-même, il ne pouvoit me quitter un seul instant.

The most intense, and best known, form of concentration on self, however, comes during his sojourn, with only Thérèse, and the Receiver and his wife, for company on the Ile de St. Pierre in the Lac de Bienne. He writes of how, there, his 'vie interne et morale semble s’être accrue par la mort de tout intérêt terrestre et temporel'; \(^{25}\) and in listening to the flux and reflux of the water on the lake, mirroring internal movements of thought, he reaches a moment of reverie when he can 'sentir avec plaisir mon existence, sans prendre la peine de penser.' \(^{26}\) In other words, the setting of physical solitude has led to a meditation which gradually sheds all reference to physical entities or embodiment, that seeks to view his own existence as a state pure and simple, divorced from any of its manifestations; the deepest possible form of mental 'solitude'.

In so doing, Rousseau grounds his thought in the idea that there is an identifiable self, an existence-in-itself, at the core of all our beings; and in approaching it through the medium of reverie he attempts to express it in concrete terms, to seize the inexpressible. As Ernst Cassirer puts it, Rousseau has made 'his intensely personal being and existence' into an instrument
of objective truth, what Ronald Grimsley calls an affirmation of the self as reality. The nearest Rousseau comes to giving this principle of existence at the core of life a named, and normally acceptable, form is the idea expressed in the 'Profession de Foi' in *Emile*, of a principle written at the bottom of our hearts, which in the *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* takes the title of 'vertu'. Here, in *Emile*,

Il est donc au fond des ames un principe inné de justice et de vertu, sur lequel, malgré nos propres maximes, nous jugeons nos actions et celles d'autrui comme bonnes ou mauvaises et c'est à ce principe que je donne le nom de conscience.

Hazlitt - the Romantic critic who treated Rousseau most affectionately and perhaps most justly - points to this intensive exploration of the unconnected, undetermined centre of being:

The only quality which he possessed in an eminent degree, which alone raised him above ordinary men, and which gave to his writings and opinions an influence greater, perhaps, than has been exerted by any individual in modern times, was extreme sensibility, or an acute and even morbid feeling of all that related to his own impressions, to the objects and events of his life. He had the most intense consciousness of his own existence.

The concentration on the self, which reaches its fullest expression in the moments of reverie - the spots of time - on the Ile de St. Pierre, nonetheless poses
a major problem, one which haunts Rousseau throughout his retired life. In isolating himself, both in body and in mind, from the outside world, he has subsequently to face the difficult question of relating to that world again, and to the people in it. We have already seen the strong need for love and affection which runs through the Confessions, and the adoption of a small domestic community, to provide the right balance of company and retirement. Even that ideal, however, reveals itself as finally endangered: the liaison with Therese, difficult at the best of times, grows worse, and each of the chosen retirement spots has to be abandoned, in turn. And continually, Rousseau is haunted by a fear of outsiders, friends and enemies alike, and of the rejection he fears they have heaped upon him.

He is at pains to emphasise that his decision to flee the world is by no means an abandonment of social ties or affections. On a number of occasions, he stresses that he has withdrawn in order to love. Because men will not (he asserts) allow him to love them individually, face to face, he must withdraw from their company in order to love them ideally, in general. The innate virtue at the heart of all men can be loved the better for being divorced from its particularities. He possesses 'un coeur trop aimant, trop tendre, qui, trompé par ceux qu'il a voit cru de sa trempe, étoit forcé de se retirer au dedans de lui.' Baczko describes this double movement as one of Rousseau entering his internal
life and also wishing to pass out beyond himself; and Georges Poulet has commented on the effort of withdrawal and of expansion that occurs in his work.  

Rousseau argues that he must withdraw in order to expand the circle of his affection and concern, must find the centre in order to spread abroad.

The resolution of the problem of withdrawal from social intercourse cannot be so easily or painlessly achieved, however. Rousseau remains haunted, as Ronald Grimsley puts it, by the ghost of the 'others' with whom he finds it difficult or impossible to relate. His striving for an ever deeper understanding of his own self is in large measure a compensation for his failure in relationship. Whether it really will provide the entry back into a relating world remains a question deliberately unasked.

Rousseau does ask the question, however, of society at large: what form of society can be constructed where there will be no impingement on the inviolate selves of the individuals comprising the community; how is it possible to be an individual and yet form part of a society? In his two Discourses, he traces the development of social groupings and 'civilizing' forces, examining their impact on man. In many ways his 'homme naturel', the point from which he starts, is himself a Rousseau-figure, the poet alone, in seclusion, roaming the forest, slaking his thirst at the brook; but he is a figure profoundly unaware of his position, or the world, or of his own existential core,
and as such cannot form the goal of Rousseau's endeavours. As Arthur O. Lovejoy has shown, man's task, for Rousseau, does not lie in recreating or rediscovering the state of nature. It lies in developing from it, but not too far; in aiming to recapture the 'jeunesse' of society, not its infancy.\textsuperscript{33}

In constructing his own form of society in Du Contrat Social, Rousseau does not seek to re-establish the state of nature, but to achieve a form of social organisation that comes as close to embodying its spirit as possible, while yet maintaining both a working society and a maturity among its members. The principle of preserving the individual self while creating a society common to all finds expression in Rousseau's idea of the general will. The general will (volonté générale) arises from all the people collectively; it is not simply the sum of individual wills (volonté de tous). The citizen surrenders part of his freedom - while retaining part of it which remains inalienable - to the general will of all; and the general will, by definition always right, protects and enhances individuality in its turn. The general will, in fact, exists in every individual, and not outside him: the Kantian principle of 'omnes et singuli' which becomes 'universi'.\textsuperscript{34}

Rousseau limits the applicability of his 'system' to the small city-state; but, even so, its practicality remains very doubtful. It represents, in fact, an ideal, serving to point a principle, rather than a
practical draft for the organisation of a state. But if that is the case, what happens when we seek to apply the principle in the world at large? As with Rousseau's analysis of his personal position, withdrawing in order to love mankind in the ideal, leaving the question of how this affects relationship in the world unasked, so here the principles sketched in the Discourses, and Du Contrat Social, present an ideal of statehood, but many questions of applicability to a relating and compromising world remain. Rousseau, however, seems unconcerned by the problem.

Coleridge identifies the difficulty, in an essay in *The Friend*:

... all which is said in the contrat social of that sovereign will, to which the right of universal legislation appertains, applies to no one Human Being, to no Society or assemblage of Human Beings, and least of all to the mixed multitude that makes up the PEOPLE: but entirely and exclusively to REASON itself, which, it is true, dwells in every man potentially, but actually and in perfect purity is found in no man and in no body of men.

As in his experience of self-awareness which detaches itself from all the limits of the sensory world, and his withdrawal into himself leaving behind the sphere of individual relationships, so in his vision of man in the political state Rousseau sets an ideal which, in effect, ignores the problem of practical application and the limits of experience in the world. Rousseau, in fact, aims far beyond any succeeding writer in grasping a vision of individuality; but in so doing he leaves it to those
later writers to probe the boundaries of real experience in the light of the ultimately unattainable vision he paints.

In the process, however, Rousseau has transformed the terms of the 'solitude' debate. It now revolves only in part around the difference between city and country, or the creation of a small rural community (although on both these subjects Rousseau has much to say); solitude has also been applied to a state of extreme isolation in life-style, of individualism in the political state, of intense concentration on, and awareness of, the inner workings of one's being. The unashamed audacity with which Rousseau sets out to write about - simply - himself, has reverberations we still cannot ourselves escape.

'Moi seul. Je sens mon coeur et je connois les hommes.' 36 That in itself provides a measure of the transition that has come to pass.
Chapter IV

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

When the Soul seeks to hear

'Ye woods that crown the clear lone brow of Norman Court, why do I revisit ye so oft, and feel a soothing consciousness of your presence, but that your high tops waving in the wind recal to me the hours and years that are for ever fled, that ye renew in ceaseless murmurs the story of long-cherished hopes and bitter disappointment, that in your solitudes and tangled wilds I can wander and lose myself, as I wander on and am lost in the solitude of my own heart.'

William Hazlitt.
The previous chapter has examined the work of Zimmerman and Rousseau, seeing them as benchmarks of difference in approach to the idea of solitude: the characteristic retirement interests, the traditional problems and answers, raised by Zimmerman; the new explorations made by Rousseau, involving an adaptation of the themes of retirement, an analysis of physical and emotional isolation, and a resultant deepening of consciousness of his own being, and of a philosophy of self and identity in the world.

In turning again to the mainstream of English poetry, we find precisely these differences, although in less explicit terms, marking the beginnings of development into Romanticism. In the poetry of a number of major figures in the eighteenth century, as Chapter II has shown, the issues of the retirement tradition are disturbed by tensions developing below the surface, though almost always under control; the poems are infused, at times, with a sense of personal predicament, often focused on the role of poets in general, and sometimes on that of the poet's own self. Now, in the closing decade of the eighteenth century, Coleridge and Wordsworth begin to take the tradition further, to sketch out some of the central concerns that will preoccupy much of their own poetry, and that of succeeding writers. They use, initially at least, some of the retirement form and issues,
but move beyond the limits of troubled yet muted personal predicament that finds expression in, for instance, Gray and Cowper. The problems of retirement and action, of place and role in the world, of physical solitude, begin to mirror, and to generate, the dominating psychological dilemma of self and other. It is this dilemma, broadened into a philosophy of selfhood and relationship, independence and interdependence, solitude and absorption, that forms one of the central preoccupations in Coleridge and Wordsworth. Coleridge begins, tentatively, to explore some of these concerns in his poetry, and later turns them over and over in his prose and the Notebooks; and - although the emphases and some of the interpretations will be different - the same issues form the consistent theme of Wordsworth's greatest poetry.

Rousseau searches for, and to a certain extent achieves, a reconciliation between self and other, in his own life, his philosophy, and political writing - a solitude that at the same time represents and fosters relationship; the same reconciliation is sought, and more anxiously so, by Coleridge. He strives for a resolving synthesis between the isolated, independent individual, and the enveloping, relation-filled world. He is less sure than Rousseau, however, about the outcome of his endeavour. He sees, ever more clearly, the nature of the ideal synthesis for which he strives; yet at the same time he acknowledges the difficulties
involved in achieving it. In this, both the tentative explorations of his early poetry and the complex, tortuous thought of his Notebooks, agree.

Admittedly, Coleridge does speak of himself as 'never more than a very lukewarm admirer' of Rousseau;¹ but he also comments that 'In his whole system there is beyond controversy much that is true and well reasoned, if only its application be not extended farther than the nature of the case permits.'² Rousseau reaches too far towards an ideal, assumes it too easily, ignores the manifold problems. As David Calleo puts it, 'Rousseau, particularly as Coleridge interpreted him, asserted so much of what Coleridge once had hoped would be true.'³ Yet for all his disagreement with Rousseau on ease of achievement of the goal, for all his appreciation of difficulty, Coleridge nonetheless sees the search for a reconciliation of apparently contrasting elements of human existence as being vital, and necessary. It may be that he will never achieve a resolving synthesis; if he achieves it, he may fear its inadequacy; but he must still continue the search.

This problem, of individual and all, and the attempt to embrace them both harmoniously, finds early expression in what we have now come to call the Conversation Poems. These are strangely intimate poems,
expressions and explorations of private thought, though carefully, artfully worked at the same time. Humphry House points out that 'In the Conversation poems Coleridge is carrying on where Cowper left off. The autobiographical element is given deeper psychological analysis, and the thought about it carries over into what is properly metaphysical poetry.' The poems become philosophical enquiries into the nature and purpose of the self, as well as lifting the curtain to reveal some of the inner processes of thought and expectation: what Patricia M. Ball has described as the poet contemplating the faculty of self-awareness, as it operates. And this all occurs within a setting which opens, in each case, as a traditional retirement landscape.

Nowhere is this more evident than in 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement'. When the poem was published in the 'Monthly Magazine' in 1796, its title was 'Reflections on Entering into Active Life'; and the distinction between the two titles encapsulates the debate around which the poem revolves. The poem opens with a remarkably familiar, retirement setting:

Low was our pretty Cot: our tallest Rose Peep'd at the chamber-window. ... ... the little landscape round Was green and woody, and refresh'd the eye. It was a spot which you might aptly call The Valley of Seclusion!
The opening lines emphasise the sense of diminutive physical scale and position: the 'low' cottage and the 'little' landscape. They stress the quietness, repeating the idea in the word 'calm'd, and setting the whole scene within the context of a distant sea that makes a faint murmur. The poet identifies a wealthy son of Commerce, whose normal activity is represented as a thirst for gold, contrasting sharply the worlds of seclusion and commerce.

The echoes from the retirement tradition continue. When the poet climbs the 'stony Mount', his eye gazes on a traditional prospect-picture:

And seats, and lawns, the Abbey and a wood,
And cots, and hamlets, and faint city-spire ...

The majority of the elements in these two lines are, in fact, man-made; the landscape is populous, even accepting with no hint of discordance the city-spire, albeit far distanced. Only at its far edges does the landscape blur, the coasts becoming dim, the hills merging into clouds, and the Ocean rendered shoreless. Even in this, the Thomsonian note remains, reminiscent of the bluish haze on the horizon of some of the Seasons prospects. The sharp opposition of seclusion and commercial world nonetheless permits, as in Thomson, the motifs of rural - and also of urban - activity to
be accepted into the landscape.

Both the picture of the secluded cottage, and the prospect from the Mount, give rise to more personal thoughts, however. Listening to the 'viewless sky-lark' beside the cottage, the poet comments:

\[
\text{then only heard}
\]
\[
\text{When the Soul seeks to hear; when all is hush'd,}
\]
\[
\text{And the Heart listens!}
\]

'When the Soul seeks to hear' is a revealing phrase, for it embodies two different actions. The Soul 'seeks', an independent, willed activity generated from its own self; it seeks to 'hear', a relating, depending, partly passive exercise, controlled by what lies beyond the self. The introduction of Soul and Heart, into a traditional contrast of secluded existence and world of commerce, the private into the public, has been dramatic enough; but in the process, the poet leads us to the brink of more philosophical concerns, ones of our relationship with the environment.

The theme returns at the end of the prospect passage:

\[
\text{No wish profan'd my overwhelmed heart.}
\]
\[
\text{Blest hour.' It was a luxury, - to be!}
\]

The heart here has passed further into passivity than on the previous occasion. Before, there was a combination of independence, embodied in the act of seeking, and relation, in the static form of hearing. Now we see a complete denial of independence.
The sheer bareness of existence takes over from seeking and wishing, and is juxtaposed strangely with the word 'luxury', normally suggestive of richness and appurtenances, here implying a fullness and sufficiency in the state of pure existence. The state does not, however, suffice for the poet; and he suddenly breaks from the prospect and the meditation it evokes, to embrace the active life, and castigate his former seclusion. He places stress on the degree of activity involved, speaking of how his brethren 'toil'd and bled', and distinguishing this from the coldness of those who contemplate the world of action and will but do not participate.

At the close, however, the poem comes back to the secluded cottage - the 'return' to the starting-point analysed by G.M. Harper. The tense used becomes the future, whereas in the earlier portrait of the cottage it was the past; this gives a sense of the interplay of seclusion and world extending beyond the poem, both back in time and forwards into the future. And the same attempt at balance achieved in the phrase 'seeks to hear', only more muted, recurs in these final lines. The poet's mind' rests', and 'waking loves to dream', both phrases suggesting an abandonment of independence. And yet, the poet also informs us:

And I shall sigh fond wishes - sweet Abode! Ah! - had none greater! And that all had such! It might be so - but the time is not yet. Speed it, O Father! Let thy Kingdom come!
The poet here expresses a wish - the very process denied earlier in the poem; and this final section does represent an attempt to impose, by wishing, an order of a kind on the world. At the same time, of course, it represents an acknowledgement of a higher order, and a desire to acquiesce in that order. This combination of will and acquiescence, each involving and tempering the other, forms the mood at the ending of the poem.

In so doing, it concludes a 'subsidiary' theme which emerges at three vital moments in the course of the poem. The main rhythm of the verse is of contraction and expansion, what Albert Gérard has called, speaking of 'The Eolian Harp', a 'heart-beat rhythm of systole and diastole': from secluded cottage, to son of Commerce, to Soul and Heart, to prospect with vast circumference, back to overwhelmed heart again, out into the world of energetic action, back to the cottage at the end. The edges are more blurred than such a sketch of the structure would seem to indicate, but this alternating rhythm does embody the opposition of retirement and action, secluded contemplation and vigorous worldly activity, that provides the major theme of the poem. Virtuous seclusion, inglorious activity in commerce, human activity in a harmonious prospect, glorious activity (though painful), and nostalgically yearned-for seclusion: the case for retirement or for action is carefully weighed and
balanced, different values or disadvantages in each are emphasised in turn. But at three points in the process, the poet brings in a different problem, the more philosophical question - not of conduct, but of attitude to, and relationship with, the environment, be it sky-lark's song, the vast prospect, or a spiritual revisiting of the cottage. At the first of these points, the values of both independence and acquiescence are balanced; at the second, acquiescence takes over completely; and at the third, as we have seen, the balance is retired. Just as the poem finally balances - without resolving the question of which is more virtuous - the social conditions of retirement and action, so it balances - though with more apparent harmony - the debate which has been linked to the main theme, of how we, in our hearts, should relate to the world. The traditional retirement issues have been used as a framework for the tentatively sketched, more metaphysical, debate.

Gradually, as Coleridge's poetry develops, the retirement setting fades into the background. But in one other early poem at least, it is still prominent; 'The Lime-Tree Bower my Prison'. The poet finds himself confined to the enclosed, small-scale world of the bower, while his friends roam abroad, experiencing the delights of a vaster natural world than has been permitted to him. In his mind, however, he projects himself into their setting, and vividly evokes - with strong strokes of colour, for instance 16 - the scenes.
through which he imagines them to be travelling. Indeed, we almost sense that his perception, absent and imagining only, not directly viewing, is more acute than theirs. His friends emerge, to be faced with a panoramic prospect, and at this point nearly all hesitation in the imagining is dropped: earlier, the poet had seen them 'perchance' winding down into the dell; now, he boldly informs us simply that they 'emerge' and 'view again' the prospect. The degree of certainty is in fact increased by confirmation, in 'Yes! they wander on', although an element of doubt does recur when the poet refers specifically to Lamb.

The prospect now perceived by the poet's friends has significant differences from that experienced in 'Reflections':

and view again
The many-steepled tract magnificent
Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea ...

The scene is less obviously populous, although the reference to steeples suggest the presence of village or town life; and the whole picture has been, as it were, concertina-ed, elements in the landscape being run together, in 'many-steepled tract' and 'hilly fields'. As a result, the eye skirts more rapidly over the immediate panorama than it does in 'Reflections', and lights on the bark in the 'slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two Isles / Of purple
shadow, clearly and sharply perceived on the horizon, and suggestive of both the open (smooth clear blue) and the less fathomable, perhaps more private, parts of man's life (the Isles of purple shadow).

This leads the poetry into a more individual focus, Coleridge's wish for Charles Lamb. The tone becomes more ecstatic as the poet expresses the wish that, for his absent friend, the flowers will shine in the setting sun, the clouds burn more richly, the groves live in the light, and the Ocean kindle:

So my friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirits perceive his presence.

The process of 'gazing' wished on Lamb - and repeated, for emphasis - combines the operations of independence and acquiescence, as in the Soul seeking to hear in 'Reflections'; and the idea is picked up again in the reference to making 'Spirits perceive his presence'.

Perhaps this combination of the mind's action in perceiving with an acceptance of the power of external forces, is reflected in his description of Lamb as 'gentle-hearted', the gentleness striking the appropriately balanced note. Lamb himself vehemently protested at the attribution, claiming that 'the meaning of gentle is equivocal at best, and almost always means 'poor-spirited'.


Coleridge carries the exploration of independence and acquiescence further, however, in applying it to himself and his own situation in the bower. He speaks of how

A delight
Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
As I myself were there!

The feeling here is complex. He has been expressing a wish for Lamb, delighting vicariously in the scenes and feelings which he imagines, and wishes, Lamb to be experiencing. And now he is glad 'As I myself were there', an expression of delicate balance, which could imply that he wishes he were himself present, with Lamb, or that he is in fact content with imagining the experience after all. Coleridge wrote against the poem, shortly before his death, the words: 'Ch: and Mary Lamb - dear to my heart, yea, as it were my heart.' In this expression of a wish for Lamb which yet is also a wish and an acceptance of circumstance for himself, he conflates the two personalities - Lamb and himself - and, indeed, the poem has been moving towards this point throughout the previous forty lines.

The mixture of wishing to thrust himself out of his confined bower, and yet being content only to wish, also marks the mood of the last thirty lines of the poem. He turns to the immediate environment of the bower, seeing its minute beauties, and picking up in the description references to the greater glories he has imagined for Lamb. From this, he generalises on the
benevolence of Nature, before expressing again an imagined wish for Lamb, linking both his own world and his friend's by the flight of the last rook, and reminding us again of Lamb's gentle-hearted nature and gazing stance. We end the poem in the same mood we have felt throughout - with an unresolved balance between the poet's acceptance of his current lot and his wish to experience the scenes and feelings he imagines for his friends. When George Watson speaks of how 'the balance of the poem lies between the simple warmth of his friendship for them, on the one hand, and the disturbing force of the poetic mood on the other', he identifies only one aspect of the poem's subtlety. For, just as the poem moves from his friends, abroad, to his own self, in seclusion, so the poetic mood established in the state of seclusion itself combines the expansion and contraction of wishing and contentment - and ends with the linking in thought of himself and Lamb, the two worlds of here and 'out there' brought together.

'Frost at Midnight', more even than 'Reflections' or 'This Lime-Tree Bower', carries out an exploration of the relationships between mind and world, self and environment, between a projection of the mind beyond its own existence and an acknowledgement of, and accordance with, the constraints of that existence. The setting, as in the other two poems, is a retirement scene: a silent cottage, isolated from and contrasted to the world
outside. The cottage, the poet emphasises twice, possesses a sense of 'calm'; and the poet himself has been left to 'solitude'. The world beyond the cottage, evoked in a strange and ungrammatical sentence, is inaudible yet still present:

Sea, hill, and wood,
This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life,
Inaudible as dreams!

The word 'populous' sits strangely with 'village', as it sits strangely in the opening entry of Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals, carrying reminiscences of the urban rather than the rural. The lines here also convey the sense of a wide surrounding landscape: the generic terms of 'Sea, hill, and wood', deliberately removed from the particular, are then stretched further, in elongated form, in the succeeding line. And the perspective widens again, taking us beyond the horizon, in the 'numberless goings-on of life'. The isolated cottage, silent and calm, has been set in a wide, peopled landscape that is full of potential, if inaudible, activity.

Out of this initial comparison - again, a traditional retirement setting with the active world beyond - grows a meditation on the poet's mind and its relationship with the surroundings. Humphry House points to the movement of mind which forms the study of the poem, commenting that it 'leaves us with a quite extraordinary
sense of the mind's very being'. The poem, indeed, presents a carefully articulated stream of consciousness with the poet's mind first exploring its own relationship with the film on the grate, then projecting itself into his schooldays, from there further back still to his birthplace, though returning to the schooldays, had ending, back in its actual setting, addressing, and wishing for, the sleeping babe beside the poet in the cottage.

Noticing the film on the grate, the poet begins to analyse its effect on the mind, and the mind's response:

Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought.

The passage is deliberately ambivalent. The phrase, 'with me who live', could refer either to the poet or the sympathies: 'who' picking up the idea of the poet, and 'live', in the plural, referring to the sympathies. The Spirit idles, yet it carries out an active process of interpreting and seeking. And the final line, 'makes a toy of Thought', could equally apply to 'its motion' or to 'idling Spirit'. The resultant confusion ensures that - while we have a strong sense of the companionship and sympathies established between mind and object - we sense only dimly the balance of activity and passivity
which goes to make up the link. And the whole has, of course, been set within the context of a controlling hesitation in 'Methinks'.

Later in the poem, when Coleridge turns to the babe at his side, he contrasts his own childhood, enclosed in the city, with the scenes that shall be revealed to his babe, a contrast similar to that between the poet confined to the Lime-Tree Bower and his friends roaming abroad. And, again similarly, the poet expresses a wish for the babe, that he shall have contact with the elements of nature, that those elements shall themselves grow fuller (the clouds imaging in their bulk the components of the landscape), and that a responsiveness shall be set up in both mind and natural world:

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.
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

The mind responsive to nature will yield itself into that unity of all things, the 'one Life within us and abroad' Coleridge writes of in the passage he added to 'The Eolian Harp', the spirit shall allow itself to be moulded. Yet at the same time the moulding finds a reciprocal action: by being given to, the spirit asks.
John Beer sees the poem as celebrating a relationship between the animal principle of energy and the vegetable principle of unity, moving from the hectic musings of the poet's schooldays (embodying energy) to the unity of the eternal language, encapsulated in the final scene where sun and ice blend together in a harmonious landscape. The closing landscape of the poem has a still richer significance, however, for it fuses within itself the giving and asking process established in the preceding lines; and in producing a fusion it veils in a mystery the precise degrees of each involved in the process. When we are told that 'Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee', we remain unsure as to the parts played by the seasons and by the perceiving human mind. The ambivalence established, between the poet's spirit and the film on the grate, earlier in the poem still persists here at the end, although the explicit exploration of the mind's processes has been left behind, and the problems are subsumed in a harmony that appears to resolve all, but which — by the very beauty of that harmony — yet obscures the nature of the relationships involved in perception.

