

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 compass 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 Empyrean 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 pleasancesses, 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

various episodes and renderings: "The Old & New Testaments," he wrote, "are the Great Code of Art." [35](#)

The German writers of the time were steeped in Biblical literature and exegesis. Theology had been Schiller's favorite study in his early youth, and he developed some of his leading ideas in the form of a commentary on the Pentateuch. Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel (like the poet Hölderlin) had all been university students of theology, and explicitly undertook to translate religious doctrine into their conceptual philosophy. And for Novalis, as for Blake, the Bible was the great code of art.

We need to keep in mind that Wordsworth had been given religious training at Hawkeshead, which was a Church of England foundation under a clerical headmaster, and had been early destined to take holy orders. Coleridge, who aspired to be the Milton of his age before resigning that task to Wordsworth, was (in his own phrase) a "tolerable Hebraist," an inveterate philosopher-theologian, and a lay preacher who came within a hair of accepting appointment to a Unitarian pulpit. Keats was much less directly and persistently Biblical than any of his great fellow-poets; but he had studied carefully Wordsworth's Prospectus as well as his poems, and with his usual acumen, he recognized that Wordsworth had set himself to go beyond Milton's enterprise by humanizing Milton's "hintings at good and evil in the *Paradise Lost*" and by freeing them from Milton's "remaining Dogmas and superstitions." Keats envisaged his own destiny as a poet to be the exacting one of going beyond Milton, and Wordsworth as well, in order to develop "a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity." [36](#) Shelley, although an agnostic and vigorous anti-Jahwist, idolized "the sacred Milton"; Thomas Medwin tells us that "so far above all other Poems indeed did he class the *Paradise Lost*, that he even thinks it a sacrilege to name it in speaking of any other Poem..." [37](#) We also know from Mary Shelley that "the Bible was his constant study"; [38](#) the list of books he gave to Medwin as adequate to make a good library consisted only of Milton and fourteen other titles, including, as he said, "last, yet first, the Bible." [39](#)

Last, yet first, the Bible. Let us begin, then, at the beginning

and look to the Bible for the light it can throw on the argument and imagery in Wordsworth's Prospectus and in the many other writings of the period which reflect and transpose, in their various ways, the design, concepts, and images of Biblical history and prophecy.

The canonical books of the Old and New Testament, from Genesis to Apocalypse, constitute an account of the world and man from the literal beginning to the literal end. This account has assimilated elements from various environing cultures, but in its totality, and in accordance with the way that the earlier events are successively recalled and interpreted in the later books, it embodies a pattern of history which is profoundly distinctive. In classical antiquity, for example, philosophies of history fall chiefly into two categories. (I use "philosophy of history" in the elementary sense of the term, as a view of the overall distribution of value, especially of human well-being and happiness, through time.) One of these, the primitivist view, which was confined mainly to myth and poetry, held that the best time was at the beginning, or in the very distant past, and that there has been an overall decline ever since. The second view, which was widespread in the sophisticated thinking of philosophers, historians, and political theorists, as well as poets, was the theory of cycles: the overall course of events is from bad to better to best to worse to worst to better, and so on, time without end. Some proponents of this theory held a view of eternal recurrence, maintaining that the kinds of things that have happened before will happen again, as time brings the world back to the corresponding phase in the cycle of human values, or even that each individual being will recur and each particular event will in due course be reenacted. According to the version of individual recurrence proposed by Chrysippus, for example, every historical cycle will end in an *ekpyrosis*, or total conflagration, followed by a renewal, and

again there will exist Socrates and Plato and every man, with the same friends and fellow citizens, and he will suffer the same fate and will meet with the same experiences and undertake the same deeds.... And there will be a complete restoration of the whole ... and the same things will be restored without end. [40](#)

The paradigm of history implicit in the Biblical canon, which was made explicit by early Christian commentators, exhibits radical differences from these classical forms—differences which were fateful for post-classical thought and culture, and for the course of history itself. As against Greco-Roman views, the Christian pattern of history has these distinctive attributes: it is finite; it has a clearly defined plot; it is providential; it is right-angled; and it is symmetrical.

i) Biblical history is finite. It represents events as occurring once and once for all, in a single closed temporal span. Hence the early and repeated Christian assaults against the chief competing doctrine of the *circuitus temporum*, in which there is supposed to be "a constant renewal and repetition of the order of nature" and "cycles will ceaselessly recur." "Far be it ... from us to believe this," St. Augustine cried. "For once Christ died for our sins; and, rising from the dead, He dieth no more. ... And we ourselves after the resurrection shall be 'ever with the Lord.'" [41](#)

2) The design of Biblical history constitutes a sharply defined plot with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and a strongly accented sequence of critical events. These events are summarized in the opening lines of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which invoke the Heavenly Muse, who had taught Moses how "In the Beginning ... the Heav'ns and Earth/ Rose out of *Chaos*," to sing "Of Man's First Disobedience ... With loss of Eden," and then of the coming of "one greater Man" and how he will one day "Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat." The degree to which all of history was viewed as a drama turning on a very few key agents and actions is indicated by the striking tendency of Christian exegetes to read the myriad intervening events as either echoes or prophecies of the nodal episodes—that is, as reflections of man's first disobedience; as either prefigurations or later reminiscences of the Incarnation and Passion; or as prefigurations of the ultimate redemption. There soon developed various schemes for periodizing history, dividing the procession of events into three, or four, or six ages; but these were for the most part attempts to order the fortunes and vicissitudes of nations and institutions in the temporal course of the fallen world—vicissitudes which shrink into in

significance when put into comparison with the radical change in the fortunes of all mankind which had occurred at the fall or at the Incarnation, or which was to occur at the second Advent.

3) The plot of history has a hidden author who is also its director and the guarantor of things to come. God planned it all before it began, and He controls its details, under the seemingly casual or causal relations of events, by His invisible Providence. The inherent distinction in the Biblical account between the apparent order and connections of things, available to human inspection, and the prepotent but hidden order of Providence, soon emerged in theology as the distinction between secondary causes and the first cause, which is the invisible and immutable working of the purpose of God. As Thomas Burnet summarized the traditional distinction, the "ordinary Course of Nature" is "a Disposition or Establishment of second Causes" which "produce the most regular Effects, assisted only with the ordinary Concourse of the first Cause," which is God's "Providence." ⁴² From its early stages Christian thought thus manifested a strong and persistent tendency—to which the assimilation of Platonic dualism gave added impetus—toward a dual or multiple interpretation of persons, objects, and events as both manifest and covert, literal and figurative. Whether in Scriptures, history, the natural sciences, or just ordinary observation, everything tended to be looked upon as endowed with a divine duplicity, functioning both as surface and as symbol.

4) While the main line of change in the prominent classical patterns of history, whether primitivist or cyclical, is continuous and gradual, the line of change in Christian history (and this difference is pregnant with consequences) is right-angled: the key events are abrupt, cataclysmic, and make a drastic, even an absolute, difference. Suddenly, out of nothing, the world is created by divine fiat. There is a precipitous fall from a deathless felicity into a mortal life of corruption and anguish in a stricken world. The birth of the Redeemer, at a precise instant in time, is the crisis, the absolute turning point in the plot which divides the reign of law and promise from the reign of grace and fulfillment and assures the happy outcome. The

visible dénouement of the plot, however, awaits Christ's second Advent, ⁴³ which will bring an immediate restoration of lost happiness on earth. His reign will be followed, at the unknown but appointed moment, by the abrupt termination of this world and of time and their replacement, for all who shall be deemed worthy in the Last Judgment, by a heavenly kingdom in eternity.

5) The Biblical scheme is symmetrical. It begins with the creation of the heaven and the earth and ends with the creation of "a new heaven and a new earth"; the history of man begins with his felicity in an earthly paradise and ends with his felicity in an equivalent paradise, ⁴⁴ first on earth, then in a heavenly city which will reproduce the conditions of Eden, including the "river of water of life," the "tree of life," and man's original innocence, for "there shall be no more curse" (Revelation 22: 1- 3). The pattern of Christian history, as Karl Löwith puts it, thus constitutes "one great detour to reach in the end the beginning." ⁴⁵ And in this pattern it is the terminal and not the initial felicity that really matters, for the finish is also the goal, the telos, of the entire providential plan. Hence, as Paul and other early propagandists pointed out, the immense advantage of the Christian scheme as against competing schemes: paganism is hopeless, but Christianity gives man hope; hope is not only an obligation but also a reward of Christian faith. Despite its emphasis on a lost paradise in the distant past, and however thoroughgoing the contempt for life in this world among some of its apologists, the persistent pressure of the Christian view of history is not retrospective but strongly prospective; for always, the best is yet to be.

3. THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME: THE APOCALYPTIC MARRIAGE

Over the centuries Biblical prophecies of the last act of the drama of history have powerfully and insistently shaped the intellection and imagination of Western man. The most detailed, terrifying, and compelling of all the descriptions of the last days, the Book of Revelation, has attracted commentary

by numerous nonprofessionals, including, in more recent times, such assorted exegetes as Isaac Newton, Joseph Priestley, D. H. Lawrence, and Paul Claudel. ⁴⁶ Lawrence tells us that, as a nonconformist child, by the time he was ten "I am sure I had heard, and read, that book ten times over"; he adds that "down among the uneducated people you will still find Revelation rampant," and expresses the plausible judgment that "it has had, and perhaps still has more influence, actually, than the Gospels or the great Epistles." ⁴⁷ "The imagery and themes of the Apocalypse," Michael Fixler has remarked, so "permeated the depths of [Milton's] imagination" that he derived as many literary images from the Book of Revelation as from the three Synoptic Gospels together. ⁴⁸ A similar claim can be made for Spenser, and the preoccupation with Apocalypse in these two poets had important consequences for their Romantic successors in the prophetic tradition. Even in the English Neoclassic Age the apocalyptic end of the world remained a favorite subject for set-pieces in prose and verse. Following the examples of Milton's descriptive passages in *Paradise Lost* and of Thomas Burnet's elaborate and eloquent elaboration upon the events of Revelation in his *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, the last days were graphically rendered—to name only some of the betterknown instances—by Dryden in the conclusion of *Anne Killigrew*, John Pomfret in his Pindaric odes *On the General Conflagration* and *Dies Novissima*, Pope in *The Messiah*, James Thomson in the conclusion of *The Seasons*, James Hervey in his *Meditations among the Tombs*, Edward Young in his ode *The Last Day* and in the ninth book of *Night Thoughts*, and William Cowper in the sixth book of *The Task*.

In its late and developed form an apocalypse (Greek *apokalypsis*, "revelation") is a prophetic vision, set forth in arcane and elaborate symbols, of the imminent events which will bring an abrupt end to the present world order and replace it by a new and perfected condition of man and his milieu. The root elements of the form occur in the evolving concern, among Old Testament prophets, with eschatology, "the latter end of the days"; in the related preoccupation with "the day of Jahweh" and the convulsions and disasters to be visited upon the enemies of Israel, and upon Israel itself, "in that day"; and in the

emergence of the expectation of a Messianic deliverer. ⁴⁹ These elements are all to be found collected under the name of the prophet Isaiah, with a particular stress, after the visitation of God's wrath upon Israel, on the advent of a new world of ease, plenty, unalloyed rejoicing, and universal peace.

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind....

And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying....

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock.

(65:17-25; also Chapters 2, 9, 11, 24-27)

Eschatological prophecies and expectations abounded in the century and a half that preceded and that followed the birth of Christ. Apocalyptic passages were incorporated into the Synoptic Gospels and the Epistles of Paul, and the two greatest of the fully developed apocalypses of that period (a number of others survive as apocrypha) were adopted into the Biblical canon—the Book of Daniel into the Old Testament, and the Book of Revelation into the New. These works embody the visions of a desperately oppressed minority with a proud record of election who, despairing of history and the possibility of effecting a recovery by their own efforts, seek (in the words of Rufus Jones) "the fierce comfort of an apocalyptic relief expedition from the sky." ⁵⁰ The dreams in Daniel include a vision of the four beasts (signifying four successive kingdoms) in which the fourth beast, "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly ... devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it"; and when "the thrones were cast down" there appeared "the Ancient of days" on a fiery throne; then "one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven," and was brought before the Ancient of days.

And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

(7:1-14)

A later revelation in Daniel adds the prophecy of a resurrection, when "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (12:2).

The author of the Book of Revelation took up the concepts, phrases, and imagery of Isaiah, Daniel, and other Jewish prophecies and eschatologies, adapted them to Christian Messianism, and developed them into the intricately ordered symbolism of the most awesome and influential of all apocalyptic visions. In the course of his vision ("I John saw these things and heard them") a series of parallel but progressive symbolic events—the opening of seven seals, the sounding of seven trumpets, the pouring out of seven vials—signalize natural catastrophes and plagues, as well as the conflict between the forces of Christ and of Anti-Christ. In the course of this prodigious violence stars fall like ripe figs, the heavens are rolled up like a scroll, and the harvest of the earth is reaped and cast "into the great winepress of the wrath of God ... and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs" (6:13-14; 14:14-20; *cf.* Isaiah 34:4; 63:1-4). But the fierce destruction is a cleansing one, preparatory to the chaining up of the Dragon and the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ and his resurrected Saints. In Isaiah and Daniel the restoration of felicity under the dominion of God was to take place in this world and to endure everlastingly. In the Book of Revelation the prediction of God's kingdom on earth is retained, but with the qualification that it is to be temporary, lasting only one thousand years, "the Millennium."⁵¹ After that period the Dragon will be loosed again and defeated finally. Then will occur the universal resurrection and the Last Judgment, after which the old heaven and earth, their function in the divine plot accomplished, will pass away, to be replaced by a new heaven and earth and by a new and eternal Jerusalem which will reconstitute, for those who merit it, the conditions of the lost Eden. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (21:4). And all these things, the prophet

emphasizes, are immediately imminent. "And, behold, I come quickly." "Surely I come quickly." (22:12, 20).

Because they recur persistently in later writings, whether theological or secular, which derive from Biblical Apocalypse, I want to stress two key images in the Book of Revelation which mark the consummation of the historical plot. The first of these is, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." "And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" (21:1, 5). These were precisely the terms in which Isaiah had earlier described the coming peaceable kingdom in this world. "For behold," the Lord had said to him, "I create new heavens and a new earth"; and again, "the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me" (65:17; 66:22). The concept, and often the phrasing, are recurrent in both Biblical and extra-Biblical eschatology. ⁵² In 2 Peter 3: 10- 13 we find it joined to the notion, widely adopted thereafter, that this world will end in fire.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt away with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up....

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

The term "apocalypse" has come into increasing vogue in recent literary criticism, where it is often applied loosely to signify any sudden and visionary revelation, or any event of violent and large-scale destruction—or even anything which is very drastic. I shall restrict "apocalypse" to the sense used in Biblical commentary, where it signifies a vision in which the old world is replaced by a new and better world. It should be noted that, even when applied to Biblical visions of the events of the last days, the term is equivocal and can signify the expectation of either an earthly or a heavenly paradise. For the book called the Apocalypse includes the episode of the millennial reign of God on earth; so that the term "apocalyptic" sometimes signifies a coming state of felicity on this earth after it

shall have been renewed (which is the final state of things in Isaiah and Daniel, but only a passing state in Revelation), and sometimes signifies a transcendental new earth, or else a city in heaven and eternity (in Revelation, "the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God," 21:10), which will be the residence of the redeemed after this earth has been obliterated. To compound the ambiguity, the promise of the ultimate new earth in the Apocalypse itself was interpreted by some commentators to signify not a transcendent location in the eternity of heaven, but merely a purged and renovated form of the earth we now inhabit. Milton dismissed these alternatives as insoluble and of minor importance. When "this world's dissolution shall be ripe," Christ will come with glory and power "to reward/ His faithful and receive them into bliss"; it does not matter in what location,

Whether in Heav'n or Earth, for then the Earth
Shall all be Paradise.... [53](#)

In the Apocalypse the approach of the last things is heralded by "as it were the voice of a great multitude," announcing that "the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (19:6-7). This is the second distinctive image for the last things; the coming of the new heaven and new earth is signalized by the marriage between Christ and the heavenly city, his bride. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"; there follows a detailed description of the shining glories of "the bride, the Lamb's wife ... that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (21:2, 9-10). The longing of mankind for apocalypse is appropriately expressed as an urgent invitation to the wedding: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come" (22:17); while those who are destined for the new heaven and earth are represented as guests who have been invited to the wedding feast: "And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (19:9).

This insistent and haunting image of the consummation of

all things as the celebration of a sacred marriage had its roots in the ancient Old Testament concept of marriage as a form of covenant, and the consequent representation of the Lord's particular covenant with Israel by the metaphor of a marriage between the people and the Lord (Proverbs 2: 17; Malachi 2: 4- 14). By easy metaphoric inference, the violation of this marriage covenant by Israel was figured as her sexual infidelity, adultery, or whoredom with idols and strange gods, of which the condign penalty for the bride is to be divorced from God and sent into exile; although with the promise of a future reunion between the repentant and purified nation (or by metonymy, the purified land, or the renovated city of Jerusalem) and the divine Bridegroom. Striking elaborations of this great Biblical trope are to be found in Ezekiel 16, in Hosea 2- 6, and in Jeremiah 3:

For all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce. ... And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks.... Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you ... and I will bring you to Zion.

The most memorable passages depicting the reunion of God with his redeemed bride, after he shall have wreaked his wrath on the day of Jahweh, occur in Isaiah. "How is the faithful city become an harlot!" (1:21). "Thus saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away?" (50:1). But "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city.... For the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem" (52:1, 9). "For thy Maker is thine husband ... and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel" (54:5). Of many passages the most profoundly influential was that in which Isaiah figured forth the final redemption as a holy marriage between Zion (renamed Hephzibah, "my delight is in her") together with its land (renamed Beulah, "a married one") and the people of Israel, under the auspices of God, who in this context is represented not as the bridegroom, but as one who rejoices like a bridegroom over his bride:

Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.

For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.

(62:2-5)

Some recent commentators explain the pervasive Biblical imagery of marriage and whoredom as an assimilation of the myths, associated with ritual marriage and the rite of sacred prostitution, which celebrated the death and resurrection of vegetational deities in the agricultural societies of the ancient Middle East. ⁵⁴ Whether or not this is a tenable hypothesis, it is not in the least necessary to explain the Biblical figure, for the long evolution of the figure, from its rudimentary form in the early books of the Old Testament through the prophets to the Book of Revelation, is coherent, full, and explicable without reference to anything outside the Biblical texts themselves. After many centuries of such evolution the author of Revelation—following the traditional procedure of both Old and New Testament authors to collocate, merge, elaborate, reinterpret, and play metaphoric variations upon passages from earlier texts—concentrated the concept of idolatry as whoredom in the person of the false bride, "the great whore," "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and abominations of the earth"; focused on one of the many existing specifications of the true bride as a new, or purified, Jerusalem; ⁵⁵ transferred the role of the bridegroom from Jehovah to Christ, the Lamb; and represented the culminating union of the Lamb and the New Jerusalem as fulfilling the prediction in Isaiah and other prophets of a final redemption in the figured form of a divine marriage.

