but that should not faze us. A. C. Bradley long ago laid down an essential rule for understanding Wordsworth: "The road into Wordsworth's mind must be through his strangeness and his paradoxes, and not round them." [8]

1. WORDSWORTH'S PROGRAM FOR POETRY

In the verse preceding the Prospectus in its original place at the end of *Home at Grasmere,* Wordsworth announces his discovery that he has been chosen to be a poet-prophet for his age. He has been granted "an internal brightness" that is "shared by none" and that compels him, "divinely taught," to speak "Of what in man is human or divine."

> I would impart it, I would spread it wide,
> Immortal in the world which is to come.

He must bid farewell to his earlier scheme of playing a warrior's role in the world of action, as well as to his long-standing plan to write a traditional epic—"the hope to fill/ The heroic trumpet with the Muse's breath." Nevertheless in this remote and peaceful Vale of Grasmere "A Voice shall speak, and what will be the Theme?" [9] The answer to this question is the passage he later called the "*Prospectus* of the design and scope" of his work as a poet.

The first verse-paragraph of this passage ends: "I sing:—'fit audience let me find though few!' " Wordsworth adds, "So prayed, more gaining than he asked, the Bard—/ In holiest mood." [10] That Bard, of course, is Milton. Almost every sentence of the Prospectus rings with echoes of Milton's voice in *Paradise Lost,* beginning with the phrase at the opening, "Musing in solitude," which recalls Milton's assertion that he sings with unchanged voice, though "with dangers compast round,/ And solitude"; this passage Milton used to introduce Raphael's account of the creation of the world, and as in Wordsworth, it closely precedes his prayer that he "fit audience find, though few." [11] The unparalleled density of the Miltonic reminiscences suggests what the explicit argument of the

Prospectus confirms, that Wordsworth is setting out to emulate his revered predecessor—and rival—by writing the equivalent for his own age of the great Protestant English epic.

In the manuscript version of a passage in *The Prelude,* Wordsworth explained his feeling at Cambridge that "I was not for that hour/ Nor for that place" by the fact that it was his destiny to be "a chosen Son,"

> A youthful Druid taught in shady groves
> Primeval mysteries, a Bard elect. . . .[12]

That is, in the line of inspired British poets (what Harold Bloom has called "the Visionary Company"), he has been elected as the successor to Milton. Wordsworth remarked to Henry Crabb Robinson that "when he resolved to be a poet, [he] feared competition only with Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton." [13] Of these poets, however, Chaucer and Shakespeare exemplify what Wordsworth called "the human and dramatic Imagination"; while it is Spenser, and above all Milton, who exemplify the "enthusiastic and meditative Imagination" against which Wordsworth persistently measured his own enterprise.[14] Early in 1801, in a mood between exasperation and laughter, Charles Lamb described a monitory letter from Wordsworth,

> with a deal of stuff about a certain Union of Tenderness and Imagination, which in the sense he used Imagination was not the characteristic of Shakspeare, but which Milton possessed in a degree far exceeding other Poets: which Union, as the highest species of Poetry, and chiefly deserving that name, "He [Wordsworth] was most proud to aspire to." [15]

Wordsworth's belief that he had inherited the poetic mode and office of Milton was an enduring one. Thirteen years later he described *The Recluse* as a poem "which, if I live to finish it, I hope future times will 'not willingly let die.' These you know are the words of my great Predecessor, and the depth of my feelings upon some subjects seems to justify me in the act of applying them to myself." [16]