Robert Langbaum sees 'Frost at Midnight' as a kind of Joycean epiphany: 'The meaning of the poem is in all that has accrued since the original vision, in the gain
in perception. But the gain is rather in the intensity of understanding than in what is understood ... the revelation is not a formulated idea that dispels a mystery, but a perception that advances in intensity to a deeper and wider, a more inclusive, mystery.\textsuperscript{35} The setting which, at the opening of the poem provided a context in which the retirement of the cottage could be established, has become at the end an expression of the complexity of relationship between mind and world - of the problem of whether the world gives or the mind asks, either or both, and to what degree. In the final analysis, the poem provides no clear answer. The dim sympathies remain dim, although they are more richly apprehended.

'Fears in Solitude' has a similar starting-point, a silent spot, a place of retirement, from which the poet spreads out to meditate on the nature of violence and activity in the world beyond. The poem takes a different course from its fellow Conversation Poems, however, in that it overwhelmingly concerns itself with an examination of worldly activity. In this, it bears more resemblance to the poems of the retirement tradition than to the more intimate examination of the private self within that retirement which characterizes other of Coleridge's poems. The nature of the world beyond the silent dell is described, and balanced: the horror
of offensive or violent activity, and yet the need to repel an impious foe. But the poem does turn, towards the end, to focus on the poet himself, first in relationship to his country - where indeed the very things impelling him into patriotism are the elements of the landscape of seclusion, very different from the worldly sphere of action into which his patriotism does actually take him.

In its closing thirty lines, the poem moves, however, from the world of action back to the poet himself again, first by means of the prospect scene, and then to the lowly cottage which reminds him of the silent dell from which he started. The prospect links, in its vocabulary, the world beyond and the poet himself:

And after lonely sojournning
In such a quiet and surrounded nook,
This burst of prospect...
... seems like society -
Conversing with the mind, and giving it
A livelier impulse and a dance of thought!

The quiet nook has been lonely, yet it has led the poet through a meditation on activity, world, and human beings in the mass; the prospect - by contrast - seems like society, yet leads the poet's attention to his own individual mind again. The prospect 'converses' with the mind, a reciprocal process with a confirmation of the reciprocity in the idea that immediately follows: a livelier impulse of the mind, a relatively independent
power, being 'given' by the prospect.

The crossed intertwining of loneliness and society with the two forces on either side of the converse, prospect and mind, reveals the difficult and unfathomable nature of the relationship between the two for which Coleridge continually strives. In 'The Nightingale', for example, he stresses the power of external forces, and their impact on the mind, as in the babe who is hushed at once by the sight of the moon;\textsuperscript{37} while in 'Dejection: An Ode', the emphasis is on the power generated within the mind, a power that he feels, in the poem, has evaporated. As M.H. Abrams puts it, the poem records not merely an alteration but the 'utter loss of the reciprocating power of the mind'.\textsuperscript{38} Abrams, however, has given only half the picture. For it is not only the reciprocating power of the mind - the give-and-take of experience - that has been lost; it is also the independent, generative power of the mind which interrelates with the principle of reciprocity in approaching and relating to the world.

The poet has lost his 'shaping spirit of Imagination',\textsuperscript{39} has lost the luminous cloud issuing forth from the soul itself, and not merely partaking in the world but 'enveloping' it.\textsuperscript{40} The process of gazing which had been the goal of his imaginings for Lamb in 'This Lime-Tree Bower' now occurs with a blank eye.\textsuperscript{41} It is not simply
relationship with the natural world that has disappeared; it is also the inner resources of the mind that formed the groundwork for that relationship in the first place. Ironically, the outside world mirrors the torment in his own mind and feelings, itself relating to him in resonance, and thus in a way highlighting his own inability to relate or to project. And, also ironically, when joy comes, at the end of the poem, it arrives as a product of sleep - the suspension of all attempts at operation by the mind.

'Dejection' carries a sense - in the original version, almost embarassingly private\(^42\) - that the search for a 'converse' between mind and world, for a proper balance of independence and reciprocity within the mind itself, will after all be fruitless. But at the end, the mood of total futility is qualified, however tentatively a renewed joy may be evoked: the search must forever begin again.

With 'Dejection', Coleridge's poetry has moved fully away from the retirement setting. The poem opens, not with a peaceful, protected dell or cottage, but with an open omen of storm to come. The poet concentrates directly on the processes of mind, does not lead into them through the opposition of seclusion and activity in the world. But the basic theme has similar roots to those of most of the other poems. In them, the mind strives, ultimately only partially successful, for a consciousness of its own activity, for a realisation
of the balances within its nature and content. The search is also a wishful process, reaching for the right balance, as well as for a consciousness of it. When W.J. Bate characterises the Conversation poems as having 'less value as the direct expression' of his thought than as embodiments of how he wished others to see him, he does not do the complexities of the poems full justice; nonetheless he does identify accurately both the carefully worked, delicate artifice, and also the striving, searching nature of Coleridge's vision. In these early poems - developing mostly out of traditional retirement settings - he begins to sketch some of the problems of mind and relationship that form the dominant theme of his intellectual enquiries later in life. He arrives at no firm solutions here in the poems, only at a richer sense of the nature of the problem. But the Conversation poems do lead in to the more explicit, rationalised struggle with other aspects of the same problem in his later writing.
The ideas of independence and acquiescence, which play a prominent part - in various guises - in the Conversation poems, also represent, in a number of different forms of solitude and relationship, the core of Coleridge's thought in his notebooks, letters, and prose works. Solitude becomes, for Coleridge, both a physical state and a psychological component of the mind:

the greater & perhaps nobler certainly all the subtler parts of one's nature, must be solitary - Man exists herein to himself & to God alone - Yea, in how much only to God - how much lies below his own Consciousness.

In psychological terms, solitude represents for Coleridge the individual, detached human mind, the being-in-itself, existing on its own. But he also affirms his need for, and liking of, physical solitude:

Monday, Oct. 24 1803. I walked with Southey & Hazlitt thro' Borrodale into Watendlath, & so home to a late Dinner. Of course it was to me a mere walk; for I must be alone, if either my Imagination or Heart are to be excited or enriched.

Similarly, in a letter of 1803, he writes of how he is 'far too contented with Solitude', and able to be independent of Society.

But the 'far too contented' should give us pause. For Coleridge, like Rousseau, has both a fascination for, and a fear of, solitude. Indeed, he sees Rousseau as suffering from a 'constitutional melancholy pampered into a morbid
excess by solitude'. And, for a man who writes, 'I must be alone', it is surprising that he should confide to his notebooks:

My nature requires another Nature for its support, & reposes only in another from the necessary Indigence of its Being.

Coleridge's stormy friendships with Poole, Southey, and later Wordsworth, testify to the depth and fragility of this need. In his poem, 'The Pains of Sleep', he writes, 'To be beloved is all I need', and at the end of 'The Blossoming of the Solitary Date-Tree', he cries out, 'Why was I made for Love and Love denied to me?'. He longs for the stability and companionship of a family group such as Wordsworth enjoys; and throughout the early years of the new century, he lives with the continual example of the Grasmere circle in view, its happy, communal atmosphere compared with his own loveless life at Greta Hall. Sara Hutchinson's membership of the Grasmere community must have made the differences all the more acute. Coleridge needs to be loved, and to be understood:

The unspeakable comfort to a good man's mind, nay, even to a criminal, to be understood - to have some one that understands one - and who does not feel that, on earth, no one does? The hope of this, always more or less disappointed, gives the passion to friendship.

The pattern which emerges from the Notebooks, and Letters, is of a man who has a strong desire for
solitude, yet cannot tolerate total isolation, who feels he needs sympathy, yet fears too great a need. As Kathleen Coburn shows, the very fact that the Notebooks exist at all reflects the struggles of a 'very sociable, very lonely man'. Coleridge himself speaks of the 'Halfness' of his mind, which needs to have a Symbol, another Half, to complete its existence, and he quotes, 'I am not a God, that I should stand alone.'

The baffling ambivalence of attitude to solitude and to relationship stems partly - as in the balancing of independence and acquiescence in poetry - from a realisation of the potential values and dangers of each. Solitude can produce selfishness, morbid self-involution, or it can lead to ideas of self-consciousness, to a new examination of the independent self in the world - a distinction reminiscent of Rousseau's 'amour de soi' and 'amour propre'. Similarly, a distinction can be made within the idea of relationship, which can represent a spirit either of love or of dependence. Blake describes the problem precisely in 'The Clod and the Pebble': love can build a Heaven in Hell's despair, or a Hell in Heaven's despite.

The desire for, yet fear of, both solitude and relationship is perhaps most clearly expressed in a much later note of Coleridge's:
Two Things we may learn from little children from 3 to 6 years old...

... The first lesson, that innocent Childhood affords me, is — that it is an instinct of my nature to pass out of myself, and to exist in the form of others.

The second is — not to suffer any one form to pass into me & to become a usurping Self in the disguise of what the German Patriologists call a fixed Idea.

Coleridge is reaching towards a position where the conflict between love and independence, between relationship and solitude, becomes no longer a conflict. Only if love becomes too dependent or solitude too independent, is an unresolvable conflict reached: in true relationship and true solitude, a new level of consciousness can be attained at which the distinction is superseded. This idea of resolving the conflict and retaining but superseding distinctions forms the goal of much of Coleridge's later thinking. The points of balance towards which he tentatively moves in the early poems become, in the later philosophical writings, points of fusion which yet retain the identity of their parts:

... Infirmities sunk under, the Conscious Soul mourning and disapproving, are less hindrances than Anti-firmities — such as Self-ness ... and separative — instead of being, what it ought to be, at once distinctive and yet, at the same moment or rather act, conjunctive, nay, unificent.

Where Coleridge strives to resolve the disparate psychological impulses, to relate and to be alone, to be interdependent and independent, he also strives to resolve the more philosophical expression of the same
dilemma \(^5^6\): the conflict of 'self' and 'other', of individual, isolated identity, and continuousness with the one Life of the world. I.A. Richards describes the problem as an exploration of where Coleridge felt a reconciliation lay, between the twin positions of 'there exist things without us', and 'I am'.\(^5^7\) The sense of identity, which is enshrined in the idea 'I am', and which must be inviolate, unintruded-upon by any outside force, can yet only be apprehended by its operation upon, or response to, or distinction from, other identities. With the aim of preserving the inviolate core of identity while at the same time uniting 'self' with 'other' - because neither identity nor unit, pure and simple, are ultimately satisfactory - Coleridge continually searches for the right relationship between opposites that will produce the resolving synthesis, that will bring each term of the opposition to its full fruition.

J.H. Muirhead labels the synthesis, the concept of a uniting third term, as 'trichotomy', thus emphasising Coleridge's rejection of dichotomy.\(^5^8\) Owen Barfield calls it 'polarity', stressing that 'rival opposites exist by virtue of each other as well as at the expense of each other', and that we 'can and must distinguish, but there is no possibility of dividing them.'\(^5^9\)

The interdependence yet distinctness of 'self' and 'other' forms, for Coleridge, a case where such a principle of polarity can be applied: he seeks a
reconciliation which will both preserve the independence of each yet also create a unity, which will indeed provide a context for the mind both distinctive and conjunctive, where the particular will be preserved as the particular yet will also partake of the universal. Coleridge finds an image of this paradoxical reconciliation in the sea, full of a 'million millions of forms', yet holding them in an undivided unity or in the changing matter but constant form, perpetual difference in sameness, of a waterfall, or the fountains in front of St. Peter's. David Calleo has shown the same principle, a reconciliation of particular and general, operating throughout Coleridge's political thought. The individual and the state must form a relationship where the individual can expand beyond his own immediate boundaries, and yet cannot be dissolved into the state - the double movement that makes Coleridge both an aristocrat and a constitutionalist, anxious to preserve the interests of both individual and all.

The process of reconciliation, uniting self and other or particular and universal, comes about in large measure by involving each in its companion term, defining itself by its reconciled opposite. In fact, only in this way can a full awareness of either or both of the terms be achieved. Consciousness of self, for example, can only come from a treatment of it as 'other'.
and an appreciation of its particularity in contradistinction to, and connection with, other particularities. It is only through interdependence that a self can come to know itself:

For in truth, Time and Self are in a certain sense one and the same thing: since only by meeting with, so as to be resisted by, Another, does the Soul become a Self. What is Self-consciousness but to know myself at the same moment that I know another, and to know myself by means of knowing another, and vice-versa, an other by means of & at the moment of knowing my Self. Self and others are necessarily interdependent as Right and Left, North and South.

Elsewhere, he grasps the same problem, in similar terms:

'A could not be affirmed to be A but by the perception that it is not B; and that this again implies the perception that B is as well as A.' None of this means that the Self loses any of its individuality in becoming perceived; it is simply that it can, initially, only be approached through relationship.

The blending of interdependence and identity of self in this way has resemblances with Coleridge's distinction between natura naturans and natura naturata - the organic unity at the heart of the universe which can yet only be apprehended in its manifestations, not in its pure central form. As A.J. Harding has shown, it also owes much to the Kantian idea of transcendental apperception, the power within the noumenal part of our being which can only be approached through the empirical apperception which is the limit of conscious human knowledge. We can only glimpse the operation of - but never know - the centre by observing the circumference.
Throughout his Notebooks and much of his later prose writing, Coleridge continually returns to the theme of reconciliation, searching among all the different aspects of selfhood and universality, identity and continuousness, and searching among different images of synthesising balance:

- or like some fair Blossom-life in the centre of the Flower-polypus, a life within Life, & constituting a part of the Life that includes it?. A consciousness within a Consciousness, yet mutually penetrated, each possessing both itself & the other - distinct tho' indivisible!

The very insistence with which Coleridge pursues the possibilities of reconciliation reveals both the crucial importance this has for him, and also his ultimate dissatisfaction with the solutions achieved. Ever more clearly, he sees the need to reconcile, and ever more clearly he perceives the difficulties of so doing - but ever returns to the task.

Critics are divided over the success Coleridge feels he has achieved in his search for reconciliation. Both Owen Barfield and A.J. Harding seem to imply that a resolution is indeed achieved, that the synthesis represented in the principle of trichotomy or polarity presents, for all its difficulties, an achieved answer. Kathleen Coburn, on the other hand, writing of Coleridge's attempted 'reconcilement of the external and internal', and applying the idea to the Ancient Mariner, comments that 'For such an one, there is no perfect vision and no
final answer. Thomas McFarland puts it most clearly, in speaking of the problem of choice, or resolution, between pantheism (the primacy of 'it is') and self (the primacy of 'I am').

Such a choice Coleridge refused to make. He would accept neither alternative as finally satisfactory, or even as finally bearable, and yet, like Hamlet, he could not bridge the irreconcilability of his interests. But his mind played between its two poles with matchless vitality.

For Coleridge, the only means, for human agency, by which the two poles could be held in a sufficient unity lies in art, and the exercise of the imaginative faculties. All art, to Coleridge, is symbolic: it unites the particular and the general; it enables the secondary imagination to reach into and bring forth the primary imagination as real and visible; it encapsulates natura naturans, for a moment, in natura naturata; it offers, as Roy Park points out, a handhold into the world of noumena. Symbolism, through art, unites the individual and the representative, and thus provides the experience of a life of our own yet the inclusion of that within one Life: the dynamic opposition, otherwise ultimately unresolved, but increasingly philosophically expressed, that dominates Coleridge's thought. In the final analysis, we are all symbols, snatched from the flux of a deeper reality, particulars in a generality, searching for our own reconciliation among the seemingly ever conflicting forces of solitude and relationship.
III

In the light of the philosophical expression Coleridge gives, during the middle and later years of his life, to concerns that also run through his early poetry, we can perhaps turn back and better appreciate the baffling intricacies of his best known, and most analysed, poem, *The Ancient Mariner*.

In a letter to Wordsworth in 1816, Charles Lamb makes a comment on 'Kubla Khan' that could almost equally apply to *The Ancient Mariner*:

... which said vision he repeats so enchantingly that it irradiates and brings heaven and Elysian bowers into my parlour while he sings or says it, but there is an observation 'Never tell thy dreams,' and I am almost afraid that Kubla Khan is an owl that won't bear day light, I fear lest it should be discovered by the lantern of typography and clear reducting to letters ... 

There is a sense in both poems that they possess something magical, an inner logic of their own which we probe at our own risk. This has led a number of critics in the past, now largely superseded, to argue that *The Ancient Mariner* does not have any particular moral force: Irving Babbitt, for instance, claiming that the poem has no 'serious ethical purport', 71 or E.E. Stoll seeing the poem as a thing of beauty, pure and simple, a fairy tale and nothing more or less, 72 or Livingston Lowes commenting that the poem has no didactic value when seen in terms of external reality - though admitting that the elements do have meaning within the context of the poem. 73
More recently, critics have tended rather to adopt the L.C. Knights position, which sees *The Ancient Mariner* as almost infinitely rich in symbolic possibilities, and takes the view that to pin a specific interpretation to the exclusion of others negates much of the poem's beauty. The role of interpreters has become one of teasing out strands from the poem, revealing the connected consistency with which they are woven throughout, but yet admitting that they form only part of a richer fabric. Robert Penn Warren, for example, has identified the shooting of the Albatross with the Fall, and the poem as an exploration of the sacramental theme of man's Fall and Penance, alongside and entwined with the theme of poetic imagination. George Whalley, similarly, sees the Albatross as 'the symbol of Coleridge's creative imagination, his eagle'. Humphry House interprets the crime as a sin of ignorance, a 'wildly thoughtless failure to consider what might be the truth about the order of the universe'. George Watson speaks of the loss of innocence portrayed in the poem; and John Beer, exploring the roles of fixity and motion throughout Coleridge's thought and in *The Ancient Mariner* in particular, believes the poem leads us to a larger view where apparently sterile opposites can 'be seen as the inter-related poles of a dynamic process'. 
This last comment, set against the background of Coleridge's philosophical search for a reconciliation of opposites, suggests one line of thought within the poem which—although noticed by a handful of critics—has not received much extended analysis: its portrayal of independent willed human activity, and acquiescent acceptance of the forces of the world, and the search for a balance of the two apparently opposing approaches to existence.

The Albatross first enters the poem while the ship is passing through the land of ice:

At length did cross an Albatross,  
Thorough the fog it came;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name.  
It ate the food it ne'er had eat,  
And round and round it flew.  
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;  
The helmsman steered us through!

The bird arrives as if a Christian soul, an effect reinforced by the use of the verb 'cross', which prepares the ground for the sacramental theme identified by Robert Penn Warren. But the second stanza here introduces an equally important theme in the poem, a contrast between the unifying spirit of the Albatross and the wilful, thrusting action of the sailors and the Mariner in particular. The distinction is at this stage only hinted at, but takes fuller shape as the poem progresses.
The bird flew 'round and round', with a circling motion such as the water-snakes blessed later by the Mariner possess, or the sweet sounds that dart to the sun. The ship, however, is steered through in a straight line, embodying the purposeful human attempts individually to order the world, and pointing a contrast to the circling, dancing, accepting movement of the Albatross. Even here, though, the purposeful human action is undercut, as the poem gives the impression that the bird, in effect, causes the ice to split, and the helmsman simply takes advantage of this in steering the ship through the gap.

Nonetheless, the shooting of the Albatross becomes, in the light of this contrast, an act of human individuality and purpose, set against the unity and acquiescence evoked by the bird. The act represents - whether through thoughtlessness, or pride, or accident, or simply being human - an attempt to impose a human order on the world, not to value and accept unity as well as asserting individuality. The Mariner's punishment for his assertiveness, and the crime it generates, is twofold: he is tormented by utter solitude, the state of individuality stretched to its utmost pitch; and he is held in the grip of spectral forces, in a state of utter dependence and enforced acquiescence, also stretched to the limit.
D.W. Harding sees the killing of the Albatross as a rejection of a social offering, and the whole voyage as a 'self-reliant thrusting forth' that repudiates social ties and dependence on affection. The poem takes the idea further, however, for many of the torments undergone by the Mariner in the remainder of his 'voyage' explore different aspects of individuality and dependence, and the relationship between them. The Mariner has to learn, through his experiences, that both forces must be balanced in a human existence, that neither one should predominate.

In Part III, for example, the Mariner sights a shape in the distance, and assumes it to be a sail:

I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

The shape, however, turns out to be the spectral skeleton ship, not the sail which the ordering mind had assumed; and as if to mock further the intense human efforts described here, the ship immediately defies all the laws perceived reality, coming onward - as the later gloss puts it - 'without wind or tide'. The same process of the human mind reaching vainly out, struggling to achieve a goal, without success, can be seen in the description of the Mariner's intense (and emphasised) solitude. All the other men have dropped down dead, and the Mariner is left, totally isolated:
I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusted,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.

The Mariner is gripped by Life-in-Death. He cannot
relate with the sea or the men, he cannot pray, he
cannot die. The very fact that he 'tried' to pray has
made the drying-up of his heart inevitable; in the state
the Mariner embodies, performing extreme penance for
excessive individual striving, any further effort to
'try' or to strive, towards however noble an end, can
only increase the torment.

The moment in which everything is transformed, when
the journey back towards human normality begins,
comes with the blessing of the water-snakes. They move
with the same circular motion as had the Albatross - 'They
coiled and swam' - and the Mariner's response stands in
marked contrast to his earlier reaction to the bird.
Where he had imposed his own individual purpose on the
Albatross, here with the water-snakes his purposiveness,
his striving, his individuality have all sunk to their lowest
ebb:

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.
The beauty of the snakes is incapable of being articulated by human tongue; the spring of love gushes - of its own volition entirely - from his heart; and, emphasised by repetition, the blessing comes involuntarily, when he is 'unaware'. All attempts to impose a human order, all attempts to strive, by his own efforts, for a termination of his penance have been completely drained from him. At the nadir of individuality, in a state in which Lamb describes him as having lost all consciousness of personality, a regeneration can begin.

The first action permitted of him is prayer, in itself an exercise of both individual action and of supplicating dependence. But he still has a long way to go, many sufferings to experience, before he reaches his own country again. From this moment of prayer, until the point when he takes the oars in the pilot's boat near the end of the poem, the Mariner performs only one positive, willed, human action, and under very strange circumstances. It comes when the ship begins to move, and the dead men rise to work the ropes - in itself an image which provides the ultimate insult to human planning and feelings of indispensability. Suddenly, with the dead men moving the ship onward, the Mariner - until now frozen into inactivity or asleep - springs into life:

The body and I pulled at one rope ...
The Mariner has learned the need to adapt to the circumstances imposed on him, to temper individual yearnings with an acknowledgment that even a ship worked by dead men demands a relating, subdued response.

At the end of the poem, after the Mariner has returned to his own country, he refers again - prompted by a burst of noise from the wedding-feast - to the intensity of isolation 'this soul' has experienced. And immediately afterwards, he explains his new-found perception of the sweetness in life:

To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray ...

These lines contain two words of immense importance for the poem: 'together' - the overcoming of solitude by joining, uniting, with others - and 'pray'. The idea of prayer recurs often in the poem, especially significant at the moment the Albatross falls from his neck; and here in the closing stanzas it appears frequently. In the act of prayer - now, almost, a voluntary act (although it is hidden by the vesper bell, which reminds us of the vespers nine for which the Albatross perched on the mast\textsuperscript{91}) - we can find the right relationship between the operation of self and the acquiescence in the demands of things and beings beyond ourselves that will alone provide a resolution of all the Mariner's sufferings.\textsuperscript{92}
The Mariner is not himself allowed a complete resolution, however. He must continually wander, continually - like the poet - repeat his tale.\(^93\) He can never be fully absorbed back into his community; he has learned too much, in too extreme a fashion, about the need to form part of a true community, the need for real prayer, the limits of individual power and desire, ever to find fulfilment in a normal human society, or a normal wedding-feast. The Wedding-Guest, the listener, may have perceived in the Mariner’s tale the ideal of resolution between opposing elements of experience. But the Mariner himself, who has to attempt the task of living the different elements out, in extreme form, cannot achieve the resolution he himself points to in his tale. The resolution can be seen, can be told to the Wedding-Guest or to the world; but there remains a profound doubt as to whether it can actually be achieved. As Kathleen Coburn says, there is 'no perfect vision and no final answer'.\(^94\)

The Ancient Mariner, in fact, pursues the same themes and ideas - the same search for reconciliation - as do the Conversation Poems. For Coleridge, the idea of solitude - be it the retirement setting of the Conversation Poems, the desolation of the Ancient Mariner's penance, or the philosophical struggles of his Notebooks - takes on a significance beyond the ideas of physical setting or personal dilemma that concern the poets we have examined from the previous century. Both those themes are still present, but the poet begins - at first tentatively, but with
increasing sureness - to pose questions of independence and interdependence, individuality and generality, identity and continuousness, of how to school a Soul both to seek and to hear. And, ultimately, an ideal reconciliation between seemingly conflicting opposites can be seen, can even be approached; but whether it can be attained is a question never finally answered, for the attempt, the approach, is continually renewed.
Chapter V

William Wordsworth

The busy solitude of his own heart

'You never Enjoy the World aright, till the Sea it self floweth in your Veins, till you are Clothed with the Heavens, and Crowned with the Stars: and Perceiv your self to be the Sole Heir of the whole World: and more then so, becaus Men are in it who are evry one Sole Heirs, as well as you.'

Thomas Traherne.
In 1819, Wordsworth gave a collection of poems, by various authors, as a Christmas gift to the Lady Mary Lowther. The title of the manuscript was 'Poems and Extracts from the Works of the Countess of Winchelsea and Others'.¹ The sonnet he wrote to accompany the collection begins:

Lady, I rifled a Parnassian Cave  
(But seldom trod) of mildly-gleaming ore;  
And cull'd, from sundry beds, a lucid store  
Of genuine crystals.....

