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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Ernest Derwood Lee, Jr., entitled "The Grotesque in the Poetry of William Wordsworth." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Vice Provost
and Dean of The Graduate School

THE GROTESQUE IN THE POETRY OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Ernest Derwood Lee, Jr.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents and brother for their faith and devotion and to June for her patience and love.

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ABSTRACT

The function of the grotesque within William Wordsworth's most important poetry, that written between 1788 and 1805, has not been appreciated. Yet perceptions characterized by the juxtaposition of fearful, unattractive images with images of beauty and harmony appear throughout Wordsworth's youthful poetry and are focused and directed in the Lyrical Ballads volumes and in The Prelude (1805). The few scholars who have discussed the grotesque in Wordsworth's poetry either have not recognized the value of that mode to the development of Wordsworth's poetic idiom or have confused it with the sublime, and thus have misunderstood the nature and function of his images.

The first two chapters of this dissertation include an introduction to critical considerations of the importance of a dark, fearful tension in Wordsworth's poetry and attempt to synthesize important definitions of the grotesque. They offer a backdrop against which to consider the grotesque and provide a working definition of that mode particularly applicable to Wordsworth. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters study the poet's developing use of grotesque image patterns, beginning with his youthful poetry and continuing through the Lyrical Ballads and The Prelude

(1805). The specific argument is that Wordsworth became a true artist of the "noble" grotesque, functionally employing grotesque image patterns in his poems, not just for the sake of idle fancy or to relate social and moral meanings, but rather to reveal the dynamic role of the grotesque in the process of the imagination's growth. Wordsworth discovered the poetic voice necessary to expressing how incongruous perceptions temper and mature the imagination, preparing it to achieve a heightened vision, the sublime. The final chapter argues that Wordsworth now needs to be recognized as a masterful artist of the true grotesque. He revived the native grotesque tradition in English literature and extended the grotesque to become a positive artistic expression, a means of projecting a vision of the mystery and beauty of the divinity alive in all of creation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	DEFINING THE GROTESQUE	19
III.	THE GROTESQUE IN THE EARLY POETRY OF WORDSWORTH	47
IV.	EXPERIMENTS WITH THE GROTESQUE: POEMS FROM THE LYRICAL BALLADS	76
V.	THE FUNCTION OF THE GROTESQUE IN THE PRELUDE	145
VI.	WORDSWORTH AS AN ARTIST OF THE GROTESQUE	197
LIST OF REFERENCES		222
VITA		229

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

No attempt yet has been made to study in depth the importance of the grotesque in William Wordsworth's major poetry. In fact, only a few individuals have recognized that the grotesque plays any role in his work, despite the fact the grotesque so often has been associated with the Romantic poets.[1] In her short essay "Some Forms of the Grotesque in Wordsworth," Rosemary Boston argues that the grotesque "does generate a few strangely vivid ballads, some eerie scenes of 'visionary dreariness,' and several passages filled with bizarre detail" (35). But she seems to consider the ugly or the monstrous as synonymous with the grotesque, and in truth, makes little attempt to clarify what she means by the term grotesque, despite its traditional elusiveness. Her considerations focus primarily on "The Thorn" and "The Idiot Boy," and she concludes that Wordsworth is unable to look steadily at a disjointed, ugly external world. Thus, her argument is that the poet fails to "sustain the observation which, in even the comic 'Idiot Boy,' brings frightening implications about the

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[1]See, for example, Wolfgang Kayser's The Grotesque in Art and Literature (cited in List of References).

incoherence behind events" (40). But she does recognize, as do a number of modern scholars, that a dark, demonic aspect often surfaces in the body of Wordsworth's poetry: a tension between the external world of nature and the internal world of self, expressed and bequeathed foremost by Wordsworth, which is characteristic of the English Romantic poets.

Similarly, Ronald Earl Morgan, in his broad study of the relation of grotesque imagery to the Romantic theory of imagination, recognizes some grotesque image patterns in selections from Wordsworth's poetry, especially The Prelude. But Morgan does not consider in depth the importance of the grotesque in Wordsworth's poetry, partly because his purpose is to discuss a broad range of poets and philosophical considerations and partly because he has difficulty in defining the grotesque, particularly in Wordsworth, because he confuses it with the sublime. He admits that "in some cases, especially in the poetry of Wordsworth, the sublime and the positive grotesque seem almost to merge because both work by means of materials that evoke man's terror and awe in his encounters with an inscrutable and often overwhelmingly powerful force beyond reason" (82). Morgan bases much of his discussion on John Ruskin's comments about the nature of the grotesque, but he fails to take into account Ruskin's specific comments about

Wordsworth and the grotesque, concluding that for Ruskin "the grotesque always involves the combination of disparate elements that is both terrible and ludicrous--fantastic combinations of different animal species, disconnected parts of the human body, combinations of animal and vegetable . . . appearing as decorative motifs in the architecture he is examining" (11). In fact, Ruskin's writings indicate that the grotesque is much more aesthetically important to him than Morgan later argues. Ruskin specifically discusses Wordsworth and Plato as examples of those employing the "noble grotesque," as opposed to the more artificial "ignoble grotesque," thus extending his considerations beyond decorative motifs in architecture to poetry and to other art forms.

Modern theorists have echoed Ruskin's identification of two distinct expressions of the grotesque, yet have not followed Ruskin's lead by identifying the exact nature and function of the grotesque image patterns in Wordsworth's poetry. In short, the few individuals considering the grotesque in Wordsworth's poetry only skim the surface of a deep pool of image patterns and associated complex considerations which are significant both to a better understanding of his poetry and to his role in freeing the grotesque in

poetry from artificiality while developing it into a more subtle and true form.

And these grotesque image patterns in Wordsworth's poetry bear significantly not only on an appreciation of his individual poems, but also on a broader understanding both of Romanticism and of the grotesque. In fact, important modern studies of Wordsworth's poetry and its significance in establishing and exemplifying what we have come to recognize as the essence of Romanticism identify a tension inherent in Wordsworth's best poetry, that of the "Great Decade" between 1795 and 1805. And the grotesque image patterns, largely ignored, are especially important to supporting this critical stance and to demonstrating ways that Wordsworth creatively expresses this tension through his image patterns and responds to this tension within the context of individual poems. Certainly, this tension is nowhere more clearly evident than in those poems of Wordsworth which turn upon grotesque image patterns.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge perhaps best identifies the significance that he and his fellow poets assign to resolving a perceived tension between external and internal existences in his famous explanation that the poet ideally "brings the whole soul of man into activity" by using the imagination to create the

essential "balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" (2: 12). Within the past few decades, a number of scholars have asserted that the reconciling, synthetic imagination is, in fact, the true common denominator of nineteenth-century English Romantic poets. In his excellent essay "Romanticism Re-Examined," Rene Wellek concisely surveys attempts to define Romanticism and concludes that valid definitions all turn upon the same idea: "All see the implication of imagination, symbol, myth, and organic nature, and see it as part of the great endeavor to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious. This is the central creed of the great Romantic poets in England, Germany, and France" (Frye 132). In Natural Supernaturalism, M. H. Abrams argues that the Romantic poets undertook "to save traditional concepts, schemes, and values which had been based on the relation of the Creator to his creature and creation, and to re-formulate them within the prevailing two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-ego, the human mind or consciousness and its transactions with nature" (13). In short, Abrams convincingly argues that the Romantics displaced their frame of reference from a supernatural to a natural one and thus attempted to show how man can enjoy present

earthly existence, as opposed to some hope of distant supernatural existence, through the effective use of the imagination to reconcile the seemingly opposite aspects of man and his natural world. As C. C. Clarke suggests, the Romantics realized that human beings exist in paradox: they are in the midst of realities which are not themselves, a world beyond the limits of individual transient being, and yet they somehow feel that they can reach beyond the confines of themselves and bring the supernatural within the compass of their own lives, yet apparently without annuling the transcendence of the supernatural (1).

Both Abrams and Clarke argue that this basic Romantic character is exemplified by the poetry of Wordsworth and thus center their discussions upon his attempts to reconcile the subject-object split. Abrams states that his "rationale is that Wordsworth (as his English comtemporaries acknowledged, with whatever qualifications) was the great and exemplary poet of the age, and his Prospectus [to The Recluse] stands as the manifesto of a central Romantic enterprise . . ." (14). In this well-known Prospectus, Wordsworth asserts his central creed, which the later Romantics inherited:

> Elysian, Fortunate Fields--like those of old
> Sought in the Atlantic Main--why should they be
> A history only of departed things,

> Or a mere fiction of what never was?
> For the discerning intellect of Man,
> When wedded to this goodly universe
> In love and holy passion, shall find these
> A simple produce of the common day.
> (Prose Works 3:7, lines 105-113)

As Harold Bloom argues, Wordsworth is here seeking to surpass the attempts of his predecessors to satisfy man's desire for a supernatural existence by establishing a method of consciousness in which paradise becomes natural to our present reality. Bloom concludes that the "most defiant humanism in Wordsworth salutes the immediate possibility of this earthly paradise naturalizing itself in the here and now" (120).

In attempting to teach us how to live harmoniously in the confines of our present world by using our minds in league with natural phenomena to accomplish a new creation, Wordsworth obviously undertook a monumental task. Even as a young man, he realized that his endeavor to reconcile opposing states of existence must first necessarily require that he perceive the natural world in all of its aspects. In his notes to Isabella Fenwick, Wordsworth recalls that at about age fourteen he began to realize that preceding poets had not endeavored to consider all the aspects of the external

world: "The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them; and I made a resolution to supply, in some degree, the deficiency" (Poetical Works 1: 319). Similarly, writing to Coleridge in 1798, Wordsworth expresses what he sees as a deficiency in previous poetry to perceive the forms of the external world in a meaningful way. Discussing the German poet, Gottfried Bürger, he complains that "Bürger is one of those authors whose book I like to have in my hand, but when I have laid the book down I do not think about him. I remember a hurry of pleasure, but I have few distinct forms that people my mind, nor any recollection of delicate or minute feelings which he has either communicated to me, or taught me to recognize" (Letters Early Years 234).

For Wordsworth, then, the successful poet must learn to recognize the infinite forms of the natural world and must further absorb and synthesize these forms in order to understand their significance. But the poet's task does not end there, for he must also communicate his own awareness to the reader in such a

way that the reader's mind is habitually haunted by these forms and their associated feelings. The poet must teach his reader to recognize that behind the forms of the external world lies something that also lives within the depths of the reader's mind. In this connection, Northrop Frye suggests that Romanticism is primarily a revolution in poetic imagery, an attempt to articulate the location of archetypes in the common external world, but he carefully points out that a framework of images is not in itself a belief, but only symbolic of the creative power located within the mind itself. Reality is brought about by the mind, which constructs from experience (Romanticism Reconsidered vii-5).[2] Thus, for the Romantics the inner world is primary to the external, but the external provides the symbols necessary to spark the mind's creative responses.

In one of his notebooks, Coleridge perhaps best explains the Romantics' quest for expression: "I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking for, a

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[2]Frye's arguments in this connection appear both within the forward and within his own essay "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism."

symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new" (qtd. in Frye 10).

Similarly, in his Preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth emphasizes the connection between perception of the natural world and the importance of the recollection of associated emotions. He states that his poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity," and he further asserts that there is "little falsehood of description" in his poems because "I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject" (Lyrical Ballads 246-51).

As Frederick Pottle has suggested, these two statements appear contradictory, for how can he look at an object steadily while composing his poetry and yet be recollecting the object and its associated emotion in tranquillity? Pottle notes that Wordsworth's "extensive critical writings deride matter-of-fact and speak over and over again of the power of the Imagination to modify and create," yet "he says other things in which he appears to be vindicating the rightness of his poetry, not on the ground that it is well imagined," but rather on the ground that "the things described in the poem really did happen in that fashion and in no other" (27-28). Referring to specific poems and their method

of composition, Pottle demonstrates that "the subject Wordsworth is talking about in the sentence in the Preface is not an object in external nature," and the eye looking steadily at the object "is not the physical eye. The subject is a mental image and the eye is the inward eye which is the bliss of solitude" (35). Thus, Pottle concludes that for Wordsworth the function of the Imagination "is at the first level to make sense out of the undifferentiated manifold of sensation by organizing it into individual objects or things, at the second specifically poetic level, to reshape the world of common perception in the direction of a unity that shall be ever more satisfactory and meaningful" (31). Pottle appears to be suggesting that Wordsworth's poetic creations are grounded in the perceived forms of the natural world but are transfigured by the Imagination into new images composed not only of recollected perceptions of natural phenomena, but also of the transfiguring power of the poet's mind. The attempt is to reconcile the two worlds: external and internal. An interchange occurs between the world of "things" as perceived through the poet's senses and the Imagination which acts upon these things to transfigure them into a sensed unity. This intuited unity obviously is felt when the perceiver can recognize a harmony between the

apparently discordant natures of the outer world of things and the inner world of mind.

All of this sounds fine, if the perceiver is able to reach that magical point of recognizing a unity between the external world and the inner world of self, but modern scholars have been quick to argue that Wordsworth, like the other Romantic poets, was constantly in pursuit of an ideal world born out of the union between the two opposing worlds, yet was constantly frustrated and threatened by his own inability to achieve any final unity. C. C. Clarke asserts this point quite effectively: "His conviction that the natural world is solid, and substantially 'other' than the mind that contemplates it, had to come to terms with his conviction that what we perceive is inevitably mind-dependent. A dramatic tension in his poetry was frequently the result" (Romantic Paradox 10). Similarly, Morse Peckham argues that Wordsworth is a pure example of what he calls "Analogism." He explains that in this mode of thought "psychological or emotional adaptation to the natural world was felt to be a necessary preliminary, a kind of rehearsal, for the adaptation of the total organism and of society to the structure of nature" (25). He further defines this emotional state: "One saw through the phenomenon of

nature into the divine noumenon (or ultimate reality) that lay behind it. And at the same time, one released the nonumenal Self from the bondage of the phenomenal Self, the personality and the work of social roles" (25). But importantly, Peckham argues that nothing could be done with such an experience: "No morality could be derived from it; no metaphysic which could be used as a guide to action could be deduced from it. It was pure contentless experience" (25). He concludes that Analogism "deprived the Object of all substance, turning it into a mere transparency," and that since Analogism offered no basis for action, "it was reduced to the status of a mere psychological experience, of a value-state, not of a value-ground, which was what was needed" (25). Peckham, then, recognizes an unrest in the poetry of Wordsworth, but he does not attempt to pursue his theory in reference to specific poems or to delve more deeply into the importance of considering this unrest in order to gain a more nearly complete knowledge of Wordsworth's poetry and its implications.

At the beginning of the century, A. C. Bradley perhaps best identified this tension that lies at the heart of Wordsworth's poetry. Discussing the "visionary feeling" that Wordsworth describes so often in The Prelude, Bradley concludes: "The visionary feeling has

here a peculiar tone; but always, openly or covertly, it is the intimation of something illimitable, over-arching or breaking into the customary 'reality.' Its character varies; and sometimes at its touch the soul, suddenly conscious of its own infinity, melts in rapture into that infinite being; while at other times the 'mortal nature' stands dumb, incapable of thought, or shrinking from some presence 'Not uninformed with Phantasy, and looks / That threaten the profane'" (134). In other words, Wordsworth is constantly fluctuating between a positive mood in which, as he explains in "Tintern Abbey" (Lyrical Ballads 114), his eye is "made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy" (48-49) and a negative mood in which, as he professes in The Prelude (1805), his brain works "with a dim and undetermined sense / Of unknown modes of being" so that over his thoughts there hangs "a darkness, call it solitude / Or blank desertion" (1.419-22).

In one of the most influential studies of Wordsworth's poetry written during the past few decades, Geoffrey Hartman develops and extends the implications of the tension others have identified as inherent in Wordsworth's poetry. He suggests that for Wordsworth the Imagination is a "supervening consciousness." Hartman explains: "The effects of Imagination are always

the same: a moment of arrest, the ordinary vital continuum being interrupted; a separation of the traveler-poet from familiar nature; a thought of death or judgment or of the reversal of what is taken to be the order of nature; a feeling of solitude or loss or separation" (Wordsworth's Poetry 17-18). In brief, Hartman argues that the Imagination, rather than that which effects an immediate sense of unity and order, often forces a "consciousness of self raised to apocalyptic pitch" (17). But the consequence of this consciousness is the corresponding poem itself, which is a reaction to this consciousness as well as its expression. The poem thus becomes an attempt to alleviate the fears born out of the Imagination's interaction with natural phenomena. Hartman concludes that Wordsworth's hope is that "Nature will suffice the energies of consciousness" (18). In other words, Hartman suggests that Wordsworth constantly senses a breach between the self and the external world, a fear that man finally is unable to consummate his relationship with the external world because he is, as Yeats suggests, a dying animal, subject to decay, confusion, and imperfection. Hartman further argues that behind Wordsworth's poems lies "a secret consciousness" that man and nature are growing apart and

that "the gap between them, whether a historical error or a providential test, already verges on apocalypse" (337). Hartman warns: "The burden of this secret consciousness in Wordsworth should not be underestimated. It is he who stands between us and the death of nature; and this is also the truest justification for the 'egotistical sublime' [Keats's phrase] in his poetry" (337). Wordsworth is struggling to "personally fasten or new-create the links between nature and the human mind" (337). But, as Hartman argues throughout his study, the Imagination, which is the key to the reconciliation process, can also threaten self-consciousness, suggesting the very annihilation of selfhood. Hartman's contention is that critics have failed to recognize the importance of this apocalyptic tendency to a true understanding of Wordsworth's poetry.

Hartman's conclusion is well founded, for scholars tend to concentrate on Wordsworth's optimistic creed that man and nature are suited to each other, and certainly such emphasis is understandable. Wordsworth's intent, as evidenced in his greatest poems such as "Tintern Abbey" and The Prelude, is to sing the promise of this consummation. Yet, as Hartman demonstrates, we should be careful not to overlook the fact that there lies within Wordsworth's poetry a sense of uncertainty,

a fear of man's position in creation, which stands in opposition to his basic optimistic creed.

And it is within the body of his most important poetry, that written between his early youth and the close of the 1805 Prelude, that Wordsworth repeatedly constructs patterns of images characterized by a juxtaposition of conflicting responses to external forms. These image patterns indicate a struggle within the context of these poems for the poet to realize a positive consummation between man and the external world and to discover the means for communicating such a realization to his readers. The poet's imagination plays upon his perceptions of incongruous experience and creates a powerful mode of poetic expression, a mode which is not fully appreciated or is mistaken for "sublime" passages in his poetry. These are passages which reveal image patterns best described by the aesthetic term grotesque.

Accordingly, my purpose in the following chapters will be to define the term grotesque, both demonstrating that my definition is appropriate to current literary and critical applications of the term and establishing a more specific "working definition" particularly applicable to Wordsworth's poetry; to consider the

function of the grotesque in the context of individual poems; and to argue the importance of the grotesque to our understanding of Wordsworth's poetry.

CHAPTER II

DEFINING THE GROTESQUE

Any attempt to consider the grotesque in Wordsworth's poetry requires that the term grotesque first be understood. Such an understanding is difficult: the word has been used rather loosely and often is confused with other similar terms, such as the "horrible," the "ugly," or the "bizarre." Geoffrey Harpham, in his recent On the Grotesque, concludes that the term "remains elusive despite the fact that it is unchanging" and adds that "most curious of all, it has no history capable of being narrated," for artists created the grotesque "avant la lettre," often being innocent of the concept of the word" (xvi). The treatments of the term are so varied that one tends to take an attitude similar to that of Mario Praz who, in attempting to deal with the terms "Romantic" and "Classic," complains that "they creep quietly in again and are always obtruding themselves, elusive, tiresome, indispensable," and even after defining them carefully one finds that "in spite of all his laborious effort he discovers that he has been treating shadows as though they were solid substance" (1). Harpham warns that

contemporary usage of the term is so "loose that the word is in danger of losing all meaning," even though "the grotesque, in endlessly diluting forms, is always and everywhere around us--and increasingly invisible" (xx-xxi).

In her study of the varied uses of the term, Frances K. Barasch notes that the word is extremely popular in our own time, yet "the uses of 'grotesque' differ remarkably from each other because the critics employing them have in mind separate historical traditions for the use of the word" (The Grotesque 10). She rightly suggests that because modern uses are so varied, one must use the term in a limited sense as it applies to his own sphere of study. And such usage does appear to be the inevitable result of any effort to define a widely used aesthetic term whose meaning changes continually as new generations consider the term in relation to their own interests and norms. But Barasch herself realizes that most uses of the term share certain common characteristics, and, accordingly, she undertakes a historical survey of the uses of the term, primarily between 1500 and 1800. Although she is unable to offer a final definition, she does conclude that the grotesque is an established aesthetic category (The Grotesque 164).

Fortunately, a number of modern scholars have undertaken to study the various uses of the term in an attempt to derive a final acceptable definition of the word which can be broadly applied to individual artists. The most comprehensive and significant studies to date are those by Wolfgang Kayser, Arthur Clayborough, Lee Byron Jennings, Michael Steig, and Geoffrey Harpham. Although none of these studies attempt to claim "the definition," they do, as Steig argues, "point to the need for a comprehensive psychological definition" (253). He also rightly concludes that the ultimate test of a definition of course remains its usefulness in considering specific works (260). What follows is a brief overview of these important studies which will provide the necessary background against which to consider the grotesque as the term specifically applies to Wordsworth's poetry.

Kayser's study of the grotesque is the most comprehensive one yet attempted. Employing a historical approach, he undertakes to consider individual expressions of the grotesque in order to gain a more concrete perspective of a term which "seems to be one of those quickly cheapened terms which are used to express a considerable degree of emotional involvement," but without offering "a qualitative distinction beyond the

rather vague terms 'strange,' 'incredible,' and 'unbelievable,'" (17). After considering the etymology of the word "grotesque," he traces the extension of the meaning of the term from its use in tangible contexts (such as ornament, figure, or landscape) to its acceptance as a general aesthetic category marked by certain common characteristics. He, like Barasch and Steig, argues that the grotesque can only finally be understood within the context of the individual work in which it is expressed, but he nevertheless argues that the grotesque is characterized by forms which appear to us as alien. That is, forms suddenly appear as inhabiting realms which are ominous. But he carefully stresses that it is our natural world which is estranged, that our world must suddenly appear transformed; we become aware of an "ominous tension." He explains: "We are so strongly affected and terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world. The grotesque instills fear of life, rather than fear of death (184). Thus, Kayser stresses that the grotesque is "primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe" (185).

Kayser realizes that his explanations are somewhat vague, but unavoidably so. Admitting that the grotesque

is experienced only in the act of reception, he acknowledges that the grotesque depends upon a context; some frame of reference acts as a norm against which to determine the effect of a given object (181). For example, if an object usually perceived as normal or attractive suddenly is perceived as alien to its assigned state, it can become ominous. Thus, an insane person can be grotesque, for "human nature itself seems to have taken on ominous overtones. Once more it is as if an impersonal force, an alien and inhuman spirit, had entered the soul" (184). He notes that an object or living creature becomes grotesque when it appears monstrous: it must exhibit characteristics that are unfamiliar and unnatural. He sums up the nature of the grotesque in a brief clause: "THE GROTESQUE IS THE ESTRANGED WORLD [his capitals]" (184).

Kayser qualifies his suggestion that the grotesque is the estranged world by explaining that the elements perceived must <u>suddenly</u> appear strange and ominous. Surprise and threat are essential. He notes that the world of a fairy tale could be regarded as strange and alien, yet "its world is not estranged, that is to say, the elements in it which are familiar and natural to us do not suddenly turn out to be strange and ominous" (184). Thus, Kayser argues that the perceiver must be

caught unawares. It is as though the world being perceived turns upon the perceiver.

Kayser concludes that the "creator" of grotesques has no advice that he can follow. His use of the word "creator" is significant, for it stresses Kayser's obvious belief that the grotesque is a creation, that it is born out of the perceiver's imagination. He finds that the creative process is at the heart of the grotesque: "the estranged world appears in the vision of the dreamer or daydreamer or in the twilight of the transitional moments" (186). And he specifically argues that in the Romantics, and later in the Surrealists, "this vision takes hold of 'real' things and seeks to create enduring forms" (186). But the attempt to find an enduring quality in the "real" forms, the forms we regard daily in our natural world as normal, is not done deliberately: "It may begin in a gay and carefree manner--as Raphael wanted to play in his grotesques. But it may also carry the player away, deprive him of his freedom, and make him afraid of the ghosts which he so frivolously invoked". (187). However, Kayser does argue that in a successful artistic creation, another kind of feeling may arise: "In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have power to

estrange it, the truly artistic portrayal effects a secret liberation. The darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, the incomprehensible forces challenged. And thus we arrive at a final interpretation of the grotesque: AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD" (188).

It should be carefully noted that Kayser does not suggest that the creator of the grotesque successfully subdues the "demonic aspects of the world." He may discover ominous powers at work and sense that they lurk behind the forms of the natural world, but he does not subdue them finally. He may seem to triumph over them initially, because he is playing and does not realize consciously that they may lead him to sense demonic forces that are frightening and alien, that cannot be explained or laughed away. Although Kayser does not develop this idea, he appears to suggest that the role of laughter or the comic in the grotesque may vary depending upon the success of the artist; the more the creator recognizes the demonic forces, the less comic his grotesque creations become.[1] For as Kayser stresses, the creator of the grotesque suddenly finds

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[1]As I shall discuss shortly, this idea seems to originate with John Ruskin.

himself caught unawares, and the form or forms being perceived suddenly may turn on him.

Clayborough's approach to defining the grotesque is, like Kayser's, a psychological one; he senses that one cannot avoid considering the effects of certain contexts on the perceiver. Clayborough suggests that the central idea involved in the various senses of the term grotesque is "that of incongruity, of a conflict between some phenomenon and an existing conception of what is natural, fitting, etc." (70). However, he carefully argues that incongruity does not necessarily produce the grotesque. There must also be involved a sense of strangeness, but a strangeness not in the sense of merely unfamiliar (as playing with a "strange" tennis racket), but rather "incongrously strange" in the sense Kayser has noted: that which is directly opposed to our own normal world (70-71).

But Clayborough takes issue with Kayser's emphasis on the perceiver of the grotesque being frightened or repulsed: "This revulsion, however, is not our only emotional response to such art. . . . In any case, it would clearly be going too far to say that we do not wish to <u>experience</u> a world which upsets natural standards" (71-72). Thus, he suggests that there is a "curiosity value" in the grotesque and that

grotesqueness is not synonymous with ugliness. The grotesque can and often does exist without the introduction of deformity and without "monstrous" phenomena. So, grotesqueness "may lie in the juxtapostion of objects" (72).[2]

Clayborough's argument leads him to a rather detailed consideration of the psychological tendency in human nature to seek a relationship between contiguous objects. He is fascinated by the quality of juxtaposition which he finds inherent in grotesque art. Admittedly drawing on Jungian theories, he distinguishes between two kinds of attitudes of mind which must be considered in examining the grotesque: There is a practical "progressive" aspect of mind that characteristically rejects deliberate juxtapositions as pointless or struggles to establish a logical connection between them. But there is also a "regressive" aspect of mind that "luxuriates in their inexplicable 'significance'" (73). Clayborough asserts that Keats's famous remark about "negative capability," written in his letter to George and Thomas Keats (21 Dec. 1817), admirably describes the regressive attitude:

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[2]Coleridge had suggested this idea in his lecture "On the Distinction of the Witty, the Droll, the Odd and the Humourous," (1818): "When words or images are placed

> . . . Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason--Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge.
>
> (Letters of Keats 193)

But Clayborough is also careful to point out that every personality contains both aspects of mind. However, a mind may at times be more regressively or more progressively inclined. The rational, progressive aspect of mind occurs when the conscious impulses of the mind are dominant. The regressive aspect of mind occurs when the unconscious mind dominates (79-80). Clayborough further distinguishes between "positive" and "negative" art, suggesting that positive art is that in which the progressive and regressive impulses find satisfactory expression in the same objectification so that there is not inner conflict between impulses. Negative art finds no such removal of inner conflict, and thus the art tends to express a claustrophobia, a rejection of the physical surroundings that imprison the artist. The grotesque, then, is negative art, for the

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in unusual juxtaposition rather than in connection, and are so placed merely because the juxtaposition is unusual--we have the odd or the grotesque. . . ." Coleridge did not elaborate.

unresolved conflict of impulses is at the heart of the grotesque (81). Fear, then, is an inevitable aspect of the grotesque, for the perceiver is torn between conflicting impulses and is unable to resolve the tension.

