

The Spots of Time in Early Versions of *The Prelude*

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THE passage that begins "There are in our existence spots of time" (xi.258)¹ has long been recognized as a significant crux in *The Prelude*; here Wordsworth seems to be generalizing about the nature and value of the experiences that have made up his life and his poem. He defines these, locates them in his past ("our first childhood"), affirms their "vivifying Virtue," and relates them to the workings of his memory and, possibly, his imagination. He also offers two episodes, one describing a lost child's sudden confrontation with a gibbet, and a second that involved an anxious vigil, as the boy waited for horses that would convey him home for the holidays. Most readers, however, have experienced a good deal of difficulty in understanding exactly how Wordsworth intended these two incidents to demonstrate his general and theoretical contentions. Some thirty years ago, for instance, R. D. Havens asserted that nowhere in the 1805 version of *The Prelude* are the two spots of time "connected with the poet's restoration nor is it made clear that their renovating virtue was exercised or why their influence was so strong and salutary." Furthermore, among the lines that introduced these episodes, he found a short section which to him seemed "incomplete" and lacking "clarity in both thought and expression":²

This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will.

(xi. 269-73)

Nonetheless, more recent critics have persisted in viewing the spots of time as dramatic presentations of the mind's dominant power, although their tentative language, hedged by qualifications, implies that such a reading may be neither the most natural nor the most immediately apparent. Edward E. Bostetter, for example, refers to the "mystery of the incident which has obviously assumed supreme importance for Wordsworth as revealing the sources of power in the mind that transcend nature and in some obscure way become intima-

1. All references are to *The Prelude*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd ed., rev. Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). I refer to the text of 1805 or to manuscript variants taken from the critical apparatus or notes to this edition.

2. *The Mind of a Poet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1941), p. 575.

tions of immortality.”³ Geoffrey Hartman claims that “the spots of time . . . bring the child closer to confronting the power or mystery of its own imagination” although he is quick to admit that the boy “does not know that what he sees and feels is an effect of its power.”⁴ The difficulty, for these and almost all readers, is that in the spots of time passage, taken as a whole, Wordsworth’s argument seems at variance with his examples; the two incidents, striking and memorable as they are, do not, for most of us, seem to do what Wordsworth said they did.

To resolve the difficulties that he noted, Havens pointed to the evidence offered by early manuscripts of *The Prelude*; his hint was reiterated recently by Stephen Gill, who has remarked that “it is important that the reader should return to the parallel text *Prelude* and, from information given about the MSS, work out a chronology of the composition of the late books. . . . It cannot be stressed enough that *The Prelude* is more than an account of W. W.’s childhood and youth. It is also a sensitive record of W. W.’s growth *during the years of the poem’s composition*” [emphasis in original].⁵ A review of the history of the spots of time passage reveals clearly that the two incidents, the confrontation with the beacon in childhood (but not in “early youth”) and the waiting for the horses, were the earliest part of the passage written, and date from 1799. The argument that accompanies them in the printed text of 1805 is for the most part a product of later elaboration, first in 1804 and again in 1805. Out of a reconstruction of the two early stages of composition emerges a dramatic example of Wordsworth’s characteristic creative mode, involving a continuing reinterpretation not only of what he had already experienced, but especially of what he had already written. The descriptions of the adventures on the moor and on the sleety crag involved the capture, in poetry, of a particularly vivid memory; but after this adventure had been “enshrined,” the memory

3. *The Romantic Ventriloquists* (Seattle: U. of Washington Press, 1963), p. 23.

4. *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1964), pp. 216, 215.