Although Wordsworth qualifies his praise ('mildly-gleaming ore'), the crystals are genuine, and the cave is Parnassian. Earlier, in the 'Essay, Supplementary', he had commended the Countess of Winchelsea highly; and the poems and extracts chosen for the 1819 volume were clearly selected with care, and with affection.

The collection is of great interest for the predominant themes which run through many of the chosen extracts. Among the Countess of Winchelsea's poems represented are 'Petition for an absolute Retreat', 'Peace! where art thou to be found?', and 'Silvia, let us from the crowd retire'. There are many other poems along similar lines: Cowper's 'Ode to Peace', Thomson's 'Hymn on Solitude', a fragment from Beattie's 'Retirement', Pope's early 'Ode on Solitude', and Akenside's 'The Wood Nymph'. Most of the collection consists of poems firmly embedded in the mainstream retirement tradition of the eighteenth century, and entirely representative of the dominating themes of that tradition.

The Countess of Winchelsea's poem, 'Petition for an absolute Retreat', the first major poem in the manuscript, is a good example. Two alternatives are set up within the poem: the outside world, with its hopes and fears and vanity; and the retreat, set against that background, a retirement
That the world may ne'er invade,
Through such windings and such shade,
My unshaken liberty.

The motif of the windings and the shade is given added emphasis by being repeated at the end of each stanza. Furthermore, the retreat becomes not simply an alternative existence, but an alternative social existence. There will be 'A table spread without my care', and fruits of various kind waiting for the plucking (in a manner reminiscent of the retreats of Jonson and Carew⁴); there will be a 'partner suited to my mind'; and the poem ends with an evocation of the happy days of the Garden of Eden, when there was perfect union and love between only two, a blessed society that stands in marked contrast to the world of wealth and pride which was to follow. The idyll dissolves, however, in the final lines, as Adam and Eve flee the Garden; and perhaps the reborn idyll of the Countess's absolute retreat is also recognised, in its turn, as ultimately flawed, or ultimately threatened.

The poem stands as a forerunner of many in the volume, and in the ensuing century, that offer retreat as an alternative environment, one in which the delights of virtuous society may be enjoyed. The social implications of retirement are even more clearly drawn in 'Silvia, let us from the crowd retire':

Apart we'll live, though not alone;
For, who alone can call
Those who in desarts live with One
If in that One they've All?

The world a vast Meander is,
Where hearts confus'dly stray;
Where few do hit, whilst thousands miss
The happy mutual way.
The importance of the poems and extracts in the 1819 selection lies not so much in their own content, as in the fact that they were chosen by William Wordsworth. He was here choosing poems, which pleased and moved him, but which handle the themes of solitude and retirement in ways he himself had changed utterly, developing the familiar motifs in radically new directions.

As F.R. Leavis, among many others, has pointed out, Wordsworth's roots are 'deep in the eighteenth century';\(^6\) it has not been so often noted that they lie deep in the retirement tradition of the century. The selection he gave to the Lady Mary Lowther is not alone in confirming this. We know from Dorothy's Journals that they read Cowley, Thomson, Cowper, Michael Bruce, John Logan, and Robert Fergusson, as well as, more frequently, the works of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. We know that Wordsworth wrote to Crabb Robinson in 1835: 'This morning I chanced to mutter a line from Dyers Grongar Hill - she [Dorothy] immediately finished the passage - reciting the previous line and the two following', an incident that demonstrates remarkable familiarity and sympathy with Dyer.\(^7\) Wordsworth praises Dyer as a 'poet whose works are not yet known as they deserve to be' in the notes to the River Duddon sonnets, along with Crowe's 'excellent loco-descriptive Poem, 'Leweson Hill';\(^8\) and in the 'Essay, Supplementary', he speaks of Thomson's 'Winter' as a 'work of inspiration'.\(^9\)

But Wordsworth also qualifies his admiration for the poets of this eighteenth-century tradition. De Quincey records Wordsworth's youthful enthusiasm for Goldsmith and Gray, chanted along the banks of Esthwaite Water,\(^10\) and tells of how the poet later came to view them as 'woefully below the tone of high poetic passion'. Wordsworth, speaking of Dyer in a note to The Excursion, condemns
the advances of manufacturing industry of which Dyer speaks so acceptingly, however admirable the powers of manufacture may be in principle. He does not criticise Dyer as such, but rather the baneful effects of powers which Dyer had been able to accept had even welcome. By Wordsworth's time, the easy conclusions of the retirement tradition are not longer possible. Wordsworth takes up many of the themes and alternatives of this tradition, exemplified so well by the Lowther collection, and forges a new poetry from them; he adopts some of the iconography, and re-uses it. The view of retirement as a golden society, the debate between retirement and action, the opposition between urban and rural, are all taken over and moulded in his own way. The social issues and resolutions of the retirement tradition are maintained, viewed in a more problematic and questioning light; but their significance deepens: they embody and melt into, a poetry of personal experience and understanding. The focus moves from social to personal, and in the process a whole host of problems, philosophical and experiential, are raised and contemplated.

Wordsworth's poetry takes these themes and searches through them, attempting to find a way through the problems of retirement and action, retreat and society, solitude and relationship, experiencing self and experienced world. At its best, Wordsworth's is a poetry of tensions; there are no easy resolutions to be made, however hard the striving may have to be.

In this lies a major difference between Wordsworth and Coleridge. There are, of course, great similarities; the discussions of self and relationship, of identity and continuousness which are explicit in Coleridge, and particularly in his
philosophical prose writings, are implicit in much of Wordsworth's poetry. Coleridge himself stresses this, insisting frequently that Wordsworth is a philosophical poet. In the Biographia, for instance, he speaks of Wordsworth as being capable of producing 'the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM' (Coleridge's capitalisation). In referring to the projected Recluse as 'the first and finest philosophical poem', and to Wordsworth himself in similar terms, Coleridge is pointing to Wordsworth's ability to discern these interwoven problems of self and identity and to absorb them into poetry. The word 'philosophy' is perhaps inappropriate, but it is difficult to find a more suitable one. The philosophic scanning of experience lies firmly within the poetry - at its best, inextricably part of the poetic force: Matthew Arnold's union of natural magic and moral profundity. As Herbert Read puts it, 'Wordsworth's poetry at its best is philosophical poetry, and belongs to that rare species of poetry in which thought is felt.'

But while there are strong similarities of focus between Coleridge and Wordsworth, while the themes that are developed out of the preceding century are similar, they handle them in very different ways. Coleridge strives, through his poetry and his prose and his notebooks, to find some answering synthesis to the problem of selfhood and continuousness, an ideal reconciliation which will preserve the independence and the interdependence of each; he sees the ideal ever more clearly, and ever more clearly he confronts his own failure to grasp it. Wordsworth, however, finds no such synthesis, neither the readily embraced eighteenth-century social reconciliation of retirement and action, nor the difficult Coleridgean
philosophical reconciliation of self and relationship. These different entities must, for Wordsworth, be held in tension. It is in interaction of these irreconcilable forces that creativity and development occur; but the tensions will ultimately remain. The task is to understand, not to resolve them.
Wordsworth published 'An Evening Walk' and 'Descriptive Sketches' in 1793, and as Roger Sharrock points out, they are unquestionably eighteenth-century topographical poems, while yet containing anticipations of developments to come in Wordsworth's later poetry. 'An Evening Walk' presents a landscape full of rustic activities and vignettes. Cattle stand at the margin of a lake, schoolboys stretch themselves upon the green, deer gather in the park, horses crowd behind the swain, there is a boat-house peeping through the shade, smoke curling from a cottage, a panniered train of potters, a timber-wain, a shepherd directing his dog, a winding swan, a swain whistling and plodding his ringing way while a curfew swings long and deep, and even a quarry heard remotely at first and later coming into sharper focus. His 'I love to mark the quarry's moving trains' finds in this example of industry the same kind of activity that he is later to find disturbing in his note on Dyer, but here it forms a joyous and imperturbable part of the busy fullness of the landscape. 'Descriptive Sketches', written a few years later, portrays a series of landscapes similarly filled with rural activity or graceful ease amid the villages and lakes; interspersed are scenes of the sublime rather than the beautiful, the gipsy with her nursling babe, or the sterner silence of Uri's lake.

'An Evening Walk' and 'Descriptive Sketches' are both strongly influenced by the topographical picturesque poetry of the eighteenth century; but they go further. There is an unusual wealth and diversity of scenes and vignettes within the poems. We also have a sense of a perceiving
persona moving through the lines, actually experiencing the landscapes and sights of the poetry. The poet does not simply view a Claudian landscape, or place himself within it a stationary figure. He actively moves through and experiences, the setting. In 'Descriptive Sketches', for instance, the times of day, and the seasons, move back and forth as the mood leads, with the sequence determined by the poet and his own presence, in person or in his imagination. In 'An Evening Walk', the poet on his homeward way listens to 'th'æreal music of the hill' (later changed to the 'spiritual music of the hill'), and we glimpse a landscape that is felt, as well as being seen and traversed. The sense of the experiencing poet is Wordsworth's most important departure from convention in those two poems. The poems stand at a threshold between his eighteenth-century inheritance and the more personal poetry to come.

One of Wordsworth's earliest poems, begun in 1787 and completed in 1795, is 'Lines, left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree'. This poem presents the first in a long line of great Wordsworthian solitaries, those haunting figures who move strangely through his poetry, alone and stark and elemental. The man of the yew-tree seat does not however possess the full force of the later Wordsworthian solitaries. We know, for instance, exactly why he came to be there; it was his
revulsion from the neglect he felt the world had heaped upon him, and 'with the food of pride' he sustained his soul in solitude. With most of the other solitaries, their coming thither is unexplained and unrecounted; they are simply there, and there is certainly no indication that they have adopted the status of solitude as a personal act, far less as an act of pride. They do not choose their solitary state; it simply seems to happen. Moreover, the man of the yew-tree seat has an unusually intense level of interaction with the world around him. Sometimes, he would lift his head and gaze 'On the more distant scene' and 'he would gaze till it became / Far lovelier', a degree of perception that would be impossible for a solitary such as the Old Cumberland Beggar.

On other occasions, however, the man would fix his downcast eye upon barren ground, the rocks and fern and thistle, in a glazed contemplation that perceived little except his own morbid pleasure. In this, the man of the yew-tree seat has more in common with the later solitaries. We are told, explicitly, that in 'the world, and human life' he could not feel what others felt; the same applies, in his hours of morbid pleasure, to his relationship with the world of nature. He sees only emblems, and his relating eye is unperceiving. He may have felt and suffered with a certain dignity - a dignity that should be revered - yet he is also a man whose inward thought was often directed to pride, and whose outward perception has been, at times, of surfaces alone.

The man of the yew-tree seat stands as the forerunner of many others. As Herbert Lindenberger puts it, 'The central character throughout Wordsworth's work is the solitary; there is probably no other major writer whose dramatis personae are all so much alike.' A line of commanding solitary figures runs through all of Wordsworth's greatest poetry, figures coming towards us from
a mystery, rather as the dimly perceived figures emerge from the mists of a David Cox painting. As one early reviewer wrote, 'Without him a grey cloak seen in the distance on a lonely moor would have no meaning.' There is the Old Cumberland Beggar, the leech-gatherer, Martha Ray of 'The Thorn', the Soldier of the Prelude, Lucy, Lucy Gray, the girl who bore a pitcher on her head, the blind beggar in the streets of London, the Solitary Reaper, Margaret of the ruined cottage. These figures - the poet's meetings with them, and our response to those encounters - are crucial to an appreciation of Wordsworth's poetry. They form the focus of much of his thinking on solitude and experience.

Dorothy's Journal records a whole series of meetings with solitary figures, on their walks together or at the door of Dove Cottage itself - old men, wanderers, beggars, travelling salespeople, soldiers, sailors or a ragman. They lead Dorothy to reflect on how pleasant a life she and William have, by comparison, and to debates with herself about how much she should have given them. But in Wordsworth's poetry, these figures take on a larger significance.

The traditional view of Wordsworth's solitaries is that they are in communion with their surroundings. Albert Gérard calls it an 'intimate communion with nature'; John Jones, speaking of Michael as a 'relational solitary', describes him as a 'very old man who has reached perfect solitude through perfect sympathy with his environment'. It is certainly true that most of the solitaries are in a solitary place - the landscape which surrounds them is solitary and bare and elemental, as they are themselves. There is a sharp contrast, for instance, with the figure of the Wandering Jew in Wordsworth's 'Song' who has no home, no place where he can go. The desolate landscape in which the solitaries have their being does at least provide that. A harmony of a kind,
something external, covers both the figure and the landscape. But that does not mean to say that the solitaries necessarily have any interaction or communion or sympathy with their environment. In some cases it is specifically denied. Donald Wesling comes closer when he writes that the solitaries are 'an indeterminate thing between man and his environment, walking and testifying fragments of the landscape.' The solitaries seem to have no conscious relationship with their landscape, neither communion nor an active divorce. Their world has ceased to be one in which either dualism, or a continuity, of man and nature has any relevance. Relationship of any kind, even that of being a fragment, no longer matters.

The view of the solitaries as being in relational harmony with their landscape has led to another convention which is misleading but very tempting. Often the solitaries are seen as being at peace, representing an ideal tranquillity towards which we all aspire. Herbert Lindenberger writes, for example, 'Figures who at first seem examples of the direst possibilities within life gradually emerge as models of endurance and even holiness.' This stoicism of the solitaries, an ideal of endurance in the face of pain and suffering, a sheer clinging to existence when all else is stripped away, does indeed form part of their significance. But the picture is more complicated than that. The mere fact that all else has been stripped away, that no real relationship remains, should give us pause.

The testimony of the solitaries is, in fact, a largely unselfconscious one; they have little consciousness of their
position in life, or in nature, or even of the only thing left to them, their human existence itself. They have, as it were, an existence beyond ours, in a world on the other side of pain and suffering, where interaction with pain, with the world or with self, and the consciousness which that involves, have ceased even to be considerations. Just as they stand halfway between man and his environment, so they stand halfway out of life itself. As late as 1818, Wordsworth composed an inscription 'supposed to be found in or near a hermit's cell', and it ends:

What is peace? - when pain is over,
And love ceases to rebel,
Let the last faint sigh discover
That precedes the passing-knell!

The peace of the solitaries has been purchased at a heavy price. It lies beyond pain and love, and we must enter another order of experience entirely if we are to find the tranquillity which exclusive isolation brings.

As the solitaries move from experience in maturity to existence in solitude, they gain a peace and dignity, certainly; but in the process, consciousness and relationship, the tools for understanding experience and existence itself, are lost. These figures are not purely an ideal. In their total solitude, left with nothing but their existence, they stand as both an aspiration and a warning.
The Old Cumberland Beggar is the first of the major solitary figures. We see him first seated by the highway side, very still, active only in the slow and helpless motions of his hand. Then, after the initial stillness, the figure moves - travelling on, as he has been since the poet was a child, but yet with the same stillness about him, performing no actions, simply passing, through the poem and into the distance beyond. The age of the beggar is similarly emphasised. In the first forty lines of the poem, Wordsworth reiterates that he is 'old' or 'aged' eight times.

Him from my childhood have I known; and then
He was so old, he seems not older now;
He travels on, a solitary Man...  

As with his stillness while in motion, so in extreme old age the beggar remains ageless; or rather, he has reached a condition in which we can no longer view him adequately in terms of age at all. Perhaps in this lies the necessity for repetition, striving to express the inexpressible: he has left the ordinary human scale of computation.

The stillness, and his age which is beyond age, established so strongly from the beginning of the poem, are crucial; for the important thing about the beggar is that he does nothing; he does not really act, he does not grow, he simply passes, through the poem and through the lives of all around him. He has a strange relationship with the natural environment. He sits 'surrounded by those wild unpeopled hills', and the word 'surrounded' is important, with its sense that he has somehow not come into the midst of the hills himself, but rather that they have gathered to enclose him in. As he travels,
On the ground
His eyes are turned, and, as he moves along,
They move along the ground; and, evermore,
Instead of common and habitual sight
Of fields with rural works, of hill and dale,
And the blue sky, one little span of earth
Is all his prospect.

Although the beggar has been surrounded by hills, and by a pleasant landscape and blue sky, he perceives nothing of them. He sees only, and continually, a small patch of earth, and this degree of perception will last for 'evermore'. Even in that, he sees only leaves and straws and marks, and 'seldom knowing that he sees' them. The beggar makes hardly any contact, finds hardly any communion, with the landscape around him.

In the same way, the beggar does not interact with the people around him, upon whose charity he depends. It is their impulse of kindness towards him that comes forward, as the poem progresses, and in this lies Wordsworth's greatest emphasis. The beggar may not do anything, may not interact with the world or with mankind; but it is the response of those around him that matters. Harold Bloom describes the beggar as 'the human stripped to the nakedness of primordial condition and exposed as still powerful in dignity, still infinite in value.' His dignity lies in his sheer capacity to exist in stillness; his infinite value lies more in the way others react to him.

This idea of response helps to clarify the final thirty five lines of the poem, where the poet expresses his wish for the beggar: a wish that he may breathe 'the freshness of the valleys', that his blood may struggle with the 'frosty air and wintry snows', that he may have around him the melody of woodland
birds, whether he hear them or not. 

This prompted Lamb's famous comment in a letter early in 1801:

Here the mind knowingly passes a fiction upon herself, first substituting her own feelings for the beggar's and her in the same breath detecting the fallacy, will not part with the wish...

The poet, in other words, wishes for the beggar delights which the poet enjoys but which the beggar would not be able to wish and might not be able to appreciate; and yet, realising this, the poet continues wishing. For the wishing, in the response to the beggar, forms the crucial act; whether or not the beggar actually hears the wished-for melody or not is less important.

But the challenge of the beggar's strange, inactive stillness is not resolved quite so easily. It would be good, we feel, if the beggar were able to hear, and to interact. In wishing for him, the poet brings his own values into the value-free existence which the beggar has. In so doing, he throws both the world of values and the world of the beggar into a fulcrum of doubt, clouding the relationship between them. We leave the poem feeling that the mind cannot simply wish for the beggar, however necessary that may be, and leave it at that. The question of whether we ought to be wishing at all, of how far we should carry the world of values and of interaction into the beggar's existence, is left unanswered.

The core of doubt in our encounter with the beggar reveals itself again at the end of the poem. The little birds that at the opening were wary of sharing the old man's meal are wished
into joining in at the end as the beggar himself seems to perform the act of sharing:

and with the little birds
Share his chance-gathered meal...

But we are never sure of the significance of this. We do not know, with any certainty whether this will actually occur or not; it remains a wish. Moreover, the strongly emphasised word 'Share', with its inherent ambivalence, might imply an action not by the beggar but by the birds. It is impossible to tell if, in fact, the action of sharing has taken place of the beggar's volition or not, and even if so, whether we should welcome it. The two worlds, of the beggar and of those around him, including ourselves, are brought together; but what precisely their relationship will or can be, we shall never fully know.

The beggar's pure existence possesses a dignity, and our response a value; but we do remain uncertain about what kind of dignity and value each has. The beggar passes out of the poem, as we found him, a figure whose mystery we can approach but which ultimately we cannot reach.

Another solitary almost contemporaneous with the Old Cumberland Beggar is the old man of 'Animal Tranquillity and Decay'. He has a close similarity: the birds 'That peck along the road, regard him not', and 'He travels on', just as the beggar does. In this, both of these figures differ interestingly from the old man 'constrained to dwell/ In a large house of public charity', in a poem written nearly fifty years later, where the robin who pecks at the crumbs on his knee forms a strong and loving tie with the man, and the man with him.
the Old Cumberland Beggar, the old man in 'Animal Tranquillity' performs no action, and forges no conscious relationship. In the original version of the poem, 'Old Man Travelling', Wordsworth included an extra six lines, in which the man speaks, with an effect not only of bathos, but also damaging that sense of living-beyond-consciousness that is carefully built up in the first fourteen lines. The omission of the speech conveys much more strongly the undiluted atmosphere of a state beyond interaction. John Jones puts it well: 'He does not need to do or say anything - he is.'

The enigma remains, however, of what exactly constitutes this state of existence, this 'settled quiet', which stamps the life of the old man as it does that of the beggar. It is a remarkable state of being:

A man who does not move with pain, but moves
With thought - ...

... He is by nature led
To peace so perfect that the young behold
With envy, what the Old Man hardly feels.

The condition lies beyond pain, and beyond sensation, as he is 'insensibly subdued'- but the difficulty comes in the idea of moving 'With thought', particularly if we bear in mind Wordsworth's description of thought as an aggregation of past feelings, for the old man 'hardly feels'. The answer probably lies in the final line: the peace so perfect which the man possesses can hardly be felt or apprehended in consciousness 'Thought' becomes, in this sense, a word used to describe not consciousness or even contemplation - which it would seem at first sight to connote - but a state somewhere beyond both, in contradistinction to pain or feeling: thought as a mental state pure and simple, something without any active intercourse with the
world, without suffering or sensation. And at the close of the poem, we are left in uncertainty: doubting whether we behold the state of perfect peace with envy, and whether the peace is perhaps only possible when it can hardly be felt - and whether it then remains enviable.

"The Thorn" is unusual among Wordsworth's poems, partly from its particular use of a ballad style of repetition, and partly from the persona of the narrator, about whom there has been much heated critical debate. Stephen MaxfieldParrish, for example, believes that the poem is primarily a psychological study, with its focus upon the narrator; and while this undoubtedly represents an important strand within the poem, it is not a sufficient explanation of the narrator's role. The varying degrees of authority and certainty with which he asserts his different statements and explanations reveal a lot more than the workings of his own mind; they bring forward to our attention, in a myriad of possibilities, hesitations, and denials, a set of varied characteristics and activities for the woman and her setting, and varying conclusions for our assumptions about her.

Among these possibilities and assumptions, only one - with reference to the woman - is stated with absolute conviction:

'But that she goes to this old Thorn,
The Thorn which I described to you,
And there sits in a scarlet cloak,
I will be sworn is true.'
So certain is the conviction that the narrator repeats it 'this I know' - at the end of the poem. Every other possibility for the woman is raised only to be denied or doubted or qualified. The poet's insistent questioning, of why the woman goes there, and the narrator's reporting of gossip, and surmising, all end in doubt. The only certainty, in other words, is that the woman is there.

In this, she closely resembles the thorn itself - and we should note that in the two passages which assert categorically that the woman does exist at that place, the poet juxtaposes her emphatically with the thorn. We are introduced to the thorn with an opening statement of bare existence: 'There is a Thorn' - as we are to the boy of Winander, or the roaring in the wind at the opening of 'Resolution and Independence', or the blessing in the breeze at the beginning of The Prelude itself. And precisely this characteristic of the thorn, its capacity to exist, is the one emphasised as the poem develops. The mosses clasp around it in an endeavour to drag it to the ground, the wind sweeps across the mountain ridge, but the thorn stands on, oblivious to the forces that rage around it. Like the beggar and the old man, it is aged, and grey (in sharp contrast to the burst of colour that breaks forth in the hill of moss); the thorn has no attributes of colour, or of symbolism or suggestion of happenings within the human world, as does the hill of moss. It has a stoicism, certainly, and in a sense existence is its only essence.
In much the same way, the poet presents Martha Ray herself as a figure who simply exists, like the thorn, known to every wind that blows, unknown to human certainties. As we, through the poet, and he through the narrator, ask for more than a statement of existence, we enter a cloud of doubtful authenticities. It is almost as if the desire to find out more - to ask, to surmise, or worse, to tamper with nature in order to discover what the village would call 'truth' - is bound to end in no discovery at all. That, however, gives little satisfaction. Our human world, like that of the villagers, demands more than the simple fact that she is there. We can accept the statement of existence about the tree; but about the woman, as do the poet and the narrator, we want to know more. The problem is intensified by the fact that the myriad possibilities have been raised, only to be qualified. We do not respond to the woman just on our own, finding her strangeginity compelling but her mystery worrying; we are impelled into this by the poet himself. The poem brings us to see that the search for further knowledge must be fruitless; and yet coaxes us into demanding that knowledge. As with the beggar, though in a different way, we begin to struggle among alternatives, in our response to the existential challenge of the solitary figure.

Something of the same kind of doubtfully authenticated folk voice, as we find in 'The Thorn', can be seen in 'Lucy Gray':

- Yet some maintain that to this day
  She is a living child;
  That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
  Upon the lonesome wild.
At the ending of this poem, we again have a disturbing sense of mystery: quite what has become of Lucy Gray is left without being settled, either way. This sense of mystery, more than anything else, adds to the feeling of loneliness in the poem. A.C. Bradley records a reader of Wordsworth once saying, 'I could hardly bear to read Lucy Gray, it made me feel so lonely.' Wordsworth reinforces the sense of loneliness by including 'Solitude' specifically in the subtitle of the poem. Lucy Gray becomes particularly lonely, however, when she is lost, after she has disappeared from our sight and into a world where we know what may have happened but cannot deny the final possibility that she may still, strangely, live, or have some kind of existence. As with the beggar and the old man and Martha Ray, the state of isolation in which Lucy Gray exists is characterised not simply by pure existence and by an absence of interaction with the world, but by a sense of mystery too; one of the necessary components of total isolation seems to be that the rest of mankind should quite simply not know what precisely is happening. Confronted by a figure from the world of isolation, a world not our own, perhaps we can do nothing but see through a glass darkly.