Jennings, like Kayser and Clayborough, determines that the grotesque "always displays a combination of fearsome and ludicrous qualities [his italics] - or to be more precise, it simultaneously arouses reactions of fear and amusement in the observer" (10). But Jennings further stresses that the "seemingly contradictory tendencies are combined in the phenomenon itself and . . . the mechanism of their combination is the key to its understanding" (11). This leads him to consider that the disturbing quality of fear is combined with the relieving quality so often associated with the comic. He concludes that it is reasonable to deduce that "there is a disarming mechanism at work [his italics]" (14). Applying this idea to particular writers, Jennings demonstrates that the disarming mechanism of the ludicrous acts upon the fearsome forces so that these forces appear to be defeated, though actually "the playfulness is constantly on the verge of collapsing and giving way to the concealed horror" (16). Thus, Jennings arrives at a conclusion similar to that of

Clayborough: there is not a final resolution of conflicting inner impulses, even though such a resolution may superficially be expected.

Michael Steig undertakes to review previous attempts to define the grotesque and then to synthesize these definitions and arrive at a more nearly complete definition. He is careful to distinguish between the uncanny and the grotesque. The uncanny, like the grotesque, creates uncertainity within the mind of the perceiver, but it does not offer a defense, for "the grotesque involves the arousing of anxiety by giving expression to infantile fears, fantasies and impulses" (258). Steig suggests that what distinguishes the grotesque from the purely uncanny is that in the latter defenses against anxiety are weak, "while in the grotesque the threatening material is distorted in the direction of harmlessness without completely attaining it" (258). Thus, the result is that "the defense is still only partially successful, in that it allows some anxiety to remain, and characteristically will even contribute to the arousing of some anxiety" (258). Thus, like Jennings, Steig concludes that the comic aspect helps to disarm the fearful aspect. The uncanny is managed by the comic (259). But again the defense is not completely successful and "an unresolved tension is

the most common result, because of the intraphysic conflicts involved" (260).

Harpham's recent study of the grotesque develops some of the concepts of the previously mentioned theorists, and he too stresses that the grotesque is characterized by unresolved inner conflicts and that no final resolution of these conflicts occurs. He argues that when "we use the word 'grotesque' we record, among other things, the sense that though our attention has been arrested, our understanding is unsatisfied" (3). Thus, he agrees that surprise and unresolved tension are common to the grotesque. He particularly emphasizes that the grotesque exists naturally within our world, that we recognize something real with the grotesque image we perceive, that "in the midst of an overwhelming impression of monstrousness there is much we can recognize, much corrupted or shuffled familiarity" (5). His argument, then, is that the grotesque is not merely fantasy, but contains truth in an new guise, a chance to "achieve striking insights" (12).

Harpham observes that the grotesque "often arises in the clash between the 'virtuous' limitations of form and a rebellious content that refuses to be constrained" (7). Like Clayborough, then, he argues that the grotesque both attracts and repulses, that most

grotesque images "are marked by such an affinity/antagonism, by the co-presence of the normative, fully formed, 'high' or ideal, and the abnormal, unformed, degenerate, 'low' or material" (9). Considering examples from a number of artists and writers, he concludes: "In all the examples I have been considering, the sense of the grotesque arises with the perception that something is illegitimately in something else" (20). This sense that incongruities are somehow congruous, he argues, forces the perceiver to a reaction, perhaps to express repulsion or to disarm anxieties through apathy or the injection of the ludicrous. But, he contends, before we have either dismissed the grotesque image as meaningless or have "broken through to that wordless knowledge (which the namelessness of the grotesque parodies), we are ourselves in 'para,' on the margin itself" (20). He explains that the grotesque involves a paradox, for it contains the low and the high, the demonic and the holy: "Our ability to perceive images as grotesque may be the emblem of original sin, marking our once and future intimacy with the divine, and our present alienation from it" (19).

His contention is that the grotesque is not merely negative, that it can have a positive reaction, that if

we resign ourselves to life in a fallen world, "we can see that grotesque forms present great opportunities for the imaginative intellect, for they are pre-eminently interpretable" (19). For Harpham, the mystery, the unresolved, offers a springboard for the imagination, a chance to sense something inherent in and yet beyond ourselves. He suggests that while we are in the paradoxical, the grotesque can approach the holy.[3] However, the vision is a fleeting one. It is, he maintains, "a preludial condition which diminishes in the act of comprehension" (20).

At this point, a summary and a synthesis of the key points developed by the preceding theorists should prove useful in considering what is involved in the grotesque as we presently understand the term:

1. An individual perceives the forms of the natural world imaginatively and is <u>suddenly</u> aware of an incongruity, the result of objects being juxtaposed in ways which are opposed to our standard contexts (although this perception may or may not be particularly "monstrous") An estranged world is perceived.

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[3]Harpham is apparently influenced by Carl Skrade's <u>God and the Grotesque</u>. Skrade argues that grotesque images in our culture "point non-rationally and irrepressibly beyond themselves to the still real experience of a holy Nothingness, a reality, whose

2. A progressive, rational aspect of the perceiver's mind (born of the conscious mind) rejects these juxtapositions as pointless or struggles to establish a logical connection between them, while at the same time a regressive, imaginative aspect of the perceiver's mind (born of the unconscious mind) luxuriates in the juxtaposition and feels no need to establish final truths.

3. A tension occurs within the perceiver's mind as a result of these opposing impulses.

4. Attempts to alleviate tension are only partially successful and, paradoxically, may even contribute to increasing anxiety.

5. This increasing anxiety due to one's inability to disarm unresolved tensions may be positive because it can effect a realization of man's inability to discover truth through conventional methods and yet can excite our imaginative intellects to seek truth in new ways, without feeling the need to resolve tensions.

These points, carefully developed by prominent theorists, do satisfy the need, identified by Steig and others, for a comprehensive definition that can serve as

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freedom and force shape our present and may open up our futures in spite of our rationalistic system building" (14). I shall be considering Skrade's comments in more detail in Chapter V.

a broad basis for considering an individual artist's use of the grotesque. But as Barasch suggests, any attempt to consider the term in relation to an individual requires that it be used in a limited sense as it specifically applies to the artist. Happily for the specific purposes of my study, the individual who undoubtedly played the most important role in the development of these modern theories,[4] John Ruskin, does specifically mention Wordsworth in his comments on the grotesque. (Ironically, the later theorists who based so much of their considerations on Ruskin apparently have paid little attention to Ruskin's comments about Wordsworth and the grotesque.) Being a near contemporary of Wordsworth, Ruskin was quite familiar with the poet. His comments about the grotesque and about Wordsworth indicate that he understood an important aspect of Wordsworth's poetry virtually ignored by modern critics, and his remarks bear directly on the ideas currently developed by Steig, Harpham, and others regarding the grotesque. And, in league with the ideas developed by Harpham and others,

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[4]To my knowledge, all of the major theorists dealing with the grotesque rely on the classic statements about the true nature of the grotesque made by Ruskin in The Stones of Venice and Modern Painters. I shall discuss Ruskin's comments in detail momentarily.

Ruskin's insights help provide the necessary limited use of the term as it specifically applies to Wordsworth. Furthermore, no one appears to have surpassed Ruskin's understanding of the true nature of the grotesque.

Ruskin argues that there are two forms of the grotesque in art, "noble" and "ignoble," and that in almost all cases they are composed of two elements: the ludicrous and the fearful. If the ludicrous element prevails, the grotesque becomes more "sportive," but if the fearful element prevails, the grotesque is more "terrible." However, he notes that in almost all incidences of the grotesque, both elements are combined in some degree so that the grotesque can never be considered as either purely sportive or purely fearful; there will be shades of both elements present (Stones 3: 151). The noble or true grotesque, Ruskin explains,is developed when "a man of naturally strong feeling is accidentally or resolutely apathetic," whereas the ignoble or false grotesque is developed when "a man naturally apathetic is forcing himself into temporary excitement" (Stones 3: 168). Because the man of naturally strong feelings is apathetic when the grotesque develops, he is not seeking a serious state of excitement. He is rather involved in "recreation," but the "horror" he suddenly senses "comes upon him whether

he will or not; that which is expressed by the other [a man naturally apathetic] is sought out by him, and elaborated by his art." Thus, Ruskin contends that the true grotesque develops involuntarily; there is a sudden realization of something fearful or horrible. He continues: "And therefore, also, because the fear of the one is true, and of true things, however fantastic its expression may be, there will be reality in it, and force" (Stones 3: 168). The true grotesque, then, is born out of reality. Ruskin, in fact, defines the grotesque as symbolic and suggests, as Harpham later develops, that the grotesque image simultaneously involves and repudiates our traditional limits of form. "A fine grotesque," Ruskin asserts, is "the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in a bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way" (Modern Painters 3: 132).

Ruskin distinguishes between four types of "playfulness" that may be expressed in the noble grotesque, arguing that "the highest and healthiest state which is competent to ordinary humanity appears to be that which, accepting the necessity of recreation, and yielding to the impulses of material delight springing out of health and innocence, does indeed

condescend often to playfulness, but never without such deep love of God, of truth, and of humanity, as shall make even its lightest words reverent, its idlest fancies profitable, and its keenest satire indulgent." This form of playfulness, that may be expressed in the noble grotesque, he calls "those who play wisely." He continues: "Wordsworth and Plato furnish us with perhaps the finest and highest examples of this playfulness; in the one case [Wordsworth], unmixed with satire . . . (Stones 3: 153). Thus, Ruskin suggests that those who play wisely, and Wordsworth is a fine example, are those who are most capable of producing the highest form of true grotesque. Although Ruskin does not attempt to discuss specific examples from Wordsworth, he apparently did recognize that Wordsworth's poetry offered one of the best examples of the noble grotesque in a non-satirical form.

Ruskin also explains that this highest species of playfulness "is evidently the condition of a mind, not only highly cultivated, but so habitually trained to intellectual labour that it can bring a considerable force of accurate thought into its moments even of recreation" (Stones 3: 153). He acknowledges that only a few human beings reach this state of mind, and that these individuals "hardly ever speak through art except

seriously; they feel its nobleness too profoundly, and value the time necessary for its production too highly, to employ it in the rendering of trivial thoughts" (Stones 3: 153). Thus, the images they produce can never be altogether ludicrous, but rather "so far as their minds can recreate themselves by the imagination of strange, yet not laughable, forms, . . . we find them delighting in such inventions, and yet a species of grotesques thence arising in all their work, which is indeed one of its most valuable characteristics . . ." (Stones 3: 156). The noble grotesque, which Ruskin associates with Wordsworth, is not dominated by the ludicrous or comic.

Ruskin determines, then, that "the mind, under certain phases of excitement, plays with terror, and summons images which, if it were in another temper, would be awful, but of which, either in weariness or in irony, it refrains for the time to acknowledge the true terribleness" (Stones 3: 166). Like Clayborough, Ruskin recognizes that the mind both rejects and luxuriates in the juxtaposition of images. But "the master of the noble grotesque knows the depth of all at which he seems to mock, and would feel it at another time, or feels it in a certain undercurrent of thought even while he jests with it" . . . (Stones 3: 166). Harpham's

contention that "the sense of the grotesque arises with the perception that something is illegitimately in something else" (9) is in agreement with Ruskin's explanation of the noble grotesque as employed by artists such as Wordsworth.

Like the later theorists, Ruskin also stresses that the grotesque is not simply something strange or uncanny, but rather it must be our own world of reality that is transformed. The true grotesque is not mere fancy or make believe: "It is not as the creating, but as the seeing man, that we are here contemplating the master of the true grotesque. It is because the dreadfulness of the universe around him weighs upon his heart that his work is wild; and therefore through the whole of it we shall find the evidence of deep insight into nature. His beasts and birds, however monstrous, will have profound relations with the true" (Stones 3: 169).

In Modern Painters Ruskin further comments on the true grotesque, suggesting that it arises not only from the play of the artist's imagination and from the accidental contemplation of terrible things, but also from the confusion of the imagination by the presence of truths it cannot wholly grasp. The true grotesque does not lead the artist to a resolve, but rather leaves the

artist in a state of tension or partial confusion. Ruskin argues that "it seems not only permissible, but even desirable, that the art by which the grotesque is expressed should be more or less imperfect" (3: 138). In other words, the grotesque is by nature imperfect. Rather than creating a final sense of unity and perfection, the grotesque effects a sense of disjointedness, of incongruity, and yet there is something profound, and perhaps even pleasurable, in this not reaching after a final perfection.

In connection with his idea that the true grotesque is imperfect, Ruskin makes a careful distinction between the sublime and the grotesque, a distinction which is especially relative to this study, not only because a comparison between the two terms is useful in understanding the nature of the grotesque, but also because a distinction must be made to avoid confusing the sublime passages of Wordsworth's poetry with the grotesque passages. Ruskin suggests that in times of rest, when our minds are rightly in tone, we "seek with most avidity . . . that which rises out of the contemplation of beauty or of terribleness" (Stones 3: 165). The height and tone of our feeling, he argues, governs whether we see beauty or terribleness in noble or inferior forms: "The more noble the man is, the more

impossible it will be to confine his thoughts to mere loveliness, and that of a low order" (Stones 3: 167). The most "Divine beauty" and "terribleness coequal with it in rank" are the subjects of the highest art: the sublime. An "inferior or ornamental beauty, and an inferior terribleness coequal with it in rank" are the subjects of grotesque art (Stones 3: 165). Thus Ruskin argues that both the grotesque and the sublime contain contrasting aspects of beauty and fear. However, there is a crucial difference between the sublime and the grotesque, as Ruskin explains: "Now, so far as the truth is seen by the imagination in its wholeness and quietness, the vision is sublime; but so far as it is narrowed and broken by the inconsistencies of the human capacity, it becomes grotesque" (Stones 3: 181). The grotesque, being imperfect, does not yield a vision of wholeness nor a sense of unity with our natural world, but rather bears a fragmented vision.

In his own discussion of the sublime, a prose fragment entitled "The Sublime and the Beautiful," Wordsworth himself acknowledges that a person may not always be able to perceive objects in nature in a unified way with "exaltation or awe," but nevertheless, "it is of infinite importance to the noblest feelings of the Mind and to its very highest powers that the forms

of Nature should be accurately contemplated . . . and that we understand the several grand constitutional laws under which it has been ordained that these objects should everlastingly affect the mind" (Prose Works 2: 350). He further explains that the sublime contains a sense of individual form or forms, a sense of duration, and a sense of power: "The whole complex impression is made up of these elementary parts, & the effect depends upon their co-existence" (Prose Works 2: 351). He carefully explains that

> the only way in which such an object [a mountain] can affect us, contemplated under the notion of duration, is when the faint sense which we have of its individuality is lost in the general sense of duration belonging to the Earth itself. Prominent individual form must, therefore, be conjoined with duration, in order that objects of this kind may impress a sense of sublimity. But in works of Nature, it is not so: with these must be combined impressions of power, to a sympathy with and a participation of which the mind must be elevated--or to a dread and awe of which, as existing out of itself, it must be subdued.
>
> (Prose Works 2: 351-52)

Wordsworth's argument, then, is that for the mind to experience a sense of the sublime, not only must it realize individual form conjoined with duration, it must also be able to elevate itself to realizing a sense of power, or it must successfully subdue itself to a fear or awe that is beyond itself and therefore unknowable. But, he admits, "the capability of perceiving these

qualities, and the degree in which they are perceived, will of course depend upon the state or condition of the mind, with respect to habits, knowledge, and powers which is brought within reach of their influence" (Prose Works 2: 353). The sublime can occur only when the mind is not at war with itself; a complete sense of unity is experienced, as Wordsworth explains: "For whatever suspends the comparing power of the mind & possesses it with a feeling or image of intense unity without a conscious contemplation of parts, has produced the state of mind which is the consummation of the sublime" (Prose Works 2: 353-54).

The grotesque, as defined by Ruskin and the modern theorists, does, like the sublime, involve a sense of beauty and of fear in an object or objects, but unlike the sublime, the grotesque does not involve a sense of duration, but rather a sense of mutability, decay, transformation, uncertainity. The perceiver is unable to elevate his mind to a proper understanding of the power he senses or to subdue his mind to a sense of power beyond himself. The mind is in conflict with itself, the regressive and progressive aspects of mind are at war. In his discussion of the sublime, Wordsworth identifies another state which occurs if the sublime is not attained: "But if that Power which is

exalted above our sympathy impresses the mind with personal fear, so as the sensation becomes more lively than the impression or thought of the exciting cause, then self-consideration & all its accompanying littleness takes the place of the sublime, & wholly excludes it" (Prose Works 2: 354). This is an extraordinary remark, for although Wordsworth does not attempt to assign a term for such a state, he clearly does reveal his realization that there is a state in which the mind, in considering an external form involving beauty and fear, is so affected by a recognition of incongruity and a resulting sense of fear that it will not be able to attain a sense of unity and duration, but rather will shrink back upon itself. The state is remarkably similar to what Ruskin and the modern theorists term the grotesque!

With these broad psychological explanations argued by Ruskin and the modern theorists serving as a background, I now offer a more limited, specific definition of the grotesque particularly applicable to my study of Wordsworth's poetry. This "working definition" is intended to offer as clear an understanding as possible of the particular sense in which I shall be using the term grotesque in my following chapters:

The grotesque is a pattern of images which projects an abnormal, unattractive perception of a natural form or forms against a normal, attractive perception, the result being a sudden awareness of a threatening, incongruous world.

CHAPTER III

THE GROTESQUE IN THE EARLY POETRY OF WORDSWORTH

In book 8 of The Prelude (1805), Wordsworth, age thirty-four, looks back to the circumstances under which he wrote his youthful poetry (that written before age twenty-three) and confesses that it was Nature, not man, that dominated his "affections and regards."[1] And more specifically, he acknowledges that to him man was subordinate to Nature, "to her, her awful forms / And viewless agencies--a passion, she, / A rapture often and immediate joy." For the young poet, it was the awe-inspiring and invisible forms of the external world which attracted him, and as he developed his poetic interests, he determined to give these forms a "visible shape." He conformed his "poetic faculty" to "the works of art. / The notions and the images of books" and cast upon "these shapes of human life / A wilfulness of fancy and conceit." Attracted to the awful and viewless forms of the natural world, Wordsworth began to associate

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[1]My references in this paragraph are to lines 472-586 of The Prelude, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth et al. (cited in List of References). All subsequent quotations from the poem in my text refer to this edition.

these forms with images drawn from his early readings. The result was, as he explains, that "Nature and her objects beautified / These fictions, as, in some sort, in their turn / They burnished her." The young poet became obsessed with imaginative portrayals based on the real forms of nature but colored by his own "fancy" so that from "[touch] of this new power / Nothing was safe": the elder-tree that he recalled growing beside the charnel-house "had then / A dismal look, the yew-tree had its ghost / That took its station there for ornament." In short, his youthful fancy was not satisfied with the ordinary; only the extraordinary would do: "The tragic super-tragic, else left short." Ghosts and ghoulish forms fascinated him, becoming ornaments of his descriptions of nature.

And as his youthful poetry and prose reveal, such an early interest in the "tragic super-tragic," the dark forms born of his imagination, became natural to him, haunting his mind by day and frequenting his dreams by night. In his earliest extant prose writing, a fragment written at age fourteen, he confesses his childhood dreams of such strange forms of terror: "Nay since the hours when in my bed with closed eyes I saw perpetually rising before me the face of [?] horses as wild as Lions have the forms of [?Men] been [?dear] to me The half

formed visions [?of] the long processions of solemn terror been dear [to] me" (Prose Works 1: 7). In short, it appears that Gothic, grotesque forms were natural to Wordsworth's mind and interests even in youth[2], and these forms continued to haunt him as he developed into a young poet, dominating much of the imagery of his first long sustained poem, The Vale of Esthwaite, and blossoming into more mature, effective image patterns in his first published poems, most importantly in An Evening Walk. Specifically, grotesque images based on natural forms but frequently colored by association with fictions drawn from his readings appear first, particularly in The Vale of Esthwaite, as artificial, imitative grotesques (the "ignoble grotesque" in Ruskin's language) but develop, as the young poet struggles to find his own unique poetic voice, into more natural, creative grotesques (Ruskin's true or "noble grotesque"). And these grotesque image patterns reveal much about Wordsworth's poetic development; they threaten to fragment and skew his youthful poetic vision

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[2]Moorman notes that in his early youth Wordsworth's favorite readings were tales of travel, romance, and adventure which "accustomed his imagination to strange and even terrifying sights" (9). Later, as a student at Hawkshead, he read widely from poets of the "gothic 'and sentimental' school generally" (51).

or to unify and direct his poetic expressions and responses to the external world of forms.

As numerous scholars have demonstrated, Wordsworth's interest in Gothic images is a product not only of his fancy, but also of his historical milieu and poetical heritage. The late eighteenth century produced an array of English writers, major and minor, who were fascinated by supernatural terrors, and Wordsworth's early poems are frequented by allusions to these writers, especially his immediate poetic predecessors. In her extensive study The Insistence of Horror: Aspects of the Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Poetry, Patricia Meyer Sparks convincingly demonstrates that numerous poets of the eighteenth century, many of whom Wordsworth repeatedly imitated, employed supernatural horrors regularly in their poetry. Warton, Collins, Gray, Anne Seward, and other major and minor poets preceding Wordsworth found vital poetic resources in legends of ghosts and in demonic forces. In fact, tracing the development of the "unpleasant supernatural" up to the era of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Sparks concludes: "The problem of the supernatural's role in poetry, then, by this time had to do with function rather than propriety" (108). Paul Sheats agrees, arguing that the early poems of Wordsworth point to

"conditions imposed upon that genius by its historical milieu" and suggests that in The Vale of Esthwaite the "Gothicisms" and similar effects found throughout the poem "had been assiduously cultivated, furthermore, by poets and critics of 'romantic' sensibility since the beginning of the century" (7). He also asserts that Wordsworth inherited the assumption that lyric poetry was expected to eschew reason and indulge in the irrational (8). Émile Legouis, biographer of the young Wordsworth, traces in detail the Gothic influence of Thomson, Collins, Gray, Pope, Burns, and others on Wordsworth's style and subject matter (120-47), and Robert Aubin demonstrates that Wordsworth's first published poems had more than one hundred and fifty poetic forbears establishing their genre (217-19). James Averill, stressing forms of human suffering inherent in the early poems, notes Wordsworth's interest in "objects of distress" and suggests that he is heir to Steele, Richardson, Sterne, and others in his penchant for the "juxtaposition of suffering and calm forms" (13). E. H. King demonstrates that the descriptions of graves and corpses in Beattie's The Minstrel were "quite consciously" used as models for images in Wordsworth's early poems (3-29).

But while scholars have documented the many Gothic and horrible/supernatural allusions and influences permeating Wordsworth's early poetry, they have not appreciated the appearance of the grotesque images in these poems, although they have sensed that there is something unique, suggestive of early genius, alive in the image patterns of Wordsworth's early poetry which haunt the mind and arrest the eye. Wordsworth himself gives the clue to this uniqueness, the trait of his images which separates them from the ordinary and which is essential to his grotesque image patterns at their best. In a letter written in 1801, he looks back to his first published poems and concludes: "They are juvenile productions, inflated and obscure, but they contain many new images and vigorous lines" (Letters Early Years 327). This description parallels the comment made to Isabella Fenwick when he recalled that at age fourteen he became conscious for the first time of "the infinite variety of natural appearances" apparently unnoticed by previous poets and "made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency" (Poetical Works 1: 319).

What Wordsworth apparently recognized was that the quality of his early poems rested not upon his artificial imitations of the poetic traits of his predecessors, but rather on his ability to see more

deeply into the life of things, to observe with a keener eye the variety of natural forms; to portray as no other poet had done new images based on actual glimpses of the real world, even if these images were of a dark, fearful nature. Frederick Pottle has recognized this unique quality and has demonstrated that Wordsworth's struggle to achieve his unique expression appears most clearly in An Evening Walk, a poem which Pottle suggests enables us "to see a powerful and original genius grappling with the problem of poetic idiom" (112). Pottle notes, in fact, that perhaps the chief problem of the poem is that Wordsworth "wants to present everything through an image" (115), but he crucially recognizes that Wordsworth's descriptions of nature, though they may make a parade of botanical or geological knowledge, really have nothing to do with such knowledge and that the poem's real subject, like all successful descriptive poetry, is not the natural object, but rather man's "inner life, the motions and changes of which, in some mysterious fashion may be symbolized by the elements of landscape" (120). He continues: "And perhaps it does not become successful even then. It must realize the precise quality of this mental life which is its subject matter and not only select its symbols but direct them" (120). Pottle concludes that An Evening Walk is often

too obscure because his form and subject matter were not clear to Wordsworth (129). The poet is overwhelmed by images without having a sense of how to select and focus these image patterns toward some recognizable truth.

Wordsworth's early poetry does demonstrate that he is struggling to find his own poetic voice, to convey something of importance which he intuitively realizes is born out of an interaction between the beautiful, pleasant forms of nature and the frightful, unpleasant forms which haunt his own mind and which he senses have their roots in the natural world as well. But his early poetry primarily fails to achieve an effective poetic idiom, relying too heavily on "stock" Gothic image patterns which do not realistically express his own perceptions because these patterns are too subjective, too allusive: they lack a profound relation with the real world of daily experiences and thus fail to achieve an expression natural not only to Wordsworth, but to others as well. Yet as the young poet's genius develops in these early years, he does move toward a true expression of the tension he senses between forms of beauty and forms of fear, and this expression is achieved for the first time in the grotesque image patterns appearing in passages of An Evening Walk. From the fragmented, obscure grotesque image patterns of The

Vale of Esthwaite, Wordsworth moves toward a subtle, fine expression of the grotesque, embodied in natural appearances, which speaks of and to humanity.

As previously mentioned (see pages 35-42 above), Ruskin suggested that Wordsworth was a master of "fine grotesques"; he was able to create the "noble" grotesque because even when he was not attempting to derive great truths from the forms of nature, these forms suddenly caused horror to come upon him whether he wished it to or not. The result is that because the fear is of true things, "there is reality in it, and force." The true grotesque appears in the works of artists such as Wordsworth, Ruskin explains, because "the dreadfulness of the universe around him weighs upon his heart" and causes his works to contain "evidence of deep insight into nature. His beasts and birds, however monstrous, will have profound relations with the true." The early poetry of Wordsworth does show an artist who primarily fails to create the true grotesque, that poetry being as Wordsworth recognized, too often inflated and obscure. The early poetry shows Wordsworth's genius developing so that he begins to leave behind the artificial Gothic forms which he inherited and moves to create the kind of fine grotesque images Ruskin realized had "profound relations with the true." Representative grotesque

images from the early poems serve to demonstrate that the early "ignoble" grotesque image patterns eventually become "noble" grotesque image patterns which are, using Ruskin's terms, "symbols thrown together in a bold and fearless connection of truths."

The Vale of Esthwaite is the best example of the young poet's early attempts at expressing grotesque images, although these images are of an inferior or ignoble quality, and as already established, are based upon Wordsworth's early readings, at least primarily so. As Clifford Siskin demonstrates, many of the Gothic images of this youthful poem appear scattered throughout Wordsworth's poems of the 1790s, and the poem shows his usual pattern of struggling to "qualify the insistent Gothicism of his early works by reconciling the mind's imaginative impulses to the solidities of landscape" (13). Yet it is the grotesque image patterns of the poem, apparently ignored, which perhaps reveal the most about Wordsworth's interaction with nature and the subsequent poetic responses to the clash of his inner world of self with the external world of nature.