5. *The Prelude* (Text of 1805), ed. Ernest de Selincourt, new ed. corrected by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 313, note to line 258. In fact, Jonathan Wordsworth has recently published an essay (“The Growth of the Poet’s Mind,” *The Cornell Library Journal*, 11 [Spring 1970], 2-24) in which he discusses the earliest version of the spots of time, that found in the two-part *Prelude* of 1800. His intention, however, is to demonstrate the “superiority” in “imaginative writing” of the early version to the text of 1805; his approach necessarily precludes an account of the revisions and expansions between these dates, which I take as my subject.

itself and, more significantly, the language in which Wordsworth cast it were subject to re-evaluation. His growing insight, expressed in the changes in his argument, reflected broader shifts in the poet's thematic interests from 1799 to 1805. Other passages written in 1799 and 1804 testify to the changing concerns that engaged him and provide a context against which the spots, at each stage of their development, must be read. Wordsworth's original intention, when the spots of time episodes were part of the two-part *Prelude*, was to vindicate an education by nature; his determination at this time was wholly at odds with the notion that the mind could be "lord and master." By March 1804, his developing awareness of the powers which the mind brought to each experience found expression in the complex symbolism of the Snowdon passage, which in turn transformed the point of view by which he regarded the spots of time. He revised them to conform to his new understanding of the intimate and mutually dependent relationship of mental faculties and external images. Not until 1805, after his brother's tragic death, did Wordsworth come to see in these incidents from his childhood evidence of the dominant powers of a "mighty mind."

I

Wordsworth's explicit reasons for tapping the two memories that he called "spots of time" are revealed by their original position near the end of the first book of the two-part *Prelude*. This early version of the poem, extant in MSS U and V dating from the spring of 1800, contained in its first book a sequence of childhood episodes corresponding roughly to Book I of the published text of *The Prelude*.⁶

6. The two-part *Prelude* was probably finished by the end of 1799, although the two extant MSS date from the early months of the following year when fair copies were made. Mark L. Reed, *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Early Years, 1770-1799* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1967), p. 336, ascribes both manuscripts to the spring of 1800, but finds MS U later by a month or two. In an unpublished dissertation ("The Growth of a Poem: The Early Manuscripts of William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*," New York University, 1969) Michael C. Jaye has edited all of the manuscripts through 1800 contributory to *The Prelude*. Jonathan Wordsworth, in the article cited above, quotes sections of the early version of the spots of time passage for which he cites "Stephen Gill's transcript of MS U" (p. 23). A summary of the organization of Book I as conceived in 1800 may be helpful:

1.271-509: Address to the Derwent ("Was it for this . . ."). Snaring woodcocks. Nest-robbing. "Mind of man is fram'd. . . ." Boat-stealing. Early version of "Wisdom and Spirit. . . ." Skating. Early version of "Ye presences of Nature. . . ."

In spite of faults of bald statement and roughness of style, Book I in this 1800 version of the poem was built on an argument that has a clarity and coherence; these qualities were to be dissipated by the expansions and revisions of the next few years. The spots of time, in their original position in this book, functioned as an integral part of the argument. Wordsworth constructed the first half of Book I around the forces of nature which, he claimed, had formed the growing child:

By the impressive agency of fear,
By pleasure and repeated happiness,
So frequently repeated, and by force
Of obscure feelings representative
Of joys that were forgotten, these same scenes,
So beauteous and majestic in themselves,
Though yet the day was distant, did at length
Become habitually dear, and all
Their hues and forms were by invisible links
Allied to the affections.

(l. 631-40, critical apparatus)

The “impressive agency of fear”—by which the boy felt himself chastised for stealing another’s bird or boat—and the pleasure evoked in him when he gazed at a beautiful landscape were, for Wordsworth, nature’s means of stamping the mind with images. When he wrote these lines, he was concerned to document the origins of his love of nature, to show how, at a day far “distant,” these images would become “habitually dear” because of their association with half-forgotten joys. This self-conscious account of the dynamics of his childhood experiences comes near the end of Book I; although it frames them, it does not operate retrospectively upon the incidents that make up the bulk of the book. The striking quality of the early childhood passages is the poet’s faithfulness to the point of view of the child. From the boy’s perspective, the forces and objects of nature seemed to have an autonomous life, to speak to him “Rememberable things” through “Gleams like the flashing of a shield”

535-570: Card games.

510-524: Nutting and fishing.

Deleted transitional passage: See below: “All these and more. . . .” (See pp. 160-61, critical apparatus.)

v.457-72: Recovery of the drowned man.

Deleted transitional passage: See below: “I might advert. . . .” (See p. 163, critical apparatus.)

xl.258-389: Spots of time passage: 258-60, 263-65, 274-81 (abridged), 282-89, 290-303 (abridged), 304-16, 345-89.

l.571-end.