In the Gospels, as well as in the Book of Revelation, the image of the bridegroom and of marriage is repeatedly applied to Christ, at both His first and second Advent. "And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall

they fast." And during the time when the five foolish virgins had gone out to buy the oil they had neglected to provide, "the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.... Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." ⁵⁶ So thoroughly was the figure of Christ the Bridegroom interinvolved with the concept of Christ the Redeemer, that commentators early inaugurated the tradition that Christ's words on the cross ("*consummatum est*" in the Vulgate, John 19: 30) signified that Christ mounted the cross as a bed on which to consummate the marriage with humanity inaugurated at the Incarnation, in the supreme act of sacrifice which both certified and prefigured His apocalyptic marriage at the end of time. As it was vividly put, in a sermon attributed to Augustine:

Like a bridegroom Christ went forth from His chamber. He went out with a presage of His nuptials into the field of the world.... He came to the marriage bed of the cross, and there, in mounting it, He consummated his marriage. And when He perceived the sighs of the creature, He lovingly gave himself up to the torment in the place of His bride ... and He joined the woman to Himself for ever. ⁵⁷

The deep-rooted Scriptural image of marital union representing God's reconciliation with His redeemed people and with the land, the city of Jerusalem, and the holy temple helped to justify the hotly disputed inclusion of the Song of Songs in both the Jewish and Christian Biblical canon, by pointing the way to interpret its songs of sexual passion and union as an allegory signifying the love and marriage of the Lord to Israel, or of *Christus* to *Ecclesia*, or any of a large number of alternative relationships. ⁵⁸ In some exegeses the union celebrated in the Song of Songs is interpreted as prefiguring the marriage of the Lamb at the end of time—a kind of prothalamion, to which the Book of Revelation is the epithalamion. The canonizing of Canticles, with its candid, detailed, and erotic physicalism, opened up a rich stock of sensuous imagery on which later writers could draw to embellish the austere abstract marital

symbolism of the other books of the Bible. The result of these complex developments is the paradox that Christianity, which under the powerful influence of Pauline theology has been mainly ascetic in its doctrines and attitudes, has often employed sexual union as its central symbol for the crucial events of Biblical history, and for several of the churchly sacraments as well. [59](#)

Resort to the *Song of Songs* for detailed erotic imagery reached its height in the later Middle Ages, among commentators whose concern was less with theology than with private devotion. These pious explorers of the inner world transferred the locus of the marriage of the Lamb from the apocalyptic conclusion of history to the individual soul, which they held to be capable of achieving, even in this fallen life, the acme of experience, the mystic union with Christ the Bridegroom. This topic introduces a new and important dimension of the traditional renderings of the Biblical plot.

4. CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND CHRISTIAN PSYCHO-BIOGRAPHY

Christian thought readily extended the reference of Biblical eschatology from the last day of the human race to the last day of the redeemed individual, whose soul, at the time of his bodily death, is translated to heaven as the bride of the Lamb, or at least as a festive participant in the nuptials of the Lamb, while awaiting the larger company of those who shall be deemed worthy at the Last Judgment. [60](#) It is to this tradition that the mourning father in the fourteenth-century elegy *Pearl* owes his comfort in the dream-vision of his daughter among the redeemed virgins in the New Jerusalem, who are already spouses of the heavenly Bridegroom. Hence also the possibility of the soaring climax of Milton's *Lycidas*, in which the elegiac singer achieves the vision—described in words echoing the Book of Revelation—of the dead shepherd alive again, where he

hears the unexpressive nuptial Song,
In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.

There entertain him all the Saints above,
In solemn troops and sweet Societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears forever from his eyes.

A more important and dramatic phenomenon was the tendency, grounded in texts of the New Testament itself, to internalize apocalypse by transferring the theater of events from the outer earth and heaven to the spirit of the single believer, in which there enacts itself, metaphorically, the entire eschatological drama of the destruction of the old creation, the union with Christ, and the emergence of a new creation—not *in illud tempus* but here and now, in this life.

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.:

Neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

(Luke 17: 20- 21)

The concluding phrase is now often translated, "the kingdom of God is among you"; but the words of Christ have in the past been widely interpreted to mean that the coming universal kingdom may achieve an immediate realization in the spirit of each believer. And in the Gospel of John a present and spiritual passage through death to a new life, achievable now and by each individual through an act of absolute faith, all but displaces reference to an historical apocalypse and a racial Last Judgment:

He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear, shall live. [61](#)

The first man to give personal testimony as to what it is like to undergo the abrupt transition to this new life was St. Paul, who was struck blind on the road to Damascus that he might see a new world, and so became the endlessly influential exem

plar of the central Christian experience of conversion. Paul's allusions to his experience are in metaphoric parallel with the historical prophecies of the annihilation of the old creation and its replacement by a new heaven and new earth. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5: 17; see also Ephesians 4: 21- 25, Colossians 3: 1- 10). The individual reborn lives as though in a world re-created; and his new life is figured by Paul as a death to the old marriage covenant in the form of laws and a rebirth to spiritual marriage with the divine Bridegroom: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." ⁶²

Some three and a half centuries later, in the account of his spiritual crisis in the eighth book of *The Confessions*, Augustine followed the established tradition of conversion reaching from St. Paul through Athanasius' recent *Life of St. Antony*, ⁶³ and added an extensive analysis of his spiritual agonies, modeled both on the conflict in the Apocalypse between the forces of Christ and Anti-Christ and on the description of God's destructive violence during the *dies irae*, preparatory to bringing forth a new creation. The result is the emergence in Augustine, fully developed, of the distinctively Christian spiritual autobiography. Its moral psychology is very different from representative classical treatments of self-reliance, self-continuity, and the rational weighing of alternatives; ⁶⁴ it is, however, entirely consonant with the crises, cataclysms, and right-angled changes of the Christian pattern of history. For the mental experience in *The Confessions* is one of chiaroscuro, discontinuity, and sudden reversals, of "two wills" locked in internecine conflict—Armageddon translated into psychomachia—and of a savage, persistent, and self-destructive suffering which culminates in the abrupt interposition of God to effect, at a specific point in time (Augustine's phrases are *punctum ipsum temporis, confestim, statim*), a new identity, described metaphorically as the end of the old creature and the beginning of the new: "dying unto death and living unto life." ⁶⁵

A striking index to the psycho-historical parallelism in Chris

tian thinking is the early appearance and elaborate development of the distinction between the "letter" and the "spirit" of Biblical narrative, the same text being taken to signify, in its literal sense, an outer event of sacred history, and in one of its several "spiritual" or "allegorical" senses, an inner event which may occur within the soul of every man. ⁶⁶ This polysemantics of simultaneous reference to the outer history of mankind and the spiritual history of the individual—extended from the Scriptures to secular authors, and with a shift of the literal sense from providential history to fictional narratives—shaped the design and component details of many literary allegories in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. I shall mention one late example because it is by a man whom Wordsworth put below only Milton as a poet of the "enthusiastic and meditative Imagination" with whom he sought and feared comparison, ⁶⁷ and also because it incorporates a number of the events and images that I have been discussing. The poet is Spenser, and the work is one of Wordsworth's great favorites, Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. ⁶⁸ The prototype for the plot and symbolic elements of this work is the Book of Revelation. ⁶⁹ The Red Cross Knight escapes the wiles of the false bride, Duessa, the Whore of Babylon; is granted a vision of the New Jerusalem, "Where is for thee ordained a blessed end"; assaults and, after a long struggle, slays the "old Dragon," thereby lifting the long siege of the king and queen (Adam and Eve) and reopening access to the land called Eden; and at the end is ceremoniously betrothed to the true bride, Una, radiant with "heavenlie beautie." In one of its dimensions this "continued Allegory, or darke conceit" signifies the historical Advent of Christ, whose coming victory over the dragon and marriage to the bride will herald the restoration of Eden to all elected mankind; in another dimension, however, it signifies the quest, temptation, struggle, triumph, and redemptive marriage to the one true faith which is acted out within the spirit of each believing Christian.

The most detailed development of spiritual eschatology, however, is to be found not in the allegorists, but among the writers whom we know as Christian "mystics," who represented the soul's pilgrimage toward its private apocalypse both as an inner

imitatio of the passion and resurrection of Christ and as an inner preenactment of the events of the latter days in the Book of Revelation—an enactment in which the culmination is figured as a holy marriage and is rendered, often, in sensuous imagery suggested by the *Song of Songs*. Authors of commentaries on the Canticles from Origen to Richard of St. Victor, followed by a long sequence of later contemplatives, charted the mystic way as a sustained and arduous spiritual journey and quest, which is beset by a powerful and wily enemy and is subject to violent shifts and sudden reversals. The goal of the inner journey is the death and renovation of the old self by means of a "spiritual marriage" of the soul as *sponsa Dei* to Christ as Bridegroom, in a *unio passionalis* which sometimes is set forth in metaphors of physical lovemaking, or even of violent sexual assault, that disconcert a modern reader by their candor and detail. [70](#)

As one product of a millennium and a half of these developments, here is a familiar devotional sonnet by John Donne:

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for You
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labor to admit You, but O, to no end;
Reason, Your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love You, and would be lovèd fain,
But am betrothed unto Your enemy.
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again;
Take me to You, imprison me, for I
Except You enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except You ravish me.

The insistent paradoxes and figurative shock tactics are characteristically Donne's, but behind the diversity of Donne's metaphors we can make out the root-images of the latter days as described in the Book of Revelation, translated to a personal and spiritual application. The violence of a wrathful but loving

God, the conflict with the forces of evil embodied in one adversary, the destruction of the created world in an immense *conflagratio* (a detail from 2 Peter 3: 10) in order to make it new (Revelation 21: 5, "Behold, I make all things new"), and the ultimate marriage with the Bridegroom, represented as a rape of the longingly reluctant soul ⁷¹—all these elements, which had long since become commonplaces of Christian devotion, Donne compresses into fourteen virtuoso lines of serious wit.

The same tradition of historical and spiritual correspondences provided Milton the opportunity for a number of the serious conceits upon which he plays throughout *Paradise Lost*. Thus Satan brings with him into Eden "the hot Hell that always in him burns,/ Though in mid Heav'n" (IX, 467-8; *cf.* IV, 19-23). Conversely, as Michael tells the fallen but now penitent Adam, if he adds to his hard-won wisdom answerable deeds and the Christian virtues,

then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
A paradise within thee, happier far-

a psychological state which, in degree of felicity, is precisely equivalent to the historical state of the outer world after apocalypse which Michael had just foretold:

for then the Earth
Shall all be Paradise, far happier place
Than this of *Eden*, and far happier days. ⁷²

(XII, 585-7; 463-5)

Such spiritual overreadings of the literal texts of Scripture are in the mainstream of Christian thought. Especially germane to our enquiry, however, is a mode of interpretation applied by left-wing, Inner Light Protestants which effected a radically heterodox reading of Biblical history and apocalyptic prophecy. The greatest representative of this hermeneutic tradition is Jacob Boehme; but I shall present by way of example an English writer, Gerrard Winstanley, leader of a radical splinter group during the Puritan Revolution, who developed a theory

of Christian communism and in 1649-50 set up a short-lived community of "Diggers" in Surrey. ⁷³

Winstanley's pamphlets extend the correspondence between the spiritual history of the individual and the Biblical history of mankind back from the last to the first things, so as to establish a parallel between the innocence of Adam in Eden and that of each man at birth: "a childe that is new borne, or till he growes up to some few yeares ... is innocent, harmelesse ... And this is *Adam*, or mankinde in his Innocency." ⁷⁴ Winstanley, moreover, drastically alters the age-old procedure of retaining the literal meaning of the Biblical text as the base for the spiritual overmeanings. Not only does he attach a spiritual sense to the key personages, places, events, actions, and doctrines represented in the Bible, but he systematically invalidates the literal sense. As a result, Biblical history is completely internalized and the entire text becomes no more than a sustained metaphoric vehicle for the powers, states, conflicts, and processes of individual minds in the course of their experience on earth. All doctrinal divinity, Winstanley asserts, is based on the interpretation of Scripture by those who "think they are wise and learned, and the only men sent of God to preach the Gospel," but it is in fact nothing other than "that great Dragon, that hath deceived all the world, for it draws men from knowing the Spirit, to own bare letters, words and histories for spirit." ⁷⁵

Here are representative passages from Winstanley, most of them cited from his central declaration of belief, *The New Law of Righteousnes*, which he wrote in 1648: "All that which you call history, and have doted upon it, and made it your idol, is all to be seen and felt within you." All its component elements, including Adam, Cain and Abel, Abraham, Moses, Israel, the Land of Canaan, Judas, the commanders of the Jews, the good and bad angels—all are "to be seen within you" (p. [215](#)). And the heaven and hell of orthodox divinity are no more than externalized fantasies of a disturbed mind—"a Doctrine. of a sickly and weak spirit, who hath lost his understanding ... of the temper of his own Heart and Nature, and so runs into fancies, either of joy or sorrow"; "indeed it is not knowledg, but imagination" (pp. 567-8).

Whosoever worships God by hear-say, as others tells them, knowes not what God is from light within himselfe; or that thinks God is in the heavens above the skyes; and so prayes to that God which he imagines to be there and every where ... this man worships his owne imagination, which is the Devill.

(p. [107](#))

Therefore you Preachers, do not tell the people any more, that a man called *Adam*, that disobeyed about 6000 years ago, was the man that filled every man with sin and filth, by eating an apple.... For assure yourselves, this *Adam* is within every man and woman; and it is the first power that appears to act and rule in every man.

(p. [176](#))

Jesus Christ at a distance from thee, will never save thee; but a Christ within is thy Saviour. (p. [113](#)) [For the spirit] which is the light and life of Christ within the heart, discovers all darknesse, and delivers mankind from bondage; *And besides him there is no Saviour.*

(p. [214](#))

No less than its beginning and middle, the apocalyptic end of the Biblical text signifies a personal and inner experience, not a generic and outer event. "Now the second *Adam* Christ, hath taken the Kingdom my body, and rules in it; *He makes it a new heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwells Righteousnesse*" (pp. [173](#)-4). "And this is to be made a new creature, in whom old corrupt lusts are passed away, and every power in him is a new power" (p. [176](#)). When in the fullness of time this power shall triumph in the spirit of all individuals, then shall the prophecies of Revelation be fulfilled: "And when this universall power of Righteousnesse is spread in the earth," the world shall be "*a Land flowing with milke and honey, plenty of all things, every one walking righteously in the Creation one to another ... as it was in the beginning*" (p. [181](#)). "And that prophesie will not generally be fulfilled till this time. Rev. 12:9" (p. [184](#)). "Wel: this wil be a great day of Judgment; the Righteous Judge wil sit upon the Throne in every man and woman" (p. [206](#)). Consonantly, the restored paradise of the Apocalypse will not be a location outside this world to which we will be transferred after death; it will be this world itself, as experienced by our redeemed and glorified senses in our earthly existence. "And now in this new heaven and new earth,

he himself who is the King of Righteousnesse doth dwel and rule ... O ye hear-say Preachers, deceive not the people any longer, by telling them that this glory shal not be known and seen, til the body is laid in the dust. I tel you, this great mystery is begun to appear, and it must be seen by the material eyes of the flesh: And those five senses that is in man, shall partake of this glory" (p. [170](#); cf. p. [153](#)).

Winstanley sounds uncommonly like William Blake, who claimed that a literal-minded "Priesthood" had caused men to forget that "All deities reside in the human breast," and for whom heaven, hell, and paradise were not outward places but states of mind. We recognize the similarity in passages such as this in *Jerusalem*⁷⁷, although Blake rehabilitates the term "Imagination" to signify not a sickly fantasy, but the faculty of vision and eternal truth:

I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination.... What is the Divine Spirit? is the Holy Ghost any other than an Intellectual Fountain? ... What are the Treasures of Heaven which we are to lay up for ourselves, are they any other than Mental Studies and Performances? What are all the Gifts of the Gospel, are they not all Mental Gifts? ... What is the Joy of Heaven but Improvement in the things of the Spirit? What are the Pains of Hell but Ignorance, Bodily Lust, Idleness & devastation of the things of the Spirit[?] ... To labour in Knowledge is to Build up Jerusalem.

Winstanley's God who is externalized and worshiped "in the heavens above the skyes," and is therefore really "the Devill," is kin to Blake's Nobodaddy, the sky god whom he later incorporated into Urizen:

Why art thou silent & invisible
Father of Jealousy,
Why dost thou hide thyself in clouds
From every searching Eye?

And Winstanley's insistence that the apocalyptic new heaven and new earth will be the existing world as perceived by the

glorified "five senses that is in man" suggests Blake's contention that, while "the ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire" is true, it is true in the sense that "this will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment," for "if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite." [76](#)

This parallelism between Blake and Winstanley (we shall find in a later chapter that it extends to Blake's central myth of the fall as a splintering of the primal man) should not surprise us. When Blake had warmly declared that "all he knew was in the Bible," he at once added, H. C. Robinson tells us, that "he understands by the Bible the spiritual sense"; [77](#) and Blake's "spiritual sense" was derived from the native English tradition of radical Inner Light hermeneutics, which had already assimilated Behmenist and other esoteric doctrines, and which continued to be propagated by one or another of the extreme dissenting sects in the London of Blake's younger days. But notice that Winstanley's drastic internalization of the powers of divinity also approximates—not as explicit creed but as a way of thinking— Wordsworth's announcements of his high poetic theme:

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.

(*Prelude* III, 171-82)

And when we turn back to Wordsworth's Prospectus for his poetry, we find that what at first seemed singular in his statement now has a familiar ring. The main region of his song is "the Mind of Man," but in exploring that internal realm the poet will pass, unalarmed, the externalized Deity—"all terror ... That ever was put forth in personal form"—who is the wrathful and thundering Jehovah of the Apocalypse, enthroned in the empyrean amidst his "choir of shouting angels." Our ears are attuned now to the echoes in Wordsworth's passage of the Book of Revelation:

And immediately I was in the spirit and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.... And round about the throne were four and twenty seats.... And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices. ... And I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. [78](#)

Nor can an externalized hell or any "blinder vacancy scooped out/ By help of dreams," Wordsworth says, match the fear and awe we feel when we look into the depths of the human mind. As the poet moves through the region of the mind, beauty (in a Biblical phrase) "pitches her tents" hourly before him. All points toward "the blissful hour" which is Wordsworth's version of the holy marriage at the end of time. This event, however, is transported from the indefinite future to the experiential present, and translated from external intervention to an act of unaided vision, in which the Lamb and the New Jerusalem are replaced by man's mind as the bridegroom and nature as the bride. But this "great consummation" will nevertheless suffice to create the restored paradise predicted in the Apocalypse—although Wordsworth's syntax leaves it suspended whether the original paradise was a true "history ... of departed things/ Or a mere fiction of what never was." Furthermore, that re-creation of the world which an individual mind can accomplish here and now, "the progressive powers .../ Of the whole species," will perhaps some day accomplish universally. In the meantime the poet's prophetic annunciation of high human possibility will effect, in those who heed and believe him, the spiritual correlate of the resurrection at the last day—a revival from the "sleep/ Of Death." "This," Wordsworth grandly proclaimed, "is our high argument."

5. ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO THE MILLENNIUM: PROGRESS AND REVOLUTION

Not only did Gerrard Winstanley in 1648 foresee a future when the general triumph of the Spirit in individual minds

would inaugurate a new earth; he also announced that the Puritan Revolution even then under way marked the beginning of that glorious time in England, and that this event, by worldwide contagion, would effect the universal millennium prophesied in Daniel and in Revelation. The new David, which is the "new Law of righteousness,"

is now coming to reign, and the Isles and Nations of the earth shall all come in unto him; he will rest every where, for this blessing will fill all places: All parts of the Creation in whom the curse remains shall be shaken and moved.

(pp. [152](#) -3)

But now it is done, it is done, it is done, time shall be no more to thee... O rejoyce, rejoyce, for the time that the Lord God omnipotent wil reign in al the earth is beginning.

(pp. [207](#) -9)

We shall find that in the early 1790s Wordsworth, together with Blake and a number of other contemporaries, rejoiced in a similar assurance that the revolution of their epoch would issue in an earthly paradise, and also that the early millennial expectations of these writers influenced the themes of their later imaginative productions. To indicate the complex interrelations among these various matters I shall need to turn briefly from spiritual interpretations of the Apocalypse to some literal and historical interpretations of the events that it promised.