One of the solitaries, however, stands as an exception to this, and has much less of a sense of mystery about her: Margaret of 'The Ruined Cottage'. We know much more about her, and can approach her more readily. Whatever doubt does exist — and it casts little shadow over the tale — revolves around her husband, not around herself. But,
significantly, there are also major differences between Margaret and the other solitaries. There is much more interaction between her and the world around: not only does the garden decline in proportion with her despair, but her eye works busily in the distance, 'shaping things / That made her heart beat quick.' And Margaret still hopes, she still conjures desperate possibilities of her husband's return. She does not accept her situation, as the solitaries do, she yearns to change it. She has none of the stillness of the solitaries, she lingers in 'unquiet widowhood'. She very definitely takes part in the world of action and suffering, she does not belong to a world beyond it. Indeed, stillness and tranquillity only come when she has gone beyond, and sleeps in the calm earth, and the very grasses become an 'image of tranquillity'.

Margaret, in acting and suffering, becomes a figure of greater tangibility than the other solitaries, and accordingly one who rouses a more tragic response, for tragedy resides in this world of pain and hope. In so doing, she also becomes a figure whose mysteries are not stretched to a point where they become one of the conditions of isolation itself.

One of the strangest and most mysterious of Wordsworth's solitaries is the Soldier in Book IV of The Prelude. When the
poet first comes across him, the setting almost thrusts the figure upon him:

While thus I wandered, step by step led on, 
It chanced a sudden turning of the road 
Presented to my view an uncouth shape 
So near that, slipping back into the shade 
Of a thick hawthorn, I could mark him well, 
Myself unseen.

Wordsworth does not identify the source of the leading of his steps, adding force to the idea that it is the road which presents the soldier to the poet. At first, the soldier seems a shape, a thing, not a human being, and only a couple of lines later does the shape modulate into a 'him'. The uncouthness - like his extraordinary height - reinforces the effect. These two initial impressions - that of his surroundings acting upon him, pushing him forward, handling him as an almost helpless, non-reactive body; and of the uncouth shape which at first does not seem visibly human - are made more explicit as the encounter proceeds. The sense of inaction, and of nature's taking over in that respect, is perhaps clearest in his posture:

from behind,

A milestone propped him...

Even parts of his body, arms, hands, and mouth seem almost detached from him as a person, acting on their own behalf; his shadow lies, as if it were in no way connected; and the murmuring sounds are coming 'From his lips', as if the murmuring had in a way an independent life of its own. It is partly because of this that the solitude focuses on 'his very dress', rather than on him. The individual words - 'stiff', 'upright', 'meagre', and 'ghastly', which is twice repeated later, emphasise the sense of uncouthness. 'Upright' and 'ghastly' come in a similarly sharp
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and compelling juxtaposition in the description in Book V of the raising of the corpse from Esthwaite Water, and the undertones of the eerie and spectral are here in the description of the soldier too.

Wordsworth thus presents to us, first, a strange, non-human, unmoving figure; only when the poet hails him does the soldier move, with great deliberation, afterwards returning to his station. He begins to speak, although we, the readers, do not actually hear him. The discovery of the staff breaks some of the previous solitude of his dress. The shape that we first met is gradually, very slowly, animated into life. It is a strange kind of life, his speech, reported to us, not heard, has however a 'stately' air and yet a 'mild indifference': the 'mild' being taken up later in 'ghastly mildness', the indifference being expanded:

He all the while was in demeanour calm,  
Concise in answer; solemn and sublime  
He might have seemed, but in all he said  
There was a strange half-absence, and a tone  
Of weakness and indifference ...

This form of speech identifies the overall ambivalence of the soldier: the man who speaks concisely and yet remains half-absent; whose words are stately and yet strange; who starts as a non-human shape and moves towards humanity.

The ambiguity of the soldier becomes still clearer as the poet, having called upon the resident of the cottage to help, turns to the soldier and enjoins him, in future, not just to sit or stand in stillness, but to seek help:

At this reproof,  
With the same ghastly mildness in his look  
He said, 'My trust is in the God of Heaven,  
And in the eye of him that passes me!'
The reply has a forceful impact, being the first, and only, direct speech the soldier utters, coming out of silence with a compelling emphasis. And with this added strength, the soldier's calm conviction that he has no need to do anything, that he should simply trust in stillness, (and that state of trusting lies very close to the state of existence which, for example, the Old Cumbeland Beggar has) takes on great and important value. And yet the words are spoken with 'ghastly mildness', and that phrase, not only chilling in itself, refers back to our previous memories of the strange and non-human qualities the soldier possesses. We leave the soldier strangely attracted to him and yet strangely fearing him.

Throughout the encounter, the poet has acted as mediator between the soldier and the world around him; and Wordsworth's emotional commitment lies between the two, belonging in part both to the soldier and to the wider community represented by the village and the cottage. The poet's commitment to the community is a muted one: the village has a sense of distance, being seen but unreachable, and we feel a wariness towards it in the onlooker. Even in the case of the single cottage, we never actually see or hear the labourer who lives there - someone, invisible and unheard, simply unlocks a door. And yet the poet's commitment to the world of the soldier is also muted; he brings him in the end to the cottage, referring again to 'the poor unhappy man'. When the poet turns with quiet heart to
seek his quiet home, he feels not the quietness of the soldier alone, nor solely the quietness of the home, the truly valuable community. He feels something of both, and of the quiet on the road before he met the soldier; and more than this, he feels something of a quiet derived from an experienced encounter, in which much has been learned of the values and the failures that lie in all these different worlds.

The leech-gatherer, in 'Resolution and Independence' is probably the most important, and certainly the most discussed, of Wordsworth's solitaries. Coleridge calls the poem 'especially characteristic of the author' and A.C. Bradley speaks of it as 'the most Wordsworthian of Wordsworth's poems, and the best test of ability to understand him.' The poem opens with a storm, which immediately dissolves into a morning of sunshine, the tense changing from past to present, and the waters no longer roaring but now filling the air with pleasant noise. The world is full of interaction, between sky and morning, hare and mist, all things and the sun. Into this world of sunshine comes the poet, very directly and assertively - 'I' repeated three times, at the opening of the lines; the tense changes back into the past again, reminiscent of the previous storm; and the next few stanzas of the poem belong to the world of the poet.
A subtle change occurs as the focus changes from the world of nature to the world of the poet, signalled by the change in tense. The poet tells us:

I heard the woods and distant waters roar;
Or heard them not, as happy as a boy:
The pleasant season did my heart employ:
My old remembrances went from me wholly;
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

He heard the roar, or did not hear: his state is one of not knowing and not worrying about the world, and this comprises his happiness. 'The pleasant season' that employs his heart in this mood is rather different from the pleasure of the natural world that loves the sun and rejoices in the morning; the poet's pleasure feeds largely upon itself, and its forgetfulness. He does not interact with his environment. This characteristic of his pleasure is also true of the melancholy, with which the pleasure is almost inextricably mingled:

And fears and fancies thick upon me came;
Dim sadness - and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name.

The melancholy - being unknown and unnamable - has close similarities with the component of doubtfulness in the pleasant season of the previous stanza - the unconcern at whether the poet heard the roaring or not. In the light of this, the apparently inexplicable shift from joy to dejection becomes easier to understand and to accept.

For three more stanzas, the poet explores further the balancing between joy and dejection. The shifts within the fifth stanza are particularly complex:
I heard the sky-lark warbling in the sky;
And I betheought me of the playful hare:
Even such a happy Child of earth am I;
Even as these blissful creatures do I fare;
Far from the world I walk, and from all care;
But there may come another day to me —
Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.

He heard the sky-lark, and thought of the hare, a degree of perception that he had not had before, although this should be placed in the context of the previous two lines, with their dim sadness and blind thoughts. A new, sharper perception of the nature of joy in the world has followed from the dim unknowing state of dejection. But immediately, he adopts a joy for himself, for the poet's world, again; he does so by calling himself such a happy Child of earth — one of a kind with the hare and those that love the sun, rather than one with the pleasant season that had previously stamped the poet's world of joy. He emphasises this by the change in tense again, back to the present, of the sunshine and the morning. The perception he can now have of the world, in hearing and thinking where before there was only joy feeding upon itself, makes a finer joy possible. Simultaneously, however, it makes a perception of the converse possible — those things which he now can name and know — and which are the reverse of all his present joys: bliss becomes distress; being 'Far from the world'
(the care-free solitude of the hare, of the birds singing in the distant woods) becomes a darker, much more pain-filled solitude. Or rather, it almost becomes such, because this is a perception
that it may occur. It is the sharpened perception, and consciousness, that are important, and these bring an understanding of dejection as they do of joy. Dejection and joy in awareness are contrasted to dejection and joy in dimness and idleness.

The poet turns back, in the sixth and seventh stanzas, to the past tense, and to his original pleasant-season mood. Here it becomes a 'summer mood', an unseeking state as the previous one had been uncaring. Here, however, it becomes linked explicitly to poetry:

By our own spirits are we deified:  
We poets in our youth begin in gladness;  
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

This suggests the same kind of fear, of a poet's idleness, expressed by the Pedlar as he begins to recount the tale of Margaret in Book 1 of The Excursion ('were't not so,/ I am a dreamer among men'); or, as in 'A Poet's Epitaph':

But he is weak; both Man and Boy,  
Hath been an idler in the land;  
Contented if he might enjoy  
The things which others understand.

It is a feeling that the strength of poetry may so easily become its weakness, that a brooding and sleeping on one's own heart which, if rightly and consciously handled, can lead to understanding, can also too easily lead to idleness, and to pure vacant enjoyment or depression.

The same debate has been going on in these first seven stanzas of 'Resolution and Independence', between awareness and vacancy, and their effects on both joy and dejection.
By their own selves poets may become deified, and become happy Children of earth; similarly by their own selves they may be led to madness - the madness that is embryonic within the summer mood where hearing and seeking and knowing are absent, and which becomes so easily a mood of dim sadness and blind thoughts, a madness that had snatched away so many poets over the previous hundred years. The poet moves between two different kinds of joy, one which can lead, unknowingly and blindly, to dejection, and the other that can at least see both joy and dejection for what they are, and perceive the nature of their place in the world.

Into this debate - and to confront it - comes the leech-gatherer. The syntax of the introduction - 'Now, whether it were.... Yet it befell' is partially incomplete, and this, together with the words themselves, laces the figure with a certain air of mystery; but the initial description of the man himself has the simplest form:

I saw a Man before me unawares: The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

The rich ambiguity of 'unawares' - referring both to the man who has not yet recognised the poet, and to the poet who has yet to learn much about the man - adds to this effect of mysterious simplicity, as does the force of that strange word 'wore'. All we see at this first glimpse is a man, pure and simple.

One of the two stanzas Wordsworth omitted from the poem came immediately after this first sighting. The stanza in question conveyed no extra information about the man himself, but it did slow and lessen the impact of the famous simile that now follows immediately; and therein may lie the reason for its later exclusion. The simile - the image of the stone couched on the bald top of an eminence, and of the
sea-beast into which it turns - reinforces the simplicity of the man

In the 1815 'Preface', Wordsworth describes the process:

The stone is endowed with something of the power of life to
approximate it to the sea-beast; and the sea-beast stripped
of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone;
which intermediate image is thus treated for the purpose of
bringing the original image, that of the stone, to a nearer
resemblance to the figure and condition of the aged Man;
who is divested of so much of the indications of life and motion
as to bring him to the point where the two objects unite and
coalesce in just comparison.

The picture of the leech-gatherer in these four stanzas, the eighth
to the eleventh, portrays a man of stripped simplicity. The
man, like the other solitaries, exists. He does not move, he
does not act, and in his motionlessness he seems neither
alive nor dead. He is both less than human and more than
human (an approximation to the stone and sea-beast, yet
indicative also of 'A leading from above', 'A more than human
weight').

Wordsworth's own most explicit discussion of this initial
portrait of the leech-gatherer comes in a well-known passage
of a letter to Mary and Sara Hutchinson:

What is brought forward? 'A lonely place, a Pond' by
which an old man was, far from all house or home - not
stood, not sat, but 'was' - the figure presented in the
most naked simplicity possible....

The man has the naked simplicity of existence, of nothing-but-
existence, such as the woman of 'The Thorn' or the Old
Cumberland Beggar possess. Coleridge penetrates the difficult
unfamiliarity of this idea, in his last essay on Method:
Hast thou ever raised thy mind to the consideration of EXISTENCE, in and by itself, as the mere act of existing? Hast thou ever said to thyself thoughtfully, IT IS! heedless in that moment, whether it were a man before thee, or a flower, or a grain of sand? Without reference, in short, to this or that particular mode or form of existence? If thou hast indeed attained to this, thou wilt have felt the presence of a mystery, which must have fixed thy spirit in awe and wonder.

There is a disturbing paradox here. For pure existence, the state of being, without movement or attribute or form to it, lies at the core of all life, common to all yet familiar to none. It underscores everything we are, and yet it remains a mystery. Thus, when the leech-gatherer is presented to us, seemingly the closest it is possible to come to a state of pure existence while yet maintaining human form, he has something of the other-than-human about him, perhaps because there has to be. The debate between alternative forms of joy and approaches to dejection, which the poet was holding with himself in the previous stanzas (or, rather, the poet was observing his former self holding with himself - for the levels of narration in most of Wordsworth's poems in which he, the poet, enters, are complex) - this debate is interrupted by the appearance of a being of such simplicity that he is mysterious. The leech-gatherer brings with him a world in which joy and dejection, in all their forms, are subsumed under a greater and prior mode of being - the mode of sheer existence.

In succeeding stanzas, however, the figure that at first seems so simple, and so pure in its life that it does no living, begins to fill with movement and speech. It is the leech-gatherer who makes the first move, stirring the waters of the
pool; but it is the poet who takes the much more active step of actually speaking. His first statement, with its reference to the 'promise of a glorious day', refers us back to the first two stanzas of the poem- a reminder that, surrounding the poet and the leech-gatherer, there is that wider world of hare and morning and sunshine that forms the context within which their encounter occurs. Only after a further five and a half stanzas do we hear any direct speech from the leech-gatherer; at first, we only hear it, reported to us (in a manner reminiscent of the soldier, just as words such as 'propped' and 'mild' remind us of him). This increases the gradualness of effect in drawing the figure from motionlessness to activity: movement merges into reported speech, which in turn merges into direct speech.

The leech-gatherer's speech is 'courteous'\(^7\), even though feeble, another development in the humanising process; and for six stanzas, the poem turns to focus on the interchange between poet and leech-gatherer. Twice the poet asks the same question: 'what is it you do?', and twice the old man replies in the same way: 'And said that, gathering leeches, far and wide / He travelled'; and indeed the leech-gatherer renews the same discourse again, in the nineteenth stanza, even though the poet has not renewed his question. The leech-gatherer's replies embody two main precepts. First, the poet should not seek to know more - all that matters is that he gathers leeches, and when he elaborates on that he describes the leeches, not himself. As being resides in being, pure and simple (the most naked simplicity possible),
so doing resides in doing, pure and simple. And second, derived from this first principle, the essential thing is to do your job, to perform your destined function, with acceptance and conscientiousness. The leech-gatherer has the same kind of capacity just to fulfil his own function and purpose well and contentedly that we find in, for example, the Old Cumberland Beggar. A sharp contrast might be the Solitary of The Excursion, in whose house, despite the generous hospitality, the musical instruments have been long neglected, and there are scraps of paper scribbled on in verse lying forlornly abandoned; he has none of the surety of position and occupation that characterizes the leech-gatherer. This sense of function and of performance in that function is particularly important for the poet, whose mind at the opening of the poem had been searching through the problems and temptations of poetic creation, and the function of the poet. He makes the link explicitly when he remembers his previous fears, the 'mighty Poets in their misery dead', and it is this that impels him to renew his question about what the old man does. He now brings forward the old debate within himself for solving by the leech-gatherer.

The debate does not, however, find a full solution. For in the poet's response to the old man's words, his attitude moves and changes, but never achieves true resolution. The initial reaction is one of simple observation, mingled with mild approbation, of the choice words and stately
speech. This moves to a sense of something almost at the other end of the scale, the man's voice seeming to be like a stream, 'Scarce heard' - and in this there are resonances of the third and fourth stanzas, the mind which has a certain blindness toward what lies beyond it, not hearing or not caring that it hears. The leech-gatherer at this stage appears to the poet, again, as something from 'some far region sent', something far beyond all human life. And in this context - with this reminder, perhaps - his renewed fears about poetry arise.

This attitude of strangeness and wariness modulates, however, into the rather more paradoxical, mingled view with which the poet leaves the old man. Orthodoxy has it that, at the end of the poem, the poet recognizes the cheerful humanity of the leech-gatherer, and that the old man - a true image of resolution, and of independence - shows the poet how to accept and to live life. F.W. Bateson sees the poet as 'saved from self-pity by contemplating the Leech-gatherer, who... retains a measure of cheerfulness.' Albert Gérard puts it rather more strongly: 'Through his ecstatic identification with the leech-gatherer, Wordsworth raises himself from puzzled recognition to mature acceptance of the positive value of suffering.' Anthony Conran speaks of 'tensions ... resolved by a final, wide-awake acceptance of the old man as simply a fact.' George Meyer calls it 'despondency like the poet's... corrected'. W.W. Robson claims the significance of the figure to be that he is just 'a normal and
natural, though exceptionally dignified, patient, and resolute, human being. \cite{vogler1994}

Thomas Vogler sees in the leech-gatherer an image of 'human strength'. \cite{vogler1994a}

The picture is more complex, however. The tensions are not resolved so readily.

The poet leaves the poem with two contrasting attitudes towards the leech-gatherer, neither one of which triumphs over the other; both are held in tension. The first is enshrined in the nineteenth stanza:

\begin{center}
While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
The old Man's shape, and speech - all troubled me:
In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently.
\end{center}

The shape (the initial sight of the man) and the speech (the interaction between poet and old man that followed) trouble the poet; the image of the leech-gatherer forever pacing the moors gathering leeches - forever in the elemental process of being and doing that has been revealed to us - is a powerful one. It has a force similar to the ending of 'The Solitary Reaper', \cite{wordsworth1815}, with the music that we hear long after it has ceased in reality: the sense of a process eternally extended, however transitory our own presence before it. The final stanza, however, brings a mood full of cheerfulness - the poet re-invokes the stateliness of the old man, and realizes:

\begin{center}
I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit man so firm a mind.
\end{center}
The humanizing process, which began as the old man moved and then spoke, comes fully to fruition here at the end. We do recognize the leech-gatherer as a man, with a derived from a capacity to find, and reveal, humanity in such circumstances and in such a naked form.

But that does not remove the effect of the previous stanza, which still remains in our minds. The leech-gatherer, at the end of the poem, is both stately and troubling, both dignified and forlorn. He does represent a figure of resolution and independence, a human being who has come through much and survived. Yet he also remains a figure of the beyond, from some far region, a fragment of that stillness of the stone on the eminence. Both in what he embodies, and in the poet's response to him and his speech, these are two different strands. Both find their place in our reactions to the old man.

The initial debate within the poet himself was a social and a personal debate: socially, between the action and the inactivity of the poet, how the poet should react to his situation and his purpose; personally, how the poet can view the world, what he can hear and think and know, and how the perceiving mind can interact with the world. The leech-gatherer in his solitude represents one set of alternatives woven among these problems. Socially, he represents 'doing', pure and simple - the calm acceptance and carrying-out of one's function; and as such this has a certain value for the poet, although it does fail to dissolve his fears of mighty Poets in their misery dead. Personally, he represents 'being', pure and
simple - the fact of existence, and of continual existence in that state. This, too, has enormous value and attraction - and derived from it is the humanity the poet perceives at the end of the poem. But it remains a troubling vision, for the wandering of the weary moors alone and silently (the corollary) comes too near to the non-humanity of the initial glimpses of the leech-gatherer to be a comfortably subsumable relic of our memory. The old man is only a little less mysterious, and hardly less unnerving, when we leave him, than when we came upon him.

In 'Resolution and Independence' Wordsworth presents a solitary who embodies the main strands of thought which run through all his similar figures. The solitaries lead us to a paradox; in their isolation in pure, non-interacting or little-relating existence, we find much to attract and much to trouble. We find that the response of the poet, and, through him, our own reactions to the solitaries and to the poem, are full of strangeness and ambiguity. 'Resolution and Independence' goes further, too, for it embodies also the social and personal debate between alternatives for action and for life, and the role of forms of solitude within those alternatives, that concerns Wordsworth so deeply in himself and in his poetry about himself. Here in 'Resolution and Independence' the concern comes to the surface, finding a tentative, though unresolved, expression.
III

When we turn to Wordsworth himself, we can see in his own personality some of the elements of that nearly total isolation which he experienced in the great solitaries. Wordsworth loved to be alone, and alone not simply in terms of being a lonely place; he loved to detach himself, in person and in thought. The Rev. H.D. Rawnsley's collection of *Reminiscences of Wordsworth Among the Peasantry of Westmoreland*, written originally in 1881, gives us a valuable picture of Wordsworth as seen by the Lake District people, albeit as an old man in his latter days at Rydal Mount, and not at the height of his powers. Canon Rawnsley's evidence should be treated with some circumspection, as the authority with which it speaks is not unassailable, and it does all seem to fit rather too neatly into a pattern; but it stands nevertheless as a valuable testimony. The picture emerges of the poet as a man 'allus about t'roads', walking alone or perhaps with his family strung out behind him, murmuring to himself or passing people by without words. 'He was distant, ye may say, verra distant'; and the picture of the poet murmuring along the high roads certainly finds confirmation from Wordsworth himself in *The Prelude*, and from De Quincey too. In church, according to Rawnsley, he might be like a dazed man, and forget to stand up or sit down in the right place. And, as the man who had carried butter to Rydal Mount puts it so clearly:
"He was not a man as fwoaks could crack wi', nor not a man as could crack wi' fwoaks."

Coleridge describes Wordsworth's detachment more fully, in terms of personality as well as of manner and habit. In 1799, Coleridge writes to Thomas Poole: 'dear Wordsworth appears to me to have hurtfully segregated and isolated his being. Doubtless his delights are more deep and sublime; but he has likewise more hours that prey upon the flesh and blood.' Later, he writes to Poole of Wordsworth's 'Self-involution'. During their tour of Scotland, Coleridge speaks of how 'Wordsworth's hypochondriacal feelings kept him silent and self-centred.' Late in life, he sees Wordsworth, of all the men he has known, as the one who has 'the least femininity in his mind. He is all man. He is a man of whom it might have been said, - "It is good for him to be alone."' De Quincey sees the same kind of masculinity of temperament, in speaking of Wordsworth's austere intellect, of a forest of massive boughs that are clothed with foliage under Dorothy's influence, the strong self-sufficiency that can never be totally devoted to a woman.

Henry Crabb Robinson, recounting his first meeting with Wordsworth, in 1808 at Charles Lamb's, describes him, while not arrogant, as being inattentive to others around him; he also tells of how Wordsworth's opinions of rival celebrities
of his own day were frequently censorious. And Benjamin Robert Haydon, writing of Wordsworth's first encounter with Keats, describes how Wordsworth off-handedly belittled Keats's ode to Pan which Keats recited for him, an injury for which he was never to be forgiven. Amid such a welter of contemporary evidence, much of it from Wordsworth's closest friends and acquaintances, we can readily understand Hazlitt's comment, applied at least to Wordsworth's personality:

We do not think our author has any very cordial sympathy with Shakespear. How should he? Shakespear was the least of an egotist of any body in the world.

And yet Wordsworth writes to Sir George Beaumont in 1804:

I did not mean to recommend absolute solitude and seclusion from the world as an advantage to him or anybody else. I think it a great evil...

While Wordsworth is a lover and seeker of solitude, he is also a man who builds around him a strong, though small, community. Canon Rawnsley, indeed, admits that Wordsworth, although a silent man in public, was 'monstrable' in his family, and Wordsworth does indeed search primarily for a family style of community. Crabb Robinson reports that De Quincey labelled Wordsworth as 'incapable of friendship out of his own family', which is not entirely just (Coleridge and Beaupuy are cases in point) -
but we do find that Wordsworth's attachments are like those of a family. Certainly the home that he forms around him, first at Alfoxden and later at Grasmere, is a very tightly-knit and familial one. 'Home' as a concept has great importance for Wordsworth, and for Dorothy: it is no accident that 'Home at Grasmere' carries the title it does. 104

Dorothy's Journal records the anxieties felt for each member of the household when they are away, the importance of letters, received or written, Dorothy's worries over William's composing and the way it tires him. There is a remarkable, and revealing, comment in the entry for Christmas Day of 1801: 'Coleridge poorly but better - his letter made us uneasy about him. I was glad I was not by myself when I received it.' 105 Nothing could better demonstrate the close ties felt to members of the family group who are absent, or the closeness of those who are together. Wordsworth lives and finds affection in this group, of Dorothy, Coleridge, and later Mary; and within the context of this group he writes his poetry. He sets out, as Rousseau did while composing the Nouvelle Heloise, into the woods and along the roads, composing his poetry in the solitude of the landscape and of his heart; but he recites the poetry to the audience of Coleridge and Dorothy, and addresses The Prelude specifically to Coleridge. There is thus a creative interplay between Wordsworth's solitude and his community within the family household.

In this interaction between a 'home' retirement and solitude, there are remarkable similarities between Wordsworth
and Rousseau. Both writers have much else in common, too, in the interweaving of their themes of solitude and relationship, retirement and action. It is remarkable, however, that Wordsworth makes hardly any reference at all to Rousseau a brief reference in the preface to The Borderers, and a mention of 'the paradoxical reveries of Rousseau' in The Convention of Cintra. For the rest, all is silence. In an age dominated by the impact of the French Revolution and the impulses that gave it birth - when Coleridge and Hazlitt, for example, debate and analyse at length the merits and demerits of Rousseau - Wordsworth says almost nothing.