(1.616,614). Although the child's activity may have aroused nature (the poet says, however, that he was "led" by nature to steal the boat), the effects that he saw and heard seemed to him the communications of a power completely independent of himself, like the reprimands of a nurse who chooses her own way of expressing disapproval. The child, in this 1800 version of Book I, was passive, subject to the actions of nature and unable to avoid, through any act of his own, either nature's "gentle visitation" or its "severer interventions" (1.351-72, in critical apparatus). In fact, the episodes of Book I and the apostrophes to nature's powers that link them read, up to the last section of the book, as a paean of gratitude to those powers which, of their own accord, shaped the boy's soul and framed his mind.

This discussion of nature's formative action governed Wordsworth's approach, in the manuscripts, to three final incidents: the recovery of the drowned man and the two spots of time; he intended to offer these, apparently, as conclusive evidence of the power and effectiveness of his early experiences. Two discursive passages, which accompanied the spots of time in the version of 1800, display both the on-going thrust of Wordsworth's contentions and the insufficiency of this argument to account for the intensely suggestive and complex drama of his experiences. The first of these two passages, later deleted, introduced the final group of incidents, the drowned man and the two spots of time, that concluded the first book of the two-part *Prelude*:

All these and more with rival claims demand
Grateful acknowledgement. It were a song
Venial and such as if I rightly judge
I might protract unblamed, but I perceive
That much is overlooked and we should ill
Attain our object if from delicate fears
Of breaking in upon the unity
Of this my argument I should omit
To speak of such effects as cannot here
Be regularly classed, yet tend no less
To the same point, the growth of mental powers
And love of Nature's works. Ere I had seen
Eight summers . . .

(pp. 160-61, critical apparatus)

Here Wordsworth claims that these last incidents produce the same effect as the others in Book I, yet they are in some way distinct ("effects" not "regularly classed"). It soon becomes clear that what distinguishes the drowned-man episode and the first section of each

of the two spots is the simple austerity of the description; the poet in these passages was apparently trying to show how the "earth / And common face of Nature" spoke without resorting to inhuman or unearthly elements (1.614-15). The drowned man's ghastliness contained nothing unreal, nothing that depended on an overwrought and guilty imagination. Similarly the scene near the gibbet involved neither optical illusions nor silent voices in the wind:

through fear
 Dismounting, down the rough and stony Moor
 I led my Horse, and stumbling on, at length
 Came to a bottom, where in former times
 A man, the murderer of his wife, was hung
 In irons, moulder'd was the gibbet mast,
 The bones were gone, the iron and the wood,
 Only a long green ridge of turf remained
 Whose shape was like a grave. I left the spot . . .

(xi. 286-302, critical apparatus)

These starkly visualized objects, reported in Wordsworth's most spare and unadorned style⁷ ("Upon my right hand was a single sheep, / A whistling hawthorne on my left" [xi.359-60]), offer, in each instance, a correction to the child's feelings; the "half infant mind" of the boy, who found the beauty of the lake "like a dream of novelty," suffered an abrupt awakening when the "dead Man . . . / . . . bolt upright / Rose with his ghastly face" (v.470-72). Similarly, in the first of the two spots of time incidents that followed in MS V, the child who set out on horseback "with ambitious hopes" soon found himself lost and terrified before the mouldering gibbet. In the final episode the poet explicitly connects the bleak and naked objects of the barren crag with a "chastisement" for his eagerness. In retrospect, the poet read into the landscape an emblem of divine admonishment: "I bow'd low / To God, who thus corrected my desires" (xi.374-75).