The poem begins with the speaker observing the mountain vale in all of its beauty, noting the glassy lake, the rainbow, the shepherd's dog, and other such

pleasant images. But almost immediately, the speaker chooses to leave that scene for darker haunts:

> At noon I hied to gloomy glades,
> Religious woods and midnight shades,
> Where brooding Superstition frown'd
> A cold and awful horror round.[3]

In this new environment, supernatural forms appear: druids with glaring eyes and a mysterious "loud genius" that "shoots from the cliff in robe of white" (38). Already these beings appear inflated and obscure. If, as Wordsworth confesses in The Prelude, these images are drawn from early readings, they remain too obscure to identify, and they fail to communicate any truth with which the reader can identify. He compares this apparition to "strange forms" that are often seen around castle moats, white and tall apparitions that "stand straight against the coal-black wall" (41-42). If the poet is attempting to create a grotesque image, which he apparently is, by sharply contrasting this fearful object with the calm beauty of the vale, he fails to do so, for the image lacks graphic detail and offers no concrete relation to a generally recognizable form.

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[3]Lines 25-28 as printed in Poetical Works 1: 270-83. All quotations from The Vale of Esthwaite are from that text and hereafter will be cited parenthetically by line numbers.

And so the speaker continues, wandering by a "Gothic mansion" and along a "swampy way," hearing the dismal sounds of "Spirits yelling from their pains" and the "sighs" of his own harp as suddenly "Aghast he views, with eyes of fire, / A grisly Phantom smite the wire" (46-64). Finally, fancy, like lightning, "Shot from wondrous dream to dream" (65-66). The image patterns are broken; the grotesque figures are too imperfect to create genuine response, even from the poet himself, who shifts abruptly from image to image, apparently with an inclination to portray horrible, grotesque forms, but lacking the necessary poetic skills. Fancy seems to control the speaker; this personified faculty of the speaker's mind appears repeatedly in the poem. The speaker moves back and forth from descriptive scenes of natural beauty to Gothic scenes dominated by images created by the fancy rather than actually observed in reality. For example, "fancy's rays the hills adorn" as the speaker roves as through "an Eden vale / The ade maze of some tender tale" (178-80). He views "the dismal gloom / Of haunted Castle's pannel'd room" and sees a ghostly figure, its "face of wan and ashy hue," and other similar Gothic forms, after which he admits: "But these were poor and puny joys / Fond sickly Fancy's idle toys" (268-69), as though he himself

recognizes the failure of these forms to carry any true purpose or meaning: they are "sick" and "idle toys," mere whimsical playthings from his fancy.

The poet's own description of his grotesque forms coincides strikingly with Ruskin's description of the creator of the ignoble grotesque: "a man naturally apathetic is forcing himself into temporary excitement" (Stones 3: 168). The speaker here, like Ruskin's creator of the ignoble grotesque, does not effectively reveal a horror that comes upon him involuntarily and which has reality and force of truth in it (the noble grotesque), which expresses truth symbolically because the grotesque images produce a series of fearful symbols that are of reality and which express this reality. Rather, the grotesque image patterns here are forced upon nature but are not of it. They are watered-down forms of horror.

The poet concludes the poem nonchalantly, casually saying farewell to the fantastical forms of horror he has called to mind:

> Adieu, ye forms of Fear that float
> Wild on the shipwreck of the thought,
> While fancy in a Demon's form
> Rides through the clouds and swells
> the storm. (546-49)

He seems to regret turning from his fancy back to dull reality:

> While Fancy loves apart to dwell
> Scarce thro' the wicker of her cell
> Dares shoot one timorous winking eye
> To chear me drooping on my way
> And that full soon must I resign
> To delve in Mammon's joyless mine. (554-59)

One can sense in these lines the young poet's apathetic awareness of his youthful inconsistencies and extravagancies. He is not what he should be: a man speaking to men. Rather, he is a subjective youth indulging in his own delightful fantasies.

Thus while The Vale of Esthwaite clearly indicates Wordsworth's interest in grotesque forms, it further reveals his inability to create a fine grotesque image which will serve some useful purpose in his poetic creations. Idle fancy, not genuine imagination, controls the poet's vision, and as he himself later discusses, fancy is an inferior faculty which fails to bring the full force of truth to poetic creations. Rather, fancy seeks to determine affinities between objects, to make playful associations rather than to create a sense of truth which will continue to grow. Wordsworth's explanation of the idleness of creations of the fancy as compared to the imagination appears in nutshell form in his Preface to Poems (1815): "Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our Nature, Imagination to incite and to support the eternal" (Prose Works 3: 37). The grotesque images in

The Vale of Esthwaite rely too heavily on associative creations in which the poet subjectively calls to his mind forms which delight him, or have delighted him in past readings. His confession in book 8 of The Prelude that his early poems are made up too often of images associated with his readings, a tendency for the tragic super-tragic inherited from his literary predecessors, is confirmed clearly in The Vale of Esthwaite, as it is in most of the early poems, where similar Gothic forms appear (although not so frequently as in The Vale of Esthwaite).[4] Nature itself is not enough for the young poet; dark, supernatural forms break in upon his attempts to describe nature. His mind is too active to be bound by the chains of reality. He, like so many great creative artists, senses some truth that lies behind the world of external forms.

Wordsworth continued throughout his writing of the early poems to search for the poetic idiom by which he could truly express and understand his own natural interest in grotesque forms and reconcile this interst with his love of nature, and finally with his love for humanity. His first two long published poems,

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[4]For a brief but insightful discussion of the Gothic forms which appear throughout Wordsworth's poetry of the 1790s, see Sisken (cited in List of References).

Descriptive Sketches and An Evening Walk, appeared in 1793. Both poems reveal his continuing use of allusive Gothic forms and his creation of ignoble grotesque images. They demonstrate that a tension continues to haunt Wordsworth's perception of the world and that he is hard pressed to reconcile the conflicting opposites which he intuits within himseslf and within nature. It remains for Wordsworth to find his poetic idiom, and it is in An Evening Walk that for the first time he suddenly and surprisingly comes upon one significant framework of that idiom, a poetic expression embodied in grotesque image patterns that appears repeatedly in the later poems of the Great Decade.

An Evening Walk,[5] a loco-descriptive poem, continues Wordsworth's interest in the infinite variety of natural appearances which he felt other poets had not satisfactorily expressed, although he does not attempt to adhere to an exact portrayal of actually observed appearances from a particular walk. Instead, he chooses to create an historical/fictional walk, which is a blend

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[5]Unless otherwise noted, subsequent quotations from the poem refer to the excellent reading text of the 1793 ed. printed in An Evening Walk, ed. James Averill (cited in List of References). I quote from the 1793 edition because it offers a more useful text for appreciating Wordsworth's poetic development than do the later revised versions Wordsworth published.

of images recalled from his readings of travel books and from his own numerous outings, but not necessarily true to actuality. In later years he carefully stresses this aspect of the poem in his note to Isabella Fenwick about An Evening Walk: "I will conclude my notice of this poem by observing that the plan of it has not been confined to a particular walk, or an individual place; a proof (of which I was unconscious at the time) of my unwillingness to submit the poetic spirit to the chains of fact and real circumstance. The country is idealized rather than described in any one of its local aspects" (Poetical Works 1: 319). It is not his desire to write a realistic "guidebook" poem, but rather to use natural appearances blended with his own imaginative creations to convey poetic truths. Characteristic of the great poetry of his later years, An Evening Walk depends upon recollections rather than upon real circumstances. The grotesque patterns which develop in the poem, as we shall see, are "heightened" images in which the imagination plays with real forms of the natural world to create a fine grotesque.

The poem again evidences a tendency to rely too heavily on other poets for poetic expression and inspiration. His notes to the poem identify Tasso, Spenser, Thomson, Burns, and others as direct sources

for his own lines, and the poem alludes frequently to passages from Shakespeare, Milton, Gray, Collins, Goldsmith, and others. But the poem also shows the poet keeping his eye on natural objects more closely than ever before, and it demonstrates a new awareness of the potentiality of these forms for developing Wordsworth's own poetic idiom. Again, he is drawn toward contrasting forms of beauty with forms of fear. The dark, demonic forces continue to haunt his mind, although he dwells less frequently on traditional Gothic forms, turning instead to natural forms as he recalls them from his own imaginative observations and recollections.

The speaker begins by observing "fair scenes" which he revisits after an extended absence, these scenes having been part of his childhood haunts. He recalls that during childhood "hope itself was all I knew of pain," but confesses that even then "wild impatience" would cause him to forsake contentedness (17-36). Thus, he recognizes that the idle tale of man is depicted even in "the dial's moral round," the passage of man's life through time, and that "still, the sport of some malignant Pow'r, / He knows but from its shade the present hour" (41-42). Wordsworth's poem begins by establishing a tension created by his perceptions of

both the pleasant world of nature as he remembers it from childhood and a malignant power in nature which he sensed even as a child but now experiences more vividly as a young adult.

The speaker then continues, determining not to dwell on idle pain, but rather to show "some joys" by relating the "history of a poet's ev'ning" (51-53). But although the speaker vividly describes pleasant noonday images of glimmering streams and quiet glens, dark images haunt even these recollections: he also recalls "inverted shrubs" clinging from rocks, "pale wood-weeds," and "wither'd briars"--images which are subtly grotesque in nature, suggesting abnormality, sickness, and decay in contrast to the healthy greenery of the countryside. Even as the young poet attempts to keep his eye on nature, nature itself provides images which threaten his pleasant observations.

Deserting these image patterns, the poet shifts abruptly from noon to evening, and from the glen to a walk along the base of a precipice, where "slant wat'ry lights" cheer its "naked waste of scatter'd stone / By lychens grey, and scanty moss o'ergrown" (93-95). These images of a wasteland are followed by pleasant images of "golden light," and "boughs and leaves like threads of gold" (99-104), followed by picturesque images of

peasant troops winding along mountain roads and the sounds of humble chapel bells. Again, the poet shifts suddenly, describing a cock, or rooster, which he notes is brought to his mind from his reading of Tasso, mentioning its "spur clad," "nervous feet" and its "black and haggard eye-ball" (131-33).

The key point here, and one which seems to have gone unnoticed in this poem, is that image patterns consistently shift from pleasant, descriptive images to dark, subtle grotesque patterns characterized by fearful images which suggest death, decay, waste, and abnormality. It is as though the poet cannot fix on objects of nature without juxtaposing pleasant perceptions with dark, fearful ones. And the pattern, in fact, is established at the beginning of the poem when the speaker first announces that he will forget about a "malignant Pow'r" which haunts him and will turn instead to relate the joys of evening, which he cannot completely accomplish because the grotesque images suddenly surface, breaking apart the harmony of the pleasant images and forcing the poem into fragmented patterns of discordant images.

The poet continues in this fashion, following descriptions of the beauty of a sunset with a description of a druid monument the speaker suddenly

encounters, and the poet lapses into his Gothic indulgences, reminiscent of The Vale of Esthwaite, where "strange apparitions mock the village sight" and a "desperate form appears, that spurs his steed, / Along the midway cliffs with violent speed" (178-80). The speaker again shifts to another scene as he strays long the "glowing lake" with all its attendant beauties and encounters a swan which he loves to view closely as a creature of "Obsequious Grace" who swells his chest and with towering wings appears "Stately, and burning with pride." He is a "moveless form of snow," calm and peaceful. Near him the female swan, representative of "tender Cares and mild domestic loves" is surrounded by her cygnets at play, who rest alternately in her wings' embrace (200-17).

But suddenly, these images of calmness, serenity, domesticity, natural harmony, and grace are juxtaposed with images of the swans as awkward, lewd, theatening, and inharmonious with nature: "Thence issuing oft, unwieldly as ye stalk, / Ye crush with broad black feet your flow'ry walk" (231-32). Safe from the distant sound of the hunter with his dogs and mellow horn, the swans ungracefully submerge themselves, stirring up the thick bottom of the lake: "At peace inverted, your lithe necks ye lave, / With the green bottom strewing o'er the

wave" (235-36). The contrast is striking: the beautiful, pure swans suddenly appear as demonic forces; their pure snow-white graceful forms have given way to black, crushing feet which actually destroy the beauty of the flowers, and their graceful necks and bodies have become inverted, bringing up the muck from the lake's bottom and scattering it through the water. The swans have become grotesque creatures, threatening forms which "stalk" and "crush" and "strew" nature.

This pattern of images brings to full force the earlier patterns of the poem which contrast hopeful forms of beauty with dark, fearful forms of decay and disruption. For the first time in his early poetry, the young Wordsworth has successfully abandoned imitative Gothic images and has expressed a dark tension through natural images drawn from his own unique perceptions of nature. He has created, in Ruskin's terms, a "fine grotesque" which serves to highlight the incongruity of the natural world, to demonstrate how through nature he is affected not just by beauty, but also by fear as he imaginatively perceives his world. And these images have a profound relation with reality; they are not merely super-tragic forms created by the fancy which have no real grounds in the external world. The grotesque qualities of the forms are naturally inherent

in the forms themselves: a part of nature herself, but dependent on the perceiver's "inner eye" for full effect. That is, the perceiver selects and focuses the images to create a juxtaposition of opposites so that the images work in a pattern which brings about a fearful recognition of incongruity, a disharmony within nature. In short, the grotesque image patterns reveal an estranged world.

Furthermore, that this "swan passage" is important to the poem and to Wordsworth's development as a poet is suggested by his eager attempt to revise his poem almost immediately after its publication. Thanks to James Averill's recently published reading text of the 1794 version of the poem, the revision Wordsworth completed shortly after the 1793 published poem, we now are able to see that the poet significantly altered the wording fo this passage to heighten the grotesque effect. And he maintained this altered version consistently in his later revisions of the poem. In the expanded version of 1794, the swans again are portrayed as beautiful, graceful forms representative of harmonious domesticity. But as they issue out of the water, they are made to appear even more grotesque than they were in the 1793 version:

> Involve your serpent necks in changeful rings,
> Rolled wantonly between your slippery wings,

Or, starting up with noise and rude delight,
Force half upon the wave your cumbrous flight.[6]

The swans appear, with an even more heightened quality, as demonic and mutable. The "moveless forms of snow" are transformed into entangled snakes, repeatedly changing, rolling their serpentine necks wantonly between slippery wings (not wings which embrace the cygnets) suggesting lewdness, inconstancy, and threatened domesticity.[7] They are rude and noisy creatures, truly grotesque. The peaceful domesticity of family life is threatened by the disordered wantonness of the swans and by the sudden disruption of the natural scene, suggesting that one's intitial perception of the swans as representatives of familial love safe in their bastion of natural beauty is actually a facade. Nature has yielded to Wordsworth natural grotesques, and his

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[6]Lines 460-64 of the Expanded Version of 1794, published in Averill's edition (cited in List of References).

[7]This grotesque aspect of the swans has not been carefully observed. George Meyer, for example, recognizes that the lines depicting the grace of the swans are "most interesting," but he ignores the following lines which reveal their opposite traits, concluding that Wordsworth's "interest in the swans is great only [my italics] because they symbolize perfectly the domestic bliss and security of which he and his sister had been deprived and for which they ceaselessly yearned." (55). Recent studies continue to ignore the

juxtaposition of the opposing qualities of these forms creates incongruity, a recognition of a tension inherent within the forms of nature.

But then Wordsworth carries these images forward out of nature to man, which as Wordsworth so often discusses, is where nature ultimately led him: from nature to humanity. In both the 1793 poem and its later revisions, he follows the swan passage with a sudden shift to a portrayal of a female vagrant.[8] He imagines that if "some wretch" were to pass by the lake and see the swans in their apparent domestic bliss, she would call them blessed. But the human wretch is not herself blessed. She is vividly described as a suffering form who "faint, and beat by summer's breathless ray, / Hath dragg'd her babes along this weary way" (243-44). Her babes begin slowly to die: "--No more her breath can thaw their fingers cold, / Their frozen arms her neck no more can fold" (281-82). Finally, in the glare of a flash of lightning, the

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grotesque images of the swans. John Nichols, for example, discusses only those lines which depict the grace of the swans, concluding that they represent natural beauty (235).

[8]I again follow the 1793 text here and in subsequent references.

mother horribly sees that her children have died in her arms, frozen in death: "No tears can chill them, and no bosom warms, / Thy breast their death-bed, coffin'd in thine arms" (299-300). The story of the female vagrant ends with the grotesque image of the frozen infants.

Characteristically, the poet shifts again to descriptions of the many beauties of the natural world (301-27). But his fancy takes over and he associates the soft light of the sunset with the light of Spenser's Una, casting over all "a religious awe" and lighting the darkening evening shadows. As the evening falls away, this fairy-like world becomes discordant; dark and light vie for control: "--'Tis restless magic all; at once the bright / Breaks on the shade, the shade upon the light: (345-46). Darkness prevails and destroys the dreamy vision: "Unheeded Night has overcome the vales, / On the dark earth the baffl'd vision fails" (363-64). The tension perceived between the worlds of light and dark creates a like tension in the poet's mind, which he extends to all of humanity: "And ever, as we fondly muse, we find / The soft gloom deep'ning on the tranquil mind" (383-84). The moon rises, again breaking the gloom of the dark night, and the poet realizes that a light likewise shines within himself to illuminate his dark thoughts: "Thus Hope, first pouring from her

blessed horn / Her dawn, far lovlier than the Moon's own morn" (407-08). And so he concludes that the light of hope will cheer him on through life's dark moments until his sighs of pain are "hush'd into the tranquil breast of Death" (420-23). The lonely sounds of a mill-dog's howl and the yells of a lonely hound follow him as he concludes his evening walk. The tension of the poem, embodied from the beginning in the contrasting of hopeful forms of beauty with fearful, threatening forms of nature and intensified by the grotesque image patterns of the swans and the female vagrant, is not finally resolved.

In An Evening Walk, then, Wordsworth consistently employs a framework of contrasting images, and the grotesque image patterns inherent in nature which he suddenly comes to realize (embodied most forcefully in the swan family) are associated with humanity (embodied in the female vagrant family), leading him to seek moral and psychological meaning from these grotesque images. They are not artificial forms based on imitative, ignoble grotesque images, but rather have profound relations with human reality. In short, the grotesque images become symbols of humanity. His perception of natural grotesque images leads him to a perception of the incongruity of human existence, to the reality of

starvation as opposed to domestic bliss, to an awareness of impending gloom and death as opposed to earthly joys. The grotesque image patterns in An Evening Walk, especially Wordsworth's images in the 1794 revision depicting the grotesque swans, show a significant development in Wordsworth as an original poet. He had stressed in his note to Isabella Fenwick (see page 63 above) that he had been unwilling "to submit the poetic spirit to the chains of fact and real circumstance." And as the image patterns of the "swans" passage reveal, he had also been unwilling to be satisfied with traditional poetic images, such as those he had inherited from the Gothic writers.

The passages of the poem which continue to haunt the mind of the developing young poet are those passages containing images which contrast tranquillity and fear, the normal and the abnormal, the light and the dark of experience. It is those images of frightening incongruity fostered by his synthetic imagination which interest the young poet. And his sudden association of these haunting forms with the fearful realities of poverty and death suggests that Wordsworth is struggling to unify and direct his perception of something inherent both in nature and in man. He has only begun to focus his poetic vision, but he has taken an important step

toward discovering his own unique poetic idiom. Through his careful juxtaposition of original image patterns in An Evening Walk, particularly as they appear in his striking revision of the 1793 version, Wordsworth reveals his developing ability to employ grotesque image patterns to express to his reader an awareness of a dark presence inherent in perceptions of nature and man, a presence which suggests that a total poetic vision must not only celebrate natural beauty and joy and light--it must also seek to illuminate the abnormal and the fearful and the dark. The poet has come upon a powerful new means of expression that he will continue to develop in some of the best poems of the Lyrical Ballads volumes and which he will bring to perfection in The Prelude. He has humanized his perceptions of the grotesque and has directed them toward discovery. Wordsworth has not just taken an evening walk. He has embarked upon an original poetic quest.

CHAPTER IV

EXPERIMENTS WITH THE GROTESQUE: POEMS FROM THE LYRICAL BALLADS

Following the publication in 1793 of An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches, Wordsworth struggled to become a mature poet, seeking to find the inspiration necessary to releasing his poetic genius and the poetic voice essential for expressing his vision of man's relationship to the external world. But the years 1793-97 were stormy ones for Wordsworth: he suffered a number of crises which threatened to stifle his personal and poetic development. Mary Moorman suggests that from 1793 until his close relationship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1797, Wordsworth was in a continually agitated state of mind as a result of his dismay over the events of the French Revolution, England's war with France, his separation from his sister Dorothy, his love affair with Annette Vallon (who became the unwed mother of his child), and other personal problems, such as financial difficulties and the absence of any permanent home. As Moorman concludes, Wordsworth was on a "desperate search for a philosophy that would make life possible again" (279).

And he was also seeking to find the poetic voice by which he could establish himself as a great poet. He wrote little during these years, concentrating his efforts on revising and extending the poem Salisbury Plain, which he had written in 1793, and on The Borderers, a tragedy in blank verse begun in 1796 and rejected for production in 1797. Significantly, these works show Wordsworth continuing to dwell on Gothic themes of human suffering and on dark, frightening forms, such as the long-dead inhabitants he envisions on Salisbury Plain and the shrieking victims of Druid sacrifices, as well as the criminally deranged character Oswald in The Borderers. But neither of these works proved to be the mature poetic expression he was seeking. They failed because Wordsworth was too concerned with traditional Gothic trappings drawn from his early readings in fiction and because these works lacked the unique, personal poetic voice Wordsworth eventually recognized as suited to his character. As Wordsworth himself describes in The Prelude (1805), he was too distraught to achieve any true poetic inspiration, for he was dogged day and night by fears of impending doom and confusion. He confesses that in the years immediately following the horrors of the Great Terror in France, he was habitually haunted by grotesque visions

associated with the deeds of those men of "heinous appetites" who commanded the fall of the guillotine:

> Most melanchloy at that time, O friend,
> Were my day-thoughts, my dreams were miserable;
> Through months, through years, long after the
> last beat
> Of those atrocities (I speak bare truth,
> As if to thee alone in private talk)
> I scarcely had one night of quiet sleep,
> Such ghastly visions had I of despair,
> And tyranny, and implements of death,
> And long orations which in dreams I pleaded
> Before unjust tribunals, with a voice
> Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense
> Of treachery and desertion in the place
> The holiest that I knew of--my own soul.
> (10.363-80)

As in his youth, Wordsworth was obsessed with visions of dark, demonic forces, and he was struggling to come to terms both personally and poetically with these haunting visions.

And in 1797, as he so beautifully reveals in The Prelude (bk. 11) and in "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth overcame his personal crises and regained his optimistic spirit and sense of poetic purpose, realizing that ultimately, "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her" ("Tintern Abbey" 123-24).[1] Settled at last with his sister Dorothy at Racedown, and in league

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[1]Unless otherwise noted, all of Wordsworth's poems, prefaces, and notes related to the Lyrical Ballads are from the edition by Brett and Jones, which makes available the text of Lyrical Ballads as it appeared in print in 1798 and 1800, together with the variant readings of the 1802 and 1805 editions. My interest

with his new-found friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge,[2] he embarked upon a fervent creative quest which led to the great poems of the Lyrical Ballads editions of 1798 and 1800. And a number of these poems, characterized by contrasting patterns of frightening, grotesque figures and forms with appealing, attractive images (as already evidenced in his more youthful poetry), demonstrate that Wordsworth was coming to a deeper and more complex awareness of the importance of fearful forms and scenes of visionary dreariness to his perception of man's vital interaction with nature. Specifically, a number of the most complex poems of the Lyrical Ballads, characterized by grotesque image patterns, demonstrate that Wordsworth continued to be drawn to forms which sparked a dark, alien vision, and these objects became the inspiration for image patterns which reveal Wordsworth's deepening consciousness concerning the laws by which man's imagination and nature act and react on one another.

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throughout is to study the poems in the freshness of their composition, not as revised by the poet in later years, in order to trace more accurately the development of the grotesque image patterns in Wordsworth's poetry.

[2]See Moorman 279-320 and Byatt 13-21 for discussions concerning Wordsworth's personal crises and his renewed hopes and inspiration fostered by Dorothy and Coleridge.

As Wordsworth emphasizes in his Advertisement to the 1798 edition of Lyrical Ballads, the majority of the poems "are to be considered as experiments," and he further explains that the poems are experiments in determining "how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure." He warns that readers might "have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness," but asks them to determine if the poems contain "a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents" (7). Critics have made much ado about these words over the years, debating how effectively Wordsworth did adopt the language of the common man and how experimental Wordsworth really was, not only in his use of language, but also in his use of the ballad form, or for that matter, how truly ballad-like his poems really are. For example, in his "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads," Robert Mayo attempts to demonstrate that the themes, subjects, and titles of Wordsworth's poems share much in common with fashionable magazine poetry of the 1790s, and thus he calls into question the experimental nature of Wordsworth's ballad experiment. W. P. Ker, in Form and Style in Poetry, demonstrates Wordsworth's debt to tradition in terms of meter and stanza form (227-33).

But as Stephen Parrish so thoroughly demonstrates in his The Art of the Lyrical Ballads, at "one level, of course, the experiments did involve poetic diction. But at a deeper level they were . . . experiments in dramatic form, in characterization, and in narrative technique" (83). Parrish correctly realizes that the poems are experimental and revolutionary on multiple levels and that the moral and psychological implications of the poems are boldly new and complex. Brett and Jones concisely strike at the heart of the matter: "Revolutions in poetic style, however, generally express a desire not only to write in a new way but to find the appropriate idiom for a new apprehension of the truth" (xxv). Certainly, as the plethora of critical studies indicates, and more importantly, as the Lyrical Ballads volumes demonstrate, the poems are revolutionary and experimental on a number of levels despite their obvious debt to literary tradition. And they experiment subtly on levels far beyond their overt attempt to determine new modes of poetic diction.

Yet the exact nature of the Lyrical Ballads remains elusive, as one would expect with poetry of genius, and particularly those poems which deal with forms of human suffering and descriptions of visionary dreariness seem to baffle students of Wordsworth's poetry. For while

poems such as "Tintern Abbey" and "Lines written at a small distance from my House" celebrate Wordsworth's renewed poetic inspiration and new-found faith, other poems within the Lyrical Ballads witness Wordsworth's continuing fascination with grotesque objects and people; poems such as "The Idiot Boy," "The Thorn," "To Joanna," and others--some which Wordsworth professed to be among his favorites[3]--do not envision a harmonious, sublime universe of being, but rather create unresolved tensions which reflect threatening and uncertain aspects of existence. These poems seem to defy the spirit of hope and faith evidenced in "Tintern Abbey" and elsewhere throughout Wordsworth's poetry.

While several scholars have remarked in passing on the grotesque nature of some of the figures portrayed in several of the poems (most notably, Hartman and Danby), only Rosemary Boston, in her brief article, "Some Forms of the Grotesque in Wordsworth," and Ronald Earl Morgan in his unpublished dissertation "The Relation of Romantic Grotesque Imagery to the Romantic Theory of Imagination," have attempted to consider the implications of the grotesque nature of figures, both

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[3]Wordsworth was particularly fond of "The Idiot Boy," "The Thorn," and "To Joanna," as I shall mention in later discussions of these poems.

animate and inanimate, which haunt certain poems of the Lyrical Ballads. While they provide some useful insights into several poems, neither of them has studied the magnitude of the appearance of grotesque image patterns within the volumes, nor has demonstrated that these bizarre forms continue a preoccupation with the grotesque that began in Wordsworth's youth and that has much to reveal about the nature of individual poems and about Wordsworth's developing poetic idiom and understanding of natural appearances.

The poems of the Lyrical Ballads which contain grotesque image patterns tell us much about Wordsworth's artistic development and about his subsequent growing awareness of the laws by which nature guides and directs the imagination of the sympathetic observer of natural phenomena. As certain individual poems reveal, Wordsworth began to become aware of how nature can foster a true understanding of the human condition, not only through a heightened appreciation of the harmonious beauty surrounding us, but also through an acute awareness of the grotesque forms of the natural world. Paradoxically, several poems from the Lyrical Ballads suggest that by 1798 Wordsworth had begun to realize that the grotesque forms which he had observed in nature and which threaten his synthetic, harmonizing

imagination, suggesting instead an incongruous world, are a vital part of his coming to an awareness of the power of the imagination in league with nature to recreate our perceptions and thus direct and inform our existence.