The pervasive and persisting expectation that history will end once and for all in a new heaven and new earth is unique to Judeo-Christian civilization, [79](#) and it has had a powerful and irremissive effect in forming secular as well as religious thinking. The explosive element in apocalyptic prophecy was the millennium. The anticipation of a heavenly kingdom, to be achieved only after the end of the creation, posed no threat to the established order of the world. But in its millennial (or in the Greek term, chiliastic) component, the Biblical text denounced the present state of the world as unrelievedly evil and promised God's early intervention to annihilate all existing states and institutions in order to set up His kingdom, not in heaven, but on earth; and this constituted a patent menace to the status quo. Over the centuries of delay in the arrival of what had at first been an imminently expected second Advent, [80](#) the Church itself moved from its situation as a small persecuted

sect to the dominant position of power, and the capital of Christianity became that very Rome which had been the unholy and obscene Babylon of the Book of Revelation. Early in the fifth century St. Augustine in *The City of God*, following some earlier precedents, construed the Biblical promise of the millennium as an allegory which signified the invisible, spiritual Kingdom of God that had in fact been inaugurated by Christ's first Advent. Thereafter the figurative interpretation of the earthly kingdom became the established doctrine of the Church, and literal millennialism was looked upon as an aberration.

The concept, nevertheless, of a final state of literal felicity on this earth, equal to or (in a fairly common opinion) better than the lost paradise at the beginning, continued to be a subject for learned commentary and abstruse arithmetic computation; it also remained vigorously alive in popular thought and art, and broke out repeatedly into feverish expectations of the imminent return of Christ the King. And in the increasingly secular period since the Renaissance, no less than in earlier Christian eras, we have continued to live in an intellectual milieu which is oriented, in Tennyson's phrase, toward "one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves" an assumption so deep and pervasive, and often so transformed from its Biblical prototype, that it has been easy to overlook both its distinctiveness and its source. The pressure of this millennial orientation has helped to shape important elements of Western thought which lack close parallels in cultures that developed outside the Hebrew-Christian orbit.

One of these elements is the theory of general, continuing, and unlimited historical progress, in the moral as well as the intellectual and material realms. Historians such as J. B. Bury were wont to attribute the inauguration and rapid expansion of this idea after the Renaissance to the conspicuous advances in science, technology, and the practical arts, and to the optimism engendered by geographical discoveries, foreign colonization, and commercial and economic expansion. ⁸¹ Recently, however, revisionist historians of the idea of progress—among them Carl Becker, Ronald S. Crane, and latterly Ernest Tuveson in convincing detail—have emphasized the important fact that the

concept of inevitable and all-comprehensive progress evolved within the existing frame of Christian prospectivism, in a culture long predisposed to expect an inevitable future of absolute moral and material well-being on earth. ⁸² It seems clear that the modern development of the idea of general progress had multiple causes, and that the great post-Renaissance advances in the sciences and the applied arts entered into a preexisting scheme of historical expectation, but at the same time altered that scheme drastically. For the first time men seemed to have developed ways to achieve the anticipated state of plenty and happiness gradually and peacefully instead of abruptly and catastrophically, and by human and material means, without the need for a sudden relief expedition from the sky.

In this context Francis Bacon's views on progress are especially relevant, because he was held in extraordinary esteem by Wordsworth, and by Coleridge and Shelley as well. (Wordsworth classified Bacon, with Milton and Shakespeare, as a man in whom was enshrined "as much of the divinity of intellect as the inhabitants of this planet can hope will ever take up its abode among them." ⁸³) Like the early Christian apologists, Bacon saw the cyclical theory as the specific enemy of his mission: "By far the greatest obstacle to the progress of science" is the despair engendered by the supposition "that in the revolution of time and of the ages of the world the sciences ... at one season ... grow and flourish, at another wither and decay, yet in such sort that when they have reached a certain point and condition they can advance no further." He undertakes, on the contrary, "to give hope"; in this task "the beginning is from God," as is its destined end—he reads the prophecy of Daniel "touching the last ages of the world: 'Many shall go to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased' " as signifying that the exploration of the globe "and advancement of the sciences, are destined by fate, that is, by Divine Providence, to meet in the same age." ⁸⁴

Bacon's scheme is that of the readily possible (or as he suggests in the passage I have quoted, the providentially necessary and inevitable) advance in man's mastery over nature and over the material conditions of his well-being by the application of experimental science. In this scheme, however, the basic *don-*

nées remain those of Biblical history, although in a special interpretation of its crucial episodes, past and future. The fall, Bacon says, had a double aspect, one moral and the other cognitive, for man "fell at the same time from his state of innocence and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses however can even in this life be in some part repaired: the former by religion and faith, the latter by arts and science." ⁸⁵ Man's cognitive fall was occasioned by the loss of "that pure and uncorrupted natural knowledge whereby Adam gave names to the creatures according to their propriety," and this loss represented a divorce and separation of mind from nature, or (in terms of the mental powers involved) of the empirical senses from reason. The aim of Bacon's *Great Instauration* is to investigate "whether that commerce between the mind of man and the nature of things ... might by any means be restored to its perfect and original condition," through establishing "forever a true and lawful marriage between the empirical and the rational faculty, the unkind and ill-starred divorce and separation of which has thrown into confusion all the affairs of the human family." ⁸⁶ Such a marriage will herald our entrance into the "kingdom of man," which is closely equivalent to our entrance into the moral Kingdom of God promised to us in the latter days; for it will be a return to the condition of the original Eden by way of man's resumption of the "purity and integrity" of the mind of a child: with "the understanding thoroughly freed and cleansed, the entrance into the kingdom of man, founded on the sciences," is "not much other than the entrance into the kingdom of heaven, whereinto none may enter except as a little child." ⁸⁷ This purgation and reintegration of the mind is to be achieved by eliminating, or at least controlling, the "idols, or phantoms," either innate or acquired from false philosophy, which distort the relations between the mind and the world. In a climactic passage of *The Great Instauration* Bacon proclaims his work to be no other than a prothalamion which celebrates the coming marriage of the redeemed mind (that is, the mind which has recovered its original purity and integrity in perception) to the universe without:

The explanation of which things, and of the true relation between the nature of things and the nature of the mind, is as the strewing and decoration of the bridal chamber of the mind and the universe, the divine goodness assisting, out of which marriage let us hope (and be this the prayer of the bridal song) there may spring helps to man, and a line and race of inventions that may in some degree subdue and overcome the necessities and miseries of humanity. [88](#)

Unexpectedly, then, we find in Bacon's "bridal song" a close formal equivalent to Wordsworth's "spousal verse" in the Prospectus, which celebrates the wedding of man's mind "to this goodly universe" and the "creation" of the paradisaical world to be accomplished by their "blended might." My intent is not to claim that Wordsworth derived his concept and imagery from Bacon's prose—these things lie in the public domain of Western culture—but only to show how the persistent Biblical association of the fall and infidelity of man with separation and divorce, and of the redemption of man and his world with the union of bridegroom and bride, fostered striking metaphoric parallels in thinkers concerned with secular ways to the coming kingdom of man, even if those ways are as diverse as Bacon's purged scientific understanding and Wordsworth's liberated poetic imagination. And whatever the relation between these two writers, the Baconian parallel highlights the fact that in the Prospectus Wordsworth tentatively commits himself to the idea of the gradual progress of all mankind toward the great consummation-

my voice proclaims

How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted....

In *The Great Instauration*, moreover, only a few pages after announcing his "bridal song," Bacon goes on to describe the valid relation of the investigative eye to nature (preparatory to achieving a scientific apocalypse of nature) in words notably

similar to Wordsworth's statements of the need of the poet to keep his eye steadily on its object:

And all depends on keeping the eye steadily fixed upon the facts of nature and so receiving their images simply as they are. For God forbid that we should give out a dream of our own imagination for a pattern of the world; rather may he graciously grant to us to write an apocalypse or true vision of the footsteps of the Creator imprinted on his creatures.... Wherefore if we labor in thy works with the sweat of our brows, thou wilt make us partakers of thy vision and thy sabbath. [89](#)

More relevant to our concerns, however, than the theory of rectilinear general progress is a way of historical thinking which is much more primitive, yet one which in recent times has been given an elaborate and sophisticated understructure of theoretical sanctions. This is the belief in an imminent revolution, of which the effect on the well-being of humanity will be sudden, absolute, and universal. The concept and conduct of local rebellion against an oppressive individual or group or nation have doubtless occurred at all times and in all places. But peculiarly Western, and relatively recent, are the doctrine and trial of a total revolution, which is conceived to possess many, or all, of these attributes: (1) the revolution will, by an inescapable and cleansing explosion of violence and destruction, reconstitute the existing political, social, and moral order absolutely, from its very foundations, and so (2) bring about abruptly, or in a remarkably short time, the shift from the present era of profound evil, suffering, and disorder to an era of peace, justice, and optimal conditions for general happiness; (3) it will be led by a militant elite, who will find ranged against them the forces dedicated to preserving the present evils, consolidated in a specific institution or class or race; (4) though it will originate in a particular and critical time and place, it will by irresistible contagion spread everywhere, to include all mankind; (5) its benefits will endure for a very long time, perhaps forever, because the transformation of the institutional circumstances and cultural ambience of man will heal the intellectual and spiritual malaise which has

brought him to his present plight; and (6) it is inevitable, because it is guaranteed either by a transcendent or by an immanent something, not ourselves, which makes for the ineluctable triumph of total justice, community, and happiness on earth.

In its most recent and fateful forms this doctrine has usually claimed to base its predictions on valid reasoning from historical experience. But the course of history provides no valid grounds for large-scale certainty about the future; ⁹⁰ or at any rate, if the history of unhappy man demonstrates anything at all, it demonstrates that we have no reason to expect radical perfection either in man's moral nature or in his political, economic, and social institutions. The doctrine of absolute revolution has not an empirical but, ultimately, a theological basis; its certainty is a faith in Providence—a Providence converted into its secular equivalent of an immanent teleology, or dialectical necessity, or the scientific laws compelling historical events; and its prototype is the deeply ingrained and pervasive expectation in the Western world, guaranteed by an infallible text, of an abrupt, cataclysmic, and all-inclusive change which, after an indispensable preliminary of fierce destructiveness, will result in the perfection of an earthly paradise for a redeemed mankind. Its roots, that is to say, are in the Biblical scheme of apocalyptic history.

The attempt to translate Scriptural prophecy into revolutionary action has been a recurrent phenomenon; especially, as Norman Cohn has shown in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, in Protestant countries, at a time of rapid commercial or industrial development, and where there exists a large and oppressed class of workers. ⁹¹ The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in northern Europe—the age of the Taborites, of Thomas Müntzer, and of John of Leyden, the "Messiah of the Last Days" was a time of diverse movements to expedite the imminent divine kingdom by a struggle against the established powers of evil. ⁹² Another such period was that of the civil wars in seventeenth-century England, when we find fervent eschatological expectations among various radical sects in the parliamentary armies, especially the "Fifth Monarchy Men" (a name derived from the apocalypse of Daniel) who, as saints in the army of

Christ "the General," undertook to play their part in the violent preliminaries to founding His kingdom on earth. ⁹³ Gerrard Winstanley, as we know, called on England to rejoice that "the time that the Lord God omnipotent will raigin in al the earth is beginning"; and Oliver Cromwell himself expressed his persuasion that "I am one of those whose heart God hath drawne out to waite for some extraordinary dispensations, according to those promises that hee hath held forth of thinges to bee accomplished in the later time, and I cannott butt thinke that God is beginning of them." ⁹⁴ The sense of an imminent earthly kingdom also inflamed the imagination of Milton, who confidently awaited the advent on England's green and pleasant land of "the Eternall and shortly-expected King" who shall "open the Clouds to judge the severall Kingdomes of the World ... proclaiming thy universal and milde *Monarchy* through Heaven and Earth"; on that day "some one" (doubtless himself) will be heard chanting songs appropriate to this great consummation—"high *strains* in new and lofty *Measures* to sing and celebrate thy *divine Mercies*, and *marvelous Judgments* in this Land throughout all Ages." In *Animadversions* Milton reiterated his expectation in the traditional figure of the apocalyptic marriage:

Thy Kingdome is now at hand, and thou standing at the dore. Come forth out of thy Royall Chambers, O Prince of all the Kings of the earth ... for now the voice of thy Bride calls thee, and all creatures sigh to bee renew'd. ⁹⁵

To return to the era of our primary concern: the later eighteenth century was another age of apocalyptic expectation, when the glory and promise of the American Revolution and, much more, of the early years of the French Revolution, revived among a number of English Nonconformists the millenarian excitement of Milton and other seventeenth-century predecessors. And at the formative period of their lives, major Romantic poets—including Wordsworth, Blake, Southey, Coleridge, and later, after his own fashion, Shelley—shared this hope in the French Revolution as the portent of universal felicity, as did Hölderlin and other young radicals in Germany.

Though these writers soon lost confidence in a millennium brought about by means of violent revolution, they did not abandon the form of their earlier vision. In many important philosophers and poets, Romantic thinking and imagination remained apocalyptic thinking and imagination, though with varied changes in explicit content. This provenance is reflected in the ideas, design, and imagery of many characteristic writings of the age, including the work whose argument Wordsworth announced in his *Prospectus* as the possibility of an earthly paradise which would be a simple produce of the common day. The details of this widespread shift in the bases of hope from political revolution to the powers inherent in human consciousness will be a matter for later discussion.

6. NATURAL SUPERNATURALISM

I began with Wordsworth's "*Prospectus* of the design and scope" of his intended masterwork and went on, by way of Wordsworth's chief model, *Paradise Lost*, into what must seem an inordinate excursion on the design and imagery of Biblical history and on the diverse later interpretations of the crucial events between the first and last things. This background of Biblical text and exegesis, however, will prove of repeated relevance to our understanding of the Romantic achievement. For the fact is that many of the most distinctive and recurrent elements in both the thought and literature of the age had their origin in theological concepts, images, and plot patterns which were translated, in Wordsworth's terms, to men "as natural beings in the strength of nature," living in "the world/ Of all of us, the place in which, in the end,/ We find our happiness, or not at all" (*Prelude*, III, 194; X, 726 ff.). The phenomenon is conspicuous, and has not escaped the attention of critics and historians. If we nonetheless remain unaware of the full extent to which characteristic concepts and patterns of Romantic philosophy and literature are a displaced and reconstituted theology, or else a secularized form of devotional experience, that is because we still live in what is essentially, although in derivative rather than direct manifestations, a Biblical culture, and

readily mistake our hereditary ways of organizing experience for the conditions of reality and the universal forms of thought. Pierre Proudhon, himself a militant advocate of "humanitarian Atheism," long ago recognized his helplessness to escape religious formulas which, since they are woven into the fabric of our language, control the articulation of our thinking:

[I am] forced to proceed as a materialist, that is to say, by observation and experience, and to conclude in the language of a believer, because there exists no other; not knowing whether my formulas, theological despite myself, ought to be taken as literal or as figurative.... We are full of the Divinity, *Jovis omnia plena*; our monuments, our traditions, our laws, our ideas, our languages, and our sciences—all are infected with this indelible superstition, outside of which we are not able either to speak or act, and without which we simply do not think. [96](#)

The assimilation of Biblical and theological elements to secular or pagan frames of reference began with the establishment of Christianity, and it was immensely accelerated from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century. What is exceptional in the period beginning in the 1790s is the scope of this undertaking, and the deliberateness with which it was often carried on. A conspicuous Romantic tendency, after the rationalism and decorum of the Enlightenment, was a reversion to the stark drama and suprarational mysteries of the Christian story and doctrines and to the violent conflicts and abrupt reversals of the Christian inner life, turning on the extremes of destruction and creation, hell and heaven, exile and reunion, death and rebirth, dejection and joy, paradise lost and paradise regained. (Looking about the contemporary scene, Carlyle remarked sardonically that men cannot do for very long without the devil.) But since they lived, inescapably, after the Enlightenment, Romantic writers revived these ancient matters with a difference: they undertook to save the overview of human history and destiny, the experiential paradigms, and the cardinal values of their religious heritage, by reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent, for the time being.

This general enterprise is apparent in almost all the major metaphysicians and poets of the period, qualified to the extent that a particular writer was Christian, theist, agnostic, or atheist. The early philosophical writings of Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, and above all Hegel, set out, often quite explicitly, to retain what was valid in the myths, or what Hegel called the "picturerepresentation," of the Biblical account, by translating them into the concepts and scheme of speculative philosophy. William Blake's archetypal poet, Los, laboring at the construction of the imaginative city of Golgonooza, declared that he "must create a System" or be enslaved by the ready-made system of the current Christian creed, institutions, and morality (*Jerusalem* I. 10). Contemporary writers in Germany also announced the need for what Friedrich Schlegel called a "new mythology," to be formed "out of the uttermost depth of the spirit," which would serve as the unifying ground for all modern poetry; he looked to its imminent development out of a synthesis between the revolutionary inwardness of philosophical idealism and the revelations of contemporary physical science. ⁹⁷ Friedrich Schelling agreed that at the present moment "each truly creative individual must invent a mythology for himself," and saw in contemporary *Naturphilosophie* the adumbration of a universal mythology that would harmonize Greek myth and the seemingly antithetic claims of Christianity. ⁹⁸ Coleridge, who from the time of his maturity was a professing Christian, carried on a lifetime's struggle to save what seemed to him the irreducible minimum of the Christian creed within an essentially secular metaphysical system; while on his side Shelley, who declared that "the *Divina Commedia* and *Paradise Lost* have conferred upon modern mythology a systematic form," ⁹⁹ set out to assimilate what seemed intellectually and morally valid in this mythology to his own agnostic and essentially skeptical world-view. John Keats, whose philosophical stance was that of humanistic naturalism, undertook to project his own "system of Salvation" ¹⁰⁰ in the form of the modified classical myths of *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*. "The Mythus of the Christian Religion," Carlyle's protagonist observed in *Sartor Resartus*, "looks not in the eighteenth century as it did in the eighth," and he announced as the great need of the age "to embody the divine

Spirit of that Religion in a new Mythus." Carlyle's statement of the early 1830s precisely defines a cardinal endeavor of the preceding generation; to its results we can apply another phrase from *Sartor Resartus*—"Natural Supernaturalism" [101](#) —for the general tendency was, in diverse degrees and ways, to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine.

T. E. Hulme recognized this tendency and appraised it, in his blunt way, a half century ago: "Romanticism, then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is spilt religion." [102](#) Hulme, who thought it an act of courage to take one's dogma straight, scorned the Romantic endeavor as a failure of nerve. But the historian of the period need not accept this evaluation, nor that of other orthodox commentators who look upon it not as a sign of weakness, but as a display of overweeningness. The Romantic enterprise was an attempt to sustain the inherited cultural order against what to many writers seemed the imminence of chaos; and the resolve to give up what one was convinced one had to give up of the dogmatic understructure of Christianity, yet to save what one could save of its experiential relevance and values, may surely be viewed by the disinterested historian as a display of integrity and of courage. Certainly the greatest Romantic writers, when young and boldly exploratory, earned the right to their views by a hard struggle. Wordsworth, announcing in *Home at Grasmere* his discovered mission "divinely taught ... to speak as I have felt/ Of what in man is human or divine," insisted that "the undaunted quest" involved its high challenges and risks-

of foes

To wrestle with, and victory to complete,
Bounds to be leapt, darkness to be explored. [103](#)

And in a manuscript of the Prospectus he described himself, the "transitory being that beheld/ This vision," as

In part a Fellow-citizen, in part
An outlaw, and a borderer of his age.

These lines indicate how audacious Wordsworth esteemed his undertaking to shift his haunt and the main region of his

song from heaven, Jehovah, and hell to "the Mind of Man" in the act of finding what will suffice.