A second passage, separating the drowned man from the two spots of time incidents in MS V, similarly reveals Wordsworth's disregard of any implications of these episodes that were not aligned to his argument; his exclusive determination was to demonstrate that

7. By calling these descriptions "spare" or "unadorned," I have no intention of associating them with the unfortunate banality that marred "The Thorn" ("I've measured it from side to side; / 'Tis three feet long and two feet wide"). On the contrary, I fully concur with Jonathan Wordsworth's estimate, in the article cited, that such forceful and simple lines contain some of Wordsworth's best poetry.

even the simplest, barest objects presented to his eyes brought with them lasting moral associations:

I might advert
 To numerous accidents in flood or field
 Quarry or moor, or 'mid the winter snows
 Distresses and disasters, tragic facts
 Of rural history that impressed my mind
 With images to which in following years
 Far other feelings were attached; with forms
 That yet exist with independent life
 And, like their archetypes, know no decay.
 (p. 163, critical apparatus)

For an aspiring philosophical poet, an early acquaintance with the "tragic facts" of the human condition might seem of paramount significance; Wordsworth chose instead to emphasize the lasting effect of the "images" and "forms" which these dramas "impressed" upon his mind. In fact, his haste to mention that "far other feelings" would, in "following years," attach themselves to the memories of these scenes seems almost to deny their force as tragedies. If Wordsworth does not focus on the "distresses" inherent in these scenes, neither does he exalt the activity of the memory as reassurance that some powers of the human consciousness outlive human "accidents." Rather, what is explicit in this passage is that "facts" "impressed" "images" and "forms" on his mind. (In this same manuscript, he introduced the second spot of time, the vigil on the crag, as "Another scene which left a kindred power / Implanted in my mind" [p. 450, critical apparatus].) The images once "impressed" or "implanted" had an "independent life," independent, presumably, of the feelings of the mind in which they resided. Wordsworth's language—"impressed," "attached," "independent"—reinforces the picture that he has been building up throughout Book I of a passive mind stamped by external forces.

In MS V, the famous lines which followed this transitional passage affirmed quite simply the continuing force of the impressions with which the mind had been branded:

There are in our existence spots of time,
 Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
 A fructifying Virtue, whence, depress'd
 In trivial occupations, and the round
 Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
 (Especially the imaginative power)
 Are nourished and invisibly repair'd.
 Such moments chiefly seem to have their date

In our first childhood.

(xi. 258-76; critical apparatus)

Like the rather arbitrary movement of Wordsworth's previous argument from "tragic facts" to undecaying images, the illusion here to "the imaginative power," presented as a mere parenthetical aside, reveals the poet's inability to ignore completely his dawning awareness of the full dynamics of such memories. Nonetheless, his language here remains consistent with the intentions that have informed the movement of his poem at this time; if "imaginative power" seems to ascribe to the mind an autonomous force of its own, his verbs do not. Minds are passive, "nourished" and "repair'd," and the "moments" or "spots of time" are active; of themselves they "retain" their virtue, "fructifying" in later years. Furthermore, the "pre-eminence" of the spots remains largely unexplained. While it is tempting to ascribe their lasting force to their dramatic content, their presentations of "tragic facts," Wordsworth does not make the connection explicit.

The inadequacy of this earliest attempt of Wordsworth's to account for the spots of time stands out immediately upon examination of the two illustrative episodes. In 1800, the first incident lacked the description of the return to the scene in later youth, and there was no reference to the letters carved at the foot of the gibbet. After the simple description of the "long green ridge of turf" there came (as in subsequent versions) the similarly matter-of-fact statements of what the child saw next, followed by the mature poet's comments on the scene:

I left the spot

And reascending the bare slope, I saw
 A naked Pool that lay beneath the hills,
 The Beacon on the summit, and more near,
 A Girl who bore a Pitcher on her head
 And seem'd with difficult steps to force her way
 Against the blowing wind. 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 look'd 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 vex'd and toss'd
 By the strong wind.

(xi. 302-16; critical apparatus)

What is curious, and most significant in this passage, is that Words-

worth describes, in a space of some thirteen lines, the same scene twice over. After the first attempt, in its naked and reportorial mode ("in truth, / An ordinary sight"), he begins again, this time explicitly struggling to suggest the quality, the "visionary dreariness," that invested the beacon and the wind-tossed girl. He succeeds only by affirming the insufficiency of language to convey the haunting colors that he remembers, and then he again recites the names of the objects, as if a litany of "Beacon," "Woman," and "wind" would of itself recreate the "visionary dreariness." (Indeed, most readers find that the lack of precise "colours and words" renders the description all the more suggestive.)