But readers often seem to misunderstand the paradoxical nature of Lyrical Ballads, although critics like Hartman, Averill, and Jacobus have been careful to trace the tensions and paradoxes inherent in the poems. Others, perhaps most notably Cleanth Brooks, have pointed to the irony and paradox within individual poems such as "A slumber did my spirit seal." Yet response to some of the best poems of the volume frequently has been cool, probably because readers fail to understand the nature of the experiment as Wordsworth perceived it; they respond to the volume as a whole, failing to consider the dramatic situation and unique purpose of each poem. Wordsworth's Advertisement to the first edition clearly demonstrates that he expected to be misunderstood, and early reviews of the poems confirmed his expectations. For example, in The Critical Review, October 1798, Southey asserted: "The 'experiment,' we think, has failed, not because the language of conversation is little adapted to 'the purposes of poetic pleasure,' but because it has been tried upon

uninteresting subjects" (rpt. Brett and Jones 320). In our own day, John Danby, himself a fine Wordsworthian scholar, concludes: "In spite of Wordsworth's place in the canon one cannot be sure he is nowadays read" (1). He further suggests that over the years Wordsworth "became part of the Wordsworthianism that has blanketed his poems and prevented them from being read, part of an urban cult of 'nature', or a chief witness against the spirit of Victorian doubt to a benevolent universe and man's place in it as a favourite son" (3). In short, Wordsworth has been read too often as a one-sided poet, particularly in the Lyrical Ballads. However, when correctly perceived both as individual experiments and as part of the developing body of the Lyrical Ballads volumes, the poems demonstrate that Wordsworth was learning how to perceive and was teaching others how to perceive the real world of forms on a new level. As Danby argues, Wordsworth's apparent "simplicity is an invitation to a new intimacy, a new discipline, and a new complexity" (26).

Realizing that his purpose and, in fact, that the very nature of his poems were not being understood, Wordsworth offered a Preface to the 1800 edition of Lyrical Ballads and extended it in 1802. This Preface, while often confusing and certainly subject to broad

interpretations, does tell us much about Wordsworth's purpose and the nature of his poetic experiments. Specifically, for the purposes of this study, several of Wordsworth's comments from the Preface provide an essential backdrop against which to consider those poems that contain grotesque image patterns.

In his Preface, Wordsworth explains that the principal object he proposed in the poems was "to chuse incidents and situations from common life" and to relate them in the language actually used by men, and also "to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way" (244). This explanation agrees with Coleridge's comments about what he and Wordsworth proposed to do in the Lyrical Ballads. In Chapter XIV of Biographia Literaria, Coleridge explains that he and Wordsworth agreed that "my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic" and that Wordsworth should "give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us" (2: 5-6). It is apparent that Wordsworth's aim was to demonstrate how the mind can act

and react with the world of forms around us to give us a new way of seeing: to perceive the usual world of everyday things unusually.

Wordsworth further explains that he would make this perception interesting by tracing in the incidents of common life "the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement" (245). Wordsworth's purpose, as he explained to Isabella Fenwick concerning his youthful poetry, was to relate the "infinite variety of natural appearances" which had been "unnoticed by the poets of any age or country," but not only to relate the variety of natural appearances but also to demonstrate the laws by which these appearances operate on our minds at certain moments. As Jacobus demonstrates, Wordsworth early on was attracted to the traditional supernatural ballad technique, such as he saw in the ballads of the German poet Bürger, but eventually, "the uncongenial values of the supernatural ballad led him to create a new kind of ballad emphasizing the importance of the everyday, of feeling rather than situation" (209). Jacobus argues that by his rejecting the balladry of his contemporaries and looking to the forms and figures of the common world, Wordsworth became a truly unique poet; his originality "lay in approaching the imitation ballad

from a startling anti-literary direction" (212). Geoffrey Hartman agrees, noting that "Coleridge's assigned duty in LB, to naturalize the supernatural, carries on the Romance tradition in lyrical form, whereas no clear prototype for Wordsworth's attempt has been found" (373). Danby stresses, like Hartman and Jacobus, that the Lyrical Ballads poems are unprecedented, and the result is that they create "a new mode of sensibility and a new non-septic manner of writing" (1).

Wordsworth's best-known words from the Preface about the nature of poetry bear directly on his interest in the laws of our nature and the manifestations of those laws through poetry. He explains that all good poetry "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of comtemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind" (266). As Wordsworth explains, feelings or perceptions from everday experiences are later recalled in the poet's mind, and these recollections are acted upon by the imagination, which in turn causes the original

tranquillity to disappear, and a feeling arises which is similar to the original exciting emotion. This second feeling, of course, is a more heightened poetic experiencing than the original experience because the initial emotion has been transformed by the poet's creative imagination and recreated into poetic expression.

Critically important here is the phrase "the tranquillity gradually disappears." The mind, in reacting to a remembered experience, loses its tranquil nature: the mind begins to experience tension. In a letter to Mrs. John Marshall, written when the Lyrical Ballads was going to press, Dorothy describes this state as she saw it exhibited in Wordsworth: "Williams health is by no means strong, he has written a great deal since we first went to Allfoxden, namely during the year preceding our going into Germany, while we were there, and since our arrival in England, and he writes with so much feeling and agitation that it brings on a sense of pain and internal weakness about his left side and stomach, which now often makes it impossible for him to write when he is in mind and feelings in such a state that he could do it without difficulty" (Letters Early Years 298).

The experience of the poet as Wordsworth relates it, and as Dorothy sees it through her brother, is a painful one, yet it is that experience which Wordsworth attempts to convey to his readers. But as he is careful to explain in his Preface, the experience ultimately should involve a feeling of pleasure. The poems "carry along with them a purpose," for "if we be possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated" (Brett and Jones 247). More specifically, Wordsworth states his purpose is "to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated [my italics] by the great and simple affections of our nature" (247). These statements suggest that Wordsworth's interest in natural forms has to do with the truth that lies within diversity: he is, as Clayborough associates with the creator of the grotesque, seeking a relationship between contiguous objects (see pages 26-27 above). The importance of the relationship for Wordsworth, however, has to do with the

varying states of the mind and with how a complexity of things frequents the mind. And these varying forms, through the combining power of the imagination, can bring about a new consummation between man and the external world. But they can also threaten man's harmonious communion with nature.

Wordsworth is careful to make a distinction between the nature of his poetry and that of other poets of his day. He stresses that in his poems "the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (248). His technique is to explore the subtle windings of the mind, not to force the reader into an artificial state of excitement, but rather to discover in the world of the ordinary inherent qualities which are not usually discovered but which nevertheless are vitally important. His purpose is to develop within his reader a new capability for perceiving: "For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability" (248-49). Wordsworth thus reveals that unlike his technique in much of the poetry of his youth,

he is avoiding artificial, supernatural images (the Gothic trappings so popular at the time), in favor of what he calls in the Preface "the company of flesh and blood" (250). He is grounding his poetic images and expressions in reality, the world of natural forms. And he is acutely aware that this real world contains incongruities: figures and forms of the natural world are both beautiful and unattractive, normal and abnormal, painful and pleasurable: "I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathize with pain it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure" (258).

The essential point is that Wordsworth's comments in the Preface show that he has not approached his poetic task lightly, but rather has selected carefully those combinations of images from the natural world which excite the mind of the reader subtly, yet on a heightened level. As Frederick Pottle argues, successful description of the natural world through poetry requires that the poet realize that the real subject matter is not the object, but rather is "man's inner life, the motions and changes of which, in some mysterious fashion, may be symbolized" and that the Poet "must realize the precise quality of this mental life which is its subject matter and not only select its

symbols but direct them" (Idiom 120). Wordsworth's Preface reflects his growing awareness of precisely this quality. In addition, Wordsworth records his awareness of the complexities of the natural world and challenges his readers to be aware of subtle, paradoxical relationships.

Wordsworth's comments bear a striking resemblance to Ruskin's comments about the creator of the grotesque. As previously discussed (see pages 35-42 above), Ruskin contends that the false or ignoble grotesque develops when a naturally apathetic man forces himself into temporary excitement. The result is that the grotesque he envisions does not have a true force of reality in it. Likewise, Wordsworth has come to realize, as the Preface shows, that "gross and violent stimulants" are unnecessary to excite the mind. True mental excitement, perception on a higher level, occurs in subtle combinations. His purpose is to keep his eye steadily on everyday figures and forms as they are colored in recollection by the imagination.[4] The result in the Lyrical Ballads is that Wordsworth experiments with seeing the world around him and with translating his vision into poetry. Ruskin's comments about the master

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[4]See pages 10-11 above for Pottle's comments about Wordsworth's "eye."

of the true grotesque apply quite well to many of Wordsworth's poetic undertakings in the Lyrical Ballads, for, to borrow from Ruskin, in the poems we "find the evidence of deep insight into nature. His beasts and birds [and we might add 'humans and natural objects'], however monstrous, will have profound relations with the true" (Stones 3: 169). As Wordsworth asserts in his Preface, one of the chief causes of successful poetry "is to be reckoned a principle which must be well known to those who have made any of the Arts the object of accurate reflection: I mean the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude." This principle is essential not only in poetry, but in the development of humanity: ". . . upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our taste and our moral feelings" (265). One important manifestation of this principle in the Lyrical Ballads is the grotesque image patterns which haunt many of the best poems.

In "Simon Lee," one of the poems of the 1798 edition employing grotesque images, the speaker addresses the reader:

> O reader ! had you in your mind
> Such stores as silent thought can bring,

O gentle reader ! you would find
A tale in every thing. (73-76)

The challenge here is clear: the reader must think, as Wordsworth stressed the poet should do, long and deeply before he can determine what the "tale" of this poem is. True to Wordsworth's explanations in the Preface, the poem depends not on action or situation, but rather "on the feeling therein developed." The facts he gives about Simon Lee develop in patterns, juxtaposing images of youth with images of old age. These patterns, which are grotesque in nature, make of Simon Lee an emblem, and it is this grotesque emblem which bodies forth the central concern of the poem. In the Preface of 1800, Wordsworth explains that in describing the incident of "Simon Lee" he is placing the reader "in the way of receiving from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are accustomed to receive from them" (248). The phrase "salutary impression" suggests that the poem should do more than provide "ordinary moral sensations"; if the reader understands the complexities of the poem, he will gain an impression that is "conducive to health" and which serves to "counteract a deleterious influence" (OED). In other words, the poem has moral implications, but they are in some fashion heightened beyond the level one would normally expect. This poem serves as a fine

illustration of how grotesque image patterns function within the context of an individual poem in the Lyrical Ballads, and it exemplifies the function of grotesque image patterns as they are employed in several other important poems in the 1798 edition. The grotesque image patterns work to heighten the feeling of the incident, and thus they play an essential part in projecting the salutary impressions the poet has in mind.

In his note on the poem to Isabella Fenwick, Wordsworth explains that "Simon Lee" is based on an actual incident he experienced. True to his plan, Wordsworth is recollecting a moment from real life, but as colored over by his imagination in memory. He notes that he has, "after an interval of 45 years, the image of the old man as fresh before my eyes as if I had seen him yesterday" (284). And as the note hints, the images of Simon, grotesque in nature, remain constantly before our eyes and bring to us a heightened awareness of incongruity. The first stanza of the poem establishes contrasts about his appearance and age:

> In the sweet shire of Cardigan,
> Not far from pleasant Ivor-hall,
> An old man dwells, a little man,
> I've heard he once was tall.
> Of years he has upon his back,
> No doubt, a burthen weighty;
> He says he is three score and ten,
> But others say he's eighty.

The juxtaposition between what he is or is not continues, but the patterns become more grotesque: "And, though he has but one eye left, / His cheek is like a cherry" (15-16). And in stanza five:

> And he is lean and he is sick,
> His little body's half awry
> His ancles they are swoln and thick
> His legs are thin and dry. (33-36)

These images of disease and old age are sharply contrasted with images of his youth: "No man like him the horn could sound, / And no man was so full of glee" (17-18); and in stanza six: "He all the country could outrun, / Could leave both man and horse behind" (41-42). We are told more of his poverty and the harsh realities of his existence in his declining years, and these facts are supported by visual images of Simon; his hunting feats "have him bereft / Of his right eye, as you may see" (25-26), and " . . . still, the more he works, the more / His poor old ancles swell" (67-68). In short, we are led to see clearly the difference between what Simon Lee once was and what Simon has become,[5] and the images of what he has become are made more graphic by highlighting his physical abnormalities. We are told

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[5]As Brett and Jones note, the text of this poem underwent numerous changes between 1798 and 1845, the object being to heighten this contrast.

not once, but twice, that he is bereft of one eye and that his ankles continue to swell. His deformed and pathetic state in old age, or apparent old age, stand out sharply against the backdrop of his physical prowess and joy in youth. We are led to envision the incongruities of his life, but subtly so, without overplaying.

The speaker then relates the incident: he sees Simon Lee attempting to sever the root of an old tree, but because of his weak condition, it is clear that his efforts are in vain. The speaker, with a single blow, severs the root, and Simon overzealously thanks him:

> The tears into his eyes were brought
> And thanks and praises seemed to run
> So fast out of his heart, I thought
> They never would have done. (97-100)

The result is that the incident moves the speaker to sadness:

> --I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
> With coldness still returning.
> Alas! the gratitude of men
> Has oftner left me mourning. (101-104)

The gratitude of Simon himself is pathetically sad, obviously because he demonstrates what man can become. But also, he demonstrates man's inhumanity to man: because of social conditions he is forced into poverty, and the gratitude that he should receive for his life of work has not come to Simon Lee. He stands as an example

of the plight of the aged and the poor who are so often forgotten by other men.

Thus, the poem has "salutary" overtones, and they work on more than one level. The grotesque image patterns in the poem, characterized by a juxtaposition of normal, attractive states of being with abnormal, unattractive states of mutability and decay, work to heighten the feeling of the situation and action of the incident because they bring together a combination of forms which contain subtle mixtures of fearful states of existence with joyful states of being. The end result is that Simon Lee becomes a grotesque figure in the imagination of the reader. The image of Simon, as Wordsworth relates in his note on the poem, remained vividly in the poet's inner eye of the imagination, and because of the grotesque image patterns in the poem, the effect is to leave a similar vivid, grotesque image of Simon Lee in the reader's mind. Ultimately, the poem has a distinct moral purpose, and the grotesque image patterns in the poem are there to add a heightened feeling of anxiety relative not only to Simon Lee, but also to the human condition. As Stephen Parrish suggests, the function of Wordsworth's art in the Lyrical Ballads is "to distance both poet and reader from reality in such a way as to transfigure painful or

shocking events and heighten their meaning" (14). Certainly, this is the effect of Wordsworth's image patterns in "Simon Lee."

"Simon Lee" makes us aware of how external forces--man's inhumanity, aging, etc.--can make life frightening; the grotesque images we are led to associate with Simon Lee are meant to instill within us a fear of life and its unknown, anxiety-producing possibilities. In other Lyrical Ballads poems, however, the grotesque image patterns which are affixed to our understanding of character reflect not only the threatening aspects of external forces, but also, and perhaps even more significantly, symbolize how these external forces affect us psychologically, fostering in us a power of mind which can make us grotesque beings ourselves. Poems such as "The Mad Mother" and "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" both dramatize and symbolize how our own responses to a frightening external world can cause us to become grotesque, psychologically abnormal human beings.

In his edition of Lyrical Ballads, Thomas Hutchinson suggests that several of the poems could be grouped together as curse poems. He describes three poems on which Wordsworth and Coleridge had collaborated --"The Three Graves," "Cain," and "The Ancient

Mariner"--as sharing a common trait: "a painful idea vividly and suddenly impressed upon the mind" (255). The poems are, as Hartman terms them, poems dealing with the "psychology of the imagination" (372). Hutchinson also suggests that two of Wordsworth's poems, Peter Bell and "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," likewise are curse poems. Within these curse poems, grotesque image patterns play an important role in Wordsworth's attempts to impress upon us the relationship between our inner state of being and the external world, or as ~~the~~ James Averill ~~poet~~ expresses it, "to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature"[4] ~~(see page 90 above)~~. "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" is an excellent example.

In his Advertisement to the 1798 Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth tells us: "The tale of Goody Blake and Harry Gill is founded on a well-authenticated fact which happened in Warwickshire"[5] ~~(p. 1)~~. Wordsworth's knowledge of the story came from Erasmum Darwin's Zoonomia, which he borrowed from Joseph Cottle in 1798[6] ~~(Moorman 284)~~. In the 1800 Preface, Wordsworth explains his intention in writing the poem: "I wished to draw attention to the truth that the power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous"[7] ~~(p. 161)~~. The

poem, like others of the Lyrical Ballads, is an experiment. It is an attempt by the poet to delve into how a single frightening image can shock the perceiver into a sudden awareness of his own decayed moral state; the result is that the internal, chilled moral condition becomes outwardly apparent in a visual, physical manifestation. In the poem the grotesque images affixed to Harry Gill objectify his inner decrepitude. A kind of "doctrine of correspondences," ~~reminiscent of~~ Renaissance ~~models~~, is suggested through the poem's image patterns; Harry Gill's physical disorder reflects his disordered soul.

The speaker begins abruptly, asking the reader to determine what has caused Harry Gill's problem:

> On! what's the matter? what's the matter?
> What is't that ails young Harry Gill?
> That evermore his teeth they chatter,
> Chatter, chatter, chatter still.

The poet's repetition of the word chatter mirrors the movement of Harry's teeth. The speaker then informs us that Harry is wrapped in fine flannel waistcoats (suggesting his wealth) but remains cold. And his teeth continue to "chatter, chatter still." As is usual in the grotesque image patterns Wordsworth creates, he is careful to contrast the abnormal, unattractive state with a previous normal, appealing condition:

> Young Harry was a lusty drover,
> And who so stout of limb as he?
> His cheeks were red as ruddy clover,
> His voice was like the voice of three. (17-20)

The speaker continues by introducing poor, aged Goody Blake, ill fed and thinly clad. She lives on a cold hillside and when the winter set in, "then how her old bones would shake!" But in the summer, she is warm, unlike Harry Gill who continues to be cold even in July. The speaker relates the plight of Goody Blake: her lack of fuel for her fire, her being forced to slip out at night and steal broken boughs and rotten wood from Harry's hedge, and finally, her being caught in the act by Harry Gill, who in his scrooge-like way had hidden in the cold to catch her. He grabs her fiercely and shakes her; her response is a prayer, eerily directed to the heavens by her outstretched hand:

> She pray'd, her wither'd hand uprearing,
> While Harry held her by the arm--
> "God! who art never out of hearing
> "O may he never more be warm!" (97-100)

Her curse is called down on Harry, and he turns away "icy-cold." And, of course, he remains cold. His condition instantly changes from a young, lusty, powerful man to a muttering, decaying hypochondriac. There is no indication that any supernatural force changed Harry; rather, the suggestion is that Harry's own imagination, somehow shocked into fear by the

withered hand and frightening prayer, has made him a grotesque figure:

> Yet still his jaws and teeth they clatter,
> Like a loose casement in the wind.
> And Harry's flesh it fell away;
> And all who see him say 'tis plain,
> That, live as long as live he may,
> He never will be warm again. (115-19)

The speaker ends with a warning aimed directly at those landowners of Harry's class: "Now think, ye farmers all, I pray, / Of Goody Blake and Harry Gill." The speaker's prayer at the end has the frightening, curse-like quality of Goody Blake's prayer, and the implication is clear. The poet is asking for humanitarian treatment for the underpriviledged, but a subtle, frightening threat accompanies the closing moral suggestion.[6] As in "Simon Lee," Wordsworth has employed grotesque image patterns to heighten the effect of the poem's salutary impression, but the grotesque features no longer apply just to a third-person character; they subtly threaten to inhabit some of the audience the poet addresses. The grotesque images project a frightful portrayal of a visual manifestation of man's inhumanity

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[6]It is certainly true that the poem is not aggressively frightening. A comic, mocking tone underlies much of the poem's language. Nevertheless, the very quality of the images and the reality of moral and physical decay intrude upon the comic tone. See note 8 below.

to man. It seems that the grotesque, withered hand of Goody Blake coupled with her simple prayer brought about a sudden realization within Harry that he psychologically projected into his outer appearance.

Wordsworth employs grotesque image patterns similarly in another poem of the 1798 edition, "The Mad Mother" (given the title "Her Eyes Are Wild" in 1815). In that poem, the speaker describes the mother as having wild eyes, sunburnt coal-black hair, and eyebrows that "have a rusty stain." She carries with her a baby and talks and sings to it. Her monologue reflects her insanity: "A fire was once within my brain; / And in my head a dull, dull pain" (21-22). And, as in previously mentioned poems, we learn that her present condition contrasts shockingly with her earlier state: she had been married and had a lovely child, but now the father has deserted her, caring no longer for her altered condition:

> Thy father cares not for my breast,
> 'Tis thine, sweet baby, there to rest:
> 'Tis all thine own! and if its hue
> Be changed, that was so fair to view,
> 'Tis fair enough for thee, my dove! (61-65)

James Averill's suggestion that Wordsworth "does not avert his eyes from wretchedness; quite the contrary, he seems fascinated by it" (10) certainly rings true in this poem. The sweet babe is pictured nursing at the

mother's breast, but in her maddened state the mother grotesquely tells of her past experience:

> And fiendish faces one, two, three,
> Hung at my breasts, and pulled at me.
> But then there came a sight of joy;
> It came at once to do me good;
> I waked, and saw my little boy. . . . (23-27)

In her insanity, the mother confuses the nursing child with friends pulling at her breasts, and in the closing sections of the poem, we see that she continues to confuse her child with evil forces:

> What wicked looks are those I see?
> Alas! alas! that look so wild,
> It never, never came from me. (86-88)

The effect of the grotesque image patterns here are like those in "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" in that the abnormal, frightening inner state of the character is graphically heightened by grotesque descriptions. The fiendish faces sucking grotesquely at the discolored breast of the insane woman are analogous to the dark, alien forces at work in her brain. And the poem also reflects the plight of the homeless poor, employing grotesque image patterns to heighten the feelings of the reader to make him simultaneously aware of both the ugliness of one segment of humanity and of the frightening power of the imagination to alter reality. It is a tension-producing poem, not meant to soothe the

reader, but rather to shock him into a heightened awareness of incongruous reality.

These poems from the Lyrical Ballads on the one hand clearly evidence what M. H. Abrams argues was the spirit of the Romantic age: the poets of the 1790s were motivated by the spirit of the French Revolution. They were social poets who were obsessed with the stark realities of their age (Rom. Reconsidered 28-43). But on the other hand, the poems vividly entail what Northrop Frye suggests: the real revolution of the age was in diction and in the location of archetypes in common life rather than in heroic life. Romanticism involves a revolution in poetic imagery (Rom. Reconsidered vii). Hazlitt's asssertion that the authors of the Lyrical Ballads were turning the world topsy-turvy, "a renewal of the world and of letters," and had founded a new school on "a principle of sheer humanity, on pure nature void of art" (Howe 162), is particularly true in these poems. Wordsworth's technique is to choose incidents from common life, relate them in simplified language, draw from these incidents a moral purpose related to humanity, and heighten the reader's feeling for humanity through carefully selected and directed grotesque image patterns. But his moral and psychological implications

are not simple, for while the poems suggest an overt moral lesson, they also subtly suggest a dark, alien world inhabited by haunting external figures and forms and by haunting powers of the imagination which threaten to confuse or even destroy us. While the poems attempt a positive moral purpose, they also instill a fear of life through their grotesque image patterns. And in other poems of the Lyrical Ballads, particularly "The Idiot Boy" and "The Thorn," Wordsworth experiments even more boldly with grotesque image patterns, and his search for his true poetic idiom becomes even more complicated.

Perhaps no poem in the Lyrical Ballads has received more harsh reader responses than "The Idiot Boy." Southey attached it sharply in the Critical Review, asserting that "no tale less deserved the labour that appears to have been bestowed upon this" (qtd. Brett and Jones 319). Coleridge also criticized Wordsworth's poem in Chapter XVII of Biographia Literaria, agreeing that "the author has not, in the poem itself, taken sufficient care to preclude from the reader's fancy the disgusting images of ordinary morbid idiocy . . ." (Shawcross 2: 35-36). Yet Wordsworth was particularly fond of the poem, as he relates in his note to Isabella Fenwick: ". . . in truth, I never wrote anything with so

much glee" (292). And he was quite sensitive to criticisms leveled at the poem, as his letter (1802) to John Wilson witnesses.[7] The problem at the heart of the poem seems to be the idiot boy: numerous readers have found him to be too disgusting, boring, or in poor taste, at least. But a few readers have appreciated the subtle humor inherent in the poem,[8] not only for the sake of laughter, but also for the mock-herioc technique Wordsworth employs. In short, the images of the boy, Johnny Foy, seem to arouse some tension: the reader is uncertain whether to enjoy the portrayal or to dismiss it as a bad joke.

Dowden's comment seems the most pertinent: "At rare times in his poetry Wordsworth shows an inclination for frolic: it is the frolic of good spirits in the habitually grave, and he cannot caper lightly and gracefully" (qtd. Danby 48). As previously noted, Ruskin identifies Wordsworth as an example of playfulness expressed in its highest state by the artist of the grotesque (see pages 35-42 above). Ruskin

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[7]I shall quote from the letter momentarily.

[8]See John Jordan on Wordsworth's humor, and Jacobus, pages 250-61, for an excellent discussion of Wordsworth's mock-heroic stance and sense of humor.

observes that the works of such artists do sometimes condescend to playfulness, "but never without such deep love of God, of truth, and of humanity, as shall make even its lightest words reverent, its idlest fancies profitable, and its keenest satire indulgent" (Stones 3: 153). Certainly, Wordsworth's comments in his letter responding to John Wilson's criticism of the poem suggest that Dowden and Ruskin understood the true nature of the poem as Wordsworth did. Wordsworth confesses: "I wrote the poem with exceeding delight and pleasure, and whenever I read it I read it with pleasure" (Letters 1: 355). But to this he adds:

> [It] is not enough for me as a poet, to delineate merely such feelings as all men do sympathize with but, it is also highly desirable to add to these others, such as all men may sympathize with, and such as there is reason to believe they would be better and more moral beings if they did sympathize with."
>
> (Letters 1: 358).

Wordsworth's intent is as he expressed it in the Preface: to write the poem with a purpose and to heighten the feeling of his reader.

But the nature of his experiment in the poem is unlike the previously discussed poems from the Lyrical Ballads. Wordsworth's use of grotesque images in "The Idiot Boy" is especially fraught with emotion, and he challenges his readers to rise with him to a new level of insight into how a common incident with accompanying

grotesque images can teach us much about human nature and, more specifically, about ourselves. In "The Idiot Boy," Wordsworth's simple and often humorous story of some unremembered acts of kindness and love have no slight influence on us, or at least so Wordsworth intended. As he suggests in his letter to John Wilson, the poem was written by a poet who perceives diverse, complex, and deeply personal feelings in an incident involving a retarded boy and his mother:

> It is there that we see the strength, disinterestedness, and grandeur of love, nor have I ever been able to contemplate an object that calls out so many excellent and virtuous sentiments without finding it hallowed thereby and having something in me which bears down before it, like a deluge, every feeble sensation of disgust and aversion.
>
> (Letters 1: 357).

For Wordsworth, at least, it appears that he was so moved by the nature of the relationship between a retarded child and a parent that the frightening, abnormal appearance of the retarded child was transformed into something almost holy. As Ruskin suggests, there seems to have been a deep love of God, truth, and humanity at work in Wordsworth, even in moments of recreation (see pages 35-42 above). In fact, in the letter to John Wilson, Wordsworth himself goes so far as to say: "I have often applied to Idiots,

in my own mind, that sublime expression of scripture that, 'their life is hidden with God'"[9] (Letters 1: 357). "The Idiot Boy" does, I believe, intend that we readers feel what Wordsworth describes in his letter to John Wilson, but what complicates matters for Wordsworth's effective communication of such feelings is the grotesque nature of the boy, which constantly threatens an alien vision and a skewing of our response.