My last phrase deliberately echoes Wallace Stevens, as a reminder that the Romantic endeavor to salvage traditional experience and values by accommodating them to premises tenable to a later age has continued to be a prime concern of post-Romantic poets. Stevens expressly identified the aim "of modern poetry" as the attempt to convert the setting and agents and language of Scripture into

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the script.

Then the theatre was changed

To something else. Its past was a souvenir.
It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place. [104](#)

Among modern poets none stays so close to some of Wordsworth's formulations as Stevens does, so that his departures from his predecessor stand out with special prominence. Wordsworth, we know, did not think of *The Recluse* as an epic but as a poem for which he renounced his earlier hope to blow "the heroic trumpet," [105](#) but in taking up Milton's role he often echoed Milton's heroic voice and the idiom of Biblical prophecy as well. Stevens deliberately rejected both the prophetic stance and the epic voice:

To say more than human things with human voice,
That cannot be; to say human things with more
Than human voice, that, also, cannot be;
To speak humanly from the height or from the depth
Of human things, that is acutest speech. [106](#)

In place of the tradition Wordsworth had inherited from Milton, we find in Stevens qualities closer to the naturalism, the unillusioned resignation, and the Epicureanism of a more ancient cosmic poet, Lucretius. But within the altered frame and tone of Stevens' meditations there remains a notable continuity with Wordsworth. Shall she not find, he enquires about his protagonist in *Sunday Morning*,

In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?
Divinity must live within herself...
Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
The blood of paradise? And shall the earth
Seem all of paradise that we shall know? ...
There is not any haunt of prophecy,
Nor any old chimera of the grave,
Neither the golden underground, nor isle
Melodious, where spirits gat them home,
Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm
Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured
As April's green endures; or will endure
Like her remembrance of awakened birds,
Or her desire for June and evening, tipped
By the consummation of the swallow's wings.

Stevens represents the musing in solitude of a modern woman as she savors the luxuries of her Sunday breakfast in a brilliant un-Wordsworthian setting of sun, rug, coffee and oranges, and a green cockatoo. In these subdued lines, however, we recognize something approximating the high argument of the Romantic poet who (while "Beauty—a living Presence of the earth" waited upon his steps) proclaimed the power of the mind of man to realize an equivalent of "Paradise, and groves/ Elysian, Fortunate Fields," by the "consummation" of a union with the common earth which will require of us "nothing more than what we are."

TWO

Wordsworth's "Prelude" and the Crisis-Autobiography

They are as a creation in my heart;
I look into past time as prophets look
Into futurity....

— Wordsworth, MS Fragment

Are the true Heroic Poems of these times to be written with the *ink of Science*? Were a correct philosophic Biography of a Man (meaning by philosophic *all* that the name can include) the only method of celebrating him? The true History ... the true Epic Poem?—I partly begin to surmise so.

Thomas Carlyle, *Two Notebooks*

What is left to say when one has come to the end of writing about one's life? Some kind of development, I suppose, should be expected to emerge, but I am very doubtful of such things, for I cannot bring life into a neat pattern. If there is a development in my life—and that seems an idle supposition—then it has been brought about more by things outside than by any conscious intention of my own.

— Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography*

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TWO

HAVING announced in the *Prospectus* to *The Recluse* his high argument, Wordsworth goes on to pray to the "prophetic Spirit" that

if with this

I mix more lowly matter; with the thing
Contemplated, describe the Mind and Man
Contemplating; and who, and what he was-
The transitory Being that beheld
This Vision; when and where, and how he lived;-
Be not this labour useless.

In this way Wordsworth designated and justified the personal narrative which makes up the part of *The Recluse* he called *Home at Grasmere*, as well as the entire poem that his wife later named *The Prelude*. Wordsworth described the latter work as a "tributary" and also "as a sort of portico to the Recluse, part of the same building." ¹ The time taken to compose *The Prelude* straddled the writing of the *Prospectus*, and the completed work was conceived as an integral part of the overall structure whose "design and scope" Wordsworth specified in that poetic manifesto. "The Poem on the growth of your own mind," as Coleridge recalled the plan in 1815, "was as the ground-plat and the Roots, out of which the Recluse was to have sprung up as the Tree"—two distinct works, but forming "one compleat Whole." ² The role of *The Prelude*, as Wordsworth himself describes his grand design, is to recount the circumstances and mental growth of a "transitory Being," culminating in his achievement of a "Vision" and in

the recognition that his mission is to impart the vision in the public and enduring form of an unprecedented kind of poem:

Possessions have I that are solely mine,
Something within which yet is shared by none ...
I would impart it, I would spread it wide,
Immortal in the world which is to come. ³

1. THE IDEA OF "THE PRELUDE"

In this era of constant and drastic experimentation with literary materials and forms, it is easy to overlook the radical novelty of *The Prelude* when it was completed in 1805. The poem amply justified Wordsworth's claim to have demonstrated original genius, which he defined as "the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe" of which the "infallible sign is the widening the sphere of human sensibility." ⁴

The Prelude is a fully developed poetic equivalent of two portentous innovations in prose fiction, of which the earliest examples had appeared in Germany only a decade or so before Wordsworth began writing his poem: the *Bildungsroman* (Wordsworth called *The Prelude* a poem on "the growth of my own mind" ⁵) and the *Künstlerroman* (Wordsworth also spoke of it as "a poem on my own poetical education," and it far surpassed all German examples in the detail with which his "history," as he said, was specifically "of a *Poet's* mind"). ⁶ The whole poem is written as a sustained address to Coleridge—"I speak bare truth/ As if alone to thee in private talk" (X, 372- 3); Coleridge, however, is an auditor in *absentia*, and the solitary author often supplements this form with an interior monologue, or else carries on an extended colloquy with the landscape in which the interlocutors are "my mind" and "the speaking face of earth and heaven" (V, 11-12). The construction of *The Prelude* is radically achronological, starting not at the beginning, but at the end—during Wordsworth's walk to "the Vale that I had chosen" (I, 100), which telescopes the circumstances of two or more occasions but refers primarily

to his walk to the Vale of Grasmere, that "hermitage" (I, 115) where he has taken up residence at that stage of his life with which the poem concludes.⁷ During this walk an outer breeze, "the sweet breath of Heaven," evokes within the poet "a corresponding mild creative breeze," a prophetic *spiritus* or inspiration which assures him of his poetic mission and, though it is fitful, eventually leads to his undertaking *The Prelude* itself; in the course of the poem, at times of imaginative dryness, the revivifying wind recurs in the role of a poetic leitmotif.⁸

Wordsworth does not tell his life as a simple narrative in past time but as the present remembrance of things past, in which forms and sensations "throw back our life" (I, 660-1) and evoke the former self which coexists with the altered present self in a multiple awareness that Wordsworth calls "two consciousnesses." There is a wide "vacancy" between the I now and the I then,

Which yet have such self-presence in my mind
That, sometimes, when I think of them, I seem
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
And of some other Being.

(II, 27-33)

The poet is aware of the near impossibility of disengaging "the naked recollection of that time" from the intrusions of "aftermeditation" (III, 644-8). In a fine and subtle figure for the interdiffusion of the two consciousnesses, he describes himself as one bending from a drifting boat on a still water, perplexed to distinguish actual objects at the bottom of the lake from surface reflections of the envioning scene, from the tricks and refractions of the water currents, and from his own intrusive but inescapable image (that is, his present awareness).⁹ Thus "incumbent o'er the surface of past time" the poet, seeking the elements of continuity between his two disparate selves, conducts a persistent exploration of the nature and significance of memory, of his power to sustain freshness of sensation and his "first creative sensibility" against the deadening effect of habit and analysis, and of manifestations of the enduring and the eternal within the realm of change and time.¹⁰ Only inter

mittently does the narrative order coincide with the order of actual occurrence. Instead Wordsworth proceeds by sometimes bewildering ellipses, fusions, and as he says, "motions retrograde" in time (IX, 8).

Scholars have long been aware that it is perilous to rely on the factual validity of *The Prelude*, and in consequence Wordsworth has been charged with intellectual uncertainty, artistic ineptitude, bad memory, or even bad faith. The poem has suffered because we know so much about the process of its composition between 1798 and 1805—its evolution from a constituent part to a "tail-piece" to a "portico" of *The Recluse*, and Wordsworth's late decision to add to the beginning and end of the poem the excluded middle: his experiences in London and in France. ¹¹ A work is to be judged, however, as a finished and free-standing product; and in *The Prelude* as it emerged after six years of working and reworking, 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. A supervising idea, in other words, controls Wordsworth's account and shapes it into a structure in which the protagonist is put forward as one who has been elected to play a special role in a providential plot. As Wordsworth said in the opening passage, which represents him after he has reached maturity: in response to the quickening outer breeze

to the open fields I told

A prophecy: poetic numbers came
Spontaneously, and cloth'd in priestly robe
My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem,
For holy services.

(I, 59-63)

Hence in this history of a poet's mind the poet is indeed the "transitory Being," William Wordsworth, but he is also the exemplary poet-prophet who has been singled out, in a time "of hopes o'erthrown ... of dereliction and dismay," to bring mankind tidings of comfort and joy; as Wordsworth put it in one version of the *Prospectus*,

that my verse may live and be

Even as a light hung up in heaven to cheer

Mankind in times to come. ¹²

The spaciousness of his chosen form allows Wordsworth to introduce some of the clutter and contingency of ordinary experience. In accordance with his controlling idea, however, he selects for extended treatment only those of his actions and experiences which are significant for his evolution toward an inherent end, ¹³ and organizes his life around an event which he regards as the spiritual crisis not of himself only, but of his generation: that shattering of the fierce loyalties and inordinate hopes for mankind which the liberal English—and European—intellectuals had invested in the French Revolution.

Not in my single self alone I found,
But in the minds of all ingenuous Youth,
Change and subversion from this hour.

(X, 232-4)

The Prelude, correspondingly, is ordered in three stages. There is a process of mental development which, although at times suspended, remains a continuum; ¹⁴ this process is violently broken by a crisis of apathy and despair; but the mind then recovers an integrity which, despite admitted losses, is represented as a level higher than the initial unity, in that the mature mind possesses powers, together with an added range, depth, and sensitivity of awareness, which are the products of the critical experiences it has undergone. The discovery of this fact resolves a central problem which has been implicit throughout *The Prelude*—the problem of how to justify the human experience of pain and loss and suffering; he is now able to recognize that his life is "in the end/ All gratulant if rightly understood" (XIII, 384-5).

The narrative is punctuated with recurrent illuminations, or "spots of time," and is climaxed by two major revelations. The first of these is Wordsworth's discovery of precisely what he has been born to be and to do. At Cambridge he had reached a stage of life, "an eminence," in which he had felt that he was "a chosen Son" (III, 82 ff., 169), and on a walk home from a

dance during a summer dawn he had experienced an illumination that he should be, "else sinning greatly,/ A dedicated Spirit" (IV, 343-4); but for what chosen, or to what dedicated, had not been specified. Now, however, the recovery from the crisis of despair after his commitment to the French Revolution comprises the insight that his destiny is not one of engagement with what is blazoned "with the pompous names/ Of power and action" in "the stir/ And tumult of the world," but one of withdrawal from the world of action so that he may meditate in solitude: his role in life requires not involvement, but detachment. ¹⁵ And that role is to be one of the "Poets, even as Prophets," each of whom is endowed with the power "to perceive/ Something unseen before," and so to write a new kind of poetry in a new poetic style. "Of these, said I, shall be my Song; of these .../ Will I record the praises": the ordinary world of lowly, suffering men and of commonplace or trivial things transformed into "a new world ... fit/ To be transmitted," of dignity, love, and heroic grandeur (XII, 220- 379). Wordsworth's crisis, then, involved what we now call a crisis of identity, which was resolved in the discovery of "my office upon earth" (X, 921). And since the specification of this office 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*.

His second revelation he achieves on a mountain top. The occasion is the ascent of Mount Snowdon, which Wordsworth, in accordance with his controlling idea, excerpts from its chronological position in his life in 1791, before the crucial experience of France, and describes in the concluding book of *The Prelude*. ¹⁶ As he breaks through the cover of clouds the light of the moon "upon the turf/ Fell like a flash," and he sees the total scene as "the perfect image of a mighty Mind" in its free and continuously creative reciprocation with its milieu, "Willing to work and to be wrought upon" and so to "create/ A like existence" (XIII, 36-119). What has been revealed to Wordsworth in this symbolic landscape 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." The event which Wordsworth selects for the climactic revelation in *The Prelude*, then, is precisely the moment of the achievement of "this Vision" by "the transitory Being" whose life he had, in the *Prospectus*, undertaken to describe as an integral part of *The Recluse*.

In the course of *The Prelude* Wordsworth repeatedly drops the clue that his work has been designed to round back to its point of departure. "Not with these began/ Our Song, and not with these our Song must end," he had cried after the crisis of France, invoking the "breezes and soft airs" that had blown in the "glad preamble" to his poem (XI, i ff. and VII, i ff.). As he nears the end of the song, he says that his self-discovery constitutes a religious conclusion ("The rapture of the Hallelujah sent/ From all that breathes and is") which is at the same time, as he had planned from the outset, an artistic beginning:

And now, O Friend; this history is brought
To its appointed close: the discipline
And consummation of the Poet's mind.

... we have reach'd

The time (which was our object from the first)
When we may, not presumptuously, I hope,
Suppose my powers so far confirmed, and such
My knowledge, as to make me capable
Of building up a work that should endure.

(XIII, 261-78)

That work, of course, is *The Recluse*, for which *The Prelude* was designed to serve as "portico ... part of the same building." *The Prelude*, then, is an involuted poem which is about its own genesis—a prelude to itself. Its structural end is its own beginning; and its temporal beginning, as I have pointed out, is Wordsworth's entrance upon the stage of his life at which it ends. The conclusion goes on to specify the circular shape of the whole. Wordsworth there asks Coleridge to "Call back to mind/ The mood in which this Poem was begun." At that time,

I rose

As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretch'd
Vast prospect of the world which I had been
And was; and hence this Song, which like a lark
I have protracted....

(XIII, 370-81)

This song, describing the prospect of his life which had been made visible to him at the opening of *The Prelude*, is *The Prelude* whose composition he is even now concluding. [17](#)

2. PROUST'S GOTHIC CHURCH

Such features of Wordsworth's poem bring to mind the subject matter, aim, and structural experiments in the chief enterprise of some of our best modern writers. This is the "creative autobiography"—the more-or-less fictional work of art about the development of the artist himself, which is preoccupied with memory, time, and the relations of what is passing to what is eternal; is punctuated by illuminated moments, or "epiphanies"; turns on a crisis which involves the question of the meaning of the author's life and the purpose of his sufferings; is resolved by the author's discovery of his literary identity and vocation and the attendant need to give up worldly involvement for artistic detachment; and includes its own poetic, and sometimes the circumstances of its own genesis. Above all *The Prelude* points toward one of the most influential literary achievements of the present century, *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

Like Wordsworth's poem, Proust's great novel opens with a preamble at a time of his life when the narrator, falling asleep, has already experienced the events he is about to unfold. The narrative proper then begins with memories of the author's childhood at Combray, of which the central scene is Marcel waiting for his mother to come upstairs after the family had entertained M. Swann for dinner. It then makes a quick leap in time to a moment of illumination in the author's middle life—the tasting of the *madeleine* dipped in tea—from which unfolds the whole "vast structure of recollection." All of his

past is rendered not by direct narration, but as the emergence of his past self and experiences within the context of his drastically altered present self and consciousness; and the narrator, moving bewilderingly back and forth through time, is persistently concerned with the nature of voluntary and involuntary memory, the importance of the seemingly trivial or banal perception, the attempt to establish a single identity from his multiplex consciousness, the "anaesthetic" quality of the intellect and of habit (so needful for life, but so deadly to freshness of perception and the truth of recollection), and above all, with time and the possibility of breaking free of time. The narrative is woven together by recurrent motifs and is lit by repeated illuminations; and it ends, after a profound mental and physical crisis, with the event to which all the huge work has been pointing—the event of its own beginning.

Irrecoverably ill, exhausted, despairing of the validity of his life and of art itself, the narrator attends the reception of the Princess de Guermantes. But "sometimes at the moment when everything seems lost the monition occurs which is capable of saving us." ¹⁸ In a sequence of illuminations, involving events from the past involuntarily called forth by present impressions, he experiences a "felicity," "a state of ecstasy," which is in effect a conversion to the religion of art. In his ultimate revelation the narrator learns the significance of his earlier partial illuminations, and is finally able to answer the questions raised but left unanswered by the initial illumination when he had tasted the *madeleine*: "This potent joy.... Whence did it come? What did it mean?" ¹⁹ In such a recovery of former experience he not only has the power to live and enjoy the essence of things "entirely outside of time," but also to create a new world, an eternal world of art, out of the "resurrection" of his fugitive time-bound past. Only now is he able to recognize that an implicit design had been silently governing his seemingly haphazard and wasted past, so that "all my life up to that day could have been ... summed up under this title: 'A vocation.'" ²⁰ This vocation is to be an aesthetic evangelist for the age, announcing his discovery of a theory of art within the work which exemplifies the theory. "The true paradises are the paradises we have lost." Nevertheless art is "the genuine

Last Judgment," ²¹ for by extricating essence from time, it is able to recover the past in a new creation—an aesthetic world which is a regained paradise, because it is purged from impurity and is "extra-temporal," out of time. At the close of *The Prelude* Wordsworth had called on Coleridge to join him in making for men "a work ... of their redemption" (XIII, 439-41). Marcel's vocation is also a work of redemption; not the redemption of men, however, but of time.

In the course of his final, cumulative revelation, the author also discovers that all the sorrows and sufferings of life, for the artist who "has finally achieved his true vocation," are ultimately for the artistic best, and end in aesthetic joy. "Happiness alone is beneficial for the body, but it is grief which develops the powers of the mind." "In the end, sorrow kills," but "the instant sorrows are turned into ideas ... the transformation itself releases joy." The inescapable cost of creation is suffering, of which creativity is the priceless reward, and the artist must die to involvement with the world in order to be reborn to the detachment of the artist.

My illness, in forcing me, like a stern spiritual adviser, to die to this world, had done me a service, for except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. ²²

But "it was time to begin." "I must at once set myself to this work. It was high time." One of Proust's favorite analogues for his work, like that of Wordsworth for *The Recluse*, was architectural—the intricate structure and disposition of stresses of "une église," a "grande Cathédrale." ²³ At the end of his elaborately ordered narrative Marcel is haunted by the book *François le Champi* that his mother had read to him as a child, and he hears still reverberating, "shrill, sharp, and inexhaustible," the "iron tinkling of the little bell which told me that at last M. Swann had gone and Mama was about to come upstairs" ²⁴—memories of the central scene in his childhood at Combray with which, immediately after the poem, Marcel had begun his novelistic quest for time lost. A further refinement confirms the rondure of the whole. The initial word of

the proem itself had been *longtemps*, repeating the *temps perdu* in the title and echoed by *temps* in each of the two sentences following. So in the coda: "In the long last sentence of the book," as Edmund Wilson has said, "the word 'Time' begins to sound, and it closes the symphony as it began it" ²⁵ in the concluding phrase, "dans le Temps."

Such similarities in works otherwise so unlike— Wordsworth after all is the heir of Milton and of the moral severity of English Puritanism, while Proust, although he took a lively interest in the Wordsworthians George Eliot and John Ruskin, manifests the influence of Symbolism, the Decadence, and *l'art pour l'art*—such similarities are the less surprising when we realize that these works are cognate, and that their ultimate source (as the densely religious vocabulary of both writers indicates) is not secular, but theological. This source is the fifteen- hundred-year-old tradition of religious confessional writings, and within the tradition the first and greatest example, and one of the most influential of all books, in Catholic as in Protestant Europe, was the *Confessions* of St. Augustine.