The greater part of Wordsworth's echoes originate in the invocations with which Milton opens the first, third, seventh, and ninth books of *Paradise Lost,* and it is evident that the Prospectus has the same function as these great passages, in which Milton specifies his subject and his theme, measures it against the traditional epic subjects, alludes to his personal circumstances, and justifies his fitness for the immense endeavor by invoking and claiming divine inspiration. Wordsworth announces that he is "intent to weigh/ The good and evil of our mortal state" (lines 8–9). As Milton indicates in his opening synopsis, he had set out to weigh the good against the evil—in his theological terms, to "justify the ways of God to men"—by specifying the implications of the Biblical revelation of the first to the last things, including (by direct narrative, retrospect, and prediction) the creation of "the Heav'ns and Earth . . . out of Chaos," the fall of man "With loss of Eden," the coming of "one greater Man" to "restore us, and regain the blissful Seat," and the culmination of the providential plan in the apocalyptic end of the old world, which "shall burn, and from her ashes spring/ New Heav'n and Earth" wherein the just shall "see golden days" (III, 334–7). In the Prospectus Wordsworth patently sketches out his emended version of Milton's argument. He undertakes, that is, to represent what he calls (line 69) a "creation"; and if he does not explicitly set forth his version of a fall and a loss of Eden (though Coleridge later claimed that this had been his intention),[17] he at least proposes a resurrection from the "sleep/ Of death" and the way to the instauration of an earthly paradise —transferred, however, from a supernatural to a natural frame of reference, for this paradise will be "A simple produce of the common day," and is described by words "Which speak of nothing more than what we are."

Wordsworth preempts Urania, the pagan muse whom Milton, following earlier Christian precedent, had baptized and equated with the "heav'nly Muse" who had inspired Moses and the Biblical prophets and had associated with the Holy Spirit who moved upon the face of the waters at the beginning of all created things. Wordsworth calls upon the "prophetic Spirit,"

the "primal source/ Of all illumination," to descend upon him. As Milton's Spirit prefers "before all Temples th' upright heart and pure," so Wordsworth's Spirit, which inspires "The human Soul of universal earth," possesses also "A metropolitan temple in the hearts/ Of mighty Poets." Milton had grandly proclaimed that his "advent'rous Song" will soar

> Above th' *Aonian* Mount while it pursues
> Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme

—that is, in its Christian subject his song will exceed in originality, boldness, and sublimity the Greek and Roman epics of arms and the man, "hitherto the only Argument/ Heroic deem'd."[18] Wordsworth calmly requisitions a greater muse than Milton's, for he must undertake a poetic enterprise which is more novel, more adventurous, and of even greater dimension. In his epic flight Milton had claimed, with the help of the Muse, only to have ventured "down/ The dark descent" to the "*Stygian* Pool" and "*Chaos* and *Eternal Night,*" and then, "Up led by thee," to have ascended "Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns . . . and drawn Empyreal Air" (III, 13–21; VII, 12–14). The cosmos of Wordsworth's poem, however, is of larger extension, and requires an imaginative journey that must descend deeper and rise higher than Milton's flight:

> Urania, I shall need
> Thy guidance, or a greater Muse, if such
> Descend to earth or dwell in highest heaven!
> For I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink
> Deep—and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds
> To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.
> All strength—all terror, single or in bands,
> That ever was put forth in personal form—
> Jehovah—with his thunder, and the choir
> Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones—
> I pass them unalarmed. Not Chaos, not
> The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,

—in an earlier manuscript Wordsworth had written, "The darkest pit/ Of the profoundest hell"—

> Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
> By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe
> As fall upon us often when we look . . .

Higher than the eternal heaven beyond the visible heavens,[19] more awesome than Jehovah with his thunder and shouting angels, deeper and more terrifying than the realms of chaos and hell; what is to be the prodigious setting of this poem?

> . . . when we look
> Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—
> My haunt, and the main region of my song.