What emerges half-formed from the struggle with language in the gibbet episode is fully dramatized in the second spot of time. Here again Wordsworth builds his effect on a repetitive description of the same objects, but, between the first and second presentation of the sleety hillside and the mist-hidden valley, he interposed an event, his father's death. He thus rendered the second description of the scene retrospective; it functions as a reinterpretation of objects impressed upon the mind in an altogether different context of feeling. The "visionary dreariness" that he had asserted but had been unable to characterize in the first spot emerges, in the second, out of the contrast between the objects as first presented and the same objects colored by the child's grief. In the aftermath of his sorrow, the poet endows the sheep and hawthorn bush, unmemorable in themselves, with a haunting animation, fraught with an energy that seems intent on evolving into human or superhuman forms. The "naked wall" comes to sing "bleak music," and the "whistling hawthorn," seen through the boy's desolation, is "blasted." The mist, which in the first account had merely given "intermitting prospect of the wood / And plain beneath," seemed in retrospect to be advancing, as though the "expected Steeds" had been transformed into horses of the Apocalypse, "on the line of each of those two Roads / . . . / . . . in such indisputable shapes" (XI.354-82).

II

While Wordsworth was intent to prove that he had been educated by nature, an even more dramatic education was in progress. More than any other poet perhaps, Wordsworth drew inspiration from what he had already written. The inadequacy of the account by which he introduced the spots of time in 1800 was short-lived. The events that he memorialized in these passages undoubtedly left a

profound effect, but even more powerful was the suggestive force of the poetry that he wrote from these memories. The limiting configurations of his "argument" in Book I left little space to consider the origins of the "visionary dreariness" that "impressed" him; four years later, Wordsworth's preoccupation with the dynamics of this transformation would bear fruit in his return to the spots of time.

After finishing the two-part *Prelude* in 1800, Wordsworth apparently put the poem aside, not taking it up again for any sustained period of composition until January or February 1804; he then worked on it determinedly all spring, hoping to put it in order so that Coleridge, who was about to leave for Malta, could take a copy with him. His intention at this time was to bring his poem up to date. In 1800 Wordsworth had glanced toward the future from the perspective of the child; in 1804 as in 1805, he adopted the stance of maturity, and this new stance forced a reinterpretation of the dynamics involved in his earlier experiences. In March 1804 he tentatively planned to accomplish this expansion of his autobiography in three books to be added to the first two that he had completed in 1800.⁸ (By the end of March he had revised this five-part plan in favor of the extended poem of 1805.) Of this tentative and abortive five-book *Prelude* only the projected fifth and final book is extant in manuscript (MS W); it contains an early version of the ascent of Snowdon accompanied by a long passage (descriptions of a rainbow, a horse, and four heroic incidents drawn from the literature of travel, all of which were later deleted) and the additions to the spots of time passage. These latter included the account of the return to the gibbet in early youth and most of the lines that link this episode with the following one, describing the vigil on the crag. This manuscript opens with several passages from Book IV, including the account of the magnificent sunrise at Hawkshead. We can hypothesize that the pattern of this five-part poem was to be built on a falling and rising movement, from early unity with nature,

8. Three letters, written by Wordsworth early in 1804, testify to this plan: Wordsworth to Wrangham, late January or February 1804: "At present I am engaged in a Poem on my own earlier life, which will take five parts, or books, to complete; three of which are nearly finished." To De Quincey, March 6, 1804: "[The poem] on my own life . . . is better than half complete, viz. four books, amounting to about 2,500 lines. . . . I have just finished that part in which I speak of my residence in the University." To Coleridge, March 6, 1804: "I finished five or six days ago another Book of my Poem, amounting to 650 lines. . . . When this next book is done, which I shall begin in two or three days' time I shall consider the work as finished." These letters are quoted in *Prelude*, p. xlix.

through separation and failing responsiveness due to the pressures of society and "education," and, finally, recovery of the original unity and love of the natural world. The final movement could have been initiated and guaranteed by the sunrise dedication of the fourth book. The fifth book would then have functioned as an exposition of the qualities and powers of the renovated consciousness in the Snowdon passage, and as a demonstration of the operations of a particular consciousness through a single lifetime in the spots of time passage. In this pattern of failure and recovery, of powers lost, recovered, and known for what they are, the Snowdon passage emerges as a crux of great significance, in which Wordsworth symbolically demonstrates his vision of the way nature supplies both the mind with the means of knowing itself and the poet with images to express what he knows. When Wordsworth took up the spots of time again, intending to shift them to this projected final book, the illumination cast by Snowdon permitted him to see and understand the "visionary dreariness" that distinguished these incidents.