3. THE ART OF AUGUSTINE'S "CONFESSIONS"

Augustine's work, written at the close of the fourth century, is on the one side a culmination of the classical mode of giving an account and justification of one's life. But it converts the classical procedure of putting oneself forward as the representative of a cultural ideal, performing overt deeds on a public stage, into a circumstantial narrative of the private events of the individual mind. ²⁶ It is thus the first sustained history of an inner life and deserves, as much as any book for which the claim has been made, to be called the first modern work. It is modern, however, precisely because it is thoroughly Christian. Augustine expanded in great and fine detail the tendency (already evident, as we have seen, in the New Testament) to individualize and internalize the pattern of Biblical history; in so doing, he imposed on the flux of experience, the randomness of events, and the fugitive phenomena of memory the

enduring plot-form and the standard concepts and imagery of that unique and characteristic genre of Christian Europe, the spiritual autobiography.

The book, like its many successors, is not the presentation of an individual life for its inherent interest, but is written from a special point of view and for a given purpose. The whole is an extended "confession" addressed to God, who overhears the meditation that the author conducts in solitude, but renders in the rhetorical mode of colloquies with himself, with God, and with the natural creation. One of Augustine's aims is to know himself better and so to strengthen his private will; but he also sees himself in a public role as one of God's chosen sons whose life has been transformed, and upon whom has been imposed the mission to bring good tidings to other Christian wayfarers:

I confess not only before You ... but also in the ears of the believing sons of men, companions of my joy and sharers of my mortality, my fellow citizens, fellow pilgrims.... These are Your servants, my brethren, whom You have chosen that they should be Your sons, my masters whom You have commanded me to serve. [27](#)

The *Confessions* begins in the present time, with a meditation and prayer by the mature writer on the relations of God to His creation and to His creature, man, before it proceeds to the narrative proper, which opens with events in the author's infancy, and even with speculations about his prenatal condition. There are two distinct selves in the book—"what I once was" and "what I now am"—and between these two identities lies the crucial occasion when Augustine's "past sins" were "forgiven and covered up, giving me joy in You, changing my life by faith and Your sacrament" (X.iii). Throughout the book Augustine evokes his life explicitly as the present recollection of the past, in which Augustine as he was is co-present with Augustine as he is:

All this I do inside me, in the huge court of my memory.... And in my memory too I meet myself—I recall myself, what I have done, when and where and in what state of mind I was

when I did it... And upon them all I can meditate as if they were present. [28](#)

Looking back after the outcome, the regenerate Augustine is able to discern the silent workings of God's providential plan from the beginning of what at the time had seemed the random contingencies of his unregenerate life. In defining these hidden workings he adumbrates the concept of what we now call unconscious motivation, by internalizing the distinction, common in the Christian view of history, between the secondary causes which are available to human observation and the omnipresent but invisible First Cause. You "were then acting in me by the hidden secret of Your Providence" (V.vi); there is a difference between "Your action upon me" and "my reason" for my actions (V.viii); "You brought it about through me, and without my being aware of it" (VI.vii), for "there is something of man that the very spirit of man that is in him does not know" (X.v). Augustine uses God's latterly discovered plan as a controlling idea, to give retrospective form to the raw data of his remembered experience. (The discrepancy between Augustine's account of the crucial events of his inner life in his *Confessions* and what he had written at the time of those events has occasioned a debate about the "truth" of Augustine's autobiography exactly parallel to the debate about the factual validity of Wordsworth's *Prelude*. [29](#)) All is ordered around the great scene of his conversion in the garden at Milan. Before this he had been torn by the conflict of "my two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, one spiritual" (VIII.v), compelling him simultaneously to the goods of this sensible world and to the good beyond sense and the world. In the garden he undergoes the anguish of the annihilation of that old self and the travail of the birth of the new, "dying unto death and living unto life"—an account which has shaped the experience of innumerable men since Augustine's time, yet (as Augustine's own comments indicate) was itself modeled, even in detail, upon conventions which had been established in a sequence of works from Paul's account of his conversion through Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony*. [30](#)

Throughout the *Confessions* the haunt and main region of

his narrative is not outer events and actions but what Augustine calls the "inner life" of "the interior part." From the multitude of the *res gestae et visae* of his past, therefore, he selects, orders, and dwells upon only those few which are heavy with spiritual significance, as indices of a stage in his toilsome journey from attachment to the things of this world toward detachment and the transference of his allegiance to a transcendental kingdom. His youthful *acte gratuit* in stealing some pears, for example (we recall Wordsworth's youthful theft of a rowboat), reveals to him his participation in the theft of an apple from Eden (II.iv-x). And in a seemingly fortuitous meeting with a drunken and happy beggar at a time of "utter misery" he now recognizes that "You acted to bring home to me the realization of my misery" (VI.vi). So Wordsworth in *The Prelude* comes at a critical time upon a blind beggar, upon whom he stares "as if admonish'd from another world" (VII, 621-2). "As if admonish'd"—Wordsworth's experience is an as-if providentialism, a translated grace. And in another of his poems shaped in retrospect from an actual experience, Wordsworth in deepest dejection comes suddenly upon an old leech-gatherer who, in a manner of speaking, saves him.

Augustine's own experiences, together with the course of general human history, pose what is for him the central problem, "*Unde malum?*" "Whence then is evil since God who is good made all things good?" (VII.v). The question is answered by his discovery that evil issues in a greater good, in his own life as in the history of mankind. By his intense self-scrutiny Augustine achieved an astonishing subtlety in discriminating the variety and nuance of man's "affections and the movements of his heart" (IV.xiv), of the complex interaction between what the altering mind brings to its perceptions and what is given to it in perception, of the difficulty of separating the pure fact in memory from the intrusive presence of the self that remembers, and of the slow and obscure growth of convictions and values which burst suddenly into awareness in the quantum leap of a moment of insight; in these passages Augustine established the spiritual vocabulary for all later self-analyses and treatments of self-formation and the dis

covery of one's identity. Augustine also opened out, in the mode of a philosophy of lived experience, the topics which have since engaged the close study of professional philosophers up to that fervent admirer of the *Confessions*, Ludwig Wittgenstein. ³¹ These topics have also become the preoccupation of writers of secular *confessions*, from Rousseau and Wordsworth through Proust and Joyce. They include the question of "the vast recesses, the hidden and unsearchable caverns, of memory," that "inward place, which yet is no place" (X.viii- ix). Most prominent and persistent is the problem "What is time?". Augustine's attempt to solve the problem entails the distinction between the "three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things future" (XI.xx), as well as analyses of the difference between subjective time and the time measured by the movements of external bodies, of the relation of time and change to what is eternal and immutable (XI.xiii ff.), and of the significance of recurrent moments of illumination *in ictu trepidantis aspectus*, "in the thrust of a trembling glance" (VII.xvii), which occur in time and pass away, yet serve as portents of the ultimate escape from time into eternity.

In the induction to the *Confessions* Augustine had meditated on the relations of the Creator to the creation and of the timeless to that which exists in time. In the final book he rounds back to the genesis of all things, in a review of the significance of the creation at the beginning of time, and goes on to the uncreation of all things at the apocalyptic end of time—the word begins to toll as we approach the conclusion:

For this gloriously beautiful order of things that are very good will pass away when it has achieved its end: it will have its morning and its evening. But the seventh day is without evening....

But You, Lord, are ever in action and ever at rest. You do not see in time nor move in time nor rest in time. Yet You make the things we see in time, and You make both time while time is and rest when time is no more. ³²

4. THE TRANSACTIONS OF MIND AND NATURE

Under the similarities between the *Confessions* and *The Prelude* there lies, of course, a profound disparity. To get at the crux of this difference I shall put side by side passages from each work which have a common vocabulary and a related subject. The passage in Augustine represents him in a colloquy with the "heaven and earth"; it reminds us that to conduct a conversation with the landscape is by no means a Romantic innovation, and that Wordsworth's "speaking face of earth and heaven" is a lineal descendant of the ancient Christian concept of the *liber naturae*, whose symbols bespeak the attributes and intentions of its author. [33](#)

And what is this God? I asked the earth and it answered: "I am not He"; and all things that are in the earth made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps and the creeping things, and they answered: "We are not your God; seek higher." ... I asked the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, and they answered: "Neither are we God whom you seek." And I said to all the things that throng about the gateways of the senses: "Tell me of my God, since you are not He. Tell me something of Him." And they cried out in a great voice: "He made us." My question was my gazing upon them, and their answer was their beauty. And I turned to myself and said: "And you, who are you?" And I answered: "A man." Now clearly there is a body and a soul in me, one exterior, one interior. From which of these two should I have enquired of my God? ... The inner man knows these things through the ministry of the outer man: I the inner man knew them, I, I the soul, through the senses of the body.

(X.vi)

This is what Wordsworth wrote, in describing an "eminence" that his life had reached during his residence at Cambridge University:

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.

... All

That I beheld respired with inward meaning.
Thus much for the one Presence, and the Life
Of the great whole; suffice it here to add
That whatsoe'er of Terror or of Love,
Or Beauty, Nature's daily face put on
From transitory passion, unto this
I was as wakeful, even, as waters are
To the sky's motion...
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.

... Of Genius, Power,

Creation and Divinity itself
I have been speaking, for my theme has been
What pass'd within me...
O Heavens! how awful is the might of Souls,
And what they do within themselves, while yet
The yoke of earth is new to them...
Points have we all of us within our souls,
Where all stand single; this I feel, and make
Breathings for incommunicable powers.

... there's not a man

That lives who hath not had his godlike hours,
And knows not what majestic sway we have,
As natural beings in the strength of nature.

(III, 83-194)

The passage in Augustine has three points of reference, which serve as the premises and prime functional terms throughout the *Confessions*: God, the natural creation, and man—or more precisely, since man's body and senses are a part of nature, the human soul. Of the three, God (figured here as speaking through His creation) retains all initiative, as the first, efficient, and final cause of nature and soul. In Wordsworth's passage God has not quite dropped out, but He is mentioned only after the fact, and given nothing to do except

to be spectator of a completed action—"for it only liv'd to me,/ And to the God who look'd into my mind." But if God has become a nonparticipant, it is with this peculiar result: His traditional attributes and functions (the "holy powers," "Creation," and "Divinity") survive, to be inherited (together with the appropriate sentiments of wonder and awe) by the two remaining components of Augustine's triad, nature and the human "soul," or "mind."

My concern is not with the valid autobiographical question: "What was Wordsworth's creed—pantheist, panentheist, Christian?" in the sense of "What propositions about God would Wordsworth have been prepared to assert outside the poem?" ³⁴ With respect to the conceptual scheme of *The Prelude*, the relevant question is: "What role does God play within the poem itself?" To answer this question it is not enough to list the passages in which reference is made to God; for the essential matter is, "What does God do in the poem?" And to this the answer is patently, "Nothing of consequence." In *The Prelude* of 1805 (and this fact is only thinly overlaid with pious phrases in Wordsworth's later revisions and additions) ³⁵ God is at intervals ceremoniously alluded to, but remains an adventitious and nonoperative factor; if all allusions to deity were struck out of *The Prelude*, there would be no substantive change in its subject matter or development. God is the purely formal remainder of His former self, because His traditional offices have for all practical purposes been preempted by the other two elements of the triad—in Wordsworth's phrase in the passage I quoted, by men "as natural beings in the strength of nature." Whatever his beliefs—and it seems likely that Wordsworth did not greatly trouble himself about the question of orthodoxy until incited to do so by Coleridge's alarm and the remonstrances of friends and reviewers—the interesting thing is that Wordsworth described the process of his spiritual development within a system of reference which has only two generative and operative terms: mind and nature. As Hazlitt, with his usual acumen, observed even of Wordsworth's later and much more traditional *Excursion* (1814): "It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe." ³⁶

In this manner of proceeding *The Prelude* participates in

the large movement of Romantic philosophy. ³⁷ In its central tradition Christian thought had posited three primary elements: God, nature, and the soul; with God of course utterly prepotent, as the creator and controller of the two others and as the end, the telos, of all natural process and human endeavor. The tendency in innovative Romantic thought (manifested in proportion as the thinker is or is not a Christian theist) is greatly to diminish, and at the extreme to eliminate, the role of God, leaving as the prime agencies man and the world, mind and nature, the ego and the non-ego, the self and the not-self, spirit and the other, or (in the favorite antithesis of post-Kantian philosophers) subject and object. Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, for example, begin with an undifferentiated principle which at once manifests itself in the dual mode of subject and object, whose interactions (in and through individual human selves) bring into being the phenomenal world and constitute all individual experience, as well as all the history of mankind. The notable fact, however, is that this metaphysical process does not delete but simply assimilates the traditional powers and actions of God, as well as the over- all pattern of Christian history; now, however, subject and object, in their long interworking, are adequate to account for the whole story, from the metaphysical equivalent of the creation, through the fall and redemption, to the apocalyptic consummation at the end of the providential plot. As Hegel, who of all his contemporaries was most clearly aware of his procedure, put the matter: "Philosophy is thus identical with religion, but the distinction is that it is so in a peculiar manner, distinct from the manner of looking at things which is commonly called religion as such." ³⁸ This retention of traditional Christian concepts and the traditional Christian plot, but demythologized, conceptualized, and with all-controlling Providence converted into a "logic" or dialectic that controls all the interactions of subject and object, gives its distinctive character and design to what we call "Romantic philosophy." In this grandiose enterprise, however, it is the subject, mind, or spirit which is primary and takes over the initiative and the functions which had once been the prerogatives of deity; that is why we can justifiably call Romantic

philosophy, in its diverse forms, by the generic term "Idealism."

We shall have occasion in the next two chapters to look more closely at the typical plot-form of post-Kantian philosophical systems. Now notice how this metaphysics of subject-object interaction parallels the exemplary lyric form which Wordsworth, following the instance of Coleridge's *Frost at Midnight*, established in *Tintern Abbey*: an individual confronts a natural scene and makes it abide his question, and the interchange between his mind and nature constitutes the entire poem, which usually poses and resolves a spiritual crisis. ³⁹ *The Prelude*, too, begins with the poet alone in an open prospect, responding in spirit to the attributes and alterations of the landscape, and it proceeds by recurrent passages in which the mind is made aware of a new stage in its growth by coming to a new accounting with the natural scene. In the intervening sections *The Prelude* represents the people, actions, and events of Wordsworth's quotidian life; otherwise it would not be an autobiography (even a spiritual autobiography) but something more like Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—a work which manages the feat of epitomizing the cultural history of the maturing spirit entirely in terms of the diverse separations, conflicts, and incremental reconciliations of subject and object. We find in *The Prelude*, then, although with parsimony in number and detail, the account of people other than the poet himself, including his mother and father, various playmates, "my old Dame, so motherly and good," old beggars, and Beaupuis the revolutionary, as well as descriptions of Wordsworth's literal actions and experiences at Hawkeshead and in Cambridge, London, and France.

By a triumph of invention, however, Wordsworth supplements his literal story of a real life in this variegated world with the correlative account of the growth of the poet's mind as a direct transaction between that mind and nature. In many passages, for example, nature is endowed with the attributes and powers of a mother, father, nurse, teacher, lover, as well as a deity (or deities) who seek out, incite, guide, and discipline the individual whom "Nature" had selected to "frame/ A favor'd Being, from his earliest dawn/ Of infancy" (I, 363-5).

(That in the earliest version of this passage it was not "Nature," but first "genii," then "spirits," which performed this role indicates that Wordsworth's locutions about the "soul" and "spirit," or "spirits," of nature are not meant to assert a creed, but to constitute a poetic manner of speaking, or serious conceit. ⁴⁰) Wordsworth manages, in passages that alternate with the literal exposition, to assimilate even the recalcitrant materials of the later books of *The Prelude* to the nature and agency of landscape. In London, for example, still "the Spirit of Nature was upon me," and the place

Was throng'd with impregnations, like those wilds
In which my early feelings had been nurs'd,
And naked valleys, full of caverns, rocks,
And audible seclusions.

(VII, 735; VIII, 791-4)

In the section of *The Prelude* devoted to "Books," the greatest of these works of man are similarly naturalized, to the reader who "with living Nature hath been intimate," for their power over him springs

From the great Nature that exists in works
Of mighty Poets. Visionary Power
Attends upon the motions of the winds
Embodied in the mystery of words.

(V, 612-21)

The account of his heightening response to the existence of men outside himself, and of his growing identification with them, is entitled "Love of Nature Leading to Love of Mankind," and its central episode is the sudden appearance of the shepherd as "a Power/ Or Genius, under Nature, under God,/ Presiding," with his form "glorified" and "like an aerial Cross" —an epiphany which Wordsworth analyzes as an epiphenomenon of the mist and the setting sun (VIII, 393-410). The poet's deepening experience of human suffering and mortality is systematically translated into an altering relationship between his eye and its object: the natural scene articulates and reflects back the inchoate sentiments which are brought to it by

the apperceptive mind, so that the correlate of his coming to look upon men "with another eye" is his coming to perceive natural objects as suffused by a different light and shade. He felt

A dawning, even as of another sense,
A human-heartedness about my love
For objects hitherto the gladsome air
Of my own private being, and no more ...
A new-born feeling. It spread far and wide;
The trees, the mountains shared it, and the brooks....
Whatever shadings of mortality
Had fallen upon these objects heretofore
Were different in kind; not tender: strong,
Deep, gloomy were they and severe; the scatterings
Of Childhood. [41](#)

And in the series of revelations with which *The Prelude* draws to a close, we remember, the first is of a landscape seen as the mind of man, the main region of his song, and the last is of the secondary region of his song, the life which he himself had lived, seen as a landscape.

On the recurrent level of narration in which mind and nature must suffice to generate the plot of *The Prelude*, a heavy requisition is placed on nature, but a still heavier one is placed on mind, which in Wordsworth, as in the German Idealists, is the prior and preeminent power. For it is not nature but "the Mind of Man" which is "the main region of my song"; and in the passage in which Wordsworth speaks of "Power,/ Creation and Divinity itself," he speaks "not of outward things," but of "what pass'd within me" and of "my youthful mind." [42](#) In the final analysis the view that informs *The Prelude* is not naturalism, but humanism, in which man is "of all visible natures crown .../ As, more than anything we know instinct/ With Godhead" (VIII, 634-9); and if Wordsworth develops in *The Prelude* what Harold Bloom calls a "myth of Nature," this is incorporated within a higher and more comprehensive myth of mind.

5. THE THEODICY OF THE PRIVATE LIFE

In the *Prospectus* to *The Recluse* and its associated poems Wordsworth announced his intent "to weigh/ The good and evil of our mortal state." This was his version of Milton's undertaking to "justify the ways of God to men." Wordsworth's argument, like Milton's, is a theodicy which locates the justification for human suffering in the restoration of a lost paradise. In Milton's view, this event will not occur "till one greater Man/ Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat." Wordsworth's paradise, however, can be achieved simply by a union of man's mind with nature, and so is a present paradise in this world, capable of being described "by words/ Which speak of nothing more than what we are"—without recourse, that is, either to an intervenient deity or to a heavenly kingdom to redress any imbalance between the good and evil of our mortal state.