The possibilities of 'influence' on Wordsworth have been discussed, at considerable length, by a host of critics. Ultimately, the question cannot be resolved. We know that Wordsworth possessed copies of Emile and the Contrat Social in his library; and the Rydal Mount Sale Catalogue for the 1859 sale mentions Emile again, with a two-volume edition of the Confessions of 1782. Wordsworth must have been acquainted with Rousseau's ideas, particularly after his stay in France and his long conversations with Beaupuy. But it is impossible, from sheer lack of available evidence, to attribute any direct connection. As Herbert Lindenberger puts it, 'the influence of Rousseau,... was probably less in the nature of direct impact than an absorption, on Wordsworth's part, of notions that were already "much in the air".' The question of 'influence' cannot be taken much further. But the similarities remain startling.
Lionel Trilling puts the interplay in Wordsworth between solitude and the home community into terms that have a relevance beyond the poet's own life-style, beyond a need for Dove Cottage and for the high road where he can be alone: 'the Wordsworthian moral essence, ... the interplay between individualism and the sense of community, between an awareness of the self that must be saved and developed, and an awareness that the self is yet fulfilled only in community.' Wordsworth recognizes this dualism in experience, and the moral nature of the problem, and attempts to forge a way in life as in poetry that brings both terms of the equation into focus and seeks a creative tension between them.

In acknowledging and expressing this interplay, Wordsworth develops new potency out of a much more traditional theme. He takes the traditional debate between retirement and action, the argument between a retreat to a private world of virtuous contemplation, and an embracing of a public world of 'virtuous action (which forms the theme of many of the poems which Wordsworth presented to Lady Mary Lowther); but no longer does the argument revolve around questions of social action and environment. The dilemma becomes a personal and moral one: the problem of the individual and his own existence, how he can confront and understand
it, what it means and how it interacts with experience.

The traditional debate between retirement and action finds classic expression in some of Wordsworth's sonnets. In a sonnet on 'Retirement', published in 1827, he writes:

If the whole weight of what we think and feel,
Save only far as thought and feeling blend
With action, were as nothing, patriot Friend!
From thy remonstrance would be no appeal...

The sonnet, like the succeeding one, comes down strongly in favour of the values of retirement. Likewise, a sonnet composed while writing the Convention of Cintra tract, in 1808, declares that it is not amid the world's vain objects, but amid the woods and vales, that he has weighed the hopes and fears of suffering Spain. On the other hand, in his dedication to the Duddon Sonnets, written in 1819 to his brother, he accepts and acknowledges his brother's choice of the active life:

O Brother! I revere the choice
That took thee from thy native hills...

He does, however, qualify his reverence with the hope that moments of quietness and contemplation can interrupt the bustle and allow his brother to cast his mind back to the far-off past among those native hills. Similarly, when Wordsworth introduces us to Beaupuy in Book 1X of The Prelude, he admires the active life that will follow his friend's sojourn in retirement. Yet he realizes that he himself must seek a different answer.
Wordsworth himself chooses the retired life; but the problem remains, as it did for Cowley and Thomson and Lady Winchelsea, of how to make of retirement a virtuous, and not an idolent, state, how to reconcile retirement with action and yet still maintain it as retirement. Wordsworth's answer to the problem is again a traditional one: it is the choice of poetry as an action within retirement which can yet be relevant beyond. The Priest in Book VI of The Excursion tells of many who come to the 'studied depth of privacy' of the place of retirement, and yet stay only briefly and do not use their retreat wisely. Virtuous retirement requires more, and Wordsworth sees the alternative, wise use, as lying in a poetic vocation. In another sonnet, Wordsworth addresses Bede:

Sublime Recluse!
The recreant soul, that dares to shun the debt
Imposed on human kind, must first forget
Thy diligence, thy unrelaxing use
Of a long life...

This provides the ideal reconciliation, the diligent use of retirement which does not shun the debt of action. When Wordsworth addresses Milton with his famous invocation, 'Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart', he summons precisely those qualities which he sees and admires in Bede.

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Wordsworth does not only seek a fusion of action and retirement, in poetry as in Milton, or in scholarship as
in Bede, to resolve a general and traditional debate - but also to begin to lead himself out of a personal crisis. For poetry is seen not just as the unifying focus of retirement and action, but also as the matrix where the private world and public world can meet, in itself the point of contact between self and others. The wording of his invocation to Milton is startling: his 'soul' was like a Star; it dwelt 'apart'; the dower was one of 'inward' happiness. The essentially private world of the poet forms part of the life and stuff of poetry, just as does the public world of action. The poet is not only a man speaking to men - poetry, in a Renaissance manner, doctrinal to a nation - but he is also a person, an individual, seeking the right kind of life for himself, and the right kind of understanding of that life and self in poetry. In his exploration of the retirement and action debate, Wordsworth endeavours to find a poetry whose utterance is public, but whose sphere is private too.

This cycle, of retirement providing a fulcrum for action and of the private self providing both a voice and a matter for public statement, all bound together in poetry, 120 forms much of the dynamic of the opening book of The Prelude. He sets out in the poem, saying 'The earth is all before me',121, and yet he does not choose the earth - the field of action - but rather a vale, a harbour - the perfect place of retirement. But paradoxically, at the precise moment that he does
choose retirement, the earth is very much all before him, for the vale will be the place where poetry is made, poetry to spread abroad. 'Long months of ease and undisturbed delight', with all their connotations of indolence and idleness - retirement without any acknowledgement of action - are to be used instead to 'dedicate myself to chosen tasks'.

The realisation of action in retirement will lie in dedication to poetry. But there follows a search for a theme, a search among the great public heroes and general themes. And again, from this fruitless search, there comes a lapse into the dangers of indolence. The two terms of the debate split apart once more:

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for either still I find
Some imperfection in the chosen theme,
Or see of absolute accomplishment
Much wanting, so much wanting, in myself,
That I recoil and droop, and seek repose
In indolence from vain perplexity...
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Then, suddenly, unannounced, the subject is discovered - his own self and his development - and the poetry begins to flow again. The change, and the casting of the mind backwards onto its own past is emphasised by the turn in tense to the past again, in the light particularly of the changing conflation of present and past through the previous two hundred and fifty lines. The attempt to balance retirement and action becomes not simply poetry and poetic vocation, but a poetry of himself. That forms the only way out of perplexity.
Wordsworth sets the debate between retirement and action against the background of a wider opposition, into which it becomes at times subsumed: the opposition between the urban and the rural. The polarities of this antithesis are more clearly delineated for Wordsworth than for most of his predecessors; where in some retirement poetry the city or town could be accepted as part of the landscape, drawn in and almost hidden within a wider natural prospect, he finds such a semi-acceptance of the city much more difficult.

Wordsworth sharpens the distinctions between country and city not just to reflect his own inclinations and inheritance, nor simply to justify his choice of setting and vocation, but to identify different modes of social experience and their effect upon the individual mind. He considers the differences of urban society and rural society primarily as they affect and reflect the people who live within them, as they encourage or discourage particular ways of seeing, ways of confronting experience and the world. The country and the city both generate, and represent, differing approaches to experience.

It cannot be denied that — in seeking to draw these distinctions — Wordsworth extols the virtues of the rural community so vociferously and insistently that the value he attributes to it becomes exaggerated. As the Pedlar is described in The Excursion:
From his native hills
He wandered far; much did he see of men,
Their manners, their enjoyments, and pursuits,
Their passions and their feelings; chiefly those
Essential and eternal in the heart,
That, 'mid the simpler forms of rural life,
Exist more simple in their elements,
And speak a plainer language.

He makes the same point consistently in his Prefaces: that only in a rural setting can societies exist where men may have clear feelings and, moreover, express them clearly.

Wordsworth's contemporaries took up the point, and criticised it mercilessly. Hazlitt, speaking of country people, comments on their 'selfishness' and 'insensibility' because they are isolated from the world. Crabb Robinson copies a letter from Martineau:

"I dare say you need not be told how sensual vice abounds in rural districts ... here is dear good old W. for ever talk of rural innocence & deprecating any intercourse with towns lest the purity of his neighbours should be corrupted."

Coleridge, in the Biographia, takes hold of Wordsworth's idea of the language of those in low and rustic life and shows how this principle differs from his practice in his poetry, claiming only one case in which they concur. To many of his contemporaries, Wordsworth has preached an ideal vision of low and rustic life, which bears little relation either to the reality or to his own treatment and experience of it.

Wordsworth's expressed theories on the value of country life do indeed promote an ideal vision somewhat removed from the actuality of the rural society he knew so well, and whose language as Coleridge saw, he did not really transcribe into
poetry. But the gap is a deliberate one. It serves to point to possibilities inherent in everyone's life, too often fettered by restraining circumstance - possibilities of interaction with the world, warmth of community, directness of experience. Wordsworth posits an ideal (as Albert Gérard has pointed out\textsuperscript{128}), and stresses the simple modes of expression and understanding it can generate, because those are the qualities of perception he hopes can be achieved within society, existing in potential but too often unrecognized.

In the same way, Wordsworth talks of an ideal love of 'mankind' formed by nature, rather than of 'men'.\textsuperscript{129} This is no Rousseauian withdrawal from men to love man in the abstract; rather, it is another, perhaps ungainly, attempt to state an ideal so that the possibilities of the real may be acknowledged, and better understood. As Wordsworth writes to John Wilson, he wishes to find the best 'measure' of human nature, drawn from those 'who lead the simplest lives most according to nature'\textsuperscript{130} - a measure against which human experience can be assessed.

But blessed be the God Of Nature and of Man that this was so; That men did at the first present themselves Before my untaught eyes thus purified, Removed, and at a distance that was fit: And so we all of us in some degree Are led to knowledge....
Love of mankind may perhaps lead eventually to a love of men; we may, alternatively, fail. His trust is 'in what we may become'; the tension between the ideal vision and the reality, and the striving to unite the two, is all embodied in that potent word 'may'. If we lose this trust, we run the risk of splitting humanity from the human form, the potential of mankind from the reality of men, as in the woman he sees as he enters London.

While it may be possible to find an approach to, if not an achievement of, an ideal community fostering love and directness of experience in a rural setting, the city provides a directly opposite experience. Coleridge reports on Wordsworth's decision to adopt 'something of the Juvenalian spirit' in approaching the high civilization of towns and cities; and Wordsworth, throughout his poetry, has an almost unrelievedly dark vision of the city. He dwells on how Coleridge has had to grow to maturity in the depths of 'the huge city', on how this forces a mind to self-create its own sustenance,

Debarred from Nature's living images, Compelled to be a life unto itself...

The consciousness cannot interact with the natural world; the mind finds an isolation enforced upon it of the kind the solitaries take by choice.

In the city, interaction becomes impossible not only with nature, but with mankind as well. It is akin to Auden's distinction between societies and communities, the 'societies' growing more and more mechanical, with individuals becoming 'isolatoes' living in separate continents
of their own. Wordsworth's city, just such a mechanical society, deprives individuals of any interaction among themselves.

How often, in the overflowing street,  
Have I gone forwards with the crowd, and said  
Unto myself, 'The face of every one  
That passes by me is a mystery!'

In the undistinguishable mass that forms the people of the city streets, there can be no relationship and no identity, enforcing a total isolation, far more damaging and ominous than any embraced by the lonely solitaries of the moorlands.

The one exception to this treatment of the city is the sonnet, 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802'. It seems as if the city has become the nearest thing achievable to an ideal:

Earth hath not anything to show more fair...

But on a closer reading, we begin to see that it is not really a city at all. The ships and towers and domes lie 'Open unto the fields, and to the sky'; and the identification of the city with nature is made explicit in

Never did sun more beautifully steep  
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill...

The word 'smokeless' hints at this too, immediately presenting a contrast with the idea of smoke itself. The poem shows us, in fact, no city at all, but a work of nature; or rather, that is how it seems at this hour of the morning. As Dorothy puts it in her Journal, it has 'even something like the purity of one of nature's own grand
spectacles.142 The city stands as if transformed, and it can be praised precisely because of that. It has become, in the poet's mind and for a moment, an image of the natural world. The city, for Wordsworth, can never become part of nature - as it could in some earlier topographical poetry. The antitheses are too sharp for that; the city can resemble nature, but only when it is doing nothing, lying still, and exerting none of its effects upon its inhabitants.

Wordsworth's fear, of what the city at its worst can perform, finds expression in the one great solitary figure placed in an urban environment, the blind beggar in the streets of London. The encounter occurs immediately after Wordsworth has been describing the 'far-travelled' mood in which the whole of urban mankind seems to merge into one and the observer loses all perception of who or what lies around him:

And all the ballast of familiar life,
The present, and the past; hope, fear; all stays,
All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man
Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.

Into this mood, and this intense degree of non-perception, the beggar intrudes. And he does intrude:

'twas my chance
Abruptly to be smitten with the view
Of a blind Beggar ...

The beggar is presented to the poet, not sought out, in much the same way as the Soldier of Book IV was presented, though...
more suddenly; and the echoes continue, for the beggar has an 'upright' face, and stands 'propped' against a wall. The poet finds the beggar thrust upon him, bringing two new factors into his consciousness: the beggar is a single being in a world from which singleness had been excluded, amalgamated in the mass; he is also a perceived being, by a poet who had lost the capacity to perceive.

Neither of these factors, however, brings any balm to the encounter; they serve in fact to reinforce the dread power of the poet's earlier mood. The beggar may stand single, but he does not have the singleness of individuality and action: his shape remains 'unmoving', his face 'fixed', and his eyes 'sightless'; he has the singleness of the isolate, just such as lay in the faces that passed the poet by in mystery. Nor is the poet's perception a relating perception at all; he does not see an identified human being. The written paper explains 'who' the beggar was, but we hear nothing of its contents, nor what the beggar does - not even the role-acceptance of a leech-gatherer. The beggar becomes not so much a man, a 'who', but rather a 'type', an 'emblem'; the label takes over from the person. 145 And we are told three things about the poet's consciousness of the beggar: first, that his mind turns round 'As with the might of waters'; second, that in the label there is an 'emblem, of the utmost that we know,/

Both of ourselves and of the universe'; and third, that he
looks 'As if admonished from another world'. The beggar remains a figure of mystery; the mystery even increases, from the level of ourselves and the universe to the level of another world.

We can know no more than the label, the utmost of our knowledge; the person behind it must remain concealed. No relationship evolves, no conversation takes place, not even in reported speech. The beggar is simply there, and much more disturbingly and mysteriously so than was the case with the other solitaries. They had at least a certain dignity. Here the poet perceives only a label, and neither of them achieves any relationship. It is not a true perception at all. And however strongly the beggar was first thrust upon the mind, it is the mind that has made the beggar into that half-seen, half-apprehended figure:

Builds for itself such structures as the mind...

We are brought back to the state of mind in which the poet first was - the uncomprehending, unrelating isolatooe - a mood and mind determined by the city, just as the isolation of the beggar, the isolation of total inaction, is also brought about by the city. Perception and perceived object are operated upon by the same isolating force. The result is an encounter infinitely more disturbing and threatening than any which occurred in a rural setting.
Wordsworth focuses on the ways of perception embodied and encouraged by the urban setting, just as he focuses, at times inopportune, on the ways of perception possible within a rural ideal. His city enforces, on beggar and poet alike, a total isolation. The impulse to fear this - the impulse that leads him to clothe the rural solitaries in ominousness and mystery as well as strength, the same impulse that leads him to wish for action in retirement rather than complete idleness - is the impulse that brings him, ingenuously, to see the city as the heart of all evil.

No longer is the untroubled linking of city and country possible for Wordsworth. Dyer had been able to link the pastoral and the mercantile in a harmonious continuum; Thomson had seen London, at times, in pride and beauty; the Cumberland poet Dalton had been able to write of the triumphant advance of commercial enterprise and of the natural beauty of the Lakes, without opposition and without inner contradictions. For Wordsworth, the country and the city (and all they stand for) cannot be united in one smooth enterprise. The approaches to perception they harbour and represent are very different.

Wordsworth notes the same hindering effect on perception and relationship arising from the advance of industrialism and manufacture; and this, too, may have prompted him to accentuate the distinctions. Industry was expanding dramatically, forcing a separation of city and country:
landowners could no longer contain mines within a small corner of their estate to provide useful and acceptable revenue. And it is precisely the same isolating effect on the mind generated by the city that arises from the development of manufacture. In his tract on the Convention of Cintra, Wordsworth writes:

While Mechanic Arts, Manufactures, Agriculture, Commerce, and all those products of knowledge which are confined to gross – definite – and tangible objects, have, with the aid of Experimental Philosophy, been every day putting on more brilliant colours; the splendour of the Imagination has been fading...

And in a later poem, 'Humanity', he specifically ties the decline in importance of thought and feeling, powers of mind and soul, to the 'vast machine / Of sleepless Labour', the idol of the Wealth of Nations. He puts it perhaps most clearly in the eighth book of The Excursion, where he shows the advance of industry destroying nature, and simplicity, and domestic retirement – destroying the social values of an 'assured domain of calm simplicity'.

But worse than this, the impact has been felt within:

Oh, banish far such wisdom as condemns
A native Briton to these inward chains,
Fixed in his soul, so early and so deep...

These interrelated themes, of retirement and action, of the country and the city, of the effect of all of these on the individual, are bound together in 'Home at Grasmere', the poem originally intended as the first part of
The Recluse. The poet looks down upon the vale of Grasmere, and sees it as a home, a place within which to have his being; the poem celebrates this place, and examines its effect upon the poet. The vale in question offers a perfect retirement, entire in itself, and also a perfect community:

A true community ...

Society is here

Set against the community of the vale is the isolation of the city:

Say boldly then 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 Objects wanting life - repelling love;
He by the vast metropolis immured...

And, as with most of Wordsworth's souls lost in the city, the metropolis brings isolation not simply in lack of society, but in isolation of mind from meaning. The chosen vale, on the other hand,

as it doth in part
Conceal us from the storm, so here abides
A Power and a protection for the mind...

The mind has a 'power' that abides in the vale of retirement having a strongly active relationship with its environment, not simply being granted an enclosing protection. What we find here in 'Home at Grasmere' - and towards this point Wordsworth's handling of all these
themes tends- is that the place, the vale of Grasmere, becomes not simply a setting for a society, nor even just a place of interaction which is denied in the city, but it becomes itself an element of experience for the relating mind. The transmutation at the beginning of the poem from third person to first person emphasises this, not only a unifying of applicability to others and to himself, but also a realisation that the significances of the experience of a place can only be fully sought out within himself. The resonances are within, however applicable they may be to everyman.

The consideration of place, both as symbol and as active element, tends towards a consciousness of the self's experience. A similar movement occurs in the allied consideration of vocation within the context of place, a movement towards self-consciousness:

Possessions have I that are solely mine,  
Something within which yet is shared by none,  
Not even the nearest to me and most dear,  
Something which power and effort may impart,  
I would impart it, I would spread it wide.  

But this poses an immense problem. If poetry tries to spread abroad possessions which are solely one's own (in itself a paradoxical task) what then shall be the subject of the poetry,

A voice shall speak, and what will be the theme?

The conclusion is partly the same as it was in The Prelude:
And if with this
I mix more lowly matter; with the thing
Contemplated, describe the Mind and Man
Contemplating; and who, and what he was ...

The contemplating and questioning mind may become the goal, as well as the source, of poetry. The manifesto for The Recluse which struggles to answer the question of what will be the theme, and ends 'Home at Grasmere' - and which re-appears later as the Prospectus to The Excursion - sets out to show the poet in retirement speaking out for all men, and comes back in the end to the mind contemplating, and an invocation for the poet himself.

The search for a theme for everyman results in a theme for and of himself: that is the questioning conclusion towards which 'Home at Grasmere' tends; and Wordsworth realises that it is no easy conclusion. Geoffrey Hartman, in describing Wordsworth's doubts at the opening of The Prelude, argues that he struggles to break out of this subjectivity, to find the objective theme; that subjectivity becomes the theme at the very time he is trying to transmute it. But far from trying to transmute it, Wordsworth is struggling, in both The Prelude and 'Home at Grasmere', to reach an understanding of it - to come to terms with the subjective consciousness as the theme as well as the source for poetry.

When Hazlitt writes of Wordsworth that 'It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe. He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought', he is
expressing precisely this inner kind of solitude, focused on the independent mind and the way it views reality. Wordsworth, however, unites this idea of inner solitude - a philosophical examination of the experiencing self - with the more traditional idea of physical solitude in a retired place. The solitary figures on the lonely moors, the poet at home in Grasmere, or striving to recapture and understand his own development - in all of these, the material condition of solitude both images and generates an intense concentration on the solitude of the heart:

They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude ...

The crucial word, 'inward', has a deliberate ambiguity, referring both to the eye that lies within and to the eye that looks within - solitude both imaging and generating. The idea finds perhaps its clearest expression in 'A Poet's Epitaph':

And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.

In common things that round us lie
Some random truths can he impart, -
The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

Solitude is a physical condition, imbued with the social problems of retirement and action and individual existence. But as in 'Home at Grasmere', the idea of solitude deals also with the heart of the individual and its interaction with the common things around, with the inner self and its experience. It is a concentration, moreover, that is brought to light by the physical condition of solitude.
These problems of isolation and interaction, of mind as well as of physical individual, lie behind the ambiguities of the great solitaries of Wordsworth's poetry; they also form a central core in much of the poetry he wrote about himself. The examination of isolation and interaction is worked out in the encounter between poet and natural world; the landscape becomes for Wordsworth (as Grasmere does in 'Home at Grasmere') not simply a setting, nor even a 'paysage moralisé' in the eighteenth-century manner - a manner that was to be repeated again in some of the greatest Victorian landscape poetry. The landscape becomes itself an interactive element of experience.

Many commentators have pointed to this central theme of Wordsworth's poetry, the meeting of mind and world in the meeting of poet and landscape. Even Macaulay, commenting on The Prelude and regarding it as 'a poorer Excursion', speaks of 'the old flimsy philosophy about the effect of scenery on the mind'. John Jones speaks of a 'partnership' of mind and world, or Harold Bloom of a 'reciprocity between the external world and his own mind', or Donald Wesling of the 'profoundly moral job of understanding the encounters of mind and world'.

It would be a mistake to assume that the relation between mind and world is an unproblematic, or even a clear, one - as Shelley is on the verge of doing in his
satire on 'Peter Bell', speaking of how

... the outward world uniting
To that within him, he became
Considerably uninviting ...

The process does not simply involve a 'uniting', for the problem is one of perceiving, and preserving, the independent solitude of mind - the power possessed that is solely one's own - while still perceiving, and encouraging, its interaction with things outside its independent sphere. The mind does not simply come to an encounter with the world; there is a probing within that encounter, of the mind's preservation of or surrender of its isolation - a probing of how both solitude and encounter are part of the stuff of our experience.

We should perceive this meeting of mind and world as a relationship, rather than a union. Each element in the equation preserves, actively, its own independence. The world of landscape is, for Wordsworth, its own world. It exists, and has its being, separated from the mind. The Wordsworthian landscape has a sense of reality, of literalness, which Coleridge refers to when he talks about the 'matter-of-factness' in some of the poems.170 The world has a solidity of its own, one of the two voices that J.K. Stephen parodies in Wordsworth.171 And yet, there is the other voice too- the spreading of the depth and height of the ideal world around that solidity and reality, the taking of commonplace incidents and lifting them to profound reflections, as Hazlitt describes,172 the individual
forms becoming an embodiment of universal ideas, Crabb Robinson's account of Wordsworth seeing a spider's line with a microscopic eye and fancying it a cable. The real becomes the ideal. The world is transformed by the mind. Coleridge, in a famous passage of the *Biographia*, speaks of

the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed ...

and in another passage,

the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination.

In the encounter of mind and world, in other words, each has an independence from the other (the gulf which David Perkins describes as separating human nature from the rest of nature), and at the same time an involvement in the other.

The two processes are held together in a tension in Wordsworth's poetry. There is a sense of the necessity both of isolation and interaction for mind and world, and a sense too of the mysteries which lie beyond the limits, where the tension relapses and either term - isolation, or interaction - predominates. In the great solitary figures, it was isolation; in a case such as the incidents on his journey to school that he describes, it was interaction:

I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality.
The experiences must have been profound ones, for we know he retold the story again, when he met with Constable.\textsuperscript{178} The 'abyss' of total involvement lies as a mysterious region too far beyond ordinary experience, much as the solitary figures do, at the other end of the scale, by their very presence. The mention of the occasion to Constable is interesting, for there exists perhaps the same kind of tension in Constable's painting - and also that of Turner in his middle years - the desire to see a landscape or a world as it really is; and yet a desire for the mind to transform it from a material presence to a felt presence. In their greatest paintings, they succeed in forming landscapes which, in the eyes of the viewer, achieve both.\textsuperscript{179} The same kind of holding of tensions, while yet maintaining a sense of the mystery which lies beyond them, half-feared and half-attractive, can be seen in Wordsworth.

Geoffrey Hartman argues that Wordsworth's poetry revolves around a dualism of imagination and nature, that there is a movement back and forth from one to the other, a raising of apocalyptic self-consciousness and then a retreat from it: a movement, as it were, from nature to self and back to nature again.\textsuperscript{180} This analysis, however, misses the point. Wordsworth does not seek to engage in a perpetual movement back and forth, nor in a triumph of mind over nature, or vice versa; nor does he strive for a uniting Hegelian synthesis of both as equal existences in a third term; his is a search for a perspective in which the tensions
between interaction and independence may be accepted: the striving is to understand, not to unite or to transform. As Wordsworth writes of the individual and universal in his 'Essay upon Epitaphs' - applicable to epitaphs, but with resonances for his poetry as well - 'The two powers should temper, restrain, and exalt each other.'\textsuperscript{181} What is true of the individual and the universal applies also to their counterparts, the inviolate solitude of mind and the influencing of mind and world together.