In the description of his adventure on Mount Snowdon, Wordsworth presented himself in a stance or attitude toward the scene that functions as a dramatic analogy to the new perspective of maturity that governed his writing in 1804. While the child in Book I had participated actively in the effects of the landscape—the faster he rowed, the higher rose the black cliff, for instance—in the episodes added to *The Prelude* after 1800, including the Hawkshead sunrise and Snowdon, the poet adopted the role of spectator, standing and looking at the scene before him. This new stance implies a consciousness of the self apart from nature, a sense of a distinct human identity that permitted the poet to transform the scene into a symbol. Before he described the vision of the mountain-side, Wordsworth prepared for it with the narrative of his climb; telling how he "panted up / With eager steps and no less eager thoughts," "With face toward / The hill, as if in opposition set / Against an enemy" (xiii.31–32; 29–31, critical apparatus), he established an opposition between the climbers and the landscape, as their eagerness turned them almost hostilely against the mountain. Furthermore, he emphasized that the thickness of the surrounding mist cut them off entirely from external objects; nothing was "either seen or heard the while / Which took me from my musings" (xiii.21–22). The inward-turning state of mind, the "half dream which wrapp'd me up," heightened the effect of the light, which "before my eyes / Fell like a flash" (p. 480, critical apparatus). The dramatic change in the poet's perspective as he emerged above the clouds while the mists

hid the valley below radically altered the relationships of all the objects that he saw; the mist became a "huge sea, / . . . meek and silent," while the real sea, largely hidden from view, "seem'd / To dwindle, and give up its majesty" (XIII.43-44, 49-50).

As the poet realized how greatly his new perspective had transformed the landscape, his attention focused on a single feature of the scene; in the "blue chasm" which he singled out, all that he saw and all that he had been thinking fused into a symbol, which in itself demonstrated the means by which the fusion occurred:

a blue chasm; a fracture in the mist,
A deep and gloomy breathing-place through which
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Inseparable, roaring with one voice.
The universal spectacle throughout
Was shaped for admiration and delight,
Grand in its single self, but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thoroughfare had Nature lodg'd
The Soul, the Imagination of the whole.

(XIII. 56-65; critical apparatus)

The chasm brought to the poet knowledge of the torrents below, hidden and unseen, by offering passage to their "voice" which rose to his ears. This "breach" offered a symbolic parallel to the poet's experience in climbing, like the "roar" of waters, up the path—his own "thoroughfare"—through the enveloping mists to the moon-lit landscape. Wordsworth had emerged into the light from "commerce with his private thoughts" (XIII.19), into which he "sank" (the verb is significant in this context of "dark deep" chasms) when the vapors, like his "half dream," first "wrapp'd" him up. This state of inner awareness had heightened, in fact, the force of the scene: "at least I fancied that it look'd / More bright" (p. 480, critical apparatus). Thus the "musings" of the poet found their expression only when a landscape, thrust upon his notice, led him to see in the objects and sounds that presented themselves a symbol of his own "private thoughts." As the gap in the mists offered a "breathing-place" to a noise otherwise muffled, so the objects of the landscape animated the "musings," formless, otherwise, and suffocating without forms and images in which to live, and made these thoughts known even to the mind in which they had been conceived.

When he had completed the portrait of himself, poised on Snowdon, Wordsworth moved on in MS W, after a series of draft fragments, to his re-evaluation of the spots of time. The mental review of the pattern of his life, occasioned by his attempts in early March

1804 to wind up his autobiographical poem, led Wordsworth to translate a spatial symbol of transformation, which he had created out of the scene on Snowdon, into a temporal symbol of growth. The first addition to the spots of time described a return, at a later time and in a very different state of mind, to the scene of the gibbet and the beacon:

When, in a blessed season
 With those two dear Ones, to my heart so dear,
 When in the blessed time of early love,
 Long afterwards, I roam'd about
 In daily presence of this very scene,
 Upon the naked pool and dreary crags,
 And on the melancholy Beacon, 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? So feeling comes in aid
 Of feeling, and diversity of strength
 Attends on him who hath but once been strong.