The dramatic situation of the poem is simple: Betty Foy is forced by conditions beyond her control to send her retarded son, Johnny Foy, to fetch a doctor for a sick neighbor. The night is clear, the moon up, and Johnny must be on his way, despite his not being mindful of his purpose or the inherent dangers. He leaves and his mother worries and worries about him. He does not return on time, she seeks him throughout the night, he finally appears, and she learns that he has spent the night whiling away the hours idly in the moonlight. His only explanation for where he has been is: "'The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo, / 'And the sun did shine so cold'" (460-61). Throughout the telling of the story, Wordsworth does frolic: the humor in the poem is unmistakable and, as scholars have so carefully noted,

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[9]See Ephesians iii.9 and Colossians iii.3.

mock-heroic in nature (see Parrish, e.g. 88). The portrayal of Johnny is primarily gleeful. And all turns out for the best: the sick neighbor miraculously recovers, Betty Foy is overcome with joy, and Johnny is a happy boy.

But while simple and humorous on the surface, the poem is complicated in depth. The reader does not know until the end that the neighbor will simply recover or that Johnny has simply been off having fun. In fact, Wordsworth tediously spends nearly half of the poem telling us about all of the many mental contortions Betty Foy suffers worrying in a rather hen-like way about her boy (one could easily think the mother a greater idiot than her son, as Byron suggests).[10] Wordsworth's word selection often seems too harsh or repulsive in the midst of his humor: "Burr, burr--now Johnny's lips they burr, / As loud as any mill, or near it . . ." (107-8). The effect of the structure of the narrative and the language of the narrator, and other factors such as the pathetic aspects of retardation, is to thrust into the poem elements of fear, their subtlety dependent upon the reader's own perception of retardation and its accompanying influences. In

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[10]See Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviews."

attempting not only to be humorous but also to provide a heightened feeling of the nature of love, Wordsworth is not able to disarm the fearful, perhaps unattractive aspects of the human condition. As Danby suggests, it "is most important to remember the seriousness that embraces the comic in Wordsworth's achievement. "But Danby admits that the retarded boy indicates "worlds unrealized that may be realizable" (54-56). Boston clearly states the problem: the facts of the poem are "obscured by the poem's mixed atmosphere of buffoonery and the bizarre" (39).

But Boston goes too far in arguing that the poem "carries us through a series of images of our-world-gone-unconnected, of bizarre juxtapositions" and that Wordsworth was unable rather than unwilling to keep looking at the kind of world that appears in the poem, a world Boston describes as one in which "vacant-eyed idiots get los [sic] in the cold and, nevertheless, continue to grin and burr like wind-up marionettes" (40). A careful consideration of the evidence makes such an interpretation an improbable one; Wordsworth is not afraid to look at the world of the retarded boy. On the contrary, Wordsworth does not himself seem at all frightened. If the poem has such strong implications, they depend upon factors external

to the poem which have to do with the reader's own inability to look at the realities of retardation. For Wordsworth, the boy clearly appears to be a delight, even if some of his readers don't think so.

In short, the grotesque nature of the images in the poem are too subjective, and ultimately that explains the controversial quality of the poem. Unlike the more calculated grotesque image patterns of other poems in the Lyrical Ballads, the grotesque patterns in "The Idiot Boy" seem not to have been so apparent to Wordsworth, but that does not mean they do not exist for the reader. The poem was intended all along to be an experiment, and in this case Wordsworth learned a lesson. Undoubtedly, this poem and the negative comments about it must have been in Wordsworth's mind when he wrote the following in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads:

> I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, sometimes from diseased impulses I may have written upon unworthy subjects. . . . Hence I have no doubt that in some instances feelings even of the ludicrous may be given to my Readers by expressions which appeared to me tender and pathetic. (268)

But he is careful to explain further that he will not correct these matters because it is dangerous to do so on the authority of a few men rather than to act on the authority of his own feelings. And he reminds the

Reader that "he is himself exposed to the same errors as the Poet, and perhaps in a much greater degree" (268). The tone here is very much echoed in his letter to John Wilson where he states that while some readers have been disgusted by images in "The Idiot Boy" other people have experienced "exquisite delight," finding the poem to be their favorite. He concludes: "This proves that the feelings there delineated [are] such as all men may sympathize with. This is enough for my purpose" (358).

Marian Mead's splendid comments about "The Idiot Boy," although rather general in nature, are borne out by the poem and by Wordsworth's remarks in the letter and Preface. Mead suggests that the incongruity which Hazlitt saw in Wordsworth's face and which we can see in the poem itself may "teach us afresh that Wordsworth, though his too-early aging mind hid itself in platitudes and moralisings, was, in his poetic season, a being in whom enormous forces met, forces sometimes unrestrained and 'convulsive'" (202). She further suggests that Wordsworth, "whether in his mirth or his majesty, is not always in good taste or quite intelligible to mankind in general." But she is careful to point out that the "Idiot Boy" does have much to teach us:". . . and to find the piece merely insipid, trivial, or absurd, is to miss an instructive

opportunity" (202). Her point is well taken, for through his poem Wordsworth challenges us to attain the stature of mind which he apparently felt was the appropriate one. And it is the same stature of mind which Ruskin associates with the creator of the noble grotesque.

"The Idiot Boy" was a somewhat uncharacteristic experiment for Wordsworth, but it undoubtedly served to foster his poetic growth. "The Thorn" stands as an example of the poet's experimenting on another, even more complex level, and it is representative of the height of Wordsworth's perfection of his true poetic idiom in the Lyrical Ballads. "The Thorn" is perhaps the most experimental of the Lyrical Ballads poems, and certainly one of the most inexplicable. As Albert Gérard suggests, the complex organization of the poem "accounts for the uncommon amount of critical dissension which characterizes interpretations of The Thorn" (66). The problem which any serious reader of the poem faces is to decide what the subject matter of the poem actually is.[11] The thorn itself certainly dominates the poem, but the narrator and the central character, Martha Ray, also haunt the poem throughout. Part of the

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[11]See Gérard, pages 66-67, for an excellent summary of critical reviews and Parrish, pages 98-99.

problem seems to have been created by Wordsworth's comments about the poem, for in his Advertisement of 1798 he states that "the character of the loquacious narrator will sufficiently shew itself in the course of the story" (288), but in the 1800 edition he considerably expands his comments, suggesting that his purpose was to focus on the character of the narrator to "follow the turns of passion" in a superstitious character to "exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind" (288). He further stresses that he wished to represent "a picture which should not be unimpressive yet consistent with the character that should describe it" and that he wished to take care that words "should likewise convey passion to Readers who are not accustomed to sympathize with men feeling in that manner or using such language" (288). In short, Wordsworth's purposes in the poem are many, and ultimately the poem has a rich array of subject matters: narrative, descriptive, and psychological.

But as Albert Gérard so convincingly argues, the poem exhibits an intricate interplay of three imaginative elements: the thorn and its setting, the story of Martha Ray, and the attitude of the narrator. Yet, Gérard asserts, "the only possible basis for an analysis of the poem as a whole is the assumption that

its primary theme is the tree, and that the Martha Ray story and the narrator belong to the 'invention' devised by Wordsworth to impress the thorn on the imagination of his readers" (69). We know from Dorothy's Journal that Wordsworth began the poem on a bleak, cold day, March 19, 1798: "We were met on our return by a severe hailstorm. William wrote some lines describing a stunted thorn" (1: 13). In his note to Isabella Fenwick, Wordsworth confirms Dorothy's entry and relates what he recalls about his purpose:

> 1798. Arose out of my observing, on the ridge of Quantock Hill, on a Stormy day, a thorn which I had often passed in calm and bright weather without noticing it. I said to myself, 'Cannot I by some invention do as much to make this Thorn permanently an impressive object as the storm has made it to my eyes at this moment?' (290)

The stunted thorn itself seems to be at the heart of the poem.

But it is critical to note that the thorn impressed itself upon Wordsworth's mind only when viewed in contrast. He has seen the thorn in calm weather and has hardly noticed it; the sudden impression it makes on him relies in some mysterious way upon a heightened awareness of the thorn in a more frightening way, against the backdrop of its usual appearance on a normal day. In his letter to John Wilson, Wordsworth suggests that the poet should give men "new compositions of

feeling" by rendering these feelings "more consonant to nature," and he illustrates his point by referring to the poet Cowper, who when he saw a gorse, [a spiny shrub] made "in some degree an amiable boast of his loving it, 'unsightly and unsmooth[']as it is." Wordsworth concludes: "There are many aversions of this kind, which, though they have some foundation in nature, have yet so slight a one, that though they may have prevailed hundreds of years, a philosopher will look upon them as accidents" (Letters 1: 356). It is with the "accident" of his new perception of the stunted thorn on a stormy day that Wordsworth is most concerned as a poet speaking new compositions of feeling to other men. The grotesque image patterns which Wordsworth associates with the object of the thorn are meant to focus and direct our attention as we read the poem, and finally these grotesque images project to us the true subject matter of "The Thorn."

The poem begins with the narrator describing the thorn as he sees it: old and grey. But Wordsworth is careful to juxtapose the age of the thorn with youth, and more specifically, with the youth of a human being, not the youth of a plant:

> Not higher than a two-year's child,
> It stands erect this aged thorn;
> No leaves it has, no thorny points;

> It is a mass of knotted joints,
> A wretched thing forlorn. (5-9)

The thorn is thus personified, and its knotted joints subtly suggest human old age, wretched and forlorn. The narrator describes the thorn as overgrown with "melancholy" crops of moss and lichens which seem to be bent with "plain and manifest intent, / To drag it to the ground" (19-20). The forces which pull at the thorn and threaten its existence are likewise personified, and so the images begin to align themselves not only with the Darwinian realities of a botanical world, but also with a symbolic suggestion of alien forces threatening human beings. A conflict is established between the thorn and destructive natural forces and between man and harsh realities, such as old age and death.

The narrator then describes the thorn as being high on a mountain's ridge where the force of winter storms threaten it. Near it is a "little muddy pond" which is "three feet long, and two feet wide" (30-34). Beside the thorn and pond is another object which is juxtaposed with their unattractive images:

> And close beside this aged thorn,
> There is a fresh and lovely sight,
> A beauteous heap, a hill of moss,
> Just half a foot in height. (34-37)

It is described as consisting of "lovely colours" and a woven network of moss, suggesting beauty and order as compared to the ugly, disordered thorn. But, the beauty

of the mound is threatened by images of it as a grave, and it and the muddy pond become associated with the death of an infant, perhaps by drowning: "The heap that's like an infant's grave, / The pond--and thorn, so old and grey . . ." (93-94). As Danby suggests, the result is that the "mound is grotesquely prettified" (63). The image patterns of the poem set up striking and sudden incongruities which are both appealing and threatening in nature. No doubt, the purposeful juxtaposition of these images corresponds to Wordsworth's desire to relate the same type of feelings he experienced on Quantock's Ridge when he suddenly was impressed by the image of a thorn viewed in stormy weather rather than in calm conditions.

But what the reader is to learn from all of this is never stated or even very directly implied in the poem. Wordsworth complicates matters more by introducing into the poem the figure of Martha Ray, and the reader learns that she has perhaps had an illegitimate child, that she is in misery, and that rumors have it that she may have killed the child. The narrator never reports these events as actual facts, but rather as things that "they say." The narrator knows only that Martha is obsessed with this spot high on the mountain:

> At all times of the day and night
> This wretched woman thither goes,

> And she is known to every star,
> And every wind that blows;
> And there beside the thorn she sits. . . .
> (67-70)

And so Martha is associated with the thorn, and like the thorn she resists the forces which threaten her: the weather, the superstitious and gossiping villagers who want to dig up the grave but are frightened away, and her own bereaved and troubled mind. The narrator concludes the poem by leaving the reader with the images of Martha and the thorn adamantly withstanding alien forces:

> But plain it is, the thorn is bound
> With heavy tufts of moss, that strive
> To drag it to the ground.
> And this I know, full many a time,
> When she was on the mountain high,
> By day, and in the silent night,
> When all the stars shone clear and bright,
> That I have heard her cry,
> 'Oh misery! oh misery!
> 'O woe is me! oh misery!' (244-54)

True to the previous contrasting patterns of the poem, the wretched images of the thorn and Martha stand against the background of the silent, clear, beautiful night.

Thus, the poet leaves us with little doubt that the wretched, stunted thorn and the likewise wretched, forlorn Martha Ray are enduring. Despite the forces which threaten to destroy them, they are weathering the storms, literal and figurative, which blow against

them, and the reader is left with the image of the two rock-like forms, maintaining their vigil. But there is no final resolution of the tensions the poem creates. The reader has no assurances that Martha Ray or the thorn will ultimately defy the forces which antagonize them. The poem offers a sudden awareness of not only their plights, but because of its subtle personifying and symbolic qualities, also of the realities of destructive forces in nature and in society. The thorn becomes a symbol, and Martha Ray's attraction to it suggests that something in the nature of the enduring thorn has meaning for her, giving her a tangible, concrete object upon which to affix her own psyche. True, as Hartman suggests, the thorn has the symbolic quality of "the emergent self conserving its being despite everything (including its own strength, its mass of knotted joints) that conspires to bury it" (147). But it is a vastly complex symbol, suggesting triumph, but without guaranteed permanence, hope threatened by fear and continued suffering. In the final analysis, the poem accomplishes just what Wordsworth defines as the poet's purpose: "What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and reacting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure" (Preface 258).

Unlike "Simon Lee" and the other previously mentioned poems, "The Thorn" does not make a final attempt to moralize or to relate the grotesque images to a truth in some positive way. There is not a clear suggestion that right will ultimately prevail, nor is there a guarantee that evil, destructive forces will not triumph. The poem ends on a stoic note, yet it does suggest a complex affinity between objects of the real world of forms and the power of the human mind. But the exact nature of that affinity is left for the reader to ponder. As Gérard suggests, the thorn becomes "a living natural metaphor for something human" (69). We just are not certain what that something is, at least not on the level which would allow us to state it in any direct verbal way. Gérard's assertion is that Wordsworth, like the romantic poets in general, was seeking what T. S. Eliot later assigned as the purpose of art in his essay on Hamlet: "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" (qtd. Gérard 65). Gérard brilliantly argues that "The Thorn" is an example of

this principle and that the natural form, the thorn, is an emblem of "human inwardness rather than of cosmic unity" (64-65).

Certainly, Wordsworth wished to impress upon us the particular emotion he felt that stormy day on Quantock Ridge in 1798. As he had done with the swans in An Evening Walk, Wordsworth seems to have sensed complex tension-producing associations between inconsistent perceptions of the natural world and the uncertainties and injustices of life. His interest on one level is to spark within the heart of his reader a more acute moral and social awareness. And importantly, he recognizes the value of grounding his poetic expression on the actual forms and figures of daily experience, which are more humanized and more emotionally valid than the forms and figures drawn from the stockpile of conventional poetic expressions and stale images. On a second and more important level, Wordsworth reveals his interest in the workings of the mind, an interest he had attempted to develop in "The Idiot Boy" through his dramatic portrayal of little Johnny Foy, whose strange perception of reality seems somehow mysteriously "hidden with God" (see Wordsworth's letter to John Wilson (pages 111-12 above). But in "The Thorn," Wordsworth moves toward a more profound poetic vision. He extends the

complexities of his images, suggesting mysterious connections between a power at work in nature and a power at work in the human mind. The poem significantly reveals Wordsworth's developing ability to employ grotesque image patterns functionally. He has shifted his emphasis from employing grotesque image patterns to impress a moral and social awareness to employing these images to explore the psychological implications of experience.

The poem depends on feeling rather than stated truth. And in this sense, Wordsworth achieved in "The Thorn" what Keats later admired in poetry, and which he felt Coleridge lacked: the ability to be content with half truths.[12] In his letter to John Hamilton Reynolds (3 May 1818) Keats praises Wordsworth's power of "sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man, of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness, and oppression--whereby this chamber of maiden-thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open--but all dark--all leading to dark passages." Keats seems to see Wordsworth as a true master of that kind of poetry that

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[12](See page 28 above for Keats's definition of negative capability).

evidences negative capability: "We see not the balance of good and evil--we are in a mist--we are now in that state. We feel the 'burden of the mystery.'" He asserts about Wordsworth: ". . . and it seems to me that his genius is explorative of those dark passages" (Letters of Keats 1: 279). And, as discussed earlier (Chapter II), Ruskin and others considering the grotesque suggest that it is precisely the nature of the true grotesque in art not to lead the artist to a reconciliation of opposites, but rather to leave him in a state of tension and partial confusion. Yet, as Ruskin states, "it seems not only permissible, but even desirable, that the art by which the grotesque is expressed should be more or less imperfect." That is a defining characteristic of the true grotesque: "Now, so far as the truth is seen by the imagination in its wholeness and quietness, the vision is sublime; but so far as it is narrowed and broken by the inconsistencies of the human capacity, it becomes grotesque (see pages 41-42 above).

"The Thorn," then, serves as a fine example of the noble grotesque in the Lyrical Ballads. While the poem offers no final moral insight, it does objectify the process of the receptive imagination interacting with the conflicting images of transitory nature. But we are

not taken beyond that process to some resolution or justification of fear and suffering. The effect on the reader is unresolved tension, yet a tension that suggests possibilities because nature and the human mind are shown to be sympathetic to one another in some mysterious fashion. Martha Ray affixes her own psyche to the enduring thorn, and likewise nature protects Martha Ray from the nosey village gossips. If the poem does nothing more, it certainly suggests that a power is at work both in nature and in the mind of man, a complex power that inhabits both worlds and which is intuited in and through the habitual interaction of the imagination with forms and objects of nature. The function of the grotesque images is to show the reader how the human mind sympathetic to natural forms receives valuable influences, even if these influences make no immediate promise of renovating power. The poem offers insight into the process of man's interaction with nature, not the ultimate value of that interaction. Like "The Idiot Boy," "The Thorn" demonstrates Wordsworth's growing interest in the psychology of the imagination, that part of the human mind hidden from the discursive eye. The grotesque images function poetically not merely as stimuli meant to arouse emotions of fear or to project an alien existence, but rather as signs which emblem

forth the process of man's mind as it interacts with life's and nature's incongruities. The interest of the poem does not lie in a vision of dark, alien forms, but rather in the psychology of the imagination under the influences of both beauty and fear, pleasure and pain, the past and the present.

Both "The Thorn" and "The Idiot Boy" show Wordsworth moving away from poems which employ grotesque images merely to heighten feeling or to effect moral insights or instigate social change toward poetry which employs grotesque images to reveal the laws by which nature interacts with man to feed the imagination and shape it toward maturity. And in the process, the grotesque images function to implant influences in the imagination of the sympathetic reader, providing objective correlatives for complex psychological phenomena.

In "The Thorn," Wordsworth employs grotesque images to explore the interaction of the imagination with nature, focusing on the receptivity of the mind to something mysterious it senses is inherent in the incongruous forms of the external world. But other poems of the Lyrical Ballads volume of 1800 reveal Wordsworth's developing ability to use grotesque image patterns not only to show the receptive quality of the

mind toward the incongruous images of nature, but also to understand the functional value of the grotesque to the psychology of the imagination's growth. Importantly, the two poems of the Lyrical Ballads which Wordsworth considered the most illustrative of his poetic genius in the 1800s volume, "Nutting" and "To Joanna," are the poems which best exhibit his developing use of grotesque image patterns.

Wordsworth explains in his Fenwick note that "Nutting," written 1799-1800, was intended as part of The Prelude but was "struck out as not being wanted there" and inserted instead into the 1800 Lyrical Ballads. The poem, Wordsworth recalls, "arose out of the remembrance of feelings I had often had when a boy" (304). And the opening lines of the poem make clear that this memory exemplifies many similar ones: "It seems a day, / (I speak of one from many singled out)." Wordsworth obviously provides the poem as representative of a complex psychological phenomenon not uncommon to his youthful experience. As Hartman suggests, the images of the poem serve as an emblem to the reader," a kind of pictorial machine disposing the argument into an easily intuitable form" (Wordsworth's Poetry 73).

The poem recalls a "heavenly" day in which the speaker, then a young boy, sallies forth in a carefree,

happy mood to gather hazel nuts, wearing clothes "of power to smile / at thorns, and brakes, and brambles." He forces his way into a quiet, unvisited bower. The poet carefully stresses the beauty of the scene in terms suggesting human innocence and purity, describing the hazels "with milk-white clusters hung, / A virgin scene!" The boy approaches the unravished bower breathlessly, "with wise restraint / Voluptuous, fearless of a rival," his heart, in its secure joy, luxuriating "with indifferent things" (11-40). But this indifferent, happy mood abruptly and shockingly snaps, for the boy's quiet respect for the lovely scene suddenly changes, and he mutilates the virgin bower:

> "Then up I rose,
> And dragg'd to earth both branch and bough,
> with crash
> And merciless ravage; and the shady nook
> Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower
> Deform'd and sullied, patiently gave up
> Their quiet being. . . . (42-47)

The bower becomes grotesque, described in terms suggesting the rape of an innocent, trusting maiden. At this point, the poet has projected to the reader through the emblem of the ravished bower the conflicting perception of the youth's vivid imagination, which imaged the bower in human terms, first in joy and beauty worthy of respect and admiration, and then as an object of abuse at the mercy of the dark, destructive forces of

the boy's own psyche. The grotesque images symbolically project the inner workings of the youth's imagination.

And then Wordsworth takes the poem one step farther, for the speaker explains his reaction as he now remembers it:

> . . . and unless I now
> Confound my present feelings with the past,
> Even then, when from the bower I turn'd away,
> Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings
> I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
> The silent trees and the intruding sky.- (47-52)

Recollecting the scene in tranquillity, the speaker now recalls the pain of the experience, and the result is that the speaker, now able to perceive the event symbolically with his more mature, experienced imagination, can appreciate the value of the grotesque images and can offer instruction:

> Then, dearest Maiden! move along these shades
> In gentleness of heart with gentle hand
> Touch,--for there is a Spirit in the woods. (53-55)

Wordsworth has developed the poem beyond the imaging of a fine grotesque. He has demonstrated through the use of grotesque images the specific importance of the event, an event which like others, perceived now in the light of maturer recollection, reveals to him the reality of a power that lies beyond nature and which can be perceived <u>only</u> through the interaction of his own mysterious, maturing mind with the beautiful forms of nature. The poem's grotesque

images provide the key, for the speaker does not sense the Spirit in the woods when as a boy he perceives the bower merely as beautiful or pleasurable in the guise of an unspoiled maiden. It is only when he perceives the woods in fearful forms of destruction and mutilation, forms which make concrete to his sensory perception the dark forces which haunt his own mind, that he is able to sense a pain within himself which eventually becomes vital to his spiritual awareness. The structure of the poem's image patterns elucidates the necessity of both beauty and fear to the maturation of the speaker's imaginative perception. Functionally, the grotesque image patterns symbolize the workings of the boy's imagination, and they illuminate a vision of not only the beauty of nature, but also the mysterious and frightening images the imagination creates in its relationship with natural forms. Such a visionary process has the potential to lead us to an awareness of an infinite power that lies beyond the outward forms of nature and yet is envisioned through our interaction with those external forms. It is only through the matured perceiver's awareness of the transitory beauty of nature as it conflicts with his own psychic impulses that the speaker envisions the value of the experience. For Wordsworth, the notion that beauty is truth, truth

beauty, does not suffice here; images of both beauty and fear are necessary if the perceiver is to move beyond nature to an awareness of his own imagination and its relationship to an instructive power at work both within nature and within the mind of man. Wordsworth has chosen a representative imaginative event to emblem forth the power of the imagination to draw upon both beauty and fear to achieve a heightened perception.

The speaker's warning to the "Maiden" (apparently his sister, Dorothy) at the end of the poem is ironic, for it is only through his not gently touching the beauty of nature that he is able to perceive the spirit in the woods. His mutiliation of nature is the catalyst which sparks his awareness of the value of natural beauty and his realization of the destructive potential of his own dark mind. Undoubtedly, his hope is that the maiden will not, like the bower and the boy, have to suffer the ravishment of her innocence in order to envision an infinite spirit and instructive power. His poetic purpose is to reveal vicariously to her and to the reader through the grotesque images of the poem the experience which he suffered in order to mature. Perhaps the grotesque images are projected in the contrasting, personified guise of a pure and then ravished maiden in order to heighten more effectively

the fear of the "Maiden" to whom the poem is directed. Thus, "Nutting" reveals a poet who is maturing in the appropriate functional use of grotesque image patterns.

Wordsworth's functional use of grotesque image patterns in the Lyrical Ballads is likewise exemplified by his poem "To Joanna," which again extends and develops his interest in the psychology of fear as it affects the maturing imagination. As in "Nutting," the poet uses grotesque image patterns to demonstrate how the imagination, influenced by a power in nature, recreates sensory experience into instructive psychological experience. The poem serves not only to instruct Joanna, to whom it is addressed, but also to provide the dramatic framework necessary to imaging to the reader the complex interaction of nature and the imagination. Wordsworth does not merely project the reality of an alien vision; he offers this vision to exemplify why he and others are sympathetic lovers of nature.

The speaker begins by addressing Joanna and reviewing her past. She has grown up amid "the smoke of cities" and has learned to love the "living Beings" by her own fireside with such a strong devotion that her heart is "slow towards the sympathies of them / Who look upon the hills with tenderness / And make dear

friendships with the streams and groves" (1-8). He then narrates a story about his having chiseled out Joanna's name upon a rock, like a "Runic Priest," and then having been chastised by a local vicar for this revival of "obsolete Idolatry." His reply to the vicar is to tell a story about an experience he once had while walking with Joanna.

They had strolled out on a beautiful day along a river bank, and he, in awe of the visionary beauty of the scene, stood gazing for "perhaps two minutes' space." Joanna, upon observing his eyes' "ravishment" of the scene, laughed aloud, presumable at his being so affected. Immediately, the surrounding rock, "like something starting from a sleep," echoed Joanna's laughter, as did a rock on a distance crag, which looked like an old woman cowering, that "ancient Woman seated on Helmcrag" (35-56). Likewise, other mountain caverns, portrayed in personified images of old, ancient beings, echoed her laughter. The speaker admits that he cannot now tell if "this were in simple truth, a work accomplish'd by the brotherhood / Of ancient mountains," or if his "ear was touched / With dreams and visionary impulses," but he is sure that "there was a loud uproar in the hills" (57-73). The result of this eery, haunting laughter is that to his side "Joanna drew, as

if she wish'd / To shelter from some object of her fear" (75-76). Obviously, the echoing sounds, which seemed hauntingly real, were fearful in tone, mocking Joanna's laughter which had rather disrespectfully sounded her lack of sympathy for the speaker's reverence for natural beauty.

The speaker concludes his story to the vicar by stating that now, "long afterwards, when eighteen moons / Were wasted," he has sat down in "memory of affections old and true" to chisel out "in those rude characters / Joanna's name upon the living stone." And he and his friends, in apparent memory of both Joanna and that special event, have given a name to the carved stone: "And I, and all who dwell by my fireside / Have called the lovely rock, Joanna's Rock" (77-85). The speaker's words reveal much about the instructive nature of his experience with Joanna, for the stone upon which he chiseled is now seen as a "living stone," and his memory of that time's affections, recollected now in his tranquillity, is perceived as "old and true." The frightening images of the ancient laughing forms that nature has carved out in the mountains are subtly connected with a sense of duration, heightened by his mentioning Runic letters and ancient mountains whose names extend from ages past. These forms <u>seem</u> alive and

ageless, no matter whether they be real or products of his own "dreams and visionary impulses."