The struggle to accept and to understand this tension can be seen more clearly in 'Tintern Abbey'. The poem has aroused some controversy in recent years: the traditional view, represented by John Jones's description of a 'poem of steady and shining optimism',\textsuperscript{182} has been sharply challenged by such as Albert Gérard's argument that interprets the poem as an 'utterance of puzzlement'.\textsuperscript{183} Gérard sees the poem as alternating between metaphysical ascent and descent to sensory certainty: a continual qualification and doubt brought in, counterbalancing the apparent sweep of the greater metaphysical passages. The poem does contain balancing doubts as well as a broader optimism, but Gérard's conclusions take too sweeping a view of the overall effect of these counterbalanced forces.

The poem announces, early on, that it will turn itself to a philosophical solitude of mind, as well as a material solitude of place, and that the two are to act upon each other:
these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion...

The ambiguity of 'thoughts' - thoughts which imagine places of
deeper seclusion, and thoughts which are themselves more deeply
secluded - brings together the two seclusions, of scene and of
thought itself, more closely; and the effect is strangely enhanced
by the Wordsworthian 'quiet' of the sky, a word with both emotional
and physical implications. The poem focuses, almost
from the beginning, on the experiencing mind, and the
links between that mind and the scene around it.

The poem begins to explore these themes further, and
in the process Wordsworth twice brings the poetry to a
visionary pitch, in two well known passages which form
the heart of the poem. They are worth examining closely.

Speaking of the beauteous forms of the landscape - that
landscape which is full of independent action at the opening
of the poem - and the gift of 'aspect more sublime' he owes
to it, he speaks of the 'blessed mood' in which the burthen of
the mystery, and

the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened ...

and of how

the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.
The passage places its major emphasis on a visionary power of mind existing in isolation from, and indeed rejecting, the outside encircling world. The weight is lightened, the bodily functions are suspended, the senses by which we interact with, and perceive, the world are laid asleep. It seems to be a vision of the mind triumphantly aloof and visionary. And yet that is to belie the passage, for the point to which it all tends is the seeing into the life of things, a higher act of perception than that of the bodily eye. The interaction of sense gives way to a more penetrating form of interaction, that of soul; and what was previously unintelligible becomes now intelligible. The mind relating perception has been abandoned on one level to be taken up again at a higher level. The 'eye made quiet' - as in the second book of *The Prelude*, when the 'fleshly ear' is laid asleep 187 - is an eye aware of the sheer power of the mind to form its own vision, and to reject the world of sense (and the word 'power' is repeated twice to reinforce the idea), and that can yet turn the power towards an interaction with the world. Like the harvest of a quiet eye, here the mind sees into its own life and into the life of things.

The second of the great visionary passages comes when Wordsworth describes his later appreciation of the presence in nature:
a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

As the previous passage had appeared to represent a total aloofness of mind, so here the poetry seems to represent a total absorption in the natural world, a complete union of all thinking things and all objects of all thought. But again a qualification must be made. The presence dwells in 'the blue sky, and in the mind of man', and the juxtaposition of sky with mind tends to fuse the two together; but there is a considerable braking force inherent in the word 'in', interrupting the smooth continuum of dwelling-places, and introducing a caveat that the presence does not occupy all of the mind of man. Furthermore, while the spirit that impels all thinking things does roll everything, mind, and objects, up together, the insistence on 'thinking' and 'thought' (which are emphasised also through the consonance of the 'th' sound), does serve to remind us, however quietly, of the presence of the thinking mind somewhere beyond the rolling process.

Both passages, however strongly they tend towards independent power of mind, or complete union of thought with object, do have strong balancing forces within them. And the very fact that they exist together, both elements of the poet's maturer vision as described in the poem, has a balancing effect. That maturer vision, distinguished
in the poem from the earlier absorption in the sensory experience of nature brings dangers more of visionary concentration or isolation, rather than of sensuous revelling. But the sense of an achieved, though precarious, balance between the mind's isolation and the mind's absorption does render the poem ultimately triumphant - and the precariousness, while it still remains, fades. The balance is between half-creating and half-perceiving, although the terms are in fact used of the world of the senses, rather than of the mind: neither term is fully embraced, both are necessary. It is more than simply a meeting of creating mind and perceptible world; it is a meeting of creative independence and perceiving interaction. As he turns to his sister at the end, and sees what he was, and hopes for maturity for her, he speaks of a number of problems somewhat similar to those facing the poet before he meets the leech-gatherer - solitude, fear, pain, and grief; and Wordsworth seeks the same remedy, reaching towards a state in which creation and perception may both be held together.
In Coleridge's poem, 'To William Wordsworth', composed after hearing *The Prelude* read, he speaks of

tides obedient to external force,
And currents self-determined, as might seem,
Or by some inner Power ...

and Coleridge here delineates one of the central strands of *The Prelude*. For, in examining the growth of a poet's mind, Wordsworth records not only the vocational choice of poetry (which is certainly one element in the poem), but more insistently the hazardous course of the mind's activity, its obedience and its self-determination. The two themes, the mind inviolate and the mind responsive - like the poet as Orphean lyre and Aeolian harp - run, both of them, through the poem. At one point, the tempering of sportive instincts in youth produce a 'quiet independence of heart', and yet the poet does not embrace the independence too readily:

And I was taught to feel, perhaps too much,
The self-sufficing power of Solitude.

In the 'perhaps too much' there lies the same wariness - while yet an appreciation - as there was in the approach to the great solitaries. Only shortly thereafter, however, the focus swings back to a deep interpenetration of heart and world, in the passage on the flute-player:

the sky,
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream.

The word 'into' has a strong force, particularly emphasised by its position at the opening of the line, and the movement
from the earlier 'upon' to the more penetrative preposition.

The moment in the sixth book, where Wordsworth, and Robert Jones, discover that they have in fact crossed the Alps, gives rise to a discourse on Imagination. The 'light of sense' goes out, like the sensory eye in 'Tintern Abbey', but here the power of mind goes much further. What is shown to us is not a new vision of the world we inhabit, not the life of things, but the 'invisible world', and our home 'Is with infinitude, and only there'; the mind becomes

blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward,
Strong in itself...

The mind has a power here to create its own reality, strong in itself, and glorious withal: we say to the soul, 'I recognize thy glory'. But the power also brings great dangers. It comes 'athwart' the poet, which carries an ominous and hostile connotation; and, although the syntax is ambiguous, the losing as in a cloud does bear with it implications of danger in the power of the imagination if unfettered words such as 'lost', or 'halted' bear heavily against the sense of glory. After the vision, the power of reality reasserts itself, countering the totality of mental power; but it is an unusually vividly conceived reality, not a simple absorbing natural force, something different still, containing within its vision both a power of mind and a recognition of reality. The landscape that speaks and mutters does so 'as if' a voice were in its crags and rocks; all are 'like' the workings of one mind; they are 'types and symbols' of Eternity. We are no longer
lost in an entire creation of the mind, at one with
infinitude, divorced from any contact with the world; we
are yoking our vision of eternity to a reality that exists
around us. There is vision, and there is relationship to
the features of the world.

The equilibrium cannot easily be achieved, however,
and throughout the course of The Prelude Wordsworth
struggles to perceive and attain the right balance, forging
a way between the temptations of isolation or absorption
for the mind. He describes his own flirtation with Godwinism,
the mental and moral tumult aroused in him by events in
France and his own country's reaction, and the strong
temptation to fly to a total freedom (and total solitude)
of the individual mind:

How glorious! in self-knowledge and self-rule,
To look through all the frailties of the world,
And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
The accidents of nature, time, and place ...

But the glory ends only in despair; for it lies beyond the
'limits of experience and of truth'. Those limits of experience
are ones that we must front if we are to exist in this
world, not in a state beyond it as the solitaries do.

Wordsworth, in The Prelude is probing those limits of
experience, searching for what they are and for what the mind
can and must do within those limits, searching for some
way of perceiving aright the tensions between a resolute
mastery in independence and the necessity of coming to terms with the accidents of nature, time, and place.

The Prelude moves to a climax in the ascent of Snowdon in the thirteenth book, the experience of the huge sea of mist and the naked moon and the chasm roaring with the voice of waters. In a way, this chasm provides in itself an image of the process of isolation and interaction that runs through the poem. It is a single, fathomless source of a roar of waters, like the imagination itself; and yet it is also part of an immensity, a universal spectacle, and it produces not simply a roar but a voice which spreads and which we hear and feel. In lodging 'The soul, the imagination of the whole' therein, Nature has lodged something both individual and universal, unapproachably mysterious and yet something to which we can relate.

The meditation Wordsworth draws from this sight reveals three processes at work in such a 'mighty mind'. The first is

an underpresence,
The sense of God, or whatso'er is dim
Or vast in its own being...

Here lies that mystery which shrouds the unapproachable chasm, the innermost powers of the noumenal being which are one's own and cannot be perceived, existing in total exclusion - much like the mystery that resided in the solitaries. The other two are the forces in the reciprocal relationship of mind and world that works within, and grapples with, the limits of experience: the power that nature 'Thrusts forth upon the senses'; and its counterpart, the glorious faculty
Which higher minds bear with them as their own.
That is the very spirit in which they deal
With all the objects of the universe ...

The relationship does consist of a 'dealing' process;
the workings of mind and powers of nature meet and act
upon each other. It is a complex relationship, however,
for that power of mind comes itself from the inviolate
selfhood of what is dim and vast in its own being; in its
experience of reality the power of mind bridges the gulf
between the solitary mystery and the active relating world.
The meditation concentrates on the isolated mind, the
relating mind which yet comes originally from isolation, and
the relating world. Wordsworth finds no grand synthesis
among these elements, only an attempt to bridge the
gaps, to see the distinctions and the links for what they
are, to state the tensions ever more emphatically, not to
resolve them into something else.

With a right seeing developed in this way will come

the highest bliss
That can be known is theirs - the consciousness
Of Whom they are, habitually interfused
Through every image and through every thought,
And all impressions ...

If we can perceive the way in which our mind works and experiences
then true self-consciousness will be gained - an awareness,
however dim, of 'whom we are', not simply in ourselves,
but fused through all our actions and contacts with the world.
Roger Sharrock puts it well when he speaks of 'the increasingly
better understood experience, which is the stuff of
Wordsworth's poetry'. Throughout The Prelude,
Wordsworth searches for just such an understanding of the power of mind, and of the limits of experience. When at the end of the poem he calls back to mind the mood in which the poem was begun, in which he rose

As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretched
Vast prospect of the world which I had been
And was...

we see how far we have come. At the beginning of the poem, the world had been all before him; it is now the world not even of the vale of Grasmere but of himself. The focus has narrowed. And yet the prospect is vast, for the person acts as part of a whole world as well as being a world entire unto himself, and if we can better understand the forces which operate within those two worlds and between them, we shall have richly progressed. We may not have reached a resolution, but we can perceive the problem, and hold it, and it does become, in the end, 'All gratulant, if rightly understood.'

This kind of understanding and awareness is the task, specifically, of the poet to achieve. The solitaries possess a total isolation of existence, and no consciousness of
interaction. At the other end of the spectrum, the child has a total sensory absorption in the natural world - as in Wordsworth's younger days in 'Tintern Abbey', or the 'unconscious intercourse' he describes in The Prelude, or the Idiot Boy laying hands upon a star and in his pocket bringing it home. Arnold describes this absorption as laying us 'On the cool flowery lap of earth'; and in it there is no consciousness of independent existence or power of mind. These states have profound attractions, but neither is sufficient in itself. The poet has to perceive the power of, and need for, both isolation and interaction; and he must have an awareness also of the darkness and struggle that very perception may entail.

In the 'Intimations Ode', for example, the poet leads us through a reckoning of gain and loss, as he does in 'Tintern Abbey' or in the descriptions of poetic composition in the Prefaces. The child enters life with an ecstatic though unconscious identification with the world around; and awareness grows; as the child grows, of that joyous involvement; but no sooner does awareness come than the joining of child and world starts to dissolve, the identification fades, and mortality begins to trouble and to press upon the mind. The new understanding that gives a sober colouring where before there had been a holiday mood comes only out of difficulty and suffering; but it brings a consciousness of the world and its relation to the mind wiser, though less
glorious, than that which went before. 212

The poet's task must be to work towards this consciousness. Dorothy's Journal records often how Wordsworth finds composition compelling - and yet also an exhausting struggle. Almost all of Wordsworth's greatest poetry has this sense of a struggle towards awareness; the soul retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, to which
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still
That whatsoever point they gain, they still
Have something to pursue.

The insistent movement of the words, 'growing', 'faculties', 'still', conveys well the sense of never-to-be-concluded movement, of a continual process of thought and motion; and it complements the idea of obscurity which yet still conceives the possibility of sublimity. In the eighth book of The Prelude, Wordsworth describes a traveller entering a dark cavern from the daylight, and the shifting, vanishing, changing shapes that commingle in the roof; and then it all lapses into clarity, and

The scene before him lies in perfect view
Exposed, and lifeless as a written book!

There can be too much simplicity, too much easy discernment; the poet has a more worrying job. When offered the choice between the shell of poetry and the clear synthesis of mathematics or geometry 215 - attractive as the clarity may be - it is the shell that we must choose, full though it is of the fleet waters of the drowning world.
Perhaps, in later years, the abandonment of the obscure sense of possibilities, the lapsing into easier clarity, forms one of the causes of Wordsworth's long decline. No longer struggling to balance the tensions between the strength of mind alone and its interchange with life and the world, a balance that is dimly perceived at best, his poetry begins to lapse into complacency. The tension between opposite existences of mind becomes an easy rolling-up of problems into serenity.

In earlier poems, a serenity had to be struggled for, and tended to come as an achievement in balancing, rather than reducing, opposing forces. And sometimes - with the perception of an eye made quiet - the poetry could break through to true quietness. The idea of 'quietness' has an immense importance for Wordsworth. Dorothy writes of one particular evening, in her Journal: 'Grasmere was very solemn in the last glimpse of twilight it calls home the heart to quietness.'

Wordsworth has a number of poems which move through activity towards this kind of tranquillity - among them are 'A Night-Piece', the thirty-third of the Duddon Sonnets, and the skating passage of The Prelude. The same is also true of the Boy of Winander; after the evocation of the wild and noise-filled concourse, suddenly there comes a moment of calm:

and when it chanced
That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,
Then sometimes, in that silence while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents ...
In that moment of quietness we glimpse a precarious, but profound, balance between two forces of mind. Much of it depends on the gap that separates 'hung' and 'Listening' — a gap which not only gives a vivid impression of the action itself, but which allows the force of 'hung' — an independent, powerful act of a solitary mind — and of 'Listening' — a relating act, initially of sense, but which modulates into a profounder form of interaction — to exist separately and yet to be brought together. For a brief moment, a balance is achieved, a central peace exists 'at the heart / Of endless agitation.'

Such moments of quietness are very precious for Wordsworth. His reference to them as 'spots of time' has a particular importance here, because the normal Wordsworthian word 'spot' usually denotes an idea of place, and in this phrase, space and time are thus united. Not only does the idea of 'spots of time' give a sense of solidity to the evanescent, moving force of time; nor does it just imply a landscape against which the moment of tranquillity can be set; but it achieves above all a union of the world outside ourselves (a world of space) with our own personal world (a world of memory and time). We glimpse the possibility of contact between the individual, the isolated, and the more widely ranging, in our experience. That is the greatest gift of moments such as these: the achievement of the difficult balance between the individual and the general.
For Wordsworth, this balance forms the goal and the central theme of his poetry; but it also acts as part of the very nature of the poetry. Wordsworth's poetry is both highly personal and intended to be universal in applicability: and herein lies both a problem, and a grandeur. The inaccessibility of mind which the poems examine could arguably be seen as leading to, and being born out of, an inaccessibility of poetry, in the intensely introverted focus of the poet. Many of Wordsworth's contemporaries feared that his aloofness as a man carried over into an aloofness and self-involution of the poetry itself, that his poetry could be accessible to, and deal with, himself alone. Coleridge speaks of Wordsworth as a 'spectator ab extra', described in the Biographia as having a capacity to sympathise as a contemplator of his characters, but never as a fellow-sufferer. John Wilson concurs in the same assessment when he describes Wordsworth, as poet, as being detached, aloof from the subjects of his description, a man contemplating from the shore the terrors of the sea.

Wordsworth himself hints at a more emphatic charge, however, in a letter to Sir George Beaumont while composing The Prelude: 'a thing unprecedented in Literary history that a man should talk so much about himself.' And yet Wordsworth insists, to Lady Beaumont, that his purpose is 'to teach the young and the gracious of every age, to
see, to think, and feel.' He wishes to write about himself, and to teach by so doing. The old dilemma has been reborn: the attempt to balance the retirement and action debate in poetry finds the antithesis perpetuated in that very poetry, at a more personal level - the attempt to speak for oneself and for a world. Keats tackles the paradox in his description of the 'wordsworthian or egotistical sublime', arguing that the poet should not stand alone, but become a chameleon. Wordsworth writes too much about himself.

Keats also writes, in an earlier letter, of how Milton 'did not think into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done', of how it is Wordsworth who explores the dark passages beyond the Chamber of Maiden Thought. This is the key to the egotistical sublime: for Wordsworth's poetry does think into the human heart; its focus is on the heart's nature and experience, albeit this only becomes possible in thinking into his own heart and life. It is more than simply being an 'I-representative'. It is an I, real and substantial, and yet one which can be of value to us all. Coleridge, after hearing The Prelude, identifies the applicability which reaches far beyond the poet alone:

Ah! I listened with a heart forlorn,
The pulses of my being beat anew ...
In a way, the egotistical sublime in poetic voice reflects the problem of the solitary and interacting self which forms its theme. Wordsworth interweaves the ideas of solitude and relationship, isolation and absorption, independent mind and interaction with the world, examining each and testing each, and through it all he moves towards an understanding of his own experience. In re-working the theme of solitude in a much more deeply personal way, he concentrates on the experiencing mind which must be his own. But in so doing, he has not rendered that mind or that experience inaccessible. Indeed, it may well have been so beforehand; now at least we have a means to approach it. In moments of quietness, we can glimpse the possibility of balance, we can dimly understand our mind's experience of the world. We may well find that in the process we have come full circle, that we have arrived back at where we started - as Wordsworth himself does in The Prelude - at our own selves, alone and relating. But that is surely the most important journey of all.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Notes

Chapter I


2. 'The Choice', l.157.


6. For a thorough account of the poets in the Pomfret tradition, see Maren-Sofie Røstvig, The Happy Man, II, chapter VI, pp. 295-315: 'Crowned with Content'.


8. 'The Spleen', ll. 688-691; p.261.


Chapter II

I James Thomson

All quotations from Thomson's poetry are taken from James Thomson, Poetical Works, ed. J. Logie Robertson, London (OUP), 1908. Referred to below as PW. Quotations from Thomson's letters are from James Thomson, Letters and Documents, ed. Alan Dugald McKillop, Laurence, Kansas, 1958. Referred to as Letters and Documents.

2. Autumn, I.1235-1238; PW, p.177.
3. Autumn, I.1239-1278, and 1279-1347; PW, pp. 177-180.
10. Thomson, 'Hymn on Solitude', PW pp. 429-430. Compare James Grainger, 'Ode to Solitude', I. 1-12: 'O Solitude, romantic maid... You, Recluse, again I woo...'. A startling, and similar, conception of solitude as a companion is in Thomas Warton's 'Ode to Solitude; At an Inn', I. 1-6: Oft upon the twilight plain, Circled with thy shadowy train, While the dove at distance coo'd, Have I met thee, Solitude! Then was loneliness to me Best and true society.

See also, for comparison, Henry David Thoreau's Journal, January 7, 1857.
11. 'Hymn on Solitude', ll. 45-48; PW, p. 430.

12. To George Lyttleton, July 14, 1743. Letters and Documents, p. 163.

13. To Elizabeth Young, August 29, 1743. Letters and Documents, p. 166.


17. Summer, ll. 318-320; PW, p. 65.


20. An instance of how the natural world expresses in itself the state of man can be seen in the alterations Thomson made to the original ending of Winter. In the first edition (PW, p. 238) the poem ends with the abstract force of Time, Eternity, Life, Love, Joy, and Happiness all bringing hope to the distressed. In the final version (PW, p. 225), the abstractions are gone and the movement of hope is expressed as a passage from the storms of wintry time to one unbounded spring. As Pat Rogers points out (The Augustan Vision, London, 1974, p. 124), Thomson 'makes the natural order a kind of hieroglyphic statement of eternal processes.'


22. Summer, ll. 1753-1781; here, ll. 1762-1765; PW, pp. 118-119.

23. Summer, ll. 1765-1768; PW, p. 119.

24. The Castle of Indolence, Canto II, Stanza LIV, ll. 3-6; PW, p. 297.


29. John Dyer, *The Fleece*, Book III, 1. 120.


31. *Spring*, 11. 950-962; *PW*, pp. 38-39. Compare Collins' 'Ode to Evening', 11. 35-40, where the landscape contains spires and hamlets, in an even smoother harmony than Thomson's; or Joseph Warton's *The Enthusiast*, 11. 32-36 where spires, smoke, cottages and even, in later editions - a Warton touch - Gothick battlements, appear in the landscape. The importance of painting in encouraging this resolving harmony of natural and human landscape has often been pointed out. See, for example, John Barrell's discussion of this prospect passage from Thomson, in *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place* (Cambridge, 1972) pp. 12-20; or Ralph Williams' reference to Thomson's 'prospects' in 'Thomson and Dyer: Poet and Painter' (in *The Age of Johnson*, New Haven, 1949), p. 212; or Edward Malins, in *English Landscaping and Literature* (London, 1966), p. 59; or William Shenstone, in his essay, 'Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening' (in *Essays on Men and Manners*, Ludlow, 1800): 'Landscape should contain variety enough to form a picture on canvas; and this is no bad test, as I think the landscape painter is the gardener's best designer.'

33. Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (London, 1973), p. 71. In identifying Thomson's approach to nature in the raw as hinting at times at an alternative form of order, Williams disagrees with Barrell, in The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, who discusses (pp. 21-34) the need Thomson feels to impose a control over nature, to organise it into a structure, in order not to be controlled by it. There are certainly parts of The Seasons where Barrell's analysis applies - descriptions of the tropics, for example, which through sensuous are also genuinely frightening, threatening man's control; there are other evocations of wild, untempered nature, however - the description of fog and mountain in Autumn, for instance (11. 707-835; PW, pp. 158-162) - where the wilderness is observed affectionately, and contributes in the end to the social harmony of all life.

34. Summer, 11. 1379-1466; PW, pp. 104-106.
35. Summer, 11. 1397-1398; PW, p. 104.
37. Summer, 11. 1457-1466; PW, p. 106.
40. John Dixon Hunt, The Figure in the Landscape (Baltimore, 1976), p. 106: 'As with many of Thomson's connections, the 'while' that serves to join his two sentences there is required to perform almost impossible tasks. 'While' simply evades an explanation of how the two themes of Thomson's song coexist in the poetry, except as alternating modes of vision.' (This referring to Summer, 11. 1730 ff.) A related point, on the demands Thomson places on his syntax, is made by Reuben Brower, in 'Form and Defect of Form in Eighteenth-Century Poetry' (College English, vol. 29, no. 7, April 1968, pp. 535-541), pp. 538-539.
42. Autumn, 11. 970-1081; PW, pp. 167-171.
43. Autumn, 1. 1042; PW, p. 170.
44. Autumn, 1. 1037; PW, p. 170.
45. In the ease with which Thomson achieves this movement, there is something akin to the untroubled observation of response, standing apart from the objects of rapture, noted by Marjorie Hope Nicolson in Newton Demands the Muse (Hamden, Conn., 1963), p. 164 — although the ease is not, for Thomson, an explicitly conscious element in the poetry.

46. William Shenstone, 'A Pastoral Ode: To the Hon. Sir Richard Lyttleton', stanza 11. See also his poem, 'Rural Elegance: As Ode to the late Duchess of Somerset, 1750', l.216: 'Then hither oft, ye Senators! retire!' Gray unkindly — but justifiably — comments, in a letter to Nicholls of June 24, 1769, that Shenstone only enjoyed his retirement 'when people of note came to see and commend it.'

47. The Castle of Indolence, Canto I, Stanza LXVIII; PW, p. 275.

48. Summer, 11. 548-551; PW, p. 73.
II Thomas Gray

All quotations from Gray's poetry are taken from The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray, ed. H.W. Starr and J.R. Hendrickson, Oxford, 1966. Referred to below as CP.


52. To West, July 16, 1740. Toynbee & Whibley, I, pp. 167-170.

53. 'Alcaic Ode'; CP, pp. 151-152.

54. To Wharton, April 22, 1760. Toynbee & Whibley, II, pp. 665-672.


56. See Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Poetry of Vision (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 117: '... the poet's interest in life's incessant and intolerable presentation of opposites as a theme. The oppositions which dominate these poems are characteristically between innocence and experience...'