(XI. 316-28, critical apparatus)

The contrast between his two separate memories of the scene, like the contrast in the objects of the sleety crag before and after his father's death, stood out sharply in Wordsworth's mind when, in 1804, he put the second memory down beside the first.⁹ The almost stammering repetitions of the opening lines emphasize that a different period of the poet's life is before his eyes; not the "earliest childhood" of the original spots of time episodes but the "blessed season," the "blessed time of early love, / Long afterwards." In fact, these later visits to the beacon on Penrith Moor occurred, like the ascent of Snowdon, during the poet's summer vacations from Cambridge University. With the passing of time had come a new complex of feelings. The "ambitious hopes" of the child had been "corrected" and converted to "fear," but the love that the young poet shared with his friends, "blessed" with a "divine" radiance, was sanctified from the start. Furthermore, the language evokes an altogether different relationship of the participating consciousness, child or youth, to the scene. In spite of his "fear," the child's attention had been wholly filled with the objects that he "saw," which are catalogued in suggestive simplicity in line after line of the original episode; the "visionary dreariness" "Did at that time invest" the scene without explicit reference to the child's feelings. In the later

9. Actually, MS W contains only the additions to the spots, that is, XI.316-37, and none of the material already available in MSS U and V.

account, the syntax of the first sentence, built on a series of prepositional phrases leading to a delayed subject, diffuses the effect of the "radiance" which seems to emanate from the scene and the participants alike. The two experiences were not, however, discrete and separate events; the transformation of the scene, like the growth of the child into the youth, were continuous developments, leading ultimately to the poet who "saw" in his mind the pattern of his early years.

In the apostrophe that follows this sequel to the beacon episode, Wordsworth comments on the revelation afforded him by the contrast between the two memories, between the dreariness of the first and the radiance of the second; to express his understanding of this revelation, he adopted the symbolic images of Snowdon, of hidden depths and opening and closing gaps.

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. The days gone by
Come back upon me from the dawn almost
Of life: the hiding-places of my power
Seem open; I approach, and then they close.

(xi. 329-37)

Like the "voice of waters," man's mysterious "honours" rise from a depth; Wordsworth associates this "mystery" of man's "greatness" with the act of remembering. The quality of vision that the poet brought to Snowdon enabled him similarly to catch brief glimpses of his "days gone by" and to discover in these his "power." Like the "breathing-place" in the clouds, the consciousness of the passing of time, the memory that is the "hiding-place" of this power, concealed as much as it revealed. Nonetheless, it is the revelation that the poet catches, slight as it is, that counts. On Snowdon he saw the "blue chasm," heard the roar, and made of these the "Soul, the Imagination of the whole"; here, regarding his past, he remembered a pair of incidents that occurred at the same place, saw again the distinct coloring that invested each, and made of these a concentrated symbol of his autobiography. What he had to work with, in each case, was something that struck his senses. The "voice of waters" emerged through the fracture in the mists, and the memory of strikingly visual images lasted through the years. The brief opening in the clouds of forgetfulness brought back days from the "dawn almost / Of life," raising before the inner eye of the poet a revelation of

himself. He saw that nature had provided something already within him, "dark deep" and "gloomy," with a "voice," a set of images, by which it made itself known. The "mystery of man," like his "thoughts," could be recognized only by actions and effects, only by the palpable form in which they were transmitted to the senses. His imagination, his own "dark deep thoroughfare," conveyed inner truths and instincts to external objects, transforming them into the "images" which, he believed, had formed him. When he reviewed the spots of time in the context of Snowdon, Wordsworth saw that it was the deepest mysteries and powers of his own being that had always come to him as presentations from without. The "strength" of the boy in the initial interchange, when he received and accepted an emblem of mortality as a communication from the landscape, in time aroused a second and deeper instinct which rejected the first, bringing "other feelings" to attach themselves to the same objects. This second instinct, forced into consciousness by the "distresses and disasters" that the child had witnessed, found its expression in the love that transformed the scene on his return, the "radiance more divine" that transcended the "visionary dreariness."