In Wordsworth's *Prelude*, the autobiographical preliminary to *The Recluse*, the ultimate goodness governing the course of his life is brought into question by his suffering and crisis of spirit, then is established by the outcome of his experience, which is represented as prototypical for the men to whom he addresses himself. Wordsworth's assumption, like that of all writers of theodicies, whether of universal scope or of the private life, is that if life is to be worth living there cannot be a blank unreason or mere contingency at the heart of things; there must be meaning (in the sense of a good and intelligible purpose) in the occurrence of both physical and moral evils. The Christian theodicy of the private life, in the long lineage of Augustine's *Confessions*, transfers the locus of the primary concern with evil from the providential history of mankind to the providential history of the individual self, and justifies the experience of wrongdoing, suffering, and loss as a necessary means toward the greater good of personal redemption. But Wordsworth's is a secular theodicy—a theodicy without an operative *theos*—which retains the form of the ancient reason

ing, but translates controlling Providence into an immanent teleology, makes the process coterminous with our life in this world, and justifies suffering as the necessary means toward the end of a greater good which is nothing other than the stage of achieved maturity:

Ah me! that all

The terrors, all the early miseries
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all
The thoughts and feelings which have been infus'd
Into my mind, should ever have made up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!
Thanks likewise for the means!

(I, 355-62)

In other words, the Wordsworthian theodicy of the private life (if we want to coin a term, we can call it a "biodicy"), belongs to the distinctive Romantic genre of the *Bildungsgeschichte*, which translates the painful process of Christian conversion and redemption into a painful process of self-formation, crisis, and self-recognition, which culminates in a stage of self-coherence, self-awareness, and assured power that is its own reward.

On the one level Wordsworth tells this story in terms of his literal experiences of terror, pain, error, and misery, climaxed by his crisis of doubt and despair after the failure of the French Revolution; and he justifies these experiences (as he says in a revision of the passage just quoted) as "bearing a part,/ And that a needful part" in making him a man, in making him a poet, and in making him exactly the kind of man and poet he was. But throughout *The Prelude* there is a double story being told—a story of Wordsworth's life in the world and a correlative story of his life in nature. And on this second narrative level Wordsworth incorporates the problem of suffering within his overarching myth of the interaction between mind and nature, in which fostering nature conducts the mind through successive stages of growth, while speaking nature defines and communicates to the mind that degree of self-knowledge which its stage of cumulative experience has prepared it to receive.

6. THE THEODICY OF THE LANDSCAPE

No sooner does Wordsworth begin the story of his life as a child engaged in the ordinary activities of bathing, basking in the sun, and running through the fields and woods, than he turns to the correlative presentation of his soul in direct engagement with nature, as it is formed by contrary influences of the external scene:

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear.

(I, 305-6)

Throughout the earlier books of *The Prelude* Wordsworth repeatedly represents his mind as developing by a sustained interchange with "these two attributes," the "sister horns that constitute [nature's] strength," whose "twofold influence ... of peace and excitation" instills in the mind a union of "emotion" and "calmness," of "energy" and "happy stillness." ⁴³ Of one type are the gentle and "fearless" aspects of nature—the calm and ordered prospect, small-scale objects, "quiet Heavens," "tranquil scenes," "gentle breezes," "a garden with its walks and banks of flowers," all of which manifest "love" and "tenderness," act by effecting "pleasure and repeated happiness," and move the mind "by feelings of delight." But "Nature ... when she would frame/ A favor'd Being" alternates her "gentlest visitation" with "severer interventions, ministry/ More palpable." Of this opposite type are the awe-inspiring and terrifying aspects of nature—vast scenes of wildness and majesty, the "awful" and the "grand," elements "in tumult," "the midnight storm," "the roaring ocean and waste wilderness," which act on the mind by "terror" and by "pain and fear" and manifest not nature's "love" but her punitive actions: her "impressive discipline of fear." ⁴⁴

In this natural polarity of "beauteous forms or grand," or of "forms sublime or fair," ⁴⁵ as Samuel Monk pointed out

more than three decades ago, Wordsworth adapted the two primary categories—that of the beautiful and that of the sublime—into which earlier eighteenth-century theorists had apportioned the aesthetic qualities of the natural scene. ⁴⁶ By and large the beautiful is small in scale, orderly, and tranquil, effects pleasure in the observer, and is associated with love; while the sublime is vast (hence suggestive of infinity), wild, tumultuous, and awful, is associated with pain, and evokes ambivalent feelings of terror and admiration. But behind this familiar eighteenth-century aesthetic dichotomy lay centuries of speculation about the natural world—speculation whose concerns were not aesthetic but theological and moral, and which in fact constituted a systematic theodicy of the landscape. For on the Pauline ground that "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen," the problem had early arisen, how to justify the goodness of an omnipotent Creator who has brought into being an earth which, in many of its aspects, is not beautiful and beneficent, but wild, waste, ugly, perilous, and terrifying?

This is precisely the question put to God by Dorigen in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* when, her husband away on a distant voyage, she looks with terror from the brink of a cliff upon the sea and its "grisly feendly rokkes blake,"

That semen rather a foul confusion
Of werk than any fair creacion
Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable,
Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable? ...
I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste,
By argumentz, that al is for the beste-

But having thus displaced the burden of theodicy from human evil and suffering, with its backdrop of Eden, Calvary, and the New Jerusalem, to the ugly and terrifying aspects of what should be the best of all possible physical worlds, Dorigen helplessly resigns all disputation on the matter "to clerkes," while her friends, to distract her from the "disconfort" of the wild sea, escort her to conventional places of ordered and agreeable beauty:

They leden hire by ryveres and by welles,
And eek in othere places delitables.

(lines 856-99)

The "clerkes" proposed a variety of answers to this question, but a standard one was that a perfect, wise God had originally created a perfectly smooth, orderly, useful, and beautiful world. Mountains and other wild, waste places were the product not of divine benevolence but of human depravity, for they had been wreaked by the wrath of a just God at the original fall of man in Eden, or alternatively (in some commentators, additionally), they had been effected by the devastating flood with which He punished the all-but-universal corruption of mankind at the time of Noah. Henry Vaughan expressed the common opinion in his poem *Corruption*; when Adam sinned

He drew the Curse upon the world, and Crackt
The whole frame with his fall.

Mountains, therefore, and other vast, chaotic and frightful aspects of nature, as Marjorie Nicolson has said, were looked upon as "symbols of human sin" and of the consequent wrath of a justly punitive God. [47](#)

A late and circumstantial document in this tradition was Thomas Burnet's *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*, of which the first Latin version was published in 1681-89. On the one side, this immensely popular book fostered the development of "physico-theology," which undertook to demonstrate the existence and attributes of God, and especially the justice of His ways to men in the creation, entirely by reasoning from the phenomena of nature; on the other side, it served as an influential model for translating theological and moral concepts into an aesthetics of landscape. Burnet was often compared to Milton (Coleridge described *The Sacred Theory* as "a grand Miltonic Romance" [48](#)), and not merely because of the baroque magnificence of his style. As Burnet's subtitle to the expanded version in English describes his subject, it is "an Account of the Original of the Earth, and of all the General Changes

which it hath already undergone, or is to undergo, till the Consummation of all Things." The span of his work, then, from creation to apocalypse, coincides with that of the plot of *Paradise Lost*; and although Burnet tells the story primarily in terms of changes in the physical universe which were effected by natural law, or "second Causes," these causes operate in preestablished harmony with what he calls the "first Cause" that is, with the underlying purpose and providence of Milton's God. ⁴⁹

According to Burnet the perfect God had originally brought into being a perfectly beautiful world; and this, by Burnet's Palladian standards of beauty, was a world "smooth, regular, and uniform; without Mountains, and without a Sea" (I, 72). Earliest mankind dwelt in perfect innocence and ease in an unchanging springtime, in a region of the flawless world which was even more perfect than the rest. This region was the paradise which is described in Genesis and is also dimly remembered in pagan myths of "Elysian Fields, Fortunate Islands, Gardens of *Hesperides*, *Alcinous*, etc."—a passage Wordsworth may well have recalled when he wrote in the *Prospectus* of "Paradise, and groves Elysian, Fortunate Fields...." ⁵⁰ The providential cause of the destruction of this perfect world was God's wrathful judgment on "the Wickedness and Degeneracy of Men" at the time of Noah, when "the Abyss was open'd" and "the Frame of the Earth broke and fell down into the *great Abyss*"; the resulting flood and cataclysm transformed all nature into its present state, "wherein it must continue till the Redemption and Restitution of all Things." The world we now inhabit therefore is only the wreck of paradise, with some remains indeed of its original beauty, yet overall "the Image or Picture of a great Ruin ... the true Aspect of a World lying in its Rubbish" (I, 130, 90, 223, 148).

Toward the ruinous parts of the present world Burnet exhibits the complex attitudes which helped form the new aesthetics of the following century. For he finds positive values in those aspects of the landscape which are vast, misproportioned, terrifying, and by traditional aesthetic standards, ugly; but these values are both aesthetic and quasi-theological, for

in them the speaking face of earth declares the infinity, the power, and the wrath of a just deity.

As to the present Form of the Earth, we call all Nature to Witness for us; the Rocks and the Mountains, the Hills and the Valleys, the deep and wide Sea, and the Caverns of the Ground: Let these speak, and tell their Origin: How the Body of the Earth came to be thus torn and mangled?
(II, 331-2)

Yet these same phenomena, "the greatest Objects of Nature," the "boundless Regions where Stars inhabit ... the wide Sea and the Mountains of the Earth," seem to him "the most pleasing to behold."

There is something august and stately in the Air of these things, that inspires the Mind with great Thoughts and Passions; we do naturally, upon such Occasions, think of God and his Greatness: And whatsoever hath but the Shadow and Appearance of INFINITE, as all Things have that are too big for our Comprehension, they fill and over-bear the Mind with their Excess, and cast it into a pleasing kind of Stupor and Admiration.

And yet these Mountains ... are nothing but great Ruins; but such as shew a certain Magnificence in Nature.

(I, 188-9)

Inherent in precisely those ruined elements of landscape which manifest the terrifying wrath of God are the highest aesthetic values, because they also express God's infinite power, and so evoke from Burnet attitudes and emotions which men had earlier felt for almighty God Himself.

Burnet's distinction between the beautiful and the "great" aspects of nature was developed by later theorists (with the help of a term imported from Longinus' treatise on the elevated style) into the distinction between the beautiful and the "sublime." Even in later naturalistic treatments of these categories, we recognize a consonance with the earlier theological context, in which the beautiful elements in nature are the enduring expression of God's loving benevolence, while the vast and disordered in nature express his infinity, power, and

wrath, and so evoke a paradoxical union of delight and terror, pleasure and awe. Edmund Burke, for example, in his greatly influential *Philosophical Enquiry into ... the Sublime and Beautiful*, bases the sense of beauty on the passion of love and associates it with pleasure, while "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible ... is a source of the *sublime*." ⁵¹ The sublime also has its source in the associated qualities of "power," "vastness," "infinity," and "magnificence," and its characteristic effects on the beholder are the traditional ones aroused by the conception of the infinite power of a stern but just God: "terror," "astonishment," "awe," "admiration," and "reverence." ⁵²

William Wordsworth, who in his writings showed an early and continuing interest in the antithetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime, ⁵³ thus inherited a long tradition of finding moral and theological meanings in the aesthetic qualities of the landscape, as well as of conducting an inquiry into cosmic goodness and justice by reference to the contrary attributes of the natural world. From such hints he constructed his account of an individual mind in its developing capacity to respond to and interpret "whatso'er of Terror or of Love,/ Or Beauty, Nature's daily face put on" (III, 132-3)—an achievement which in its subtlety and insight had no precedent either in the physico-theology, the aesthetics, or the psychology of his day.

We can most clearly follow Wordsworth's procedure in the biography of the Pedlar which he interpolated into the 1798 version of his greatest narrative poem, *The Ruined Cottage*. Wordsworth told Isabella Fenwick that he represented in the Pedlar "chiefly an *idea* of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances," ⁵⁴ and he later transferred a number of passages from this description into *The Prelude*. The biography of the Pedlar, then, is the first sketch of what I have called the controlling "idea" of *The Prelude*, and in it Wordsworth, in some 250 packed lines, describes the growth of the Pedlar's mind from early childhood, through a spiritual crisis (experienced "before his twentieth year was pass'd," in which "his mind became disturbed"

and he turned "in vain .../ To science for a cure" in order "to mitigate the fever of his heart") to the time in which he discovered his role in life and "assumed/ This lowly occupation." But though his outer occupation was that of a pedlar, he had also been born to be a mute inglorious poet, for

he was a chosen son

To him was given an ear which deeply felt
The voice of Nature in the obscure wind
The sounding mountain and the running stream.

... In all shapes

He found a secret and mysterious soul,
A fragrance and a spirit of strange meaning. [55](#)

The compactness of this biography allows Wordsworth to sustain the narrative mode of the transaction between mind and nature in a way not possible in the extended autobiography of *The Prelude*. In early childhood the Pedlar's mind had been fostered by his solitary experiences with the terror, power, and grandeur of the natural sublime:

So the foundations of his mind were laid
In such communion, not from terror free.
While yet a child, and long before his time
He had perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness, and deep feelings had impressed
Great objects on his mind.

(lines 77-82)

Though even at this time, in the "fixed and steady lineaments" of the face of the landscape, he had "traced an ebbing and a flowing mind," he had not yet been ready for a later stage of nature's teaching, "the lesson deep of love" enciphered in the gentle aspects of the outer scene.

In his heart

Love was not yet, nor the pure joy of love,
By sound diffused, or by the breathing air,
Or by the silent looks of happy things.

The passage to that stage at which he learns to decipher the lesson of love in nature is precisely fixed in time: it occurred

"ere his ninth summer," when having for the first time been sent out alone to tend his father's sheep, he beheld the beauty of a mountain dawn.

He looked,

The ocean and the earth beneath him lay
In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were touched
And in their silent faces did he read
Unutterable love....
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him. It was blessedness and love.

(lines 106-41)

Such were the experiences which fostered the development of his mature mind which, "in a just equipoise of love," had the psychic strength to participate with human wretchedness—"He could afford to suffer/ With those whom he saw suffer." [56](#)

In a revealing passage Wordsworth says that the boy "had learned to read/ His bible" while at school, before he came to discover the same meanings written more distinctly and impressively in the *verba visibilia*, the symbolic language of the landscape:

But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith
There did he see the writing—All things there
Looked immortality, revolving life,
And greatness still revolving, infinite;
... nor did he *believe*—he saw.

(lines 54-6, 146-55)

But it would appear that the Pedlar learned to transfer the divine attributes from the *Book of Scripture* to the *Book of Nature* with some help from the physico-theology of Burnet's *Sacred Theory*; for one of the revelations he found encoded in a scene of bleak sublimity was that of the cosmic vengeance which had loosed the mountain-making deluge in the age of Noah—in

some peak

Familiar with forgotten years, which shews,
Inscribed, as with the silence of the thought,

Upon its bleak and visionary sides,
The history of many a winter storm,
Or of the day of vengeance, when the sea
Rose like a giant from his sleep, and smote
The hills, and when the firmament of heaven
Rained darkness which the race of men beheld
Yea all the men that lived and had no hope. ⁵⁷

In *The Prelude* (which also contains echoes of Burnet's *Sacred Theory*, ⁵⁸ as well as of various eighteenth-century treatises on the aesthetics of landscape), after Wordsworth moves from the rural milieu of his boyhood into the variegated life of Cambridge, London, and France, he represents himself as coming to terms with his experience in periodic accountings with the natural scene. The mind finds in the scene what it has become ready to find, and what it finds is its own aspect. As Wordsworth put it, "from thyself it is that thou must give,/ Else never canst receive" (XI, 333-4). And what the mind at such moments brings to nature is the hitherto inchoate product of its experience of men and the world since it had last come to an understanding with nature.

A central instance of this recurrent tactic constitutes a notable passage in Book VI of *The Prelude*. There Wordsworth describes his first pedestrian trip through France in the summer of 1790, when he participated joyously in that festival period of the Revolution. On his way through the Alps from France to Italy he crosses the Simplon Pass and descends into the narrow and gloomy ravine of the Gondo, there to read, inscribed in the physical properties of the scene, a revelation about man and nature and human life.

Burnet had long before incorporated in *The Sacred Theory* reminiscences of his trip across the "great Ruins" of the Alps, ⁵⁹ and the description of Alpine sublimity had become a standard *topos* among eighteenth-century connoisseurs of pleasing horror, including John Dennis, Shaftesbury, Addison, and Thomas Gray, who had vied in representing prospects where, as Gray said, "not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry." ⁶⁰ Wordsworth's description of the ravine below Simplon thus epitomizes

a century of commentary on the religion and poetry in the sublime Alpine landscape, brought together by a poet of genius and endowed with an ominous life:

The immeasurable height.

Of woods decaying, never to be decay'd,
The stationary blasts of water-falls,
And everywhere along the hollow rent
Winds thwarting winds, bewilder'd and forlorn,
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
The rocks that mutter'd close upon our ears,
Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream...

The grimness of the lesson this scene bespeaks is made even more emphatic in a manuscript addition which suggests Burnet's view that mountains and rocks are the ruins left by the wrathful destruction of the pristine world, and also indicates the implicit relevance of the prospect to the violent contingencies of human life:

And ever as we halted, or crept on,
Huge fragments of primaeval mountain spread
In powerless ruin, blocks as huge aloft
Impending, nor permitted yet to fall,
The sacred Death-cross, monument forlorn
Though frequent of the perish'd Traveller....

Integral to Wordsworth's description of terrifying sublimity, however, is a contrary aspect of the scene: the light and serenity of beauty, exhibited in "the clear blue sky" and in "the unfetter'd clouds, and region of the Heavens." And this *coincidentia oppositorum* suddenly expresses a revelation which Wordsworth equates with the showing forth of the contraries of God in the Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation itself. There the Lamb of the gospel of love had manifested Himself as the terrifying deity of the *dies irae*, while men cried "to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us ... from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come"; but the opening and closing chapters had insistently reiterated that the

God of wrath and destruction is one and coeternal with the God who manifests his love in the creation at the beginning and in the redemption at the end of time: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending"; "Fear not; I am the first and the last"; "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." ⁶¹ In Wordsworth's version:

Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first and last, and midst, and without end.

(VI, 551-72)

In consonance with Wordsworth's two-term frame of reference, the Scriptural Apocalypse is assimilated to an apocalypse of nature; its written characters are natural objects, which are read as types and symbols of permanence in change; and its antithetic qualities of sublimity and beauty are seen as simultaneous expressions on the face of heaven and earth, declaring an unrealized truth which the chiaroscuro of the scene articulates for the prepared mind—a truth about the darkness and the light, the terror and the peace, the ineluctable contraries that make up our human existence.

This recognition, however, is not the end but only a midstage in the evolution of the poet's mind. Book IX, which will begin the fateful record of his second visit to France and its aftermath, opens with a statement of Wordsworth's human reluctance to face the crisis of maturity, as he winds and doubles back like a river which fears the way "that leads direct to the devouring sea"; the passage ominously echoes Milton's invocation to his ninth book, which narrates the fall of man and his expulsion from paradise into "a world of woe,/ Sin and her shadow Death, and Misery." ⁶² After the failure of the limitless initial promise of the French Revolution, the growing divisions and conflicts in a world gone mad are reflected in Wordsworth's inner divisions and conflicts, until the integrity of his spiritual development is shattered in what seems incipient madness. He suffers from Kafka-esque nightmares, pleading

Before unjust Tribunals, with a voice
Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense
Of treachery and desertion in the place
The holiest I knew of, my own soul.