The personified, ancient, grotesque stones suggest that a living, timeless spirit may haunt our perception of external forms, making the stones living stones in the sense that the imagination, under the influence of accidents of nature, recreates the scene into a vision of something true, a sense that nature in league with the imagination serves an instructive purpose to teach us to reverence the value of transitory beauty. The instructive force of the poem comes full circle, for the speaker demonstrates that just as Joanna learned to love the "living Beings" by her own fireside (opening lines of the poem), he has learned to be sympathetic towards the "living stone" (closing lines) admired by all who dwell at his fireside. Although never stated directly, there is in the poem a suggestion that an apparent accident of nature may not be accidental, that there is a living, renovating power inhabiting natural objects and affecting the perceiver's sympathetic vision. In a way, the old vicar's accusation that the speaker is reviving obsolete idolatry is true, but not in the Runic sense. The speaker's carving reflects both his appreciation of the value of that spot and all that it suggests to his personal experience and his

appreciation of Joanna, whose active imagination drew her into sympathy with nature, even in such an abrupt and unwilling fashion.

The telling of the story is aimed at the reader. Wordsworth employs the grotesque image patterns as representative of a law by which nature affects the mind. Only through fear is Joanna made aware of the power of nature. She is not able to perceive this power through surrounding scenes of beauty, to which she is not attuned. She must experience a sudden awareness of incongruity which fearfully jolts her imagination into a heightened awareness. Likewise, as an observer able to recollect the moment of her jolting later in his own imagination, the speaker gleans from the experience a visionary awareness he bequeaths to his readers.

In "Nutting" Wordsworth reveals his awareness of a spirit in the woods, but in "To Joanna" he extends his vision to see the value of this awareness of something other-worldly, both to himself and to others. "To Joanna" demonstrates how the experiencing of the grotesque, implanted in the mind and recollected in tranquillity, serves to spark and mature our appreciation of transitory beauty. But the poem further shows how the experiencing of the grotesque through the accidents of nature leads to a love of man, because the

speaker's appreciation if not just for "living" nature, but also for what lives within Joanna and others by his fireside. It is the grotesque's action upon the sympathetic imagination which Wordsworth celebrates in "To Joanna." As he reveals, the function of the grotesque specifically is to set into motion the truly perceptive faculty of the human mind: the imagination. The scene the speaker recalls is not merely a celebration of the power of beauty or fear, but rather a celebration of how a power at work in nature can invest itself into the imagination to lead man beyond nature to a heightened awareness of the value of the intricate human mind, which through the mysterious visionary power of the imagination can glean from the incongruous images of experience a vision of the infinite spirit alive within nature and within others who come to dwell at our fireside. The poem celebrates the process by which the imagination is sparked to unite observers of nature's beauties and fears in sympathy, and it demonstrates the essential function of the grotesque as one of the means by which nature operates on the human mind to develop and focus the imagination.

The grotesque, then, plays a vital role in the poetic vision developing within the Lyrical Ballads. Of the sixty-four original poems of the Lyrical Ballads

volumes of 1798 and 1800, twelve contain grotesque image patterns which function significantly within the contexts of the poems. Of those twelve, five poems functionally employ grotesque image patterns to help develop themes concerning the alleviation of social or moral evils: "Lines Left Upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree," "The Female Vagrant," "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," "Simon Lee," "The Mad Mother." These poems dwell on human forms of fear and suffering as reflective of decaying moral or physical states, and they all appeared originally in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads . Two other poems of that volume, "The Idiot Boy" and "The Thorn," appear as transitional poems, marking a shift in emphasis by Wordsworth towards employing grotesque images which function to reveal the process by which the receptive imagination interacts with forms and objects of the world of sensory experiences. "The Thorn" particularly exhibits a bold new use of grotesque image patterns to provide insight into the interaction of the human mind and transitory nature.

The second volume of Lyrical Ballads (1800) includes five poems which contain grotesque image patterns: "Hart-Leap Well," "Ruth," "Nutting," "The Old Cumberland Begger," "To Joanna," All of these poems employ these images functionally and symbolically to

illuminate the process by which nature interacts with the experiencing imagination to inform and direct our understanding of the value of both beauty and fear and to teach us more specifically that, as the speaker in "The Old Cumberland Beggar" proclaims,

> 'Tis Nature's law
> That none, the meanest of created things,
> Of forms created the most vile and brute,
> The dullest or most noxious, should exist
> Divorced from good, a spirit and pulse of good,
> A life and soul to every mode of being
> Inseparably link'd. (73-79)

Furthermore, the Lyrical Ballads poems employing grotesque image patterns show Wordsworth's development of a conscious and formal poetic idiom which rejects the artificial picturesque (projected scenes of visionary beauty) or the popular Gothic (forms of gross and violent stimulants drawn from fictions) in favor of a poetic technique which brings together "with blended might" images which embody the fears and beauties inherent within the common forms of nature and within the mind of man. The explicit function of this developing poetic idiom is to show how love of nature leads to the development of the mind, a mind with infinite potential, and to understand the growth of the imagination as it is repaired and restored by a power at work in and yet beyond nature. Thus, these poems react against Wordsworth's neoclassical predecessors both in

technique and in theme, suggesting the value of the ordinary and the irrational. They anticipate the great theme of The Prelude, and they reveal Wordsworth's growing interest in the psychology of the imagination. In The Prelude, Wordsworth unveils more exactly the specific role of the grotesque within the larger scheme by which an infinite power at work in nature guides and directs the sympathetic perceiver toward joy and harmony.

CHAPTER V

THE FUNCTION OF THE GROTESQUE IN THE PRELUDE

During the years 1798-1799, when Wordsworth was composing many of the best poems for his second edition of Lyrical Ballads, he also embarked upon his most important poetic journey, the writing of The Prelude.[1] As he explains in his Preface to the 1814 edition of The Excursion (Prose Works 2: 145-48), Wordsworth first had intended to write a long, philosophical poem "containing views of Man, Nature, and Society," but that poem was never completed, for as preparatory to its writing, he began an autobiographical poem "to take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such

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[1]For an excellent, concise discussion of the structure and unity of The Prelude, see M. H. Abrams's "The Design of The Prelude" (rpt. The Prelude, Jonathan Wordsworth et al. 585-598). Abrams specifically argues that Wordsworth's poetic account in The Prelude is held together by the persistent image of a journey, and he further demonstrates that this organizing figure works in two dimensions: The poem represents the life which Wordsworth narrates as a self-educative journey, and the imaginative enterprise of conceiving and composing The Prelude itself is portrayed as a perilous quest through the dark regions of the poet's own mind. Abrams suggests that Wordsworth "converts the wayfaring Christian of the Augustinian spiritual journey into the self-formative traveler of the Romantic educational journey" (591-92).

employment." He further proposed that the autobiographical poem, addressed to Coleridge, would have the same relation as "the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church."

But the long philosophical work was never completed. In 1798 he began what he hoped would become his magnum opus, The Recluse, but by 1799 he had turned his primary attention to the poem to Coleridge, The Prelude. For more than forty years, Wordsworth worked on this autobiographical poem to his friend, and it now remains as the greatest of Wordsworth's poetic accomplishments. Wordsworth did complete the first book of The Recluse, Home at Grasmere, in 1806, but almost immediately turned back to The Prelude. By 1814 he completed The Excursion (the narrative section of The Recluse) which had been planned as early as 1804 and which was founded on the The Ruined Cottage of 1797-78, but again he turned back to the revision of The Prelude throughout the remainder of his life.[2] In short, Wordsworth never seemed to find the inspiration necessary to complete The Recluse,

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[2]For a detailed discussion of The Prelude's textual composition, see "The Texts: History and Presentation" printed in The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850, edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill. As these distinguished editors suggest, no literary masterpiece "has a more complicated textual history than The Prelude. . . . Aside from notebooks that contain

and as his interest in The Prelude indicates, he came to understand that his poetic voice was to be found in his own past understood from the present, not in the composition of the stilted philosophical poem which Coleridge had urged him to write. As Mary Moorman argues, by 1799 Wordsworth's true interest was the mind of man and its association with nature, for his growing faith was "the result of inward experience of exceptional power, extended back to the earliest recesses of memory" (368). And as already discussed in Chapter IV, important poems of the second volume of Lyrical Ballads particularly attest to Wordsworth's growing awareness of the value of exploring the interchange between nature and his own imagination to the illumination of his true poetic vision. The route of discovery for Wordsworth must involve sailing the seas of his own memory and recreating the past into a

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isolated drafts, seventeen major Prelude manuscripts survive in the Wordsworth library at Grasmere, and many of these contain several stages of revision" (ix). Unless otherwise noted, all my references to the poem are to the thirteen-book Prelude text, reprinted in the edition cited above, finished ca. May 1805 and copied November-February 1805-6. My preference for the 1805 Prelude over the more formal 1850 Prelude published after the poet's death is in keeping with my desire to consider Wordsworth as a developing poet, and the 1805 text is, as Jonathan Wordsworth suggests, by far the more accurate version for "reflecting the thought processes it had been Wordsworth's original intention to evoke."

meaningful present. Moorman rightly concludes that Coleridge had interests based more on intellectual conceptions and images drawn from reading than on personal experiences (368). But as Wordsworth proclaims in book 1 of The Prelude, his soul had experienced "fair seed-time" and was "fostered alike by beauty and fear," for he had been "much favored" in his birthplace (305-07). His poetic voice must sing of his own personal experiences recollected in tranquillity rather than articulate philosophical views. By 1798-99, Wordsworth apparently sensed what Keats later recognized, that "axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses" (Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds 3 May 1818). In fact, in 1814 Wordsworth proclaimed this idea in his Preface to The Excursion: "It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system: it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself" (Prose Works 2: 146). The Prelude became the most animated of Wordsworth's poetic creations. In it he gives life and meaning to his faltering poetic soul and illuminates the total poetic vision for which he had been striving in

the poems of his youth and in the Lyrical Ballads. In The Prelude, as F. R. Leavis suggests, Wordsworth creates an "expository effect" that produces mood, feeling, or experience and at the same time appears to be giving an explanation of it. Leavis concludes: "He had, if not a philosophy, a wisdom to communicate" (163).

It is in The Prelude that Wordsworth achieves his complete poetic vision. Not only does he discover his true purpose, but he also realizes the essential nature of his images and focuses them within a carefully structured frame that encompasses a whole vision of man, nature, and the eternal. Grotesque image patterns play a vital role in the development of this unified vision, and Wordsworth illuminates specifically the significance of the grotesque to the highest perceptive faculty, the imagination.

As M. H. Abrams suggests, The Prelude is climaxed by two major revelations, the first being "Wordsworth's discovery of precisely what he has been born to be and to do," as implied in books 3 and 4 and resolved in the "my office upon earth" passage of book 10 (904-20). The second revelation, projected through the symbolic landscape viewed from the top of Mt. Snowden (bk. 13), "is the grand locus of The Recluse which he announced in

the Prospectus, 'The Mind of Man-- / My haunt, and the main region of my song,' as well as the 'high argument' of that poem, the union between the mind and the external world and the resulting 'creation' . . . which they with blended might / Accomplish'" ("Design" 589-590). In book 12 of The Prelude, Wordsworth proclaims that he will "bend in reverence / to Nature, and the power of human minds," and will "teach" and "inspire" his theme

> No other than the very heart of man
> As found among the best of those who live
> . . . In Nature's presence--thence may I
> select
> Sorrow that is not sorrow but delight,
> And miserable love that is not pain
> To hear of, for the glory that redounds
> Therefrom to humankind and what we are.
> (238-48)

In brief, Wordsworth's poetic accomplishment in The Prelude is to envision the revelation which he proclaims in his Prospectus to The Recluse:

> Paradise, and groves
> Elysian . . . --why should they be
> A history only of departed things,
> Or a mere fiction of what never was?
> For the discerning intellect of Man,
> When wedded to this goodly universe
> In love and holy passion, shall find these
> A simple produce of the common day.
> (Poetical Works 47-55)

As The Prelude reveals, man's "discerning intellect" is the imagination, and the journey on which Wordsworth embarks and on which he invites his readers

is a passage through the poet's mind from its earliest remembrances to the present: a history of the growth of his imagination in childhood and youth, its crises as it is threatened by the realities of the French Revolution and personal disappointments, and its restoration under the powerful influence of nature. His theme is the imagination's triumph, and his poetic technique is to recreate his past into a matured vision which details the progress of his mind as it developed under the myriad images and impressions of experience. As M. H. Abrams concludes, since the specification of his poetic purpose "entails the definition, in the twelfth book, of the particular innovations in poetic subjects, style, and values toward which his life had been implicitly oriented, The Prelude is a poem which incorporates the discovery of its own ars poetica" ("Design" 590).

Scholars studying The Prelude have long been aware that the poem does not offer absolute factual validity regarding Wordsworth's own life. Abrams warns against attempting to read the poem as biographical fact, arguing that "the major alterations and dislocations of the events of Wordsworth's life are imposed deliberately, in order that the design inherent in that life, which has become apparent only to his mature awareness, may stand revealed as a principle which was

invisibly operative from the beginning" ("Design" 588). Similarly, Raymond Dexter Havens contends that Wordsworth purposely avoided the merely personal, maintained a sense of form and artistic effectiveness, and simplified in the interest of clarity because "The Prelude is not so much an account of its author's development as of the development of certain traits in him and the influence of certain forces on him" (273). Herbert Read even more boldly asserts that the poem "is a deliberate mask. It is an idealisation of the poet's life, not the reality" (21).[3]

The point of these critics is essential to a complete appreciation of the poem and to this study. In The Prelude, Wordsworth selects only those events which are important to the illumination of his theme. These events are meant to function as representative of the process by which the imagination in league with nature enables one to mature toward a unified vision, a spiritual harmony between finite man existing in transitory nature and a creative power at home in infinity. Based on Wordsworth's mature vision of an

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[3]It should not be surprising that Wordsworth chose not to be bound by factual validity. As he explains in his note to Isabella Fenwick about An Evening Walk, in his writing of that youthful poem he had already decided not "to submit the poetic spirit to the chains of fact and real circumstance" (see page 63 above).

inherent order in nature which in his youth had been invisibly operative, though glimpsed momentarily, The Prelude symbolically unfolds the laws by which nature can instruct one and direct his life toward spiritual fulfillment. The faculty necessary to this heightened state is the imagination, and it is repaired and restored by experience. In an important recent study of Wordsworth's poetry, J. R. Watson undertakes an anthropological approach to argue that Wordsworth draws from the temporal to achieve for us a mythical understanding of our everyday world. Watson concludes that "The Prelude is thus a poem which is both history and myth: it records events in the poet's life, but arranges and selects them in such a way that they re-enact the myth of the lost paradise. His function within the poem is not allegorical but symbolic, in Coleridge's definition: it is characterzed by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal" (12).

The Prelude specifically orders experience to illuminate its value to the growth of the imagination, and the grotesque, envisioned for us through Wordsworth's image patterns drawn from his own experience, plays a crucial role in this illuminating vision. Wordsworth functionally employes grotesque

image patterns in The Prelude to help unravel the mystery of the mind's growth and to reveal to us the explicit value of certain laws by which nature operates on our imaginative faculty. He reveals that the imagination's evolution, if it is to evolve into a faculty of heightened perception, depends upon natural effects which feed it and which are stored for future nourishment. One of the means nature employs to nourish and restore our imaginative perception is the grotesque. While Wordsworth had had intuitions of the importance of the grotesque, as revealed in poems from his youth and the Lyrical Ballads, such as An Evening Walk and "The Thorn," it is in The Prelude that he achieves a clear vision of the value of the grotesque. As The Prelude itself reveals, such a total vision was not possible for him in his youth. The imagination must experience and then mature. Only through habitual influence in the light of recollection, through a cumulative effect, could nature lead him to a heightened awareness of the intrinsic value of natural influences, and more specifically to an understanding of the importance of the process by which nature develops the imagination to achieve a unity between man, nature, and the Eternal.

As nearly every critic of The Prelude has recognized, at the heart of Wordsworth's poetic revelation in the poem are what the poet calls in book 11 "spots of time." These are those moments in life characterized by what Wordsworth calls "visitings of imaginative power" which assure that he will stand in nature a "sensitive, and a creative soul" (252, 257). This passage, proclaiming the importance of certain spots of time, was written early on in Wordsworth's composition of The Prelude (ca. January 1799) but appears for structural reasons in the latter part of the poem, and it functions to draw together a number of important episodes detailed within the poem:

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> Which with distinct preeminence retain
> A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
> By false opinion and contentious thought,
> Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight
> In trivial occupations and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
> Are nourished and invisibly repaired--
> A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
> That penetrates, enables us to mount
> When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
> (257-67)

Apparently, Wordsworth placed this passage late in the poem because prior to it he wanted to offer specific incidents which would, through example, prepare his reader for the unveiling of his poetic vision. In order to appreciate the exact nature of these spots of time, we must first consider the preceding books of The

Prelude, specifically books 1 and 2, in which Wordsworth first narrates what he later terms "spots of time."

As previously mentioned, in book 1 Wordsworth explains that as a child he was fostered "alike by beauty and by fear" (306). He determines to "make rigorous inquisition" through himself, to review his experiences for his "glorious work," the writing of his greatest poem (158-60). He begins by selecting several incidents from his boyhood, involving beauty and fear, which he realizes now, in his maturer years, are somehow vitally important to him, and which will best serve to lay a foundation of symbolic images for his reader.

He recalls first an incident (310-32) which occurred at about age nine, when in late autumn he had gone forth into the mountains to snare some woodcocks. It was a beautiful evening, moon and stars were shining and all was at peace. But the boy had "a strong desire" that "o'erpowered" his "better reason," and he took a bird which "was captive of another's toils." The result was sudden fear and a sense of unrecognized sounds: "Low breathings coming after me, and sounds / Of undistinguishable motion, steps / Almost as silent as the turf they trod" (330-33). He then recalls a second event (334-50) involving plundering through birds' nests as he hung upon a mountain cliff, suspended "by the

blast which blew amain, / Shouldering the naked crag." Suddenly, as he clung in fear on the cliff, he became aware of a world which seemed strangely alien to his own:

> While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
> With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
> Blow through my ears; the sky seemed not a sky
> Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!
> (347-50)

Now, in the light of his maturer years, he marvels to himself that somehow these early experiences, in which he felt a sudden fear and became aware of new modes of existence, are vitally important to the heightened sense of unity and peace he now feels during the best moments of his life:

> Ah me, that all
> The terrors, all the early miseries,
> Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all
> The thoughts and feelings which have been infused
> Into my mind, should ever have made up
> The calm existence that is mine when I
> Am worthy of myself. (355-61)

These experiences, characterized by image patterns juxtaposing beauty and fear and ending in a sudden awareness of incongruity between his normally perceived world and a newly perceived one, are thus shown to be moments of time vital to the development of his mind and representative of the process by which nature employs a ministry of fear and beauty to foster the imagination's growth.

Wordsworth then progressively develops his complex vision revealing the laws by which nature acts upon the imagination. He claims that not only does nature "frame / a favored being" with such incidents of "gentlest visitation," but also "haply aiming at the self-same end, / Does it delight her sometimes to employ / Severer interventions, ministry / More palable . . . (363-71). He describes two more incidents from his childhood which represent these "severer interventions" of nature, and he poses for the "presences of Nature" a rhetorical question:

> can I think
> A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
> Such ministry--when ye through many a year
> Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
> On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
> Impressed upon all forms the characters
> Of danger or desire, and thus did make
> The surface of the universal earth
> With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear,
> Work like a sea? (493-501)

The two events Wordsworth describes in this section, one involving borrowing a boat without permission, and the other ice-skating in the evening, like the earlier scenes of book 1, involve a heightened experiencing of beauty and fear. These experiences sparked either a dark, alien vision of strange modes of being, such as the boat-stealing incident (373-426), or a soothing vision in which all became "tranquil as a dreamless sleep," such as the ice-skating episode (474-90). In

the boat-stealing incident, fear dominates the boy's vision, and the result is unrest and a profound sense of incongruity. In the ice-skating scene, beauty dominates, and the boy feels a profound sense of harmony. Thus the first incident represents the type of influence nature has on the imagination when fear overrides beauty; the latter incident shows nature's influence on the imagination when beauty dominates. Wordsworth has selectively chosen incidents and images which symbolize to us the sister influences of nature--beauty and fear--as they work upon us in varying degrees. And as he explains later (1.571-641), nature "by extrinsic passion first / Peopled my mind with beauteous forms or grand / And made me love them," and spoke rememberable "things; sometimes, 'tis true, / By chance collisions and quaint accidents-- / Like those ill-sorted unions, work supposed / Of evil-minded fairies. . . ." Yet these are not without purpose

> if haply they impressed
> Collateral ["indirect" OED] objects and
> appearances,
> Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep
> Until maturer seasons called them forth
> To impregnate and to elevate the mind.

In short, he represents to his readers the kind of influences he has experienced and then broadens his vision to illuminate the specific function of these memories to heighten the power of his maturing mind, all

of this serving to exemplify to us the laws by which nature influences the sympathetic observer.

This pattern of presenting selected scenes imaging beauty and fear in which one or the other of these influences dominates occurs throughout The Prelude, all helping to reveal how nature and the imagination can habitually act and react upon each other to teach man to realize a divine joy and harmony, to regain lost paradise here and now without despairing of the pains and disappointments inherent in our being an active part of humanity and nature. It is a complex pattern that Wordsworth offers, exhibiting to us varying degrees of experience, some more frightening and severe than others, some more profoundly beautiful. But he is careful to maintain a balance, to reconcile the beautiful and fearful images which reflect the diversity of his experiences. His structuring of image patterns in book 1 is an excellent example of this balance. Remembrances of boyhood experiences involving beauty and calmness, such as the steady cadence of the sounds of flowing water blending with his nurse's song (lines 273-85), are juxtaposed with recollections of fear and confusion, such as the "undistinguishable motion" of "low breathings" which the boy imagines after having taken a bird from another's snare (lines 306-33). These

remembrances, in each case juxtaposing images of fear with images of beauty, are consistently followed by the mature speaker's unifying pronouncements; he assures the reader that the scenes of his childhood, incidents in which the boy remained unconscious of the workings of nature on the imagination, are a vital part of an ultimate balance, a blending of beauty and fear now appreciated by the matured speaker. Wordsworth leaves no doubt about the result of these past moments:

> The mind of man is framed even like the breath
> And harmony of music. There is a dark
> Invisible workmanship that reconciles
> Discordant elements, and makes them move
> In one society." (351-55)

The climax of these scenes is the Mt. Snowden episode (13.10-119) in which Wordsworth describes the most profound and insightful of his experiences, the ascent of Mt. Snowden.[4] There he envisions the paradise to which nature has been directing him. The earlier incidents described in The Prelude are

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[4]As M. H. Abrams argues, the ascent of Mt. Snowden described in the final book of The Prelude is a climactic revelation in which Wordsworth achieves the vision of which he sings in his Prospectus to The Recluse. Abrams suggests that the ascent of the mountain becomes a metaphor for the climactic stage "both of the journey of life and of the imaginative journey which is the poem itself. This time, however, the walk is not a movement along an open plain but the ascent of a mountain, the traditional place for definitive visions since Moses had climbed Mount Sinai" ("Design" 593).

preparatory to that climax, not only imaging to us Wordsworth's experiences, but also symbolically developing the poetic myth of regaining lost paradise, which is Wordsworth's greatest achievement. Within the framework of developing image patterns which Wordsworth employs to transport us on his poetic journey through the mind, the grotesque plays a specific role. It is one of the means by which the mind ascends on its journey upward toward a sublime vision.

No better example of Wordsworth's use of grotesque image patterns exists in The Prelude than the boat-stealing scene in book 1 (372-426). Recalled in the light of memory by a matured mind and presented in the context of the entire poem, that incident illustrates specifically the function of the grotesque within Wordsworth's total poetic vision.

The scene begins (372-84) with the poet's recollection of one particular evening from his boyhood when he borrowed, without permission, a shepherd's boat tied up by the edge of a beautiful lake. He was a traveler there while on a holiday from school, so the countryside and lake were unfamiliar to him. The night was especially beautiful, with the moon shining brightly on the lake among the "hoary mountains," and as he glided out upon the water in his boat, facing the

shore as he rowed outward, he saw "circles glittering idly in the moon, / Until they melted all into one tract / Of sparkling light." Wordsworth is careful to infuse elements of fear within the images of visionary beauty. His enjoyment of the experience is dampened by his awareness of having stolen the boat: "It was an act of stealth / And troubled pleasure." And the hoary mountains' echoing of his boat's sounds in the otherwise "silent lake" undoubtedly increases the fearful tension within the boy's mind.

As he rows out (384-426), he fixes his view upon a "craggy ridge, / The bound of the horizon," but as his boat moves gracefully through the water "like a swan," suddenly another mountain appears, previously out of view behind the craggy ridge: "a hugh cliff, / As if with voluntary power instinct, / Upreared its head." As the boy describes, he struck the lake again and again with his oars, but "growing still in stature, the hugh cliff / Rose up between me and the stars, and still / With measure motion, like a living thing / Strode after me." The boy, trembling with fear, stole his way back to the cavern where he first discovered the boat.

The images of beauty--moonlight reflections, the swan-like boat, the stars--contrast sharply with sudden, fearful images--the mountain's uprearing, serpent-like

head and its striding after him "like a living thing"--and they project concretely the boy's inner state of troubled pleasure, but with fearful images overbearing images of beauty. The result is that the boy, having left the boat at the lake, is haunted by an alien, frightening vision:

> and after I had seen
> That spectacle, for many days my brain
> Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
> Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts
> There was a darkness--call it solitude
> Or blank desertion--no familiar shapes
> Of hourly objects, images of trees,
> Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,
> But hugh and mighty forms that do not live
> Like living men moved slowly through my mind
> By day, and were the trouble of my dreams. (417-26)

The boy's mind becomes unable to perceive its usual world of beautiful nature. Instead, his vision suggests to him unknown modes of being that are awesome in form, grotesque and frightening supernatural beings born of his imagination but grounded upon the reality of the mountain crag, whose form sparked the imagination.

The experience of the boy strikingly portrays one kind of experience which Wordsworth describes in his fragment "The Sublime and the Beautiful" and which I have suggested is appropriately termed the grotesque (see pages 40-42 above):

> Yet it cannot be doubted that a Child or an unpracticed person whose mind is possessed by the sight of a lofty precipice, with its attire of hanging rocks & starting trees, &c., has been

> visited by a sense of sublimity, if personal fear & surprise or wonder have not been carried beyond certain bounds. For whatever suspends the comparing power of the mind & possesses it with a feeling or image of intense unity, without a conscious contemplation of parts, has produced that state of the mind which is the consummation of the sublime.--But if personal fear be strained beyond a certain point, this sensation is destroyed. . . . But if that Power which is exalted above our sympathy impresses the mind with personal fear, so as the sensation becomes more lively than the impression or thought of the exciting cause, then self-consideration & all its accompanying littleness takes place of the sublime, & wholly excludes it. (Prose Works 353-54)

Thus, by Wordsworth's own definition the experience is not the consummation of the sublime, although it does involve many of the same attributes which can lead to the sublime if the perceiver is able to elevate his own mind so that there is a feeling or image of intense unity, without a contemplation of parts. If the perceiver cannot accomplish this elevated state, the sublime is destroyed. As Wordsworth asserts,

> if this [the sensation of sublimity] is analyzed, the body of this sensation would be found to resolve itself into three component parts: a sense of individual form or forms; a sense of duration; and a sense of power. The whole complex impression is made up of these elementary parts, & the effect depends upon their co-existence. For, if any one of them were abstracted, the others would be deprived of their power to affect. (Prose Works 351)

In short, the boy is unable to achieve a sublime vision, for his mind lacks the mature power to effect a total vision of unity.

But as Wordsworth makes quite clear, the event, grotesque in nature rather than sublime, is not without purpose, for he immediately follows the boat-stealing incident with an offering of praise to a "wisdom and spirit of the universe":

> not in vain,
> By day or star-light, thus from my first dawn
> Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
> The passions that build up our human soul,
> Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
> But with high objects, with enduring things,
> With life and Nature, purifying thus
> The elements of feeling and of thought,
> And sanctifying by such discipline
> Both pain and fear, until we recognise
> A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. (431-41)

As Wordsworth vividly expresses here, the value of the boat-stealing "spot of time" is that it represents the process by which an informing spirit works over time to intertwine certain passions into the human soul and by such discipline to sanctify both pain and fear until we mature to the recognition of a grandeur in our own hearts.