Wordsworth's new perspective as he reached the peak of his (temporarily) final book in 1804 led him to revise his faith in the agency of nature to include his deeper understanding of the participation of the human mind. Having discovered that he himself had made the "unknown" "colours and words," he affirmed that "from thyself it is that thou must give, / Else never canst receive." His new sense of the mind's activity had not, however, totally replaced the poet's original faith in nature's formative power. If he recognized that his strength resided in the activity of his imagination, in the power that transformed the "dim and vast" instincts of the soul into palpable scenes and the thought that fed upon them, he nonetheless credited nature with thrusting upon his notice the forms and images that activated this power in the first place. The investigation of the spots of time dramatized the developing relationship through time, between the poet's mind, growing steadily in powers that were both human and divine, and the scenes and objects that had nourished it. The relationship with nature that Wordsworth, in the spots of time, presented as a progression—from early passivity and dependence to a mature self-consciousness—in fact operated instantaneously within each perceptive and creative moment. When the poet "received" the "universal spectacle" on Snowdon in all its striking contrasts and created from the scene a symbol of "higher minds," he exhibited in a single experience the entire range of responses to nature which, in

sequence, had shaped his autobiography. Finally, Wordsworth offered the most irrefutable evidence of this mode of consciousness when, "in manhood now mature," he created of the episodes of his life a poem that is an extended symbol of man's powers when he stands, like a new Adam or an aspiring poet, with the earth all before him.

III

The final development of the spots of time occurred in the complete *Prelude* of 1805, where Wordsworth exalted, above the efficacy of nature and its images, the powers of a "mighty Mind." There, among the last additions to the passage, we find the lines that puzzled Havens, lines that express Wordsworth's last significant insight into the meaning of those childhood memories on which he built his poem. Speaking of the "virtue" of the spots of time, he added:

This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had the deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will.

(xl. 269-73)

In the place of his faith in the active ministry of nature and his groping formulation of 1804 in which nature supplied the mind with the means of knowing itself, Wordsworth asserted, in 1805, the dominance of the mind. In the aftermath of his brother's tragic death at sea, he came to revise drastically the position of "outward sense" in his theory of experience and to see in the "forms and images" put forth by nature, not a vehicle for transmitting truth, but a mere "obedient servant" of the "will" of the mind. The imaginative coloring investing the landscape in each of the spots, even in the earliest version, could lend support to Wordsworth's later intuitions about the dominant power of the mind; but to read the incidents of the beacon and the vigil on the crag solely as demonstrations of the "deepest feeling that the mind / Is lord and master" is to miss both the point of the episodes themselves and the strength of the poetry that Wordsworth made from them. The child certainly did not feel that his mind was master; he was terrified by the dreary images that presented themselves to his eyes. The poet of 1800 not only recalled the original effect of the scene, but he affirmed the continuing vividness and power of the images in his memory over the years. In 1804, when Wordsworth recognized the role that

his imagination had played in making the powerful impact of the scene, he nonetheless reaffirmed the supreme value of the "Impressions . . . early and . . . strong" (p. 444, critical apparatus) as the only means by which man's "musings" could reach the light of consciousness. The most irrefutable evidence of Wordsworth's faith in the mediating power of images lives in his best poetry. In the spots of time, it is the naked, starkly visual realization of the gibbet, beacon, pool, and woman that remains most memorable, to the poet and to the reader. Sadly, however, when Wordsworth relegated "outward sense" to the role of servant, he added other lines which dissipated the effect of some of the most memorable lines of the first episode. As Jonathan Wordsworth has clearly argued, the "fussiness" of the talk about the "monumental letters" cleared away annually in accordance with local superstition, distracts the reader from the effect of the scene as a sudden, immediate presentation.¹⁰ When Wordsworth began to lose faith in the power of images, he inexorably closed off the well-spring of his freshest inspiration.

10. *Op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.