(X, 378-81)

He makes a desperate attempt to reestablish on abstract premises, and by logical analysis and reasoning, what had originally been his spontaneous confidence in life and his hope for man, but the attempt leads only to utter perplexity about "right and wrong, the ground/ Of moral obligation," until he breaks down completely. In the context of our discussion it is significant that Wordsworth describes his crisis as involving, explicitly, his despair about a solution to the problem of the good and evil of our moral state:

I lost

All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarities,
Yielded up moral questions in despair.
This was the crisis of that strong disease,
This the soul's last and lowest ebb. [63](#)

The account of the dark night of his soul—"I was benighted heart and mind" (XII, 21)—is at once correlated, in Wordsworth's double narrative, with an account of the paralysis of the earlier reciprocative relation between his mind and nature. For his heart "had been turn'd aside/ From nature by external accidents" (X, 886-7), and the habit of "logic and minute analysis," infecting even his perceptions, replaced the attitude of total receptiveness to all that nature had to give—"I never thought of judging, with the gift of all this glory filled and satisfied"—by an attitude in which the mind sat "in judgment" on nature,

disliking here, and there,

Liking, by rules of mimic art transferr'd
To things above all art.

(XI, 126-55)

That is, he evaluated the scene according to the fixed and formal aesthetic categories of the picturesque which had been abstracted from the principles of composition in the art of

landscape painting. ⁶⁴ And in place of the earlier freedom in its negotiations with nature, his mind, thus weakened, became a slave to "the eye .../ The most despotic of our senses," which rejoiced "to lay the inner faculties asleep" (XI, 171-99). The poet had succumbed to the "sleep/ Of death" from which, in the *Prospectus* (60-61), he undertook to "arouse the sensual" by his evangel of the creative power of the liberated mind.

Wordsworth's eleventh book, which begins the systematic account of his "Imagination ... Restored," opens with another extended parallel to *Paradise Lost*, this time echoing Milton's relief, in his invocation to the third book, at escaping the realms of hell, "though long detain'd/ In that obscure sojourn." In Wordsworth's version:

Long time hath Man's unhappiness and guilt
Detain'd us; with what dismal sights beset
For the outward view, and inwardly oppress'd ...
And lastly, utter loss of hope itself,
And things to hope for. Not with these began
Our Song, and not with these our Song must end:
Ye motions of delight, that through the fields
Stir gently, breezes and soft airs that breathe
The breath of Paradise, and find your way
To the recesses of the soul!

Thus having traversed his personal hell, he turns to the correspondent breeze which had blown in the glad preamble of his song—now specified as "the breath of Paradise" that finds its way "to the recesses of the soul"—to assist him in restoring the paradise within. ⁶⁵ Wordsworth narrates the process of this recovery by his customary alternation between the details of his outer life (the influence of Dorothy, of Coleridge, and of the "uncouth Vagrants" and "lowly men" with whom he talked in his solitary wanderings) and his private intercourse with "Nature's Self, by human love/ Assisted," which ultimately brings his mind back to what it had earlier been, but on the level now of deepened awareness, wider breadth, and firm stability. Nature's self

Conducted me again to open day,
Revived the feelings of my earlier life,

Gave me that strength and knowledge full of peace,
Enlarged, and never more to be disturb'd.

In a manuscript version of this passage Wordsworth remarks that in saying this much he feared "to encroach upon a theme/ Reserv'd to close my Song." ⁶⁶ This ultimate resolution of his crisis is reserved for the concluding book of *The Prelude*, and follows from the climactic revelation on Mount Snowdon in which, in a sudden burst of natural illumination, the poet sees the landscape as "the perfect image of a mighty Mind." Like the ravine below Simplon Pass, the prospect unites the contraries of tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—the terrifying dark chasm, "a deep and gloomy breathing-place through which/ Mounted the roar of waters," while overhead the moon "naked in the Heavens ... look'd down upon this shew/ In single glory." Above all, the give and take of influence between the moon and the mist-shrouded scene shows forth the radical power of human minds to confront nature in a creative and life-giving interchange, "Willing to work and to be wrought upon," so that "in a world of life they live." From this power, Wordsworth says, follows "sovereignty within and peace at will," "truth in moral judgments and delight/ That fails not in the external universe," as opposed to the tendency, from which he has finally freed himself, of "habit to enslave the mind ... by laws of vulgar sense," and so to

substitute a universe of death,
The falsest of all worlds, in place of that
Which is divine and true.

(XIII, 39-143)

That is, his mind has escaped back to "a world of life" from its experiential equivalent of the hell which Milton had described (in the phrase Wordsworth here dramatically echoes) as "a Universe of death, which God by curse/ Created evil, for evil only good/ Where all life dies, death lives" (*Paradise Lost*, II, 622-4).

There immediately follows the first part of Wordsworth's resolution of his long dialectic of good and evil:

To fear and love,

To love as first and chief, for there fear ends,
Be this ascribed; to early intercourse,
In presence of sublime and lovely Forms,
With the adverse principles of pain and joy,
Evil as one is rashly named by those
Who know not what they say. From love, for here
Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,
All truth and beauty, from pervading love,
That gone, we are as dust.

And this love is a "higher love," a "love more intellectual" than maternal and sexual love, which are "human merely," for this "proceeds/ More from the brooding Soul, and is divine" (XIII, 143-65). Patently Wordsworth's statement is in the traditional idiom of Christian theodicy, and is exactly equivalent in its place and function to Adam's climactic statement in the last book of Milton's epic when, upon hearing Michael foretell Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and return to an earth which then "shall all be Paradise," he acknowledges the justice of the ways of God to men:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful
Than that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness! Full of doubt I stand,
Whether I should repent me now of sin
By me done and occasion'd, or rejoice
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,
To God more glory, more good will to Men
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound.

(XII, 469-78)

In the passage in *The Prelude* of 1805, however, there is no mention of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, or Second Coming, nor even of a deity. The recognition Wordsworth describes is the end product of a sustained intercourse between mind and nature, and in defining it he collects and resolves the contrary qualities of the natural scene—aesthetic, moral, and quasi-theological—with which he has been weaving the complex design

of his theodicy since his opening statement that he grew up fostered alike by beauty and by fear. On the one side is the "sublime" and its near-synonym, "grandeur"; and on the other the "lovely Forms" of nature (the identification is sharpened in the later revision of line 146, "In presence of sublime or *beautiful* forms"). With the sublime are aligned "fear" and "pain," hence what is mistakenly supposed to be "evil"; with the beautiful are aligned the "adverse principles," which are "joy" and "love." And whereas in the poet's earlier revelation in the Alpine ravine he had envisioned the contraries of peace and fear to be equal as well as coeternal attributes of the "first and last, and midst, and without end," he now has progressed to the higher realization that love is "first and chief, for there fear ends," and therefore is the last as well as the first ("from love .../ Do we begin and end"), so that in this final accounting not only the beautiful but the sublime turns out to issue from love: "From love ... all grandeur comes,/ All truth and beauty." Such is Wordsworth's naturalistic equivalent, in a theodicy transacted between mind and nature, of the Miltonic doctrine that God's love not only subsumes and justifies, but necessitates the pain and fear imposed on man by God's wrath—a paradox put by Dante with a starkness beyond Milton when he inscribed over the eternal gates of his ghastly hell that primal love had made it:

Fecemi la divina potestate

La somma sapienza e'l primo amore. [67](#)

Not all readers of *The Prelude* attend to its conclusion with the care they devote to the earlier sections, and to some of those who do it has seemed that Wordsworth's shift from pain and evil to love and good has been managed by logical sleight of hand. A main undertaking in the later parts of the poem, John Jones has said, is to marshal "into consequential argument 'the history of a poet's mind,' " and the "optimism ... of the late *Prelude* is a determined end towards which the poem must be manipulated, like the plot of a bad play." [68](#) But Wordsworth does not undertake to prove that good subsumes ill by consequential argument; in fact, he has told us that it

was the attempt to apply "formal proof" to moral matters that precipitated the breakdown in which he "yielded up moral questions in despair." What Wordsworth attempts is to represent a mode of experience, in which the recovery from his spiritual crisis yields the vision of a nature transformed, and in which, conversely, what he now sees in nature is correlative with a radical change in himself. ⁶⁹ "His attainment of intellectual love," Francis Christensen has said, is "a kind of secular conversion" marking "the poet's entrance into his maturity" and involving (as Wordsworth goes on to describe in some detail) "the taming of the daring, the turbulent, the violent, the wilful in his nature." ⁷⁰ That is, it involves the taming of the equivalent in Wordsworth's inner nature to the sublime aspects of external nature; for his own "soul," as he puts it, had been framed at birth to be "a rock with torrents roaring" (XIII, 221-32). It is possible to read the slackened power of these passages as a sign that Wordsworth feels less than the total assurance to which he aspires, and it is also possible to infer, from our knowledge of his later fate as a poet, that he has given up too much for too little. The conclusion of Wordsworth's theodicy, however, is not an extemporized argument, but is grounded in the beginning. And if this conclusion exhibits "optimism," it is of a kind which, far from denying the reality of pain, terror, and suffering, insists not only that they are humanly inevitable but that they are indispensable conditions for developing the calm, the insight, and the power that is ours when, as Wordsworth put it, we are worthy of ourselves.

In *The Prelude*, then, the justification of seeming evil turns on a crisis and inner transformation, parallel to Augustine's agony and conversion in the garden at Milan. An important difference is that in Augustine's account, although his spiritual preparation has been long, the conversion is instant and absolute, an accession of grace which takes place at a precise point in time, "*punctum ipsum temporis*," and effects at a stroke the destruction of the old creature and the birth of the new. In Wordsworth's secular account of the "growth" of his mind, the process is one of gradual recovery which takes three books to tell in full; and for the Christian paradigm of right-angled change into something radically new he substitutes a pattern

(the typical Romantic pattern, we shall see in the next chapter) in which development consists of a gradual curve back to an earlier stage, but on a higher level incorporating that which has intervened. "Behold me then," Wordsworth says, "Once more in Nature's presence, thus restored," although now "with memory left of what had been escaped" (XI, 393-6). But if in the overall accounting, by Wordsworth's calculation, the gain outweighs the loss, he does not deny that growth is change, and change entails loss. Nature, he says, "I seem'd to love as much as heretofore," and yet this passion

Had suffer'd change; how could there fail to be
Some change, if merely hence, that years of life
Were going on, and with them loss or gain
Inevitable, sure alternative.

(XI, 36-41)

There remains a second stage in Wordsworth's elaborate resolution, in the concluding book of *The Prelude*, of the problem of human suffering. Having recognized the general truth that love is first and last, he turns to the evaluation of the particular life that he has lived. Typically, as we have seen, he transforms that life into a landscape over which he soars in metaphoric flight; and from this high perspective he is able to discern that all its parts are centered in love, and that all its earthly sorrows are ultimately for the best:

Call back to mind

The mood in which this Poem was begun,
O Friend! the termination of my course
Is nearer now, much nearer; yet even then
In that distraction and intense desire
I said unto the life which I had lived,
Where art thou? Hear I not a voice from thee
Which 'tis reproach to hear? Anon I rose
As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretch'd
Vast prospect of the world which I had been
And was; and hence this Song, which like a lark
I have protracted, in the unwearied Heavens
Singing, and often with more plaintive voice
Attemper'd to the sorrows of the earth;

Yet centring all in love, and in the end
All gratulant if rightly understood. ⁷¹

This was, he says, the vision given him at the beginning of the poem, although what he now assays is his life as represented in his just-completed song, the work of art which is *The Prelude* itself. If we turn back to the poem's beginning, we find in its fifteenth line the first prominent instance of Wordsworth's carefully chosen and allocated allusions to *Paradise Lost*— a very striking instance, because in his opening he echoes the closing lines of Milton's epic, when Adam and Eve, between sadness and expectancy, leave paradise to take up their journey in this world of all of us:

The World was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,
Through *Eden* took their solitary way.

"The earth is all before me," Wordsworth too says; but his mood is joyously confident, and he entrusts his guidance not to Providence but to nature:

The earth is all before me: with a heart
Joyous, nor scar'd at its own liberty,
I look about, and should the guide I chuse
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud,
I cannot miss my way

(I, 15-19)

Critics who have noted this parallel interpret it to signify that *The Prelude* as a whole is a kind of sequel to *Paradise Lost*; "as if," Elizabeth Sewall has said, "Wordsworth meant to dovetail his epic directly into the very place where the Miltonic epic ends." ⁷² This, I think, is a mistake (although an easy one to make) for it overlooks the fact that, though the preamble comes first in the structural order of the *Prelude*, it inaugurates the stage of the narrator's life which comes last in its temporal order. It is not, then, *The Prelude* which Wordsworth meant to dovetail into the place in Milton's poem at which man, having lost paradise, sets out on his pilgrimage to recover it again,

but the narrative which follows *The Prelude*; namely, the opening book of *The Recluse* proper, *Home at Grasmere*, in which the poet takes up the place of rest he has selected at the end of the preamble, when "I made a choice/ Of one sweet Vale whither my steps should turn" (I, 81-2).

On his first glimpse of this happy valley when, as a "roving schoolboy," he had overlooked it from the verge of a "steep barrier," it had appeared as a "paradise before him" (*Home at Grasmere*, lines 1-14), and now that he has returned to this "dear Vale,/ Beloved Grasmere," he describes it in terms which repeatedly echo Milton's description of Eden in *Paradise Lost* (e.g., lines 126 ff.). By "surpassing grace," however, his is an Eden happier far than Adam's original paradise, because it possesses an attribute which "among the bowers/ Of blissful Eden ... was neither given,/ Nor could be given": it is a felicity that incorporates the memory of what it was to have lacked it (lines 103-9). Above all, his is a higher paradise than Milton's because it is inhabited by man as he is, exhibiting the mixed state "of solid good/ and real evil"; that is, it possesses the solid advantage of reality over "all golden fancies of the golden Age," whether located "before all time" or in some distant future "ere time expire" (lines 405-6, 625-32). The point that Wordsworth repeatedly makes in *Home at Grasmere* is his personal experience of a truth which, in the *Prospectus* concluding that poem, he announces as the argument for all *The Recluse*: that in our life in this actual world, with its ineradicable evil and suffering, lies the possibility, and the only possibility, of achieving a paradise which serves him, as it did Milton, to justify the evil of our mortal state.

At the conclusion of *The Prelude* itself, in justifying the sorrows which had fostered the growth of his mind as "in the end all gratulant," Wordsworth has completed his private "history" of "the discipline/ And consummation of the Poet's mind." But this poet, as he had said in the opening preamble, is a poet-prophet, "singled out, as it might seem,/ For holy services." He has, that is, a public role; and at the close Wordsworth calls upon his fellow poet Coleridge, to whom the whole account has been addressed, to serve with him in a recreant age

as, quite explicitly, an evangelist of a new redemption. Though "this Age fall back to old idolatry," we shall be to men

joint-labourers in a work

(Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe)
Of their redemption, surely yet to come.
Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration....

But the prophet of nature at once proceeds to a coda which is a *gloria in excelsis* not to nature but to the mind of man. We will

Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this Frame of things ...
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine.

(XIII, 431-52)

Thus he announces the end of his long preparation for writing his masterpiece. But in describing that preparation Wordsworth, no less than Proust, has achieved the masterpiece itself.

7. THE REDEMPTIVE IMAGINATION

I have reserved for separate consideration a crucial element in Wordsworth's theodicy of the mind in nature. During the revelation which precipitates the resolution of the argument, when in the prospect from Mount Snowdon the mind discovers itself in its highest workings, the poet discerns "a fracture in the vapour . . . through which/ Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams/ Innumerable."

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.

And in the passage which follows, justifying fear, pain, and seeming evil as stemming from pervading love, he goes on to say that this love can neither exist nor triumph over evil except through the imagination as its complement and intermediary. "This love more intellectual cannot be/ Without Imagination" (or, more clearly by later revision, "This spiritual Love acts not nor can exist/ Without Imagination"),

which, in truth,

Is but another name for absolute strength
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And reason in her most exalted mood.

Abruptly, Wordsworth now discloses that in his account of the transactions of mind and nature, the protagonist had in fact been this power of his mind, so that what he has all along been narrating is the story of the birth, growth, disappearance, and resurrection of imagination. He represents this faculty in the metaphor of a stream, which flows intermittently above and under ground:

This faculty hath been the moving soul
Of our long labour: we have traced the stream
From darkness, and the very place of birth
In its blind cavern, whence is faintly heard
The sound of waters; follow'd it to light
And open day, accompanied its course
Among the ways of Nature, afterwards
Lost sight of it, bewilder'd and engulf'd,
Then given it greeting, as it rose once more
With strength ...
And lastly, from its progress have we drawn
The feeling of life endless, the great thought
By which we live, Infinity and God. ⁷³

The crisis narrated in *The Prelude*, then, has been a crisis of imagination. "This History," as Wordsworth says, "hath chiefly told/ Of intellectual power, from stage to stage/ Advancing,"

And of imagination teaching truth
Until that natural graciousness of mind

Gave way to over-pressure of the times
And their disastrous issues.

(XI, 42-8)

Hence Wordsworth entitled the central Books XI and XII, on his crisis and recovery, "Imagination, How Impaired and Restored." Now, in the last book, he concludes his natural theodicy by describing imagination and intellectual love as two-in-one, distinct yet undivided entities:

Imagination having been our theme,
So also hath that intellectual love,
For they are each in each, and cannot stand
Dividually.—Here must thou be, O Man!
Strength to thyself; no Helper hast thou here....

(XIII, 185-9)

If my explication of Wordsworth on imagination has been complicated, that is in part because—whether from the difficulty of what he had to say or from prudence in the way he chose to say it—Wordsworth's own account has been uncommonly abstruse. The immediate context, however, together with the over-all pattern in *The Prelude* of insistent and coherent parallels with crucial passages in *Paradise Lost*, makes its tenor clear enough. The faculty of imagination is born, then goes underground, but only to rise "once more/ With strength"; it is distinct from, yet "each in each" with, the intellectual love which is "the first and chief" and in which "we begin and end"; and it is also the indispensable mediator by which love manifests that it abounds over pain and apparent evil, by saving the poet from "a universe of death" and opening the way to an earthly paradise. It is apparent, then, that in Wordsworth's sustained myth of mind in its interchange with nature, the imagination plays a role equivalent to that of the Redeemer in Milton's providential plot. For in Milton's theodicy it is the birth, death, and return of the risen Christ to save mankind and to restore a lost paradise which serves to demonstrate the "goodness infinite .../ That all this good of evil shall produce,/ And evil turn to good."

I do not mean to propose a strict correlation but only an

overall functional parallel between Milton's sacred story of mankind and Wordsworth's secular account of the growth of an individual mind; nor can we be certain that Wordsworth deliberately assigned to imagination the Redeemer's role in his asserted enterprise, as one of the "Prophets of Nature," to write a poetic work "Of [men's] redemption, surely yet to come." Yet as late as 1812, after he had adopted some Christian tenets, Wordsworth remarked to Henry Crabb Robinson that "he could not feel with the Unitarians in any way. Their religion allows no room for imagination, and satisfies none of the cravings of the soul. 'I can feel more sympathy with the orthodox believer who needs a Redeemer.' " But then he added, "I have no need of a Redeemer"—a declaration which so startled the usually liberal-minded Robinson that he veiled it in the decent obscurity of his private shorthand. ⁷⁴ At any rate, the high argument of *The Prelude* of 1805 had no need for an external Redeemer, because in that poem the function had been vested in a power of the unaided mind of man. As Wordsworth goes on to say, with extraordinary emphasis and iteration:

Here must thou be, O Man!
Strength to thyself; no Helper hast thou here;
Here keepest thou thy individual state:
No other can divide with thee this work,
No secondary hand can intervene
To fashion this ability; 'tis thine,
The prime and vital principle is thine
In the recesses of thy nature, far
From any reach of outward fellowship,
Else 'tis not thine at all.