58. The Deserted Village, 11. 395-430. At the close of the poem, we are unsure whether poetry is, in effect, a villager departing - whether the poet himself is leaving - indeed, whether the voice that has been speaking is that of a villager, a folk voice, an observing or a participating poet. There are no certainties.
59. Gray's poetry almost touches some of the processes set out in his own Latin poem, 'De Principiis Cogitandi' - where, developing thoughts from Locke, the mind is described as consciously examining its own features. A more accurate description of his poetry, however, would be his mind consciously examining his own position in the world, as private individual and as poet. There is a search for self-awareness of position and function, but not yet the full search for the intimate nature of the mind that becomes one of the major concerns of Romanticism.


61. 'Ode on the Spring', ll. 16-17; CP, p. 3.

62. 'Ode on the Spring', l. 21; CP, p. 4.

63. 'Ode on the Spring', ll. 25-30; CP, p. 4.

64. 'Ode on the Spring', l. 40; CP, p. 4.


66. 'Ode on the Spring', ll. 41-44; CP, p. 4.

67. 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College' (Eton Ode'), l. 48; CP, p. 8.

68. 'Eton Ode', ll. 11-20; CP, p. 7.

69. The 'second spring' ('Eton Ode', l. 20) perhaps also refers back to the 'Ode on the Spring', the frolick that vanishes when the first Spring dies?

70. I say 'more or less', because Stanza 1V does contain a number of resonances of a more serious world, somewhat different from the careless, thoughtless joy of the two stanzas on either side. And it ends with a reference to 'fearful' joy (1.40), which though applied to a game of adventure nonetheless presages the onslaught of fear that will be one of the Passions of experience, in 1. 63.
71. 'Eton Ode', 11. 99-100; CP, p. 10. Compare Swift's conclusion in the 'Last Week I saw a Woman flay'd' passage in A Tale of a Tub, adopting the 'Serene Peaceful State of being a Fool among Knaves'.

72. Thomas Gray, p. 61.

73. In this, I disagree with Paul Fussell, who believes Gray wishes to preserve innocence - and contrasts him (along with Defoe and Thomson) with what he sees as the humanist tradition of Johnson, Gibbon and Burke. Fussell's identification of the adoption of solitary or social man as one of the benchmarks of difference between the two traditions is acute, as is his discussion of Johnson's attitude to solitude: we need only refer to Rasselas, ch. XXI, or to Boswell's account of Johnson's comments in the Cloisters at St. Andrews (Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, Oxford 1930, pp. 198-199) to note the suspicion Johnson holds of solitude, or even retirement. But Fussell does not do justice to the 'modernist' tradition (Defoe, Thomson, etc.), and especially to Gray, whose choice of innocence is far less simplistic than he assumes. Paul Fussell, The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism (Oxford, 1965): see especially pp. 31-35, and 267.

74. 'Eton Ode', 11.12, 93; CP, pp. 7, 9. Gray carries the analysis of tenderness further in the 'Ode to Adversity'.


81. The patterning of perspective in the conclusion to the poem has been explored by Frank Brady, 'Structure and Meaning in Gray's Elegy', in From Sensibility to Romanticism, pp. 177-189. I would disagree, however, with his belief that 'the Epitaph presents an ideal of fulfilment' (p. 186).


83. 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' (Elegy'), 11. 25-29; CP, p. 38. Gray's portrait of the village community finds an interesting parallel in his Journal in the Lakes of 1769 - the entry for October 8th: 'Just beyond it opens one of the sweetest landscapes that art ever attempted to imitate. The bosom of the mountains spreading here into a broad basin discovers in the midst Grasmere-water; ... a white village with the parish-church rising in the midst of it, hanging enclosures, corn-fields, and meadows green as an emerald, with their trees and hedges, and cattle fill up the whole space from the edge of the water. ... Not a single red tile, no flaming gentleman's house, or garden walls break in upon the repose of this little unsuspected paradise, but all is peace, rusticity, and happy poverty in its neatest, most becoming attire.' (The Works of Thomas Gray, ed. Edmund Gosse, London 1884, Vol. I, pp. 265-266).

84. 'Elegy', 11. 55-60; CP, p. 39.

85. 'Elegy', 1. 60; CP, p. 39.

86. 'Elegy', 1. 65; CP, p. 40.

87. 'Elegy', 11. 93-94; CP, p. 41. There is an interesting correction in the Eton MS version, 'Dost in these Notes thy artless Tale relate': 'thy' being changed to 'their'.

88. 'Elegy', 11. 109-112; CP, p. 42. Is it entirely fanciful to see, in the upland lawn and the beech-tree, a hint of a directly personal reference, to the 'Eton Ode' and the 'Ode on the Spring' respectively?

89. 'Elegy', 1. 123; CP, p. 43.

90. 'Elegy', 1. 125; CP, p. 43.
III James Beattie


James Beattie, On Poetry and Music, as they affect the Mind, Edinburgh, 1776. Referred to as 'Poetry and Music'.

91. Quoted in Margaret Forbes, Beattie and his Friends (London, 1904), p. 58.

92. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanzas I, 11. 3-9 (p.1); Gilfillan, I, 3-9, p. 2. The echo of Gray is also emphasized by the reference to 'artless lines' that closes the second stanza (compare the 'Elegy', 1. 94), picked up again several times in the poem.

93. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanzas IV, 1. 2(p. 3); Gilfillan, IV, 2, p. 3.

94. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanzas XVI, 11. 5-7 (p. 9); Gilfillan, XIV, 5-7, p.6. Note the strong physical, as well as moral, force of the words: 'lowly', 'beneath', 'lofty'.


96. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanzas XVIII, 11. 8-9 (p.10); Gilfillan, XVI, 8-9, p.6.

97. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanzas XIX, 11. 2-9 (p. 10); Gilfillan, XVII, 2-9, pp. 6-7.

98. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanzas XXI - XXIV (pp.11-13), Gilfillan, XIX-XXII, p.7-8.
99. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanza XXIII, 1.3 (p. 12); Gilfillan, XXI, 3, p. 8.


101. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanza XL, 1.3 (p. 21); Gilfillan XXXVIII, 3, p. 13; and Book I, Stanza XLI, 11.1-3 (p. 21); Gilfillan, XXXIX, 1-3, p. 13.

102. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanza LIV, 1.3 (p. 28); Gilfillan, LII, 3, p. 17.

103. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanza LVI (p. 29); Gilfillan, LIV, p. 18. Beattie's poetry frequently contemplates the ocean, or glimpses it in the distance. See also the picture Margaret Forbes gives (in Beattie and his Friends, p. 117) of the poet at Peterhead, standing 'for a long time on the adjoining promontory, inhaling, in a fine day, the pure air of the ocean'.

104. The Minstrel, Book I, Stanza LX, 11.8-9 (p. 31); Gilfillan, LVIII, 8-9, p. 19.

105. The Minstrel, Book II, Stanza III (p. 2); Gilfillan, III, p. 21.

106. The Minstrel, Book II, Stanza VI, 1.3 (p. 4); Gilfillan, VI, 3, p. 20. Note also the intensifying (by Edwin's own choice) of the mildness and the sublimity in 1.4; this comes at the very moment he is about to enter the vale and encounter the hermit, who will change his enjoyment of sublimity completely.

107. The Minstrel, Book II, Stanza XXIII (p. 12); Gilfillan, XXIII, pp. 26-27. The portrait of the youth suddenly modulates into a portrait of the landscape. It is an effective stanza, but it places intolerable weight on the weak transition word, 'enjoy'd'. This does not really convey much feeling or understanding of his relationship with the world around him. Like the earlier landscape experiences, it reveals a position rather than a cluster of feelings.
108. The Minstrel, Book II, Stanza XXX, 1. 9 (p. 16); Gilfillan, XXX, 9, p. 29.

109. The Minstrel, Book II, Stanza XXXII (p. 17); Gilfillan, XXXII, p. 29.

110. The Minstrel, Book II, Stanza XLI, 11. 3-4 (p. 21); Gilfillan, XLII, 3-4, p. 32.

111. The Minstrel, Book II, Stanza XLVIII, 11. 1-2 (p. 25); Gilfillan, XLIX, 1-2, p. 34.

112. 'Elements', Vol. I, p. 87. Compare also 'On Truth', p. 62: 'We have no other direct evidence than this of consciousness, or internal sensation, for the existence and identity of our own soul.'

113. 'Elements', Vol. II, pp. 73-74.

114. 'Poetry and Music', p. 205. An essay by Ian Watt, 'Robinson Crusoe as Myth', in Essays in Criticism, April 1951, pp. 95-119, makes a similar point: Defoe's figure, though achingly solitary, nonetheless represents economic man. The tale concentrates not on Crusoe's isolated soul and mind, but on the processes of economic struggle and self-help, the nature of economic and social activity.

115. 'Ode on Lord H--'s Birthday', 11. 46-50, Gilfillan, p. 50.

116. Compare Thomson's picture, in Summer, 11. 1753-1781 (discussed above), where he contrasts the savage man, roaming the wilds, with the civilized man, softened into brotherhood by the influence of poetry.

117. The Minstrel, Book II, Stanza LVIII, 11. 3-9 (p. 30); Gilfillan, LIX, 3-9, p. 37.

118. Quoted in Beattie and His Friends, p. 56.

120. 'Essay on the Ancient Minstrels', p. xl.

    Compare also Akenside, The Pleasures of the Imagination, Bk. IV, ll. 101-130, stressing the importance of the poet to the world; and Collins' praise of Milton at the end of the 'Ode on the Poetical Character'.

122. Thomas Gray, letter to Beattie, July 2, 1770.

123. The Minstrel, Book II, Stanza LXI, 1. 5 (p. 31); Gilfillan, LXII, 5, p. 38.

124. Quoted in Beattie and his Friends, p. 55.

125. Letter to Mrs Montagu, July 26, 1773. Quoted in King, James Beattie, p. 78.

126. See Beattie's London Diary 1773, ed. R.S. Walker (Aberdeen, 1946), which details Beattie's comings and goings during his visit, his meetings with Johnson, Burke, Garrick, and Reynolds.
IV William Cowper

All quotations from Cowper's poetry are taken from Cowper, Poetical Works, ed. H.S. Milford, fourth edn., Norma Russell, London 1967. Referred to below as PW.

Quotations from letters: Correspondence of William Cowper, ed. Thomas Wright, 4 vols., London, 1904. Referred to as Wright. (A further grouping of letters was published as Unpublished and Uncollected Letters of William Cowper, ed. Thomas Wright, London, 1925. They are relatively few in number, and none are quoted in this chapter.)

127. To William Unwin, April 25, 1784 (Wright II, p. 194); and April 5, 1784 (Wright II, p. 188).

128. The Task, Book III, ll. 108-120; PW, p. 166.

129. The Task, Book III, ll. 684-688; PW, p. 179.

130. For 'panting', see (among several references in the poem) the stricken deer passage, The Task, Book III, l. 110 (PW, p. 166), or 'Ode to Peace' l. 19 (PW, p. 292). For the Olney Hymns, see especially nos. I (PW, p. 433), XIX (PW, p. 445), XLI (PW, p. 459), XLVII (PW, p. 463): this last speaks of 'The calm retreat, the silent shade'. For 'hide', 'refuge', and 'shelter', see 'Truth', ll. 267-282 (PW, pp. 36-37).

131. The Task, Book III, ll. 334-351; here, l. 334. PW, p. 171.

132. The Task, Book III, l. 321; PW, p. 171. The two predominant sets of language motifs used by Cowper to evoke his desire for retreat cluster around the ideas of safety from the hunt, and of shade from heat.

133. The Task, Book I, ll. 749-753; PW, p. 145.


135. The Task, Book III, ll. 835-839; PW, p. 182. See also the account of cities in general given in Book III, ll. 729-744; PW, p. 180.
136. See letter to Samuel Rose, October 19, 1787, Wright III, pp. 167-168, describing his feelings on leaving Olney: 'There was neither tree, nor gate, nor stile, in all that country, to which I did not feel a relation...'


139. F.W. Farrar, Dean of Canterbury, on the centenary of Cowper's death; in Andrew James Symington and others, The Poet of Home Life: Centenary Memories of William Cowper (London, 1900), p. 114. See also David Cecil, The Stricken Deer (London, 1943 edn.), p. 95: 'the two things which in his chequered thirty-three years really won his affection—family life and the Evangelical faith.'

140. The Task, Book IV, 11. 36-41; PW, p. 183. Compare Book III, 11. 40-41 (PW, p. 165): 'Domestic happiness, thou only bliss'; and Book V, 11. 438-439 (PW, p.209): 'th' endearments of domestic life/ And social'. Henry Mackenzie satirizes the Cowperian style of fireside life— or, at least, places scorn on the lips of an unpleasant misanthropist with whose words the novelist may or may not agree—in The Man of Feeling, published in 1771, fourteen years before The Task. In Chapter XXI: 'Whence the luxurious happiness they describe in their little family-circles? Whence the pleasure which they feel, when they trim their evening fires, and listen to the howl of winter's wind? Whence, but from the secret reflection of what homeless wretches feel from it?'
Compare also Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Traveller, or a Prospect of Society', 11. 13-14: 'Blest be that spot, where cheerful guests retire / To pause from toil, and trim their evening fire...'

141. The Task, Book IV, 11. 88-100; PW, p. 184.

142. William N. Free, William Cowper (New York, 1970), p. 139. Compare a letter from Cowper to John Newton, July 27, 1783 (Wright II, p. 85): 'Thus am I both free and a prisoner at the same time. The world is before me; I am not shut up in the Bastille; there are no moats about my castle, no locks upon my gates, of which I have not the key; - but an invisible, uncontrollable agency, a local attachment, an inclination more factsible than I ever felt, even to the place of my birth, serves me for prison-walls, and for bounds which I cannot pass.'

143. Note, on this, The Task, Book VI, 11. 924-929 (PW, p. 239): contemplation of the glories of a 'heav'n unseen', lifted above the earth, is immediately linked with employment and the rejection of sloth.

144. To Joseph Hill, December 7, 1782; Wright II, pp. 33-34.


146. The Task, Book V, 1. 181 (PW, p. 204); and 'Retirement', 11. 603-610 (PW, p. 122).


148. To Lady Hesketh, October 12, 1785; Wright II, p. 364. See also letters to Lady Hesketh, January 16, 1786 (Wright II, p. 444), and to William Unwin, April 6, 1780 (Wright I, pp. 182-183). Note also, on the idea of constant employment, The Task, Book I, U. 367-371 (PW, p. 137): nature subsisting by ceaseless action, and dreading an instant's pause. Is there perhaps a resonance here of Cowper's own position?

150. The Task, Book IV, l. 292; PW, p. 189.

151. The Task, Book IV, ll. 296-300; PW, p. 189.

152. The Task, Book IV, ll. 308-310; PW, p. 189.

153. William Cowper, p.67


155. The Task, Book I, l. 1; PW, p. 129. See also letter to John Newton, December 13, 1784 (Wright II, p. 281): 'But the Sofa being, as I may say, the starting-point from which I addressed myself to the long race that I soon conceived a design to run, it acquired a just pre-eminence in my account...'

156. See letter to Lady Hesketh, January 16, 1786 (Wright II, p. 444): 'In the year when I wrote 'The Task' (for it occupied me about a year), I was very often most supremely unhappy, and am under God indebted in good part to that work for not having been much worse.'

157. 'Retirement', ll. 801-808; PW, p. 126.

158. The Task, Book II, ll. 285-303; PW, p. 152. The sense of being 'lost in his own musings' here is very active and un-idle, surprisingly different from the passage on musings and being lethargic while contemplating the fireplace and the sooty films on the bars of the grate.

159. The Task, Book II, ll. 311-314; PW, pp. 152-153.

160. The Task, Book VI, ll. 715-758; PW, pp. 235-236. Here, ll. 719, 723, 752, 754.

161. To Walter Bagot, August 2, 1791; Wright IV, p.103.


164. Myra Reynolds, in The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry (New York, 1966) is only
half right, when she comments (p. 192) how, in Cowper's poetry, we are 'throughout conscious of the poet's presence'. This is true to a certain extent; but it ignores the subtlety which renders Cowper's poetry both personal and yet not directly self-expressive.

165. Compare the different, relatively untroubled connection of solitude and the Deity in Young's Night Thoughts, Night Fifth, ll. 171-172: 'and solitude, what is it? / 'Tis the felt presence of the Deity.' An awesome-though impersonal—tone can be found also in Thomson, Winter, ll. 195-201, where Nature's King 'dwells alone' in the tempest, and walks 'dreadfully serene'.


167. 'Verses, supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk, during his solitary abode in the Island of Juan Fernandez', ll. 17-24 and 1. 9; PW, p. 311.

168. 'Verses ... by Alexander Selkirk', ll. 53-56; PW, p. 312.

169. 'The Castaway', ll. 61-66; PW, p. 432.

170. To Lady Hesketh, August 27, 1795; Wright IV, p. 49Q
Chapter III

The availability of different editions of Zimmerman's Solitude varies widely, especially of those issued in two volumes. Accordingly, references are taken from a popular single-volume edition, printed by T & J Allman, London, 1824. Referred to below as Solitude. Volume and chapter numbers are also given, to assist reference to other editions.

For Rousseau, all references are to the Pleiade edition, referred to as Pleiade: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oeuvres Complètes:


IV (Dijon): Emile, ed. Charles Wirz & Pierre Durgelin. (Translations in the notes are by J.M. Cohen for the Confessions, and by Barbara Foxley for Emile.)

For Hazlitt, references are to Complete Works, ed. P.P. Howe, London, 1930-34 (21 vols.). Referred to as Howe.


3. An interesting analogy can be drawn here with the traditions of English landscape painting. In many landscapes of the mid-eighteenth century, and also the early paintings of Girtin, Constable, and Turner, the focus of the picture rests on a small group of figures, who provide a pivot and an essential meaning to the painting. As time passes, however, the figures in the landscape become less and less pivotal, in many cases cyphers only - and eventually, in Turner's maturity for example, vanish altogether. A seemingly converse trend can be observed in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, who makes the single, solitary figure increasingly pivotal, so much so that in many of his pictures
the lone figure becomes an element of the landscape, and the landscape a portrait of a state of mind. Both trends, however, have a major motivating force in common: a movement away from the calm acceptance of the rural group as an automatic element in a landscape setting.

4. Solitude, pp. 214, 217. (II, 2)

5. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers, ed. E.L. Stahl (Oxford, 1942), p. 105. In 'Werther', the movement away from the pastoral retirement of Wahlheim to passionate extremism, from Homer to the landscapes of Ossian, is both deprecated and celebrated. 'Müßigen Sie sich' may be the 'moral' - if any - of the tale, but we remain profoundly attracted as well as disturbed by the extremism of individual passion. (Compare also Zimmerman's description of Petrarch and his 'victory' over passion - Solitude, p. 123.)


7. Solitude, pp. 1-3 (I, 1).


10. Solitude, p. 158 (I, 4). In this, Zimmerman foreshadows some of the themes of Chateaubriand. In René, for example, we learn at the close of the book that solitude is only virtuous for those who live with God, as for Amélie in her convent; for the rest of us, life must be lived in and with society.


13. Solitude, p. 403 (II, 8).


17. Pleiade I, p. 214.


23. Pleiade I, p. 521. 'And there in that deep and delightful solitude, amongst the woods and the waters, to the sounds of birds of every kind, and amidst the perfume of orange blossom, in a continuous ecstasy I composed the fifth book of *Emile* ...'

24. Pleiade I, pp. 225-226. 'I helped in the household, and happiness followed me everywhere; it lay in no definable object, it was entirely within me; it would not leave me for a single moment.'

25. Pleiade I, p. 1000 (Promenade I).


28. See, for *Emile*, Pleiade IV, p. 594 and p. 598. For *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*, Pleiade III, p. 30. 'There is therefore at the bottom of our hearts an innate principle of justice and virtue, by which, in spite of our maxims, we judge our own actions or those of others to be good or evil, and it is this principle that I call conscience.'


33. Arthur O. Lovejoy, Essays in the History of Ideas (Baltimore, 1948), p. 31. Lovejoy sees the appropriate stage of 'jeunesse' as a third of four stages in the evolution of social man, just before a society embarks on the dark Hobbesian field of the fourth stage. By contrast, Hobbes is invoked by Cassirer (The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, Princeton, 1951, p. 259) as one of the moving spirits of the first stage, the world of 'l'homme naturel' - with the proviso that the egotism within the state of nature is largely passive, whereas in Hobbes it is active.


36. Pleiade I, p. 5.
Chapter IV

Abbreviations:


5. See Patricia M. Ball, The Central Self (London, 1968), pp. 87-88. While Patricia Ball's analysis of the operation of 'reflex consciousness' in the Conversation Poems illuminates the complexities of Coleridge's study of the mind and its own experience, nonetheless her view that all of Coleridge's discussion in the poems, of the experience of others as well as himself,
provides a mirror-image of his own self, does surely overstate the case.

6. 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' ('Reflections'), 11.1-2 and 6-9; PW, p. 106.


8. As, for example, in the prospect from the hill in Hagley Park, Spring, 11. 950-962. Note also, in the Hagley prospect, the familiar motifs repeated here in 'Reflections': wood, lawn, embosomed villages, spiry towns, mountains 'like far clouds' that 'dusky rise'.

9. Compare the 'singing lark (that sings unseen / The minstrelsy that solitude loves best)' in 'Fears in Solitude', 11. 18-19, PW, p. 257.


11. 'Reflections', 11. 41-42; PW, p. 107. Note the 'blest', picking up the description of the cottage in which 'we were bless'd'.


13. George McLean Harper, 'Coleridge's Conversation Poems', in The Quarterly Review, 244, no.484, April 1925; p. 289


15. Albert Gerard, English Romantic Poetry (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1968), pp. 29-30. Patricia Ball, in The Central Self, p. 91, uses the same expression of 'Frost at Midnight': 'a rhythm of systole and diastole is suggested'.

16. 'The Lime-Tree Bower my Prison' ('This Lime'Tree Bower'), 11. 14-20; PW, p. 179: 'yellow leaves', 'dark green file', 'blue clay-stone'.

17. 'This Lime-Tree Bower', 1. 8 ('perchance'), 1. 20 ('emerge'), 1. 21 ('view again'); PW, p.179.

18. The only note of hesitation in describing the prospect is the 'perhaps' of 1. 24, coming late in the passage; the element of doubt in Coleridge's reference to Lamb comes in 'methinks' (1.27).
19. 'This Lime-Tree Bower', ll. 21-23; PW, p. 179.

20. 'This Lime-Tree Bower', ll. 25-26; PW, p. 179.


22. The idea of the veil being lifted so that the Almighty Spirit may be perceived lies at the heart of mainstream Romantic thought: Shelley, for example, speaking of the veil of familiarity that obscures from us the naked and sleeping beauty of the world, in 'A Defence of Poetry', or Coleridge in 'Biographia Literaria' describing the awakening of the mind's attention 'from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us.' (Biographia, II, p.6).

Note also, in comparing the operation of Almighty Spirit and human Spirits in 'This Lime-Tree Bower', the reference to primary imagination in Biographia I, p. 202: 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM .'

Here in 'This Lime-Tree Bower', the reference to 'hues' that veil the Spirit may perhaps be to the exceptionally vivid colours which have been presented earlier in the poem, and particularly in the immediately preceding lines.

23. Lamb's aggrieved reaction to this description (l. 28, l. 68, l. 75) has been well documented: here, letter to Coleridge, August 6, 1800, Marrs I, p. 217. See also letter of August 14, 1800, Marrs I, pp. 224-225.

24. 'This Lime-Tree Bower', ll. 43-45; PW, p. 180.

25. Lucas notes this pencil inscription of Coleridge's, in Lucas (Letters), I, p. 125, and also I, pp. 199-200.

26. 'This Lime-Tree Bower', ll. 68-70; PW, p. 181.


28. 'Frost at Midnight', ll. 10-13; PW, p. 240.

30. 'Frost at Midnight', 11. 17-23; **PW**, pp. 240-241. In the original 1798 edition of the poem, as printed by Peake in *Poetry of the Landscape and the Night*, pp. 182-185, there is a comma between 'me' and 'who' in 'with me, who live'; this, together with the earlier version's phrasing of 'a companionable form,' with which I can hold commune', gives a clearer, less ambiguous impression than does the later rendering. The ambivalence I claim here is much less evident in the earlier version.


32. 'The Eolian Harp', 1. 26; **PW**, p. 101. The notion of 'one Life' has a much fuller impact than the more Thomsonian idea of 'Harmony' included in the original version of the poem. See also letter to Sotheby, September 10, 1802 (Griggs II, 864) 'everyThing has a Life of it's own,& ...we are all One Life.'


34. 'Frost at Midnight', 1. 65; **PW**, p. 242.


37. 'The Nightingale', 11. 97-105; **PW**, pp. 266-267. Note also the power of the moon revealed earlier in the poem, when, on its re-emergence, a previously silenced world breaks into minstrelsy.


42. See Ernest de Selincourt, 'Coleridge's Dejection: An Ode', in *Essays and Studies, XXII* (1937), pp. 7-25, where the full text of the much longer original version was first published.


44. Notebooks, I, n. 1554 (revised from n. 524).


46. December 5, 1803; Griggs II, pp. 1021-1022. (to Matthew Coates).
49. 'The Pains of Sleep', 1. 51, PW, p. 391; 'The Blossoming of the Solitary Date-Tree', 1. 78, PW, p. 397.
50. Notebooks, I, n. 1082.
52. Notebooks, III, n. 3325.

For much of the account of Coleridge's psychological and philosophical approach to the ideas of solitude and relationship in this chapter, I am indebted to Harding, who picks a way through the maze with great dexterity. I suspect, however, that in his anxiety to defend Coleridge, and other Romantic poets, against the charge of solipsism, he sometimes places too great an emphasis on the element of relationship. Occasionally, he seems to be in danger of removing individuality from its position as a vital and necessary component of human existence.