William Blake, who respected Wordsworth enough to read him closely and take his claims seriously, told Henry Crabb Robinson, in whimsical exasperation, that this passage "caused him a bowel complaint which nearly killed him." "Does Mr. Wordsworth think his mind can surpass Jehovah?" [20] To which the answer is, "No, he did not," any more than he thought himself a greater poet than Milton. What Wordsworth claims is that the mind of man is a terra incognita which surpasses in its terrors and sublimities, hence in the challenge it poses to its poetic explorer, the traditional subject matter of Milton's Christian epic. Blake took offense at Wordsworth's literary enterprise because it paralleled his own, but deviated on the crucial issue of naturalism. For in his *Milton* (1804–10) Blake too had undertaken, as the epigraph said, "To Justify the Ways of God to Men" by his own imaginative revision of the doctrines of *Paradise Lost;* but what Wordsworth in the Prospectus calls "this goodly universe" is to Blake the illusory result of the fall of man. After politely hearing out Robinson's loyal defense of that poet, Blake, with his engaging mixture of candor and generosity, finally set Wordsworth down "as a Pagan, but still with great praise as the greatest poet of the age." [21]

According to the Prospectus, then, the heights and depths of the mind of man are to replace heaven and hell, and the powers of the mind are to replace the divine protagonists, in Wordsworth's triple (or, counting *The Prelude,* quadruple) successor to Milton's religious epic. Following his model, Wordsworth at once goes on to identify the supreme power of

that mind, whose function is to restore to us "the blissful Seat" of the lost paradise.

In the course of his flight from hell to earth Satan had discerned the newly created stars which, upon nearer view,

> seem'd other Worlds,
> Or other Worlds they seem'd, or happy Isles,
> Like those *Hesperian* Gardens fam'd of old,
> Fortunate Fields, and Groves and flow'ry Vales,
> Thrice happy Isles. . . . (III, 566–70)

Again when Satan, perched on the Tree of Life, achieved his first prospect of paradise and the Garden of Eden, Milton pillaged the pagan legends of the golden age, the Elysian Islands, the Gardens of the Hesperides, and other fabulous pleasances, in order to adumbrate the supernal beauty and blessedness of the true paradise, "*Hesperian* Fables true,/ If true, here only . . ." (IV, 250–1).[22] And when this residence shall be restored to man by one greater Man, its location may be either on earth or in heaven, no matter which, for then, Milton says, the earth "shall all be Paradise" (XII, 463–5). Wordsworth makes it clear that his concern is limited to the green earth, but that to his visionary gaze this present reality exceeds in beauty all the imaginative constructions of poets who have portrayed a golden age. The point is especially explicit in his earliest manuscript version:

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

He goes on to say, repeating Milton's very phrases, that the pagan Elysium and Islands of the Blest need not be limited to the realm of fantasy, nor need the Christian paradise be a paradise lost:

> Paradise, and groves
> 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? [23]

For such realms are available on this earth, to each of us, as an ordinary possibility of every day. We need only to unite our minds to the outer universe in a holy marriage, a passionate love-match, and paradise is ours.

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.

That Wordsworth commits himself deliberately to this figure of a culminating and procreative marriage between mind and nature he makes unmistakable by expanding upon it with pomp and circumstance. "I, long before the blissful hour arrives,/ Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse/ Of this great consummation. . . ." The plot envisioned by the aid of the "prophetic Spirit," then, will end in the marriage of the protagonists, and Wordsworth's song is to be the "spousal verse," or sustained prothalamion, of its anticipated "consummation." This song will be an evangel to effect a spiritual resurrection among mankind—it will "arouse the sensual from their sleep/ Of death" [24]—merely by showing what lies within any man's power to accomplish, as he is here and now. For the poet will proclaim how exquisitely an individual mind—and perhaps the developing mind of generic man as well—is fitted to the external world, and the external world to the mind,[25] and how the two in union are able to beget a new world:

And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish:—this is our high argument.

That is, this is *our* high argument, as distinguished from the one Milton had defined in his opening announcement:

* In the MS, "mind."

That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.