The critical word in this passage is <u>until</u>, for it is evident that the boy does not come to an awareness of grandeur immediatly. He does not experience the sublime at that moment. The sublime vision, such as Wordsworth later experienced on Mt. Snowden, required a more matured imagination. On the contrary, the boy is left with confusion, an overpowering sense of incongruity

between his normally perceived world and a shocking, newly perceived world which troubles his conscious mind and his dreams. He is not one with the universe of things about him, but rather is distinctly alienated from his world. This point is essential, for critical to appreciating Wordsworth's poetic vision of man's interaction with the external world is an understanding of the process of the imagination's growth. The boat-stealing incident becomes valuable later in the light of an experienced imagination that through a habitual discipline of fear and beauty is able to achieve a sublime vision.

As previously mentioned (pages 2-3 above), in his attempts to study the grotesque in Wordsworth, Ronald Earl Morgan confuses the grotesque experience with the sublime. Similarly, in a recent study of the sublime in English poetry and painting, James Twitchell refers to the boat-stealing incident of The Prelude as an example of the development of the "subliming self" theme in Wordsworth, and more specifically labels that scene an example of the sublime as derived from Burke's definition (61-62). Yet Twitchell follows that notion with a discussion of Wordsworth's requisites for the sublime, noting that a sense of duration is one of the elements Wordsworth defines as essential to the sublime.

Clearly, there is no true sense of duration apparent to the boy in this scene. The final sense of duration the poet realizes comes later, following the ascent of Mt. Snowden, only after early experiences are understood in the light of a matured, experienced imagination. The boat-stealing incident is grotesque in nature, not sublime, and thus its function is to play a part in a ministry of fear that helps develop the boy and prepare him for a later total, sublime vision. In the boating scene, the boy becomes aware of unknown modes of being, of a possible spiritual realm that lies beyond nature, but he achieves no complete vision of that spiritual realm, rather solitude or "blank desertion," and a vague sense of "huge and mighty forms" which trouble his mind.

In his brilliant comments on The Prelude, Geoffrey Hartman warns that the pattern of the poem is extremely complex and that one must be careful to recognize Wordsworth's struggle to unfold the process of the developing imagination, especially in the early books. As he explains, the "narrative weight of The Prelude, therefore, is not on childhood, but on the difficult process whereby the soul, having overcome itself through nature, must now overcome nature through nature." In short, Hartman suggests that the "problem of how the senses lead beyond themselves, or bear witness to the

unsubdued imagination, is an extremely complex one; contradictions hedge it about" (Wordsworth's Poetry 221-22).

Certainly such is the case in the boat-stealing incident, which illuminates the kind of struggle the boy's imagination underwent on its journey upwards toward a total, clear vision. The incident is one of magnitude. The boy has moved beyond perceiving forms of nature as mere stimuli to a recognition of nature as offering signs of an infinite realm lying beyond his finite, temporal world. But it is too simple to assume that the boy's experience of the grotesque mountain and the subsequent dark forms in his mind's eye is itself sublime. J. R. Watson rightly argues that the boy's observing the mountain coming after him, at least as he thinks he sees it, is "a manifestation of a force in the universe," but it serves as a memory that beomes illuminated as the child grows older: "The 'blood-stirring Thou' remains in the memory, to counteract the inexorable augmentation of the world of It" (135).

Early in this century, with his characteristic insight, A. C. Bradley argued that to appreciate Wordsworth's poetry fully, one must understand the importance of a "mystic" strain in his poems. Bradley

observes that in Wordsworth's poems "there is always traceable a certain hostility to 'sense,'" and he carefully explains that he uses the word sense in a poetic way, in that poetry frees us from the regular action of customary sensory experience, or at least breaks into customary sensory perception, and so may be considered hostile to normal sense. For example, Bradley notes that when Wordsworth writes of daffodils dancing in glee, the hostility to sense is "no more than a hostility to mere sense: this 'spiritual world' is itself the sensible world more fully apprehended" (131). On the other hand, Bradley suggests, a more heightened mystic strain in Wordsworth's poetry involves the kind of experience in which "there is always some feeling of definite contrast with the limited sensible world. The arresting feature or object is felt in some way against this background, or even as in some way a denial of it" (131). And Bradley suggests that the exact nature of this kind of hostility to sense varies tremendously in Wordsworth's poems. It may involve "visionary unearthly light" or a "feeling that the scene or figure belongs to the world of dream" or an intimation which contradicts or abolishes "the fixed limits of our habitual view," or just a complete sense of obscurity, "unlike the familiar modes" (131). It is this last feeling, one of obscurity

that breaks in upon the boy's senses in the boating incident. But, Bradley argues, this scene ends in more than mere perplexity: "There is apprehension, and we are approaching the sublime" (132).

Bradley's use of the word approaching provides the key, for unlike the several later critics who assume the boating incident is an experiencing of the sublime, Bradley sees it as moving us toward the sublime. And that distinction is crucial. The incident moves the boy toward sublimity, but does not actually achieve sublimity. The experience is by definition better termed the grotesque. Wordsworth's poetic revelation of the growth of his mind as symbolic of certain laws by which nature operates on the imagination here exemplifies the specific function of the grotesque. It becomes a means of approaching a higher realm of spiritual, mystic perception. The experience of the grotesque provides food for the growing imagination, and intertwined over time with other experiences of beauty and fear plays a vital role in fostering the growth of the imagination to move toward a complete vision which incorporates not only the finite temporal world, but also the infinite eternal universe.

The habitual experiencing of the grotesque, purged by time of its fearful immediacy, becomes for Wordsworth

a revelation, and subsequently in his poetry grotesque image patterns become revelatory of the spiritual vision possible for all men. Through his own experiencing of the grotesque, Wordsworth recognizes that his imagination, sparked by a ministry of fear born of "accidents" of nature, creates its own dim, grotesque modes of being. The grotesque images are rooted in natural phenomena but are expanded by the power of his own creative mind, and thus become reflective of his inward perceptive ability that can envision realms beyond the immediate world which he senses have mysterious affinities with an all-encompassing creative power.

But the difficulty in understanding the specific function of the grotesque in Wordsworth's poetic unfolding of the imagination's growth lies in distinguishing how the imagination reacts differently to experiences which end in confusion--in a fearful, acute awareness of incongruous modes of being--as compared to experiences which lead him to a sense of wholeness and oneness with infinity. The answer lies in understanding the complexity of the functioning of the imagination as Wordsworth apparently understood it. As W. J. B. Owen suggests ("Wordsworth's Imaginations"), the poet never produced a sustained, specific theory of the

imagination's nature and operation, although he did come to see that the imagination is creative and quasi-divine. In his poetry and prose, Wordsworth often defined the imagination as Coleridge did in Biographia Literaria, Chapter 13: the imagination is either Primary or Secondary. The Primary imagination functions to interpret and give significance to the environment--for example, the ability to perceive an apple distinctly as an apple. The Secondary imagination, on the other hand, is the creative imagination of the artist who can assemble elements of nature into a unity which reveals Eternity--for example, Wordsworth's Mt. Snowden vision in book 13 in which objects of nature appear as "The perfect image of a mighty Mind" (69). Wordsworth, unlike Coleridge, is "intent on elevating the act of perception, the meaningful interrelation of man's mind with the environment, to the status of artistic creation" (222).

Quite important to the purposes of this study is that Wordsworth sometimes perceives the imagination as working in a third way, separate from its functioning as either Primary or Secondary. Wordsworth reveals that at times the imagination is not distinctly creative, but rather is intensely receptive. For example, in book 2 of The Prelude (237-80), Wordsworth praises the "infant

babe," for it reveals to us the way our minds develop, and he blesses the infant because with the poet's "best conjectures" he would "trace / The Progress of our being" (238-39).[5] Wordsworth professes of the babe that "From Nature largely he receives; nor so / Is satisfied, but largely gives again" (267-68). And he proclaims that the infant's mind, "Even as an agent of the one great mind, / Creates, creator and receiver both," working in alliance with the forms of nature (271-75). Thus, Wordsworth establishes early in The Prelude both the creative and the receptive faculties of the imagination and their relationship to the Eternal.[6]

Owen refers specifically to a number of poems and passages in Wordsworth's poetry which reveal the receptive imagination at work (218-21). As he suggests, one of the most important is "There Was a Boy," which first appeared in Lyrical Ballads (1800), was later

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[5]Because of Wordsworth's close relationship with Coleridge, discussions of Wordsworth's views of the imagination naturally tend to compare his more poetic treatment of the imaginative faculty with Coleridge's scattered comments in Biographia Literaria. Probably the most definitive of the critical discussions comparing the two poets' theories is Raymond Dexter Havens's comments in The Mind of a Poet (1.205-29);

[6]Earlier, in Tintern Abbey" (1798), Wordsworth speaks of the eye and ear "--both what they half create, / And what perceive" (Poetical Works 106-07).

incorporated into The Prelude (5.389-422), and was published in Poems in Two Volumes (1815), where it was placed under the heading "Poems of the Imagination." In his comments on that poem in the Preface to the 1815 edition, Wordsworth explains the poem's purpose: "I have begun with one of the earliest processes of Nature in the development of this faculty [the imagination]. I have represented a commutation and transfer of internal feelings, co-operating with external accidents to plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the Imagination" (Brett 299).

As the poem appears incorporated into The Prelude, Wordsworth reveals how on many occasions the boy would stand alone in the beauty of nature under the evening stars and blow "mimic hootings to the silent owls / That they might answer him" (398-99). And it often chanced that in pauses of deep silence, when the owls did not respond to his calls, "a gentle shock of mild surprise / Has carried far into his heart the voice / Of mountain

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Havens suggests that Wordsworth may have influenced Coleridge, noting that The Prelude (1805) precedes Coleridge's comments in Biographia Literaria (1817) by more than a decade. Havens argues that Wordsworth is no mere "tame disciple" of Coleridge's theories, but concludes they were in "substantial agreement." Only Owen has specifically recognized the important third function of the imagination that Wordsworth reveals and has offered a more in-depth analysis of Wordsworth's understanding of the imaginative faculty.

torrents" (407-09). As Owen contends, this passage, along with numerous others, demonstrates the receptive imagination which receives influences from "accidents" of nature which are carried deep into the heart, usually early in life, and are stored in "the celestial soil" of the imagination for immortality (218). Thus, Wordsworth's poetic vision illuminates how the receptive imagination implants images which are stored to later feed the divinely creative imagination. The stored images, which are suggestive of something other-worldly and eternal, have not yet coalesced into a final vision. Nevertheless, they later become a vital part of the sustained vision focused by the matured imagination.

In short, Wordsworth's poetry, and especially certain passages of The Prelude, suggests that the imagination can work on an intensely receptive level not common to normal experience. Certain accidents of nature (i.e., a sudden awareness of incongruity, the grotesque) can so impress themselves upon the observer that the mind becomes acutely receptive of these images and their effects and stores these experiences for possible later recollection in tranquillity, where they are reshaped by the creative imagination (analogous to Coleridge's Secondary, artistic imagination) into a meaningful unity.

If we apply this notion to the grotesque image patterns Wordsworth progressively portrays in certain passages of The Prelude, we can see specifically how the grotesque tends to function. First, it acts as a catalyst which sparks the intensely receptive imagination, and thus impresses incongruous images on the mind for future nourishment. Second, it functions as re-created images which under the illuminating power of the matured imagination foster a heightened awareness of a profound, eternal power that lies beyond and yet speaks through these experiences of the grotesque. This second function is exemplified by the mature Wordsworth looking back at these past scenes involving the grotesque and in the light of his matured imagination unifying them into a profound understanding.

Wordsworth's use of grotesque image patterns in The Prelude, then, functions poetically as significant re-creations of experience meant to impress themselves upon the reader to intensify the receptive imagination. And this explains even more clearly why Wordsworth would choose to relate his childhood experiences of the grotesque early in book 1, divorced from the later "spots of time" passage in book 11. The reader experiences these abrupt images progressively, similar to the way Wordsworth had actually experienced them.

The reader is introduced to them in the childhood books, and the images impress themselves and are stored for later illumination after the reader has experienced the poet's journey form childhood to adulthood, and thus has vicariously experienced images and objects in the progressive way the poet did. The reader's process of imagination as he reads The Prelude becomes a journey of the imagination's growth similar to the journey Wordsworth himself experienced. Thus, the grotesque image patterns appear to the reader as illustrative of one of the ways that nature, habitually sparking "accidents" of perception, breaks through present reality to impress upon the imagination a dim sense of the value of other realms of being, an illumination of the transience of normal sensory perception that re-visions images of the present world and stores that new vision to nourish and mature the mind for its journey aloft to an all-encompassing view of man, nature, and the Eternal. The experience of the grotesque is especially valuable not for any immediate, conscious vision it offers, but rather for its function in the process of shaping and maturing the imagination. In its immediacy the value of the grotesque is elusive, but purged by time and renewed by the creative

imagination, it becomes a vital link to finding ultimate joy.

In book 11 (279-327), Wordsworth follows his explanation of "spots of time" with an example which demonstrates how a recollected grotesque experience is transformed over time by the imagination so that the residual effect is not the initial feeling of overbearing fear and clouded vision, but rather an elevated feeling of joy and a more ethereal perception of a divine power which feeds the struggling imagination. He recalls a childhood experience (not yet quite six years old) in which he had become inadvertently separated from his caretaker while on a horseback ride. He dismounted his horse "through fear" and led it to a valley bottom "where in former times / A murderer had been hung in iron chains" (288-89). There he chanced upon the name of the murderer carved in a rock, and so he fled away to the top of the adjoining bare common where he saw a naked pool, a stone signal-beacon on a summit, and a girl with a pitcher on her head, struggling against the wind. As Wordsworth explains, it

> was, in truth,
> An ordinary sight, but I should need
> Colours and words that are unknown to man
> To paint the visionary dreariness
> Which, while I looked all round for my
> lost guide,
> Did at that time invest the naked pool,
> The beacon on the lonely eminence,

> The woman, and her garments vexed and tossed
> By the strong wind. (307-15)

But the memory of that incident, recalled afterwards when Wordsworth habitually returned to that same location in later years, is a recollection not of fear and visionary dreariness, but rather one of nearly divine pleasure. For when he later walked in that spot, there "fell / The spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam-- / And think ye not with radiance more divine / From these remembrances, and from the power / They left behind?" (321-25).

Wordsworth's point is clear. His present elevated vision paradoxically can be achieved only because he retains the vivid impression of the earlier grotesque images, but purged and transformed over time by a creative imagination so that in blended might with present experiences they create an illumination within him, a "radiance more divine." Wordsworth concludes: "So feeling comes in aid of feeling, and diversity of strength / Attends us, if but once we have been strong" (325-27). It is the diversity of his vision which strengthens his mind.

Wordsworth understands, then, something of the process of the grotesque and its influence on his imagination, but he also realizes that while he glimpses the process, he cannot fully explain it:

> Oh mystery of man, from what a depth
> Proceed thy honours! I am lost, but see
> In simple childhood something of the base
> On which thy greatness stands--but this I feel,
> That from thyself it is that thou must give,
> Else never canst receive. (328-33)

Wordsworth's vision here is partial, but as he shows, partial vision becomes the foundation for later intense illumination. Because of his having perceived the grotesque at the hands of nature, he has realized that in time he both half-creates and half-perceives his past into a meaningful present, and it is this imaginative experience he celebrates and envisions for his readers:

> I see by glimpses now, when age comes on
> May scarcely see at all; and I would give
> While yet we may, as far as words can give,
> A substance and a life to what I feel:
> I would enshrine the spirit of the past
> For future restoration. (337-42)

It is his explicit poetic purpose to transport the reader on an imaginative journey through the process of the growth of the mind as it stores nourishment for future creative restoration.

In book 12, Wordsworth explains more concretely the workings of nature on the imagination as he has exemplified those workings experientially in the earlier books:

> From Nature doth emotion come, and moods
> Of calmness equally are Nature's gift:
> This is her glory--these two attributes
> Are sister horns that constitute her strength;
> This twofold influence is the sun and shower

Of all her bounties, both in origin
And end alike benignant. (1-7)

Grotesque, fearful experiences, which by their very nature end in strong emotion--a trouble to the mind, are balanced over time with experiences of beauty, which leave the perceiver in tranquillity. This process mysteriously develops the imagination toward creative genius:

Hence it is
That genius, which exists by interchange
Of peace and excitation, finds in her [Nature]
His best and purest friend--from her receives
That energy by which he seeks the truth,
Is rouzed, aspires, grasps, struggles, wishes, craves
From her that happy stillness of the mind
Which fits him to receive it when unsought. (7-14)

It is paradoxically the grotesque experience with all of its accompanying excitement and confusion that eventually enables the creatively imaginative perceiver to generate that stillness of the mind necessary to achieving a harmonious vision of infinte truth. And that total vision comes upon him unsought, but would not come without the preparatory process nature provides.

And Wordsworth stresses that this kind of heightened perception, this genius, is possible in some measure for all of humanity:

Such benefit may souls of humblest frame
Partake of, each in their degree; 'tis mine
To speak of what myself have known and felt--
Sweet task, for words find easy way, inspired
By gratitude and confidence in truth. (15-19)

And so, after having progressively prepared his reader and having himself been prepared poetically, in the final book (13) of The Prelude Wordsworth unveils the complete poetic vision for which he had been striving throughout his life and within his poetry. Employing the symbol of his ascent of Mt. Snowden (10-119), Wordsworth sings the consummation of man, nature, and the Eternal. The Power he envisions upon that "lonely mountain" (67), born of images which nature thrust upon his senses, becomes

> the express
> Resemblance--in the fullness of its strength
> Made visible--a genuine counterpart
> And brother of the glorious faculty
> Which higher minds bear with them as their own.
> (86-90)

As Jonathan Wordsworth explains in his gloss of this passage, nature has demonstrated by analogy the power of the human imagination (462, note 1). Specifically, as Wordsworth looked out over the vast expanse of the tops of hundreds of hills, he became aware of "a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour, / A deep and gloomy breathing-place" (56-57). The vastness of the spectacle with all of its accompanying beauty was the catalyst to produce tranquillity, while the dark chasm became the center of the vision:

> The universal spectacle throughout
> Was shaped for admiration and delight,
> Grand in itself alone, but in that breach

> Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
> That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodged
> The soul, the imagination of the whole. (60-65)

In analogy, Wordworth explains how that experience became for him a symbol of genius, of the power of the imagination:

> A meditation rose in me that night
> Upon the lonely mountain when the scene
> Had passed away, and it appeared to me
> The perfect image of a mighty mind,
> Of one that feeds upon infinity,
> That is exalted by an under-presence,
> The sense of God, or whatsoe'er is dim
> Or vast in its own being-- (66-73)

Wordworth's revelation, then, is that the imagination feeds upon the infinite forms of nature (such as the mountains rising above the mist), which in their vastness and power create within the perceiver a feeling of beauty, of infinite harmony and tranquillity. And likewise, the imagination is exalted by an under-presence, the dark vision which breaks through into the tranquillity and harmony of the world (such as the dark, romantic chasm). And as Wordsworth has explained, such an elevation of the mind is possible in some degree for all men. The mind which has habitually experienced these sister influences of beauty and fear-producing images is now able to fuse them together into a unified vision of the Eternal. The crowning height, the one to which Wordsworth had traveled on his journey upward to a complete vision, is that one at

which he achieves the "sense of God, or whatsoe'er is dim / Or vast in its own being," formed of both beauty and fear, vision and obscurity, and the one at which he realizes that the mind of man can glimpse that divine presence in the immediacy of external reality. That alone allows for a complete, sublime vision.

Wordsworth's analogy of the deep dark chasm as an exalting under-presence that contains the "soul, the imagination of the whole" is especially fitting to Wordsworth's theory of the imagination's growth as that process is unveiled in The Prelude. The "spots of time" episodes involving grotesque image patterns act as an imaginative under-presence, a suggestion of another infinite realm of existence, to exalt the poet's experiences of the vastness and beauty of nature, and they act as an under-presence for the reader to thrust upon him an awareness of a creative imagination, a nonrational perception, that is the soul of the poet and that reflects the essence of the creative, instructive power that underlies natural forms. The matured imagination that eventually enables the man to re-create the boyhood memories of fearful experiences into moments which portray a renovating, living power is shown to be nurtured by the grotesque, sparking an awareness of the mysterious and infinite, which so impresses itself on

the mind that it is stored to be synthesized with other experiences of the grotesque. The result is that the imagination becomes tempered, is strengthened, so that rather than allowing a personal fear of strange new perceptions to overbear and cloud the mind's vision, the imagination can embrace dark, unknown modes of existence as symbols of the eternal mind, that is, as symbols of the creative mind of God, "or whatsoe'er is dim / Or vast in its own being--" (72-73).

A useful example of Wordsworth's awareness of the value of experiences of the grotesque in tempering the imagination appears in book 5, where he considers the relationship of books and formal education to the imagination's growth in childhood. There he criticizes teachers and thinkers "who in their prescience would controul / All accidents" (380-81), and he wonders

> when will they be taught
> That in the unreasoning progress of the world
> A wiser spirit is at work for us,
> A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
> Of blessings, and most studious of our good,
> Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?
> (383-88)

He follows this avowal for "unreasoning progress" and a faith in an instructive life force with the previously mentioned "there was a boy" episode (see pages 157-58 above), which demonstrates how the child's receptive imagination stores a shocking awareness of "an uncertain heaven" for

future restoration. He then praises what he calls "A race of real children, not too wise, / Too learned, or too good" (436-37) who often bend "beneath our life's mysterious weight / Of pain and fear, yet still in happiness / Not yielding to the happiest upon earth" (442-44). Thus, Wordsworth reveals his belief that mere goodness and knowledge alone are not enough if we hope to become "real" human beings. Goodness and knowledge that are too "safe," that assume man can perceive absolutes rationally and exclude irrational dark perceptions, are too limited to support joyous life. Rather, true joy and wisdom lie in not knowing too much, not being aware of goodness alone. It is a heightened experiencing of life's mysteries, a bending before an awareness of the overwhelming mysterious, which is painful and frightening, that paradoxiacally offers the mind supreme happiness.

Later in book 6, when he describes part of his own education, his experiences as a young man on his walking tour of the Alps, he mentions specific episodes in which he experienced a mysterious weight of fear born of a recognition of strange realms of being, and yet he eventually came to realize the value of those grotesque experiences to his own imaginative development. One of these episodes is his disappointment when he learns that

he has anticlimactically crossed the Alps, that what he had so eagerly anticipated was in fact over. He describes how he felt: "I was lost as in a cloud, / Halted without a struggle to break through" (529-30). Yet, now, in the light of maturer vision, he perceives that moment in a different way:

> And now, recovering, to my soul I say
> 'I recognise thy glory'. In such strength
> Of usurpation, in such visitings
> Of awful promise, when the light of sense
> Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
> The invisible world, doth greatness make
> her abode,
> There harbours whether we be young or old.
> Our destiny, our nature, and our home,
> Is with infinitude--and only there. (531-39)

It is when his mind is visited by startling experiences which make him aware of "the invisible world" that he recognizes the eternal and stores this awareness so that the mind becomes "strong in itself, and in the access of joy / Which hides it like the overflowing Nile" (547-48). The simile of the Nile is especially telling, for it suggests that the startling experience has posited, like the Nile whose floods bring life and fertile soil, something rich and fertile in the celestial soil of his imagination.

Another of his educative experiences described in book 6 (617-67) offers a further example of the particular ability of the grotesque to temper the imagination. He and his companion, lodging near

Locarno's Lake, misunderstood the time sounded by the Italian clocks and arose too early and wandered lost and bewildered in "woods immense." They sat on a rock to wait for daylight and watched a "dull red image of the moon" reflected in the water, "changing oftentimes its form / Like an uneasy snake." They heard strange sounds, such as the "cry of unknown birds," and were disturbed by the haunting forms of nature about them in the darkness. The result was that the sights and sounds did not leave them "free from personal fear." They experienced there on the shore of the lake, grotesque images which were alien to their usual, reasoned sensory perception.

Immediately following this passage, Wordsworth carefully explains that such experiences did not leave him ultimately in "hollow exultation," but rather

> whate'er
> I saw, or heard, or felt, was but a stream
> That flowed into a kindred stream, a gale
> That helped me forwards, did administer
> To grandeur and to tenderness-to the one
> Directly, but to tender thoughts by means
> Less often instantaneous in effect--
> Conducted me to these along a path
> Which, in the main, was more circuitous. (672-80)

The scenes of beauty and harmony he experienced there brought a grandeur to his mind, but other scenes, such as the grotesque images of Locarno's Lake, <u>eventually</u>

led him to "tender thoughts," which we can assume were substantially exulting.

The Prelude, then, systematically and progressively unveils the means by which an instructive power can experientially lead the sympathetic observer of nature to a sublime vision of man's oneness with the external world and with the Eternal. Wordsworth's avowed faith is that nature will not betray the heart that loves her, but rather will thrust an "unreasoned" education upon him, which, because such an education is not accomplished through the usual, limited conceptual methods of finite thinkers, can lead to an infinite understanding. Wordsworth undoubtedly had come to see that true understanding cannot be taught rationally nor gained without experiencing fear and anguish. A bending before the awful mystery of the eternal is vital to glimpsing the magnitude of ultimate reality. He realized that an imitative philosophical poem or a topographical poem employing artificial image patterns drawn from popular poetry or fictions and based on fanciful associations rather than on real experience would not suffice. Having been himself educated through spots of time, through moments of illuminating experience involving beauty and fear, his poetic process in The Prelude must be to present selectively image

patterns which would transport his reader on an experiential journey very like the one he had traveled on his flight upward to visionary heights. As Wordsworth proclaims in his Prospectus, the regaining of paradise can become the "simple produce of the common day" when the imagination is "wedded to this goodly universe / In love and holy passion."

It is an understanding of the magnitude of the holy, what Wordsworth calls "the one mighty mind", that the poet acknowledges through the grotesque image patterns in The Prelude. As Rudolf Otto argues in his classic study The Idea of the Holy, "the holy" has been misinterpreted in traditional Christian orthodoxy to mean "completely good," and so an understanding of the idea of the deity is limited to conceptual human terms in which the nature of God is "thought of by analogy with our human nature and personality" (1). Thus the deity is viewed only in rational, measurable, human terms. But, he continues, the holy has and must include the irrational as part of its essence: "For so far are these 'rational' attributes from exhausting the idea of deity, that they in fact imply a non-rational or supra-rational Subject of which they are predicates" (2). He adopts the word numinous to name that something "extra" which must be included in any true consideration

of the meaning of the holy. The term numinous suggests a complexity of feelings or sensings of the divine which are irreducible to conceptual terms, but included within this complexity of feelings is the emotion of a kind of nothingness or blankness of the mind in which the observer is "submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures" (10).

A part of the numinous, which Otto suggests is reflected in the mind in terms of feeling and can only be suggested through indirect modes of expression, is what he calls a feeling of a "bewildering strength" which occupies the mind. Otto calls this feeling mysterium tremendum. Mysterium denotes more than that which is hidden and esoteric or unfamiliar, because it is not mererly a negative feeling, but also is a positive feeling. Tremendum is an emotion of fear, but quite distinct from being merely afraid. Otto suggests that the Hebrew word higdish (hallow) is an example, because "'to keep a thing holy in the heart' means to mark it off by a feeling of peculiar dread, not to be mistaken for an ordinary dread" (13). It is a particular kind of fear of the divine that often "seizes upon a man with paralysing effect," although it can come upon him more gently. This fear "begins to stir in the

feeling of 'something uncanny', 'eerie', or 'weird'," and it is objectified in different modes. It involves the mysterious strength of the divine looming before the mind.