56. In embarking, tentatively, on this aspect of Coleridge's philosophy, G.M. Harper's description, in 'Coleridge's Conversation Poems', p. 284, springs to mind: 'If the truth were told, we should all be obliged to admit that the Philosopher escapes us. We hear his voice and enter the room where he is speaking, only to see his retreating figure down some dim corridor.'


60. Notebooks, II, n. 2344.

61. See Notebooks, II, n. 2832.


70. To William Wordsworth, April 26, 1816; Lucas (Letters), II, pp. 189-191.


73. See John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu* (London, 1927), Book III, ch. XVI, section II.


77. Coleridge: The Clark Lectures, p. 98.


79. Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence, p. 169.

80. The Ancient Mariner, 11. 63-70; PW, p. 189.

81. The Ancient Mariner, 1. 280 (PW, p. 198) and 1. 354 (PW, p. 200).

82. George Whalley believes even 'loneliness' to be too gentle a word for the Mariner's state, and suggests 'aloneness' instead. See 'The Mariner and the Albatross', p. 383. Irving Babbitt also comments on the degree of sheer isolation, On Being Creative and Other Essays, p. 116.

An interesting comparison can be drawn with the figure of Hayy, by Ibn Tufail (c.1170), whom Antonio Pastor in The Idea of Robinson Crusoe (Watford, 1930) sees as having given birth to one of the great myths of European literature, the figure of the solitary. Hayy is not only solitary: he also ponders over multiplicity and unity, and he wishes to teach mankind, as does the Mariner (pp. 96, 108).


84. The Ancient Mariner, 11. 160-161; PW, p. 192.


86. The Ancient Mariner, 1. 280; PW, p. 198.


Robert Langbaum, in The Poetry of Experience, pp. 3-9, discusses in general terms - for Romanticism as a whole - the idea of the superior individual seeking to give meaning to the world; and he stresses that a crisis of personality, the abandonment of all existing formulations, must be undergone before a man can begin to bring a new order to bear upon the world. For Langbaum, however, such a course is seen as a chosen one, very different from the crisis experienced and regeneration brought about, 'unaware', in the Mariner, and with a very different result in terms of relationship with the world.

Compare also the moment in 'Dejection: An Ode', mentioned earlier in this chapter, where joy comes only when all human faculties and struggles are set aside, in sleep.

89. The Ancient Mariner, 1. 343; PW, p. 200.
90. The Ancient Mariner, 11. 605-606; PW, p. 208.
91. The Ancient Mariner, 1. 595 (PW, p. 208), and 1. 76 (PW, p. 189).
92. The fact that this resolution - though incomplete - comes about in the Mariner's own country is significant. In a home, a country known well, the individuality, the sense of purposefulness, feels itself more secure; yet at the same time a home also encourages the formation of, and participation in, a community.

Compare 'To the Rev. George Coleridge', 11. 39-42 (PW, pp. 174-175):

Yet at times
My soul is sad, that I have roam'd through life
Still most a stranger, most with naked heart
At mine own home and birth-place ...

93. See Morse Peckham, in 'Toward a Theory of Romanticism', PMLA, LXVI, 1951, pp. 5-23, p. 19, who links the 'act of confession' in the Mariner's compulsion forever to tell his tale, with the alienation of the poet.
94. See above, note 67.
Chapter V

Abbreviations:


Masson: The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey, ed. David Masson, Edinburgh, 1889-1890 (14 vols.).


2. 'To the Lady Mary Lowther', ll. 1-4; PW III, pp. 28-29. Perhaps the 'mildly-gleaming' here unconsciously echoes Thomson's 'mildly-pleasing' at the opening of the 'Hymn on Solitude', a poem included in the volume?

3. 'Petition for an absolute Retreat', ll. 5-7; in Poems and Extracts, p. 3.

4. Compare Ben Jonson, 'To Penshurst', and Thomas Carew, 'To Saxham': the way in which the creatures of the natural world cooperate with man in providing themselves as food for his table. Dorothy's Journal records that the Wordsworths read and liked Jonson's poem. An interesting development from this tradition can be seen in Christopher Smart's 'A Song to David', sixtieth stanza, where nature grows adoration of the Lord.

5. 'Silvia, let us from the crowd retire', ll. 5-12; in Poems and Extracts, p. 28. Amy Louise Reed, in The Background of Gray's Elegy (New York, 1962), p. 69, notes that the Countess of Winchilsea had, in fact, suffered from spleen in her younger days, struggling anxiously with an abnormal love of solitude, self-distrust, and depression of spirits.


8. PW III, p. 503.

9. PW II, p. 419.


11. PW V, p. 469.


13. To Richard Sharp, January 15, 1804, Griggs II, pp. 1033-1034: Coleridge describes Wordsworth as the 'first & greatest philosophical Poet - the only man who has effected a compleat and


15. Herbert Read, Wordsworth (London, 1949), p. 119. See also W.B. Gallie, 'Is The Prelude a Philosophical Poem?', in Philosophy, XXII, no. 82, July 1947, pp. 124-138; here, p. 136: speaking of Wordsworth's thought, Gallie describes how 'he makes us feel it on the move and catch it on the rebound'.


18. In the 1793 version, 11. 315-318 (PW I, p. 30). This passage, strongly reminiscent of Gray's 'Elegy', was later dropped completely.


22. 'Lines', Left upon a Seat', 1. 41; PW I, p. 93.


25. We know that, in at least two cases, specific poems arose from recorded meetings: the poem 'Beggars', written out of a meeting with a woman
(13 March, 1802); and, most famously, 'Resolution and Independence' from a meeting with a leech-gatherer (3 October, 1800).


28. Wordsworth observed once to Crabb Robinson, 'Solitude in a waste is sublime, while it is purely disagreeable in a cultivated country.' Robinson describes it as 'one of his striking observations'; Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, ed. Thomas Sadler (London, 1869, 3 vols.), III, p. 142.

29. 'Song, for the Wandering Jew', PW II, pp. 158-159.


32. Compare James Smith, in 'Wordsworth: A Preliminary Survey', in Scrutiny, VII, June 1938, pp. 33-35; p. 54, speaking of 'Michael': 'the extinction of suffering is the extinction of humanity.'

33. 'Inscriptions supposed to be found in or near a Hermit's Cell', ll. 33-36; PW IV, p. 203.

34. 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', ll. 22-24; PW IV, p. 234.

35. 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', l. 14; PW IV, p. 234.

36. 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', ll. 45-51; PW IV, p. 235.
37. 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', l. 54; PW IV, p.235. Canon Rawnsley, in his 'reminiscences of Wordsworth among the Peasantry of Westmoreland', in Lake Country Sketches (Glasgow, 1903), describes how Wordsworth himself was frequently seen with his head bent towards the ground, walking the roads as he composed.


39. 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', ll. 172-176 and 184-185; PW IV, pp. 239-240.


41. 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', ll. 194-195; PW IV, p. 240.

42. 'Animal Tranquillity and Decay', ll. 1-3; PW IV, p. 247. An interesting fusion of elements from 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and 'Animal Tranquillity' can be found in William Carlos Williams' poem, 'Pastoral'. The sparrows hop ingenuously, seemingly regardless of the men around them. The old man goes about without looking up, and his tread is majestic.

43 'I know an aged Man', PW IV, pp. 160-161. Compare also The Excursion, I ll. 563-564: '... the little birds / That peck along the hedge-rows'.

44. The Egotistical Sublime, p. 63.

45. 'Animal Tranquillity and Decay', ll. 5-7, and 12-14; PW IV, p. 247.

46. See also Christopher Salvesen's account of Emily of 'The White Doe of Rylstone', in The Landscape of Memory (London, 1965), p. 129, where he compares her to the 'Old Man Travelling': she achieves patience 'by coming to live, as nearly as she can on earth, in a world outside time.'

48. 'The Thorn', ll. 166-169; PW 11, p. 246.

49. 'Lucy Gray', ll. 57-60; PW I, p. 236.


52. The Excursion, Book I, l. 873; PW V, p. 37.

53. The Excursion, Book I, l. 946; PW V, p. 39.

54. The Prelude, Book IV, ll. 400-405; Prelude, p. 130. (This, and all succeeding, quotations from The Prelude are from the 1805 text.)

55. The Prelude, Book IV, ll. 411-412; Prelude, p. 130. Compare 'Resolution and Independence', l. 71: 'Himself he propped'; but note that in this case, although some of the connotations are the same as for the soldier, it is the leech-gatherer who does the propping, not (as in The Prelude passage) a milestone.

56. On several occasions, Wordsworth describes himself, as poet, 'murmuring' along the roads or by the rivers; the sound of murmuring is intimately connected with the sound of waters and the sound of poetry.

57. The Prelude, Book V, ll. 471-472; Prelude, p. 162.


59. The Prelude, Book IV, ll. 492-495; Prelude, p.134.

60. The Prelude, Book IV, l. 501; Prelude, p. 134.

61. Biographia, 11, p. 100.

63. 'Resolution and Independence', ll. 17-21; PW II, p.235.
64. 'Resolution and Independence', ll. 27-28; PW II, p.236.
65. 'Resolution and Independence', ll. 29-35; PW II, p.236.
66. 'Resolution and Independence', ll. 47-49; PW II, p.236.
67. The Excursion, Book I, ll. 634-635; PW V, p.29.
68. 'A Poet's Epitaph', ll. 53-56; PW IV, p. 67.
69. It is one of Hazlitt's acute perceptions in his essay, 'Mr Wordsworth', in The Spirit of the Age (Howe, XI, pp. 86-95) that Wordsworth's own 'strength lies in his weakness', that enthusiasm and intolerance run together (p. 94).
70. 'Resolution and Independence', ll. 55-56; PW II, p.237. Compare Robert Frost's poem, 'Desert Places', which opens 'Snow falling ...', line 8: 'The loneliness includes me unawares'. Note also Frost's third stanza, describing the 'blacker whiteness of benighted snow / With no expression, nothing to express', a very Wordsworthian identification of loneliness as absence of communication with the enveloping world.
71. Preface, to the Edition of 1815, PW II, p. 438. A useful contrast can be drawn to Johnson's discussion of the sylphs in 'The Rape of the Lock' in his 'Life of Pope', where 'New things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new' - a sylph becomes a friend, but we never forget that it is a sylph: the transmutation is a fictional one.
72. 'Resolution and Independence', ll. 51 and 70; PW II, p. 237.
73. Letters, EY, pp. 366-367. Note also Lionel Trilling, in Sincerity and Authenticity (London, 1972), p.91: 'It is impossible to exaggerate the force that the word 'be' has for Wordsworth'.
75. Compare the speech of the woman in 'Stepping Westward', 1.20 (PW III, p. 76): 'The very sound of courtesy'.


77. 'Resolution and Independence', 1. 111; PW, II, p. 239.


84. 'Resolution and Independence', 11. 127-131; PW II, p. 240. Coleridge singles this passage out as a pre-eminent instance of Wordsworth's imaginative power - a tribute to its effectiveness within the poem; see Biographia, II, p. 125.

85. 'The Solitary Reaper', 11. 31-32; PW III, p. 77.


90. 'Reminiscences of Wordsworth', p. 38.

91. To Thomas Poole, May 6, 1799; in Griggs, I, p. 491.

92. To Thomas Poole, October 14, 1803; in Griggs, II,
pp. 1012-1013.

93. To Mrs. S.T. Coleridge, September 2, 1803; in Griggs, II, p. 978.


95. Masson, II, p. 239.


97. Letter to Thomas Robinson, March 1808; Correspondence of HCR, pp. 52-53.

98. Correspondence of HCR, p. 24. This is Quillinan's opinion, but is quoted with approval by Crabb Robinson.

99. B.R. Haydon to Edward Moxon, November 29, 1845; The Keats Circle, ed. H.E. Rollins (Cambridge, Mass., 1965, 2 vols.), Vol. II, pp. 143-144. See also Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth: The Later Years (Oxford, 1965), pp. 312-320, for an account of Wordsworth's visit to London in 1817-1818, including the Keats incident, and the 'egotism' observed by many; the impressions recorded for the 1820 visit, however, are rather gentler.

100. Howe, XI, p. 92.


102. Rawnsley explains the word as meaning 'demonstrative': 'Reminiscences of Wordsworth', p. 15.

103. Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers, ed. Edith J. Morley (London, 1938, 3 vols.), Vol. I, p. 195. We should remember that De Quincey at this time, while still praising Wordsworth's poetry, was speaking ill of him as a man. The relatively stormy relationships Wordsworth had with both De Quincey and Coleridge are, indeed, further evidence of his detachment of character.
104. Compare Dorothy Wordsworth, Journals, p. 79 (January 3, 1802): 'We indulged dear thoughts about home.'

105. Journals, p. 73 (December 25, 1801).


107. In 'Byron and Wordsworth', Hazlitt even compares Wordsworth's noting of the lichen to Rousseau's 'voila de la pervenche', a personal feeling associated with the smallest things.


Most of these studies come to the conclusion - some more emphatically than others - that Wordsworth was very probably influenced by Rousseau, but that it is impossible to provide any proof. Lienemann, for example, puts it: 'Oft mag er mit seinen für Rousseau begeisterten Freunden über ihn diskutiert haben'. Eisold tries to find closer ties, although
his interpretations of Rousseau are at times arguable. Salvesen points out that, even though there are great similarities between the two writers, Wordsworth takes his responsible duty as poet much more seriously than does Rousseau, seeking always to escape from the constraints of time.

One possible resonance from Rousseau that seems to have gone unnoticed can be found in the eighth of the River Duddon sonnets, echoing the opening pictures of the Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité:

What aspect bore the Man who roved or fled,  
First of his tribe, to this dark dell - who first  
In this pellucid current slaked his thirst?


111. On Wordsworth's 'Prelude', p. 284.


114. 'Composed while the author was engaged in writing a Tract occasioned by the Convention of Cintra', 1. 10; PW III, p. 128.

115. 'To the Rev. Dr. Wordsworth' (With the 'Sonnets to the River Duddon'), 11. 19-20; PW III, p. 244.


118. 'Reproof', 11. 9-13; PW III, pp. 352-353.


120. See The Prelude, Book X, 11. 198-202 (Prelude, p. 378), where Wordsworth expresses his fear of being 'A Poet only to myself, to Men / Useless'.

121. The Prelude, Book I, 1. 15; Prelude, p. 2.

122. The Prelude, Book I, 1. 28, and l. 34; Prelude, p.4.

123. The Prelude, Book I, 11. 263-268; Prelude, p.16.


125. Howe, IV, pp. 121-124. See also Howe, XVII, p. 25-26: '... his whole system turns upon this, that the thoughts, the feelings, the expressions of the common people in country places are the most refined of all others; at once the most pure, the most simple, and the most sublime: - yet, with one stroke of his prose-pen, he disfranchises the whole rustic population of Westmoreland and Cumberland from voting at elections, and says there is not a man among them that is not a knave in grain.'

Compare Charles Lamb, letter to Wordsworth, August 9, 1814, in response to Wordsworth's sending of a copy of The Excursion, in Lucas (Letters), II, p. 127: 'There is a deal of noble matter about mountain scenery, yet not so much as to overpower and discountenance a poor Londoner or South country man entirely, though Mary seems to have felt it occasionally a little too powerfully, for it was her remark during reading it that by your system it was doubtful whether a Liver in Towns had a Soul to be Saved. She almost trembled for that invisible part of us in her.'

126. Correspondence of HCR, p. 621 (February 8, 1846). Canon Rawnsley also records, from several sources, Wordsworth's seclusion from the real peasants of his area.
129. Here I disagree with David Ferry, The Limits of Mortality (Middletown, Conn., 1959), p. 111, who sees Wordsworth as having learned 'not only that love of man which is another form of the love of nature, but a corresponding hatred and fear of the ordinary experience of men.' Quite the contrary. It is to obtain a better understanding of that experience that Wordsworth flies to the ideal form of society and of mankind.
130. To John Wilson, June 7, 1802; in Letters, EY, pp. 352-358.
132. The Prelude, Book VIII, ll. 806-807; Prelude, p.308.
138. 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802', 1. 1; PW III, p. 38.
139. 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge', 1. 7; PW III, p. 38. (My italics.)
140. 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge', ll. 9-10; PW III, p. 38.
141. One of the devices which enabled topographical poets to accept a town as part of a landscape was precisely this motif of smoke - see, for example, ch. II above, note 31. As Geoffrey Hartman has noted (erroneously, however, attributing this to the opening of The Prelude) the city smoke is 'ruralised' by distance (Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814, p. 34). Wordsworth is
perhaps hinting towards these ideas in his use of 'smokeless', an implied contrast to the traditional inhabited rural landscape, as well as to the smoke-hung world of cities.

142. Journals, p. 151. (27 July, 1802, describing 31 July.)

143. The Prelude, Book VII, 11. 603-606; Prelude, p. 256.

144. The Prelude, Book VII, 11. 609-611; Prelude, p. 256.


146. The Prelude, Book VII, 11. 615-622; Prelude, p. 256.

147. The Prelude, Book VII, 11. 624-625; Prelude, p. 256.


150. Owen & Smyser, I, pp. 324-325. Compare letter to John Wilson, June 7, 1802 (Letters, EY, pp. 352-358) in which Wordsworth argues that the development of manufacture and traffic has contributed to the decline in the formation of character by the sequestered countryside. Graham Hough notes, in The Romantic Poets (London, 1953), p. 71, that Wordsworth realizes 'so clearly the difficulty of incorporating science into our imaginative life', although Hough believes that Wordsworth nonetheless feels 'that it can be accomplished'.

151. 'Humanity', 11. 83-94; PW IV, p. 105. Jones, in The Egotistical Sublime, p. 11, sees Wordsworth's appreciation of the evils of the Industrial Revolution as a source of his radicalism, in opposition to manufacturing interests; but it perhaps also carries within it a deeply conservative strain of thought, in its nostalgic vision.
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152. The Excursion, Book VIII, 11. 82-296; PW V, pp. 268-275. Here, 1. 166. But note that, in the early stages of development, the earth lends her waters and the air her breezes; the principle of development is a good one, and initially in harmony with nature - as it is in his note on Dyer, referring to these lines; it is the practice of it, the uses to which it has been put, that are harmful.


154. 'Home at Grasmere', 11. 614-615; PW V, p. 334. An interesting comparison can be drawn with John Wilson's poem, 'Solitude' (Works of Professor Wilson, Edinburgh & London 1886, Vol. XII, pp. 346-347), where a similar vale is described, one of 'visionary rest', and yet where the idea of rural activity is specifically denied. The shepherd's cot and woodman's covert are absent, though mentioned.


156. 'Home at Grasmere', 11. 375-377; PW V, p. 326.

157. This treatment of place finds a similar form in 'Michael'. The sheepfold - an element of place - represents both Michael's love of the land, and his love of Luke. It becomes, however, more than a symbol; it becomes an active element, attempting to unite the two loves.


159. 'Home at Grasmere', 1. 753; PW V, p. 338.

160. 'Prospectus' to The Excursion, 11. 93-96; PW V, p. 6.


163. See The Prelude, Book III, ll. 186-187; Prelude, p. 80: 'Points have we all of us within our souls, / Where all stand single'.

164. 'I wandered lonely as a cloud', ll. 21-22; PW II, p. 217.

165. 'A Poet's Epitaph', ll. 47-52; PW IV, p. 67.

166. See, for example, 'Dover Beach', where Arnold presents a landscape (or seascape) that is simply a landscape — and then develops a moral deliberation out of it. For Wordsworth, the landscape itself becomes a moral experience, as well as providing a catalyst for thought about experience. There is less need to develop a deliberation out of it (though Wordsworth at times does so); the deliberation resides within the actual landscape.


170. Biographia, II, p. 101. Hazlitt reports Coleridge using the same phrase, in conversation (Howe, XVII, p. 117). Wordsworth himself uses the same expression, in a footnote to the 'Preface' to Lyrical Ballads (PW II, p. 392), where he distinguishes between poetry and 'Matter of Fact, or Science'. Science, for Wordsworth — as for Shelley — resides in only one half of the equation of mind and world; it represents only matter of fact. In poetry, he is trying to bring the two to bear on each other. John Jones demonstrates that this ability to embrace detachment is one of Wordsworth's sources of power, that it enables him to face the division/relation mode of thought that springs from the eighteenth century dualism.
in a way that Coleridge - in a search forever for unity - cannot do. (The Egotistical Sublime, pp. 5-9, and 84-85.)


173. HCR on Books etc., I, p. 135 and 190-191.


175. Biographia II, p. 5.

176. David Perkins, The Quest for Permanence: The Symbolism of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 12. It is this gap that leads Wordsworth to speak of the mind and nature being 'fitted' to each other, rather than united - and this same gap leads Blake, in his annotations to Wordsworth, to decry the fitting and fitted. There is not enough total union for Blake.

177. Note on 'Intimations' Ode, PW IV, p. 463.

178. From the Farington Diary: quoted in J.R. Watson, 'Wordsworth and Constable', in Review of English Studies, XIII, no. 52, November 1962, p. 361. Compare also Hazlitt's remark on Wordsworth's liking for among others, Rembrandt - the transformation of a common thing into an ideal object (while yet it remains a common thing) - in his essay on 'Mr. Wordsworth' (Howe, XI, pp. 86-95).

179. In this, I would disagree with Kenneth Clark's attribution, in chapter V of Landscape into Art (London, 1949), of a dedicated and unquestioning naturalism to both Wordsworth and Constable. For neither poet nor painter does the analysis apply; naturalism forms one major element of their vision, but not the totality.

180. Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814; for example p.41.


182. The Egotistical Sublime, p. 94.
183. *English Romantic Poetry*, p. 103. See also Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*, p. 27: 'a vacillating calculus of gain and loss, of hope and doubt'.

184. 'Lines, composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey' (*Tintern Abbey*), ll. 5-7; *PW II*, p. 259.

185. 'Tintern Abbey', ll. 39-41; *PW II*, p. 260.

186. 'Tintern Abbey', ll. 43-49; *PW II*, p. 260.


188. 'Tintern Abbey', ll. 95-102; *PW II*, pp. 261-262.

189. 'Tintern Abbey', ll. 106-107; *PW II*, p. 262. Compare 'Peter Bell', ll. 143-145, *PW II*, p. 337: marvels the mind 'May find or there create'.

190. 'Tintern Abbey', l. 143; *PW II*, p. 263. Compare 'Resolution and Independence', 1.35.


192. *The Prelude*, Book II, ll. 69-78; here quoted, ll. 73, 77-78; Prelude, p. 46.


198. *The Prelude*, Book XIII, ll. 1-65; Prelude, pp. 478-482. Compare a passage from 'Descriptive Sketches', ll. 494-509 (PW I, p. 72) — a section that was later slightly altered — but which foreshadows the Snowdon experience: 'Loud thro' that midway gulf ascending, sound / Unnumber'd streams with hollow roar profound.'
199. *The Prelude*, Book XIII, 1. 65; *Prelude*, p. 482.
204. 'The Figure in a Landscape', p. 16.
207. *The Prelude*, Book I, 11. 589-590; Prelude, p. 34.
208. 'The Idiot Boy', 11. 320-321; PW II, p. 76.
209. Matthew Arnold, 'Memorial Verses', 11. 48-49.
211. 'Intimations Ode', 1. 201; PW IV, p. 285.
212. 'Intimations Ode', 11. 204-207; PW IV, p. 285.
   Compare 'Elegiac Stanzas, suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle', especially 11. 53-54 (PW IV, p. 260):
   'Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone, / Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind!' In 'Elegiac
   Stanzas', suffering brings the isolated independent mind to wisdom; in the
   'Intimations Ode', as it were from the other end of the spectrum, the totally
   absorbed mind is brought, by suffering, to wisdom. In both movements to the centre, much is lost, and gained.
   See also another passage revealing the beauties of complexity, in *The Prelude*, Book IV, 11. 247-268 (Prelude, p. 122),
   the boat gliding across the surface of the water, the reflections crossing
   with reality, shadow mingling with substance, and the whole rendered more sweet by its confusion.


217. 'A Night-Piece', PW II, pp. 208-209.

218. 'Conclusion', PW III, p. 260 (The River Duddon, no. XXXIII).


220. The Prelude, Book V, 11. 389-413; Prelude, p.158. Coleridge tells us he would have recognized this piece anywhere, as being Wordsworth's. See also, as an interesting comparison in echo, 'To Joanna' (PW II, pp. 112-114), especially 11. 45-50, the similarity of 'imaged in the heart'.

221. The Prelude, Book V, 11. 404-409; Prelude, p.158.


223. The Prelude, Book XI, 1. 258; Prelude, p. 444. As Hugh Sykes Davies points out in his essay 'Wordsworth and the Empirical Philosophers', in The English Mind (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 153-174, despite Wordsworth's insistence that spots of time arise most when the mind is lord and master - there is also the importance of 'accident' to be borne in mind. Power of mind, and also relation to forces acting upon the mind, both form part of these spots of time.

224. See, for example, The Prelude, Book X, 1. 702; 'The Danish Boy', 1. 2; 'Ruth', 1. 71; and - with strong similarities - 'To a Highland Girl' (PW III, p. 74), 11. 66-67:

In spots like these it is we prize
Our Memory, feel that she hath eyes ...

We feel in this case that the reference can be equally in space and to time.
227. Works of Professor Wilson, V, p. 400.

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The Bibliography has been divided into three sections, for ease of reference. Where a work (Hazlitt, for example) has reference to more than one section, it has been placed only in the one which appears to be most appropriate.

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