Here, in short, is Wordsworth's conception of his poetic role and his great design. The author, though a "transitory Being," is the latest in the line of poets inspired by the "prophetic Spirit," and as such has been granted a "Vision" (lines 97–8) which sanctions his claim to outdo Milton's Christian story in the scope and audacious novelty of his subject. The vision is that of the awesome depths and height of the human mind, and of the power of that mind as in itself adequate, by consummating a holy marriage with the external universe, to create out of the world of all of us, in a quotidian and recurrent miracle, a new world which is the equivalent of paradise.

In a passage in the third book of *The Prelude* Wordsworth, looking back from maturity upon his youthful experience, is able to recognize the early signs of his election into the society of poet-prophets, as well as early evidences of the divinely creative interaction between his mind and the visible universe which was to be his destined theme:

I was a chosen son.
For hither I had come with holy powers
And faculties, whether to work or feel:
To apprehend all passions and all moods
Which time, and place, and season do impress
Upon the visible universe, and work
Like changes there by force of my own mind. . . .
I had a world about me; 'twas my own,
I made it; for it only liv'd to me,
And to the God who look'd into my mind. . . .
Some call'd it madness: such, indeed, it was . . .
If prophesy be madness; if things view'd
By Poets of old time, and higher up
By the first men, earth's first inhabitants,
May in these tutor'd days no more be seen
With undisorder'd sight.
. . . Of Genius, Power,
Creation and Divinity itself

> I have been speaking, for my theme has been
> What pass'd within me. . . .
> This is, in truth, heroic argument,
> And genuine prowess; which I wish'd to touch
> With hand however weak; but in the main
> It lies far hidden from the reach of words.[26]

It is noteworthy that in the line, "This is, in truth, heroic argument," Wordsworth echoes, in order to supersede, Milton's claim in the introduction to Book IX of *Paradise Lost* that his was "argument/ Not less but more Heroic than the wrath/ Of stern Achilles." And in this instance it is unmistakable that what Wordsworth vaunts is the height of his given argument, not the adequacy of his powers to accomplish a task which may require more than even poetry can manage.

An extraordinary theme, surely, for a more-than-heroic poem! Yet the more we attend to the central claims of some of Wordsworth's major contemporaries, in Germany as well as in England, the less idiosyncratic do Wordsworth's pronouncements seem. For a number of these writers also put themselves forward as members of the small company of poet-prophets and bards; they measured their enterprise against the earlier revelation of present, past, and future things, either as presented in the Bible itself or as represented by Milton or other Biblical poets; and they undertook, either in epic or some other major genre—in drama, in prose romance, or in the visionary "greater Ode"—radically to recast, into terms appropriate to the historical and intellectual circumstances of their own age, the Christian pattern of the fall, the redemption, and the emergence of a new earth which will constitute a restored paradise. Take even Wordsworth's startling figure for this last event, the renovative marriage between mind and nature whose annunciation will arouse "the sensual from their sleep/ Of death." In his *Dejection: An Ode* Coleridge wrote that the inner condition of total vitality he called "Joy,"

> is the spirit and the power,
> Which, wedding Nature to us, gives in dower
> A new Earth and new Heaven,
> Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud.[27]

Blake prefaced the concluding chapter of *Jerusalem* with the voice of the Bard arousing Albion from his "sleep of death," so that he may unite with his separated female emanation:

> England! awake! awake! awake!
> Jerusalem thy Sister calls!
> Why wilt thou sleep the sleep of death?
> And close her from thy ancient walls. . . .
>
> And now the time returns again:
> Our souls exult & London's towers,
> Receive the Lamb of God to dwell
> In Englands green & pleasant bowers.

The poem closes with the dawn of "the Eternal Day" of a universal resurrection in a restored paradise, illuminated by an etching of Albion and Jerusalem in an embrace of love.[28] At the conclusion of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* the regeneration of man in a renovated world has for its central symbol the union of Prometheus and Asia, an act in which all the cosmos sympathetically participates.