Perhaps Otto's best description of this notion of the numinous is that it is a "feeling of the 'wholly other'" (197). It is a Subject which defies conceptual terms. In fact, he notes that this feeling of the "wholly other" gives rise to a tendency in religious mystics "to follow the 'via negationis,' by which every predicate that can be stated in words becomes excluded from the absolute Numen--i.e. from Deity--till finally the Godhead is designated as 'nothingness' and 'nullity,' bearing in mind always that these terms denote in truth immeasurable plentitude of being" (197). It is interesting to note that Geoffrey Hartman, as I have mentioned earlier (see page 168 above), has argued that in The Prelude Wordsworth came to realize that nature itself led him beyond nature, and in his article published in Modern Philogy (1962), he asserts: "And since this movement of transcendence, or what mystics have often called the negative way, is shown by Wordsworth as inherent in life, and as achieved without violent or ascetic discipline, I have thought to name it a via naturaliter negativa" (214). "Holy passion," a

heightened sensing of the eternal, is without question shown by Wordsworth to be numinous, and that feeling of something extra, non-rational, and ghostlike that had haunted Wordsworth throughout his youth and into manhood did indeed, to borrow Otto's words, "survive with the quality of exaltedness and sublimity" as illuminated in The Prelude.[7] Specifically, in summary, grotesque image patterns function in The Prelude as representatives of the process by which nature, sparking "accidents" of perception, awakens the imagination and habituates and tempers it so that the mind is able to synthesize initially overwhelming and frightening experiences of a "wholly other." These experiences become a kind of dim under-presence, a non-rational recognition of holy fear or dread. This under-presence exalts imaginative perceptions so that the observer of nature perceives the images of natural experience as reflective of both heightened beauty and awesome fear,

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[7]In view of Wordsworth's images of the mist-veiled, dark romantic chasm as seen in the moonlight from Mt. Snowden, it is interesting to note Rudolf Otto's suggestion that one of the direct means of representing the numinous in Western art is darkness. The darkness, he suggests, "must be such as is enhanced and made all the more perceptible by contrast with some last vestige of brightness. . . . The semi-darkness that glimmers in vaulted halls, or beneath the branches of a lofty forest glade, strangely quickened and stirred by the mysterious play of half-lights, has always spoken eloquently to the

the one mighty creative Mind that inhabits all of creation. And the mind of man is itself, as Wordsworth asserts in the closing lines, "a thousand times more beautiful that the earth / On which he dwells" because the mind "is itself / Of substance and of fabric more divine." Man, himself at home in infinity, is of fabric more divine than the fabric which forms the veil of nature because the imagination is able to perceive nature as reflective of the magnitude of the awful beauty and holy dread that are inherently part of the essence of God. Thus, the mind of man partakes of divinity.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Wordsworth had proposed in his Preface to the 1814 edition of The Excursion that The Prelude would have the same relation to his intended long, philosophical poem as an ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church. In his An Essay on Man, Professor Ernst Cassirer

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soul.. . ." (68). For an interesting discussion of Wordsworth's use of light and dark image patterns, see Matthew Brennan's "The Light of Wordsworth's Desire for Darkness in The Prelude" (see List of References). Paradoxically, Brennan suggests that darkness becomes the desired "medium" for imaginative vision. As I have suggested throughout this study, the grotesque image patterns often involve a contrasting of dark, fearful images with images of light and beauty, and these image patterns are catalysts which spark and then temper the imagination.

suggests that "In nature, in morality, in history we are still living in the propylaeum [structured entrance] of philosopical wisdom; in art we enter into the sanctuary itself. The true poem is not the work of the individual artist; it is the universe itself, the one work of art which is forever perfecting itself" (qtd. Stevens 136). In that sense, The Prelude is not Wordsworth's ante-chapel. It is the body of the church itself. What interests Wordsworth in The Prelude is the process of a power in the universe perfecting man's vision. And just as grotesque gargoyles adorn the gothic cathedral as a part of the architect's symbolic process in creating a structure of worship that illuminates God, grotesque image patterns adorn Wordsworth's poem, providing symbols of a dark, mysterious presence that is vital to the process of man's regaining lost paradise through imaginative vision.

CHAPTER VI

WORDSWORTH AS AN ARTIST OF THE GROTESQUE

The grostesque image patterns appearing in many of the best poems Wordsworth composed between 1788 and 1805--beginning significantly with An Evening Walk and continuing through such poems as "Simon Lee," "Nutting," "The Thorn," and The Prelude (1805)--reveal that, if readers are to appreciate the magnitude of Wordsworth's poetic achievement, they must avoid oversimplification and imbalance. In failing to perceive the important function of the incongruous image patterns inherent in these poems, readers too frequently dismiss the poetry as flawed, not appreciating the value of juxtaposed images. Typical examples are George Meyer's and John Nichols's comments about the swans passage of An Evening Walk (see page 70 above). Because they overlook the grotesque images, they do not recognize the complexity of Wordsworth's poetic structure, thereby missing the rich implications of the poem. And in failing to perceive the nature of the grotesque images in his poems, readers often relegate some of Wordsworth's best poetry to a body of "traditional" poems which merely celebrate the value of visionary beauty or relate moral and social meanings. In The Simple Wordsworth, John

Danby rightly indicates that much of the best of Wordsworth's poetry has been "swallowed up in a general 'Wordsworthianism'" relecting the influence of readers such as John Stuart Mill, who suggests in his Autobiography that Wordsworth's poetry is a "medicine for the mind" which evokes states of feelings as one falls under the excitement of beauty (1-2).

Keats's comments about Wordsworth's egotism (in his letter to John Hamilton Reynolds 3 Feb. 1818) and Byron's comments about "the simple Wordsworth" in his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" are other examples of critical notions which have been influential in fixing a one-sided preconception about Wordsworth's poetic content and style. Wordsworth's poetry too often is assumed to be an egotistical seeking after the sublime and the beautiful, forcing an invalid interpretation of the poems' images and structures which overlooks the fact that many of his best poetic passages are evocations, and even celebrations, of the grotesque, not the sublime. An excellent example is the boat-stealing scene in book 1 of The Prelude (lines 372-426), which critics such as Ronald Earl Morgan and James Twitchell confuse with the sublime (see page 167 above), but which actually is grotesque, as are many of the "spots of time" passages in The Prelude. In short,

students of Wordsworth who overlook the presence of dark, fearful images among the images of beauty in his poems and who fail to consider his poetic revelations about the effect of these images on the imagination's growth are prone to perceive Wordsworth as a poet of the sublime, an idealistic visionary who chooses to look only at the good and the beautiful.

On the other hand, critical readers who too avidly follow the lead of A. C. Bradley, C. C. Clarke, and other scholars who rightly have recognized a dark tension inherent in Wordsworth's poetry over-emphasize the fearful element in Wordsworth and focus upon the dark vision that haunts his poetry and drives him away from looking steadily at an ugly, disjointed world. Geoffrey Hartman's argument in Wordsworth's Poetry that the poet's perception of nature finally forces a "consciousness of self raised to apocalyptic pitch" (see page 15 above) is the best example of a study of Wordsworth's poetry which, though correct in its intent to emphasize the dark tension in Wordsworth's poetry, overzealously states the case at the expense of belittling Wordsworth's optimistic vision and triumphant strength as powerfully expressed in such poems as "Tintern Abbey" and The Prelude. The truth is that Wordsworth does not create an imbalanced vision of

either fear or beauty in the body of his poetry, but rather accomplishes exactly what Coleridge suggests is the mark of a true poet: the essential "balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" (Biographia Literaria 2: 12). Wordsworth acknowledges the importance of this balance in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads where he suggests that the pleasure the mind derives from the perception of "similitude in dissimilitude and dissimilitude in similitude" is the principle which acts as the great spring of the activity of the mind (265). And the function of the grotesque within the larger framework of the body of his poetry clearly is to help maintain this balance. As I have suggested in Chapters IV and V of this study, the grotesque functions within the process of the imagination's growth as a counterbalance. The unusual "accidents" of nature spark the imagination so that it becomes acutely perceptive of a frightening, alien world. And over time, the experiencing imagination becomes matured so that it escapes confining itself to seeking rational "truths" or retreating from the unorthodox. The grotesque acts as a dark under-presence that exalts perceptions of beauty and harmony by tempering and maturing the imagination so that it can synthesize experience into a complete vision of the awesome beauty

and holy mystery of creation, so that the mind can bear "the burden of the mystery." The grotesque in Wordsworth's poetry is an expression of one of the chief means nature employs to nourish and mature the mind so that it becomes exceptionally wise. Wordsworth expresses the essential nature of this process in his poem "Expostulation and Reply":

> 'The eye--it cannot choose but see;
> We cannot bid the ear be still;
> Our bodies feel, where,er they be,
> Against or with our will.
>
> 'Nor less I deem that there are Powers
> Which of themselves our minds impress;
> That we can feed this mind of ours
> In a wise passiveness. (Lyrical Ballads 104)

The experiential process by which the mind attains a "wise passiveness" is the vision Wordsworth unveils in The Prelude, symbolized by the images the speaker perceives from the top of Mt. Snowden, but it is an oversimplification to label Wordsworth as a poet of the sublime. Much of his poetry, in fact the majority of it, is preparatory to the sublime. Such poems as "The Thorn," "Nutting," and "To Joanna," which contain grotesque image patterns, are not poems of sublimity or visionary beauty, but are an unveiling of the process by which man can, each in his own degree, finally envision sublimity; they are poems about how the imagination can mature to attain heightened perception. Wordsworth's

poetic purpose is to reveal how man can regain lost paradise through the imagination's interaction with the forms of external nature.

Wolfgang Kayser's definition of the grotesque (see pages 21-25 above) as the "ESTRANGED WORLD" and as "AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKED AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD [his capitals]" suggests that the grotesque is essentially alienating and pejorative. But Wordsworth's poetic creation of the grotesque reveals him to be a truly original artist. He employs the grotesque positively within his poetry as vital to the process of reconciling man's estrangement from the external world and as a means of invoking the deity, not demons. The grotesque in Wordsworth's poetry functions in a particularly inventive way because it is not an end in itself, but rather a vital link in the process of discovery.

In his excellent book God and the Grotesque, Carl Skrade discusses specifically in relation to art Rudolf Otto's argument that any true glimpsing of ultimate reality must involve a non-rational perception which illuminates the experience of the deity in its entirety, allowing for the feeling of something extra, awesome, and ghostlike as part of the essence of the divine. Skrade's argument is that any meaningful expression of

God must not "eliminate or repress man's very real experience of the non-rational" (12), yet ironically, and in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary, modern Western man has primarily attempted to comprehend ultimate reality rationally. He has submitted truth and reality to the "principles of non-contradiction." When man encounters that which does not bow before these inviolable truths, "he declares it untrue or unreal or unfit" (12). Skrade contends that man must be willing, if he is to receive divine illumination, "to look afresh constantly, without blinking, into the human situation," including its frightening incongruities (15).

Skrade's suggeston is that theologians, who are distinguished by their beliefs that "the meaning of being lies beyond this world of things and formulas and reasons," have not completely expressed the notion of the deity because they are unable to "articulate a content for that word [God]." Yet their inability to articulate is "a 'making real' of the traditional distinction between God and man" (18). Skrade's contention is that it is the artist thrusting expressions of the grotesque before us who particularly captures the essense of ultimate reality. He asserts: "I believe that while the artist of the grotesque

frequently works in a non-religious style, he nonetheless works with religious content. Further, I believe that the eruption of the grotesque in our time is an attack on and a counterbalance to our rationalism and is a recognition of the non-rational as a real and valuable aspect of man and thus, perhaps, of man's experience of God" (18).[1]

Certainly, as Ruskin had appreciated, Wordsworth is a towering artist of the true grotesque, and the body of his greatest poetry, particularly The Prelude, stands as the proof. That Wordsworth's poetry is essentially of a religious content has been argued by a number of prominent Wordsworthian scholars. Geoffrey Hartman, for example, concludes that "Wordsworth's thinking is of the existential or phenomenological kind, which starts with objects not as they are but as they appear to a mind fruitfully perplexed by their differing modes of appearance, and which does not try to reduce these to a single standard. The poet values the varying types of relations and responses of his mind to objects because they potentially unlock some truth about himself.

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[1]In her comments on the grotesque in art and theatre (1927), Mary Cass Canfield concludes: "For we shall not look long at the grotesque without realizing that there is in it something spiritually ominous, a quality in it more profound than its strangeness or its humour" (7).

Wordsworth's thought is also, therefore, of a basically religious kind. . . . every truth or error in relationship is a source of revelation" (389). Similarly, F. R. Leavis suggests that Wordsworth's "preoccupation with sanity and spontaneity" works "at a level and in a spirit it seems appropriate to call religious" (164). J. R. Watson argues that it is this religious quality in Wordsworth's poetry that has helped assure his continuing importance as a poet (13). While these scholars have not specifically focused on Wordsworth as an artist of the true grotesque, as Ruskin did, they do reveal an understanding and appreciation of the essential quality which characterizes Wordsworth's use of grotesque image patterns in a particularly "noble," basically religious way.

However, Wordsworth's originality in breaking away from traditional poetic expressions which had become too artificial and rational in favor of original poetic utterance that employed images of incongruity has been indirectly suggested, although never developed specifically. Northrop Frye's contention (see page 9 above) that Romanticism is parimarily a revolution in poetic imagery challenges us to look more closely at the specific patterns of images employed by Wordsworth and other poets of the age. In his study of "sublime and

alarming images" in poetry, Edwin Morgan does more specifically recognize that employing incongruous images in his poems was particularly part of Wordsworth's genius: "Wordsworth, more than any other poet, seems to have been created to make something of the eighteenth-century ideas of the sublime. . . . The association of the sublime with the alarming, the importance of elements of awe and terror, is particularly his. . ." (295). W. J. B. Owen rightly warns that Wordsworth recognized that we must look at nature in "several" ways. In his remarks about the sublime and the beautiful in The Prelude and in Wordsworth's prose fragment on the sublime, Owen stresses that the poet is not saying, as do contemporaries such as Edmund Burke, that the sublime and beautiful are merely useful ways of looking at nature, "but rather that the categories are two of the 'several' ways in which we must look at nature if we wish to 'contemplate accurately'" ("Sublime" 72). Thus Wordsworth demonstrates that we must understand the means by which nature works on the mind if we are to obtain truth.

For Wordsworth, understanding the process of the imagination's growth is essential, and such poems as "The Thorn," "Nutting," "To Joanna," and The Prelude

show that the grotesque is vital to that process. Patrick Holland, like Owen, warns that "it would be risky for a critic to use as a 'useful fiction" those categories that Wordsworth himself regarded as 'grand constitutional laws,' expecially when The Prelude deals explicitly with the growth of that very mind which would be everlastingly affected by nature's objects viewed under such laws . . ." (17). Holland's point is crucial, and he could have included the grotesque as one of those categories, for Wordsworth's prose fragment and numerous of his poems, especially The Prelude, as I have suggested, reveal Wordsworth's profound understanding of the grotesque and the power of its functional use.

The importance of Wordsworth as a revolutionary artist of the true grotesque now needs to be appreciated. Through his profound poetic expressions of the grotesque, Wordsworth broke away from the artificial poetic images which were popular in his day, supernatural notions of ghosts and ghoulish forms such as he had inherited from Beattie's The Minstrel and which had provided him with images of graves and corpses to be woven into his early poetry. Through the creation of his own unique grotesque images, Wordsworth freed himself from a reliance on popular Gothic images, the "tragic super-tragic" (The Prelude 8.532). Wordsworth

began this process in the swans passage of An Evening Walk and progressively developed it on through original image patterns in the Lyrical Ballads and The Prelude. And he also discovered the poetic idiom for a true artistic expression of his poetic vision, the achievement of The Prelude.

Wordsworth discovered the power of grotesque image patterns to express the complexities of reality in non-rational, symbolic ways rather than in ordered, customary, artificial expressions or images. Thus, he anticipated what so many later artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have discovered. Clayborough, Kayser, and other scholars of the grotesque in art and literature have documented the proliferation of the grotesque in art during the later nineteenth century and on to the present. Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues that by the beginning of the twentieth century, the grotesque had become a primary means of expressing truth in literature. He notes that in his Meditations of a Nonpolitical Man, Thomas Mann states that the grotesque was "properly something more than the truth, something real in the extreme, not something arbitrary, false, absurd, and contrary to reality" (xix). Harpham concludes: "By the end of the nineteenth century it was more common than not to speak of the 'naturalness' of

the grotesque" (xix). Ruskin had shown incredible insight when he identified Wordsworth as an artist of the true grotesque.

In her study of the grotesque, Sylvie Henning argues that the grotesque in art has disrupted the classical perception of ordered reality because it does not conform to the standards of mimesis and decorum established in the Renaissance. The grotesque expression, she suggests, "contravenes rationalism and any systematic use of thought," relying instead on an "inner logic" that contests conventional logic (107). Her conclusion is that the grotesque provides the modern artist with "one means of approaching a 'more flexible ordering,' an 'ordering' dependent on undecidable, rather than hierarchically distinct categories." The artist who observes the grotesque may be forced "to confront the insufficiencies of his world-view" and rather than crumble upon this unsettling foundation, the artist could enjoy a playful in-forming in which he relishes the irreconcible and yet inseparable opposites as the means of a fresh approach to artistic expression (119).

As I have suggested, Wordsworth's poetry reveals the complex process by which he accomplished just such a fresh approach to artistic expression and a deep and

joyous awareness that irrational perceptions, those sparked by unusual natural occurrences, are essential to the imagination's glimpsing the creative, unifying power that dwells within man and within all of creation. He employs grotesque image patterns functionally to reveal the process by which the imagination is developed through its non-rational perceptions of grotesque objects and forms which symbolize the "inner life" simultaneously inherent in man, nature, and eternity. And in so doing, he reveals a new way of expressing an essentially religious vision in a non-religious manner appropriate to his age and to ours. He eschewed stale and one-dimensional forms of expression in favor of fresh, multi-dimensional images.

In this connection, and especially in view of his recognition of Wordsworth's genius in exploring dark passages to new chambers of thought (see page 127 above), Keats's notion of negative capability seems particularly applicable to Wordsworth's unveiling of the process of the habitual experiencing of the grotesque to shape and mature the imagination, for through his artistic expression of the grotesque Wordsworth demonstrates Keats's definition of negative capability, that is "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable

reaching after fact and reason." This is, in effect, Wordsworth's notion of "wise passiveness" as expressed in "Expostulation and Reply." And as I have suggested, Clayborough identifies a higher realm of grotesque art in which the observer views incongruous mental images of experience and "luxuriates in their inexplicable 'significance'" (see 27 above). This is the crowning achievement of Wordsworth's expression of the grotesque in The Prelude, and we see this achievement anticipated in poems such as "The Thorn" and "To Joanna."

Importantly, Wordsworth offers an understanding of the process by which the poet's mind grows to this state. The Prelude is simultaneously a revealing of the process of the growth of the poet's imagination as well as a proclamation that this process is suited to all men, each in his own degree. In his initial experiences of the grotesque, the boy in The Prelude remains on a lower level, what Clayborough calls a "progressive" aspect of the mind in which he "rejects deliberate juxtapositions as pointless or struggles to establish a logical connection between them" (see page 27 above for Clayborough's theories). This is likewise reflected in poems such as An Evening Walk and the poems of the Lyrical Ballads volume of 1798, in which Wordsworth presents grotesque image patterns but struggles to find

his poetic idiom and to coalesce his images into a unified, extended vision. This state is marked by tension and a tendency to be overwhelmed by personal fear or to seek moral implications. The higher level of grotesque imaging, what Clayborough refers to as a "regressive" aspect, generates a profound stillness of the mind in which the observer is exalted by incongruity and irreducibleness, and yet he is vividly and realistically aware of mysterious modes of existence. This is the level attained by the mature speaker of The Prelude, and we see the process of his achieving that level in the transitional poems of the Lyrical Ballads of 1800 and in the early books of The Prelude (1805).

Wordsworth's ability to create artistic expressions of the grotesque grounded upon the realities of his everyday experiences rather than to imitate the artificial grotesque patterns he inherited from his poetic predecessors and from lesser writers of his own era reveals in another important way the original genius of Wordsworth as an artist of the grotesque. Frances K. Barasch, in an article published in Modern Language Studies (1983), suggests that scholars now need to modify some of their evolutionary theories about the development of the grotesque in English literature. Her specific argument is that during the sixteenth century,

Shakespeare achieved "the finest free-standing grotesque" developed in English literature in the character of Falstaff, from King Henry IV. She suggests that during the medieval period artists had demonstrated imaginative freedom in their creations of grotesque figures in the margins of manuscripts and on the surfaces of sacred buildings; they had overcome fears by prolific invention of embattled monsters and hellish creatures. But during the Renaissance a revival of classical grotesque forms occurred, exemplified by Raphael's designs in the Vatican Loggia in which pagan and Christian histories are bordered or framed by strange objects borrowed from the "Golden House of Nero," such as satyrs and cupids. She further suggests that this style, more restrained and redundant than the imaginative medieval grotesques, is found in Spenser's poetry, for example the "enchased mazer" in The Shepherd's Calendar (1579) portraying "beres and tygres, that maken fiers warre / And over them spread a goodly vine, / Entrailed with a wanton yvie-twined" (August Eclogue 48-50). She contends that in Spenser, especially in the Faerie Queene, grotesque monsters and spirits come into conflict with ideal figures such as the chaste Palmer and the ideal knight. The grotesque figures are one-sided, inhuman creations used for allegorical purposes.

By the sixteenth century, artists had freed grotesque figures from their entangling vines but had retained them as monstrous, not genuinely real. Examples are unruly characters--vices, fools, the grim jester in the Dance of Death--such as seen in John Heywood's "enterludes" published in 1533, but Falstaff, Shakespeare's great character, is "more than a comic monster, his self-conscious wit and awareness of his own vulnerability are humanizing elements that had never been seen before in grotesque tradition" (63). Yet Falstaff is, Barasch argues, grotesque in form and is made a "trunk of humors, that bolting hutch of beastliness, that swoln parcel of dropsies" (64). Thus Falstaff is "noble humanity deformed and deformity humanized" (65). Though often described in grotesque images, Falstaff has human actuality and potentiality, and he stands as a well-rounded character, literally and figuratively.

But, Barasch concludes, restoration writers, with their renewed interests in the sublime and in idealized, Platonic notions of harmony, were bound by principles of decorum and morality. They returned to the late Renaissance tendency of employing limited, artificial grotesque figures, such as Dryden's and D'Avenant's adaptation of Shakespeare's Tempest in which

Caliban--half man, half fish in Shakespeare--is made purely monstrous when he is assigned an attempted violation of Miranda. She suggests that the Restoration writers held the grotesque well apart from the non-grotesque aspects of existence. Shakespeare, then, had revived the native medieval grotesque form, an imaginative grotesque with human potentiality, but the restoration writers did not achieve such a true grotesque, but rather created artificial grotesque characters, flat and forgettable.

My suggestion is that in creating original grotesque images born of actual experience, Wordsworth restored the use of the true grotesque, what Barasch calls the native grotesque, in English literary tradition, breaking away from the artificial grotesque forms which he intuitively recognized as lacking a "profound relation with the true" (Ruskin's phrase about the artist of the "noble" grotesque). In the grotesque figures of The Lyrical Ballads (for example, Simon Lee, Goody Blake, Harry Gill, and the mad mother) Wordsworth, like Shakespeare, humanized grotesque figures and thus offered grotesques that were closer to human actuality. As he developed image patterns to explore psychological implications and to unveil the process of the imagination's growth and its relation to the eternal

(particularly in "The Thorn," "Nutting," "To Joanna" and The Prelude), Wordsworth expanded the grotesque in English literature to explore the realm of human actuality. Wordsworth deserves his due as a poet who significantly developed the use of the grotesque in English literary tradition, freeing that mode from artificial restraints and bequeathing a revived, native grotesque to other literary artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Wordsworth's desire, as he clearly expressed in his writings, especially the final book of The Prelude, was to be a prophet, to teach others what he had learned from his own experiences about the imagination's potentiality. Thomas McFarland argues that Wordsworth is indeed a poet-prophet, that like all great poets from Virgil to Yeats, Wordsworth presents himself as a prophet. But McFarland suggests that Wordsworth seems an anomaly because of his preoccupation with the past. Yet, as McFarland convincingly argues, Wordsworth's special poetic stance allows him to use the past as other prophetic writers use the future, and he argues that Wordsworth is in fact deeply concerned with the future, as The Prelude vividly reveals. McFarland draws on numerous authorities, past and present, to demonstrate that true prophetic utterance follows a

threefold criterion. It must have gravitas (high seriousness); it must view human experience whole (see the past, present, and future on one vision); and it must be marked by a certain indistinctness. He suggests that prophecy's largest concern in "pointing to a higher and fuller reality than the one we experience in daily life. In mundane existence, as St. Paul says, we know only in part, and 'we prophesy in part'" (253). McFarland draws upon a comment from William Blake as the best expression of the value of the indistinct to the poet-prophet: "that which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worthy my care. The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act" (253). In Modern Painters, John Ruskin argues that an "idea" an artist presents is "great" in "proportion as it is received by a higher faculty of the mind, and as it more fully occupies, and in occupying, exercises and exalts, the faculty by which it is received" (3: 92). Like Blake and Wordsworth and other great artists, Ruskin recognizes that true artistic expression cannot be easily explicit. It must exercise and exalt the imagination, rouse it into the process of acting. It is by indistinctness, so valued by great poets and

prophets, that Wordsworth rouses his readers into the process of discovery.

In his essay "Imagination as Value," Wallace Stevens suggests that "the imagination is the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos" (153). Stevens further explains: "It may be that the imagination is a miracle of logic and that its exquisite divinations are calculations beyond analysis, as the conclusions of the reason are calculations wholly within analysis" (154). In other words, Stevens proposes that the imagination is capable of a higher form of logic than is reason, that what is actually normal is beyond the limits of reason and so is perceived as abnormal by thinkers relying on finite reason. The imagination thus focuses on the abnormal, and in so doing, achieves a perception of truth beyond analysis. In book 12 of The Prelude (1805), Wordsworth defines "the best of those who live" as men of "higher" mold who do not speak with accomplished, logical rhetoric, but rather,

> Theirs is the language of the heavens, the power,
> The thought, the image, and the silent joy;
> Words are but under-agents in their souls--
> When they are grasping with the greatest strength
> They do not breathe among them. (270-74)

Later, in book 13, Wordsworth refers to the imagination as "the glorious faculty / Which higher minds bear with

them as their own" (89-90). These "higher minds" observe the objects of the external world and by a creative, instinctual perception they recreate experience into true insight:

> This is the very spirit in which they deal
> With all the objects of the universe:
> They from their native selves can send abroad
> Like transformation, for themselves create
> A like existence, and, when'er it is
> Created for them, catch it by an instinct.
> Them the enduring and transient both
> Serve to exalt. (91-98)

The passages of Wordsworth's poems which look at the "abnormal" of experience, the grotesque, with the imagination and thus unfold the appropriate process for discovering inexplicable truth, reveal that Wordsworth realized over a century ago what Stevens and other later poet-prophets have come to know. In a letter written to Lady Beaumont (21 May 1807), Wordsworth declares, "never forget what I believe was observed to you by Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen . . . (Letters Middle Years 150).

Wordsworth's poetry of the Great Decade, particularly such poems as "Nutting," "To Joanna," and The Prelude (1805), which Wordsworth himself valued as most indicative of his genius, demonstrates that

Wordsworth came to realize that for a poet-prophet the grotesque image, which is by its very nature indistinct, is an appropriate mode of expression and an appropriate reflection of inexplicable reality. His genius recognized that as a serious teacher of higher reality, a teacher who had been fostered by beauty and fear, he must unveil the process of discovery. He could not employ orthodox images that fail to "people the mind" or rouse the imagination to act. He turned to grotesque image patterns as one way to unveil the process by which he and other men could gain divine insight. It is not surprising that in his famous "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (published 1807) Wordsworth professes that in looking back at the past it is not for delight, liberty, the simplicity of childhood, nor new-fledged hope that he lifts his voice in praise:

> Not for these I raise
> The song of thanks and praise;
> But for those obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things,
> Fallings from us, vanishings;
> Blank misgivings of a Creature
> Moving about in worlds not realised,
> High instincts before which our mortal

Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power
to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the
being
Of the eternal Silence . . .

(Poetical Works 143-159)

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