Comparable are two German works which were written in the latter 1790s, almost contemporaneously with the earliest version of Wordsworth's Prospectus. In a climactic passage of Hölderlin's *Hyperion* the young poet-hero, inspired, cries out to "holy Nature":

> Let all be changed from its Foundations! Let the new world spring from the root of humanity! . . . They will come, Nature, thy men. A rejuvenated people will make thee young again, too, and thou wilt be as its bride. . . . There will be only one beauty; and man and Nature will unite in one all-embracing divinity.[29]

Novalis' unfinished romance, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen,* incorporates a *Märchen* which epitomizes the theme of the whole. At the end of this complex allegory it is announced that "the old times are returning," in which the Gardens of the Hesperides "will bloom again and the golden fruit send forth its fragrance," and that "out of suffering the new world is born" in which there will be no more woe. The event sym-

bolizing this consummation is the nuptial embrace of the king and queen, which becomes epidemic:

> In the meantime the throne had imperceptibly changed into a magnificent bridal bed. . . . The king embraced his blushing beloved, and the people followed the example of the king and caressed one another.[30]

In one of his Fragments Novalis also stated flatly that all "the higher philosophy is concerned with the marriage of Nature and Mind."[31] The philosopher Schelling looks forward to just such a union between intellect and nature, as well as to the poet-seer adequate to sing this great consummation in an epic poem:

> Now, after long wanderings [philosophy] has regained the memory of nature and of nature's former unity with knowledge. . . . Then there will no longer be any difference between the world of thought and the world of reality. There will be one world, and the peace of the golden age will make itself known for the first time in the harmonious union of all sciences. . . .
>
> Perhaps he will yet come who is to sing the great heroic poem, comprehending in spirit what was, what is, what will be, the kind of poem attributed to the seers of yore.[32]

It begins to be apparent that Wordsworth's holy marriage, far from being unique, was a prominent period-metaphor which served a number of major writers, English and German, as the central figure in a similar complex of ideas concerning the history and destiny of man and the role of the visionary poet as both herald and inaugurator of a new and supremely better world.

This book is organized as a commentary—at times a freely discursive commentary—on these and other matters set forth in Wordsworth's Prospectus to his poetry. I shall range over the more prominent antecedents of these concepts in intellectual and literary history, the political and social circumstances in Wordsworth's age which help to account for their emergence, and their relevance to the subject matter and form of a number of Wordsworth's poems. Since Wordsworth is not only a highly

innovative but also a very representative poet, I shall emphasize the striking analogues to Wordsworth's program and practice in the writings of some major contemporaries—metaphysicians and philosophers of history as well as poets and novelists—in Germany as well as in England. This procedure will bring out important elements of both continuity and change between characteristic Romantic ways of thinking, imagining, and valuing, and the theological, philosophical, and literary traditions of which Romantic writers were legatees. I intend also to look before as well as after, in order to indicate the extent to which works that we think of as distinctively modern continue to embody Romantic innovations in ideas and design, although often within a drastically altered perspective on man and nature and human life.

2. THE DESIGN OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

"The grand store-house of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination," Wordsworth tells us—that kind of imagination which he trusted he had himself demonstrated "in these unfavorable times"—"is the prophetic and lyrical parts of the holy Scriptures, and the works of Milton." [33] Behind Wordsworth's program for poetry was *Paradise Lost*, and behind *Paradise Lost* were the Holy Scriptures. We pay inadequate heed to the extent and persistence with which the writings of Wordsworth and his English contemporaries reflect not only the language and rhythms but also the design, the imagery, and many of the central moral values of the Bible, as well as of Milton, the great poet of Biblical history and prophecy. Blake identified the Hebrew Prophet with the British Bard, and in *Milton* he whimsically figured that poet as entering into his left foot, in order to project the entirely serious notion that he was carrying out, by his imaginative endeavor, Milton's unfinished task of redeeming the English people.[34] In his own person, Blake "warmly declared" to Henry Crabb Robinson that "all he knew was in the Bible," and his long poems tell one story and one story only, according to his own interpretation, and in