(XIII, 188-97)

In this aspect Wordsworth's *Prelude* participates, however guardedly, in a major intellectual tendency of his age, and of ours. In the seventeenth century the radical spiritualist Gerrard Winstanley had looked forward to the "latter dayes" when such outer fictions as "the Lamb held forth at a distance to be our Mediatour, should all cease"; for "Christ within the heart ... delivers mankind from bondage; *And besides him there is no Saviour.*" ⁷⁵ William Blake, who placed his faith in the redemptive power of man's divine creativity, characteristically

put a concept, implicit in *The Prelude*, in the startling form of an express identification: "Imagination ... is the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus, blessed for ever." ⁷⁶ In Germany, Novalis, speaking of art, declared that "in his works and in his acts and failures to act," man "proclaims himself and his evangel of nature. He is the Messiah of nature." ⁷⁷ Goethe looked upon his works of imagination as a mode of redemption not of nature, but of himself; in writing *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Clavigo*, he said, "I carried on the poetic confession which I had already begun, so that by this self-tormenting penance I might become worthy of an inner absolution." ⁷⁸ "The tragedy," declared a later heir of Romantic thought, Friedrich Nietzsche, "is that we cannot believe the dogmas of religion and metaphysics" yet continue to "need the highest kind of means of salvation and consolation"; and by a drastic exercise of the principle of parsimony, he canceled the role of nature as well as God, leaving only one agent to play out the ancient spiritual plot:

Just take one step farther; love yourself through Grace; then you are no longer in need of your God, and the whole drama of fall and redemption is acted out in yourself. ⁷⁹

Modern poetry, Wallace Stevens said, is "the poem of the mind in the act of finding/ What will suffice." It turns out that nothing less will suffice than the crucial experience for which earlier poets had relied on an intervenient deity: "After one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption." Stevens draws a conclusion which is formally equivalent to that of Blake: "We say God and the imagination are one." His claim for the efficacy of that imagination, however, is a good deal more modest than Blake's: "How high that highest candle lights the dark." ⁸⁰ W. B. Yeats saw all of modern literature moving along the path laid out by Nietzsche:

The individual soul, the betrayal of the unconceived at birth, are among her principal themes, it must go further still; that soul must become its own betrayer, its own deliverer, the one activity, the mirror turn lamp. ⁸¹

Some of Yeats's own poems exhibit the sufficiency of the individual soul to act out the whole drama of fall and redemption, until "all hatred driven hence,/ The soul recovers radical innocence." In Yeats's chief poem of autonomous grace, Wordsworth's two terms have been reduced to one, so that the colloquy is no longer between mind and nature but between antithetic aspects of the single mind: "A Dialogue of Self and Soul." Deaf to the soul's summons to reject life for beatitude, Yeats's Self reviews his life of error and suffering, in a passage comparable to Wordsworth's visionary flight over his remembered life near the close of *The Prelude*:

I am content to follow to its source,
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest. [82](#)

Yeats sees his life and the world he looks upon as all gratulant, although not by a Wordsworthian but by a Nietzschean act of heroic self-forgiveness and self-redemption.

8. THE NEW MYTHUS: WORDSWORTH, KEATS, AND CARLYLE

Both the genre of *The Prelude* and its representative character were more obvious to some discerning Victorian readers than to many readers of our own time. The Reverend F. D. Maurice wrote to Charles Kingsley in 1851:

I am sure that you are right, Wordsworth's *Prelude* seems to me the dying utterance of the half century we have just passed through, the expression—the English expression at least—of all that self-building process in which, according to their different schemes and principles, Byron, Goethe, Wordsworth, the Evangelicals (Protestant and Romanist), were all engaged, which their novels, poems, experiences, prayers, were setting

forth, in which God, under whatever name, or in whatever aspect, He presented Himself to them, was still the agent only in fitting them to be world-wise, men of genius, artists, saints. ⁸³

Since *The Prelude* had been published only the year before, Maurice makes the natural error of putting it at the end rather than at the beginning of the tendency he describes (and deprecates), but he is right about the currency of the Christian confession converted into the form of a *Bildungsgeschichte* which, whether ostensibly religious or openly secular, long or short, in verse or in prose, points toward a culmination which is comprehended within life itself. The major lyric innovation of the Romantic period, for example, the extended poems of description and meditation, are in fact fragments of reshaped autobiography, in which the poet confronts a particular scene at a significant stage of his life, in a colloquy that specifies the present, evokes the past, and anticipates the future, and thereby defines and evaluates what it means to have suffered and to grow older. In some of these poems the confrontation occurs at a time of spiritual crisis which is called "dejection" (the *acedia*, *deiectio*, or spiritual aridity of the Christian experts of the interior life); and the ancient struggle for the blessedness of reconciliation with an alienated God becomes the attempt to recover in maturity an earlier stage of integrity with oneself and the outer world, in a mode of consciousness for which the standard name is "joy."

We shall later observe how pervasive, in longer works of philosophy, fiction, drama, and narrative poetry, was the Romantic theme of the justification of evil and suffering, represented in the plot-form of a circuitous yet progressive self-education, self-discovery, and the discovery of vocation, in a life which terminates in this world. Now, in the context of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, I want to glance at two other English instances of the crisis-autobiography represented in a fictional form, Keats's *Fall of Hyperion* and Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*; for the disparities among these three works, written over a period of more than three decades, throw into bold relief the attributes, both in concept and design, which are their common possession.

Keats did not have access to *The Prelude*, but he studied carefully *Tintern Abbey* and the *Intimations Ode*, as well as Wordsworth's program in the *Prospectus* published with *The Excursion*, and the long and superficially Christianized debate on "Despondency" and "Despondency Corrected" in *The Excursion* itself. By that leap of insight familiar to the readers of his letters, Keats recognized that Wordsworth's persisting concern was to justify the experience of loss and suffering in terms of a purpose that is immanent in the mind's growth into maturity. He also recognized that Wordsworth had deliberately elected to take up this problem where Milton had left it off.

"The Burden of the Mystery" Keats called the problem of the justification of suffering, in a phrase taken from *Tintern Abbey*; and in a letter of May 1818, he undertook to explore the problem as a secular theodicy of the individual life as it moves through successive stages of experience and insight. In his version of the great trope of life as a journey, he posits "a large Mansion of Many Apartments" in which we move from "the infant or thoughtless Chamber" to "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought"; but then, by a sharpened vision into the human heart and by "convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak," we arrive at a stage of darkness, when "we see not the ballance of good and evil." "To this point was Wordsworth come . . . when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey.'" But even in going so far "I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton" because he has profited from the general "advance of intellect"; and this advance, Keats makes clear, is the movement from Christian supernaturalism to agnostic humanism. For Milton's "hintings at good and evil in the *Paradise Lost*" were grounded still on the "remaining Dogmas and superstitions" which survived the Protestant Reformation; thus "he did not think into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done." [84](#)

In a letter he wrote a year later, Keats sketched his own scheme for validating suffering as a necessary discipline toward a greater good. His metaphor now is of the world as "the vale of Soul-making," in which the function of suffering is to subject the native human "intelligence or Mind" to the knowledge and stresses (the phrasing is strikingly modern) which gradually

form its "identity." "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?"—in the sense that intelligences are merely unformed and unindividuated egos: "are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself." Such a theodicy of the individual life on earth, as opposed to the Christian view of the world as a place "from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven," Keats says, is "a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity." ⁸⁵ In this way Keats, like the contemporary German philosophers and poets whom he had not read, explicitly translated the theological system of salvation into a secular system of progressive education.

In estimating where Wordsworth stood relative to Milton in exploring "those dark Passages," Keats had promised that "if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them." ⁸⁶ Just this is what he undertook to do in the poem *Hyperion*, some five or six months after writing the first of his two remarkable letters; it is apparent that as Wordsworth had set out to emulate and pass beyond Milton in his intention "to weigh/ The good and evil of our mortal state," so Keats set out to emulate and pass beyond Milton and the "deeper" Wordsworth as well, in gauging what he called "the ballance of good and evil."

Hyperion is a Miltonic epic, but it embodies its inquiry into the rationale of evil in a Greco-Roman myth, substituting for Milton's "loss of Eden" its pagan analogue, the loss of the Saturnian Golden Age. As it opens "Saturn is fallen" (I, 234), the god who had exercised his "influence benign" in "all those acts which Deity supreme/ Doth ease its heart of love in"; so that now "the days of peace and slumberous calm are fled" (I, 108-12; II, 335). Again and again Saturn asks the question, Why? Who? How? What justification can there be in the course of things for the destruction of the easy felicity of the Golden Age, through the overthrow of its blameless deities?—and he answers despairingly that he cannot "find reason why ye should be thus:/ No, no-where can unriddle" (I, 112 ff., 227 ff.; II, 128 ff.). Oceanus proffers a solution which is in accord with pagan Stoicism: "we fall by course of Nature's law" that "first in beauty should be first in might," and this truth must simply

be faced and accepted, for "to bear all naked truths ... all calm,/ That is the top of sovereignty" (II, 181-229). This answer, however, though not invalid, is insufficient, and the narrative moves toward the revelation that suffering, even when undeserved, is explicable not merely by a natural law, but by a moral principle as well. Saturn and his fellow Titans had ruled in high and unfeeling simplicity, "solemn, undisturb'd/ Unruffled, like high Gods" (I, 330-1); and though they now suffer humanlike passion and anguish, it is without human understanding, in the absence of what Keats, in his letter on the "Mansion of Many Apartments," had called "the human heart." Thea can only press her hand

upon that aching spot

Where beats the human heart, as if just there,
Though an immortal, she felt cruel pain.

(I, 42-4)

As soon as Apollo makes his delayed appearance he reveals why he deserves his preeminence over Hyperion, for though he too lives "in aching ignorance," he feels "curs'd and thwarted" by his ignorance and is avid and active in his desire for knowledge. Suddenly he reads in the face of Mnemosyne, goddess of memory—who is to be mother of the muses and so of all the arts—the history of the undeserved defeat of the Titans, and discovers the knowledge he seeks. This knowledge is the knowledge of good and evil, in a sudden expansion of consciousness to the recognition that all process entails loss, and that there can be no creative progress except through the painful destruction, however unmerited, of the preceding stage:

Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
Names, deeds, gray legends, dire events, rebellions,
Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
Creations and destroyings, all at once
Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
And deify me....

(III, 91-118)

Apollo becomes truly a god (and so, by the grim justice of the immanent rationale of things, unintentionally effects the over

throw of the innocent Hyperion) only by willingly assuming humanity and its burden of the mystery that through loss and suffering alone can we rise from simple and ignorant innocence to the higher identity of a more inclusive, complex, and integral awareness. As the fragment breaks off Apollo experiences the application of this principle to himself, in the ordeal of dying to the stage of ignorance in order to be born to the stage of mature knowledge, like one who should "with fierce convulse/ Die into life." And since Apollo is "the Father of all verse" (III, 13), he is reborn not only as god of the sun, successor to Hyperion, but also as the god of tragic poetry, the high genre which, in this very poem, displaces the simple pastoralism of the Golden Age.

Between dropping this work in April of 1819 and taking it up again late that summer, Keats had clarified his "system of Salvation" in his second letter, on the Vale of Soul-making. *The Fall of Hyperion* transfers the locus in which the burden of the mystery is unriddled from the ordeal of the growing mind of the god of poetry to the ordeal of the growing mind of the poet himself, as he moves through stages of experience to the discovery of his poetic identity and status. Keats does this by assimilating his Miltonic epic to the form of an earlier theodicy, Dante's dream-vision, *The Divine Comedy*, which had reconciled evil and suffering with God's justice not in a third-person narrative, but in an allegorical account of the narrator's own progress through hell and purgatory to heaven. In a creative application of the medieval convention, Keats begins *The Fall of Hyperion* with a long Induction in which he presents himself, the narrator, as the sentient center of the poem, who is transformed by experiencing a vision within the double dream that he narrates. The initial dream is that of a garden in which the poet eats and drinks of a feast which "seem'd refuse of a meal/ By angel tasted or our Mother Eve" (I, 29-30), falls asleep, and awakens into a second dream in which the garden has vanished, and has been replaced by an ancient sanctuary, within which a flight of stairs leads up to the altar of Moneta (who incorporates and replaces Mnemosyne, the Titaness of the earlier poem). The narrator goes on to justify his loss of Eden as in some sense a fortunate fall, but he

translates the theodicy of his private life into the form of a pagan mystery-ritual of death, rebirth, and salvation by means of an initiation into *gnosis*, a secret knowledge.

As he approaches, then touches, the lowest stair, the poet feels "what 'tis to die and live again before/ Thy fated hour." The colloquy with Moneta that follows serves to epitomize and to project in dramatic form an extended process of self-formation, self-analysis, and self-discovery in the poet's inner life. Moneta's evolving challenges, in the form of charges against his deficiencies, and the responses he makes to these charges, recapitulate the progressive stages of his development and manifest his expanding awareness of what it is to be a poet instead of a dreamer, then to be a poet who feels "the giant agony of the world," and then one who, instead of simply venoming all his days, aspires to be "a sage;/ A humanist, Physician to all men." Thus tested, he wins to the stage at which he is able to endure, "without stay or prop/ But my own weak mortality," the vision that Moneta finally grants him of the fallen and innocently suffering Titans (I, 145-210; 388-9). By demonstrating his readiness and capacity to endure the burden of the tragic knowledge that human growth and creativity entail correspondent loss and suffering, the narrator has established his identity as a poet and defined the kind of poet that he is, and so earned the power, though remaining a mortal man (line 304), "to see as a God sees"; that is, with compassion, yet with aesthetic distance. By that fact he has also earned the right to essay his epic poem of tragic suffering. ⁸⁷

The Induction to *The Fall of Hyperion* is much closer to Wordsworth's achievement than Keats could know, for it is a *Prelude* in miniature which sets forth, immediately preparatory to his major poetic undertaking, the discipline and consummation of the poet's mind. It represents these events not as autobiography, but in the fiction of a *rite de passage*. In Keats's condensed and ritual form, however, as in Wordsworth's expanded and realistic account, the growth of the poet's mind turns on a crisis in which he achieves and recognizes his poetic identity and mission; incorporates the justification of pain as indispensable to his coming of age both as a man and as a poet of suffering humanity; involves the clarification to him of

his own poetics and of the great poet's high office as sage, humanist, and physician to all men; and issues in the genesis of the epic poem that the poet envisions and goes on, at the end, to narrate. And while there is more than one compelling reason why Keats gave up this latter enterprise, it is a probable conjecture that, just as Wordsworth found that he had absorbed into the *Prelude* to *The Recluse*—his account of "the transitory Being that beheld/ This Vision"—the material which was to have been the vital center of *The Recluse* itself, so Keats, in setting forth the growth of the poet's own mind by way of Induction to his epic, found that he had expended his material for the central element of the epic proper: the growth to tragic understanding of Apollo, the father of all verse.

Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* recounted the "self-building process" of one of the spirits F. D. Maurice ironically denominated "men of genius," as distinguished from "artists." It is much more fictional than Wordsworth's *Prelude*, but also much closer to their common theological prototypes, in the abundant genre of spiritual histories in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as in the exemplary *Confessions* of Augustine himself. ⁸⁸ Carlyle set out, very explicitly, to salvage the primary forms of Christian experience in a world which had to make do without the traditional Creator and Redeemer. "The Mythus of the Christian Religion looks not in the eighteenth century as it did in the eighth," so that he must undertake, in an iron age, "to embody the divine Spirit of that Religion in a new Mythus, in a new vehicle and vesture, that our Souls, otherwise too like perishing, may live." This new mythus, whose "one Bible" is that which is "felt in my own heart," ⁸⁹ is a mythus without a creed, and aims at a salvation which is the stage of mature consciousness: the achievement of the secure spiritual stance toward oneself and the universe that Carlyle calls "the Everlasting Yea."

Sartor is also a radical experiment in artistic form; but unlike *The Prelude*, whose innovations are unobtrusive and easily overlooked, it is so blatantly eccentric that it is readily misestimated as a freak in the history of prose narrative. In

literary genealogy it is a cross between Augustine's *Confessions* and that progenitor of all anti-novels, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*; for it is a serious parody of the spiritual autobiography which plays with and undercuts the conventions it nonetheless accepts. Augustine's two selves, and Wordsworth's "two consciousnesses," are split by Carlyle into separate literary personae. One is Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, German author of an enigmatic work on *Die Kleider, ihr Werden und Wirken*; the other is his British editor and biographer, who knows the outcome of the life from the outset, but must, in honest bewilderment, struggle to interpret the book and to construct a coherent total biography from the only available data, the almost illegible autobiographical scribbles which Teufelsdröckh had penned at various stages and had left, in chronological confusion, in "Six considerable PAPER-BAGS, carefully sealed, and marked successively, in gilt China-ink, with the symbols of the Six southern Zodiacal Signs" (pp. 77-9). *Sartor* had no close equivalent until such serio-perverse manipulations of the self-reflexive work of fiction as André Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, which (in Harry Levin's succinct description) is "the diary of a novelist who is writing a novel about a novelist who is keeping a diary about the novel he is writing." ⁹⁰ A more recent and pre-eminently complex exponent of the genre is Vladimir Nabokov. *Pale Fire*, for example, is the bizarre revelation of his own life by a demented editor who ostensibly recounts the life of a poet in the process of editing the poet's autobiographic poem; it is a work in which everything is done with mirrors and an indefinite regress of mutually reflective and fantastically distorting mirrors.

The devices of the double authorship, the work-within-the-work, and the paper bags provide Carlyle with the literary excuse to violate calendar time in the life of Teufelsdröckh by leaps and returns which seem random but in fact bring out its immanent and evolving design. Through the shifting perspectives, the temporal oscillations, and the tenebrous rhetoric, we make out a familiar Romantic metaphysic and life history. ⁹¹ An I confronts the not-I: "You are alone with the Universe, and silently commune with it, as one mysterious Presence with

another" (p. [53](#)). In this subject-object transaction the mind is primary and prepotent, and is sometimes represented as the sole ground of experience; "our ME," as Teufelsdröckh says, "the only reality: and Nature, with its thousandfold production and destruction, but the reflex of our own inward Force" (p. [55](#)). Despite its subsidiary status, however, nature is described as "thousand-voiced," a "God-written Apocalypse" which "speaks" to the prepared spirit by means of "symbols." ⁹² Existence begins in the stage of "Happy Childhood" for which "Kind Nature ... a bountiful mother" has provided "a soft swathing of Love and infinite Hope" in a "fair Life-garden" (pp. [90](#) -1). From this Eden the protagonist is expelled by the perfidy of his beloved Blumine; and this experience is followed by the erosion of all his inherited certainties, as a consequence of succumbing to the analytic procedure and skeptical rationalism of eighteenth-century thought. Having lost all traditional supports, the mind moves into the "Everlasting No" of what Carlyle calls its "Fever-crisis" (p. [157](#)), taking a spiritual beating whose savagery has rarely been equaled in the long history of Christian soul-crises. "Falling, falling, towards the Abyss" (p. [146](#)), the protagonist "turns pilgrim" and carries out an "extraordinary world-pilgrimage" (pp. [146](#) -7, [152](#)), which is the outer correlate of an agonized inner journey and quest. The first stage of this journey is through a spiritual hell, a "Gehenna ... within," which correspondently transforms the outer universe, "God's fair living world," into "a pallid, vacant Hades and extinct Pandemonium" (pp. [148](#), [114](#)). In such a lifeless world, as in a "Golgotha, and Mill of Death," he "walked solitary; and (except as it was my own heart, not another's, that I kept devouring) savage also, as the tiger in his jungle" (p. [164](#)). Like his late-Romantic contemporary, Kierkegaard, Teufelsdröckh experiences the *Angst* of existence—"I lived in a continual, indefinite, pining fear ... apprehensive of I knew not what ... as if the Heavens and the Earth were but boundless jaws of a devouring monster" (p. [166](#))—as well as spiritual nausea, "the fordone soul drowning slowly in quagmires of Disgust!" (p. [164](#)).

The "turning-point of the battle" (p. [185](#)) occurs without forewarning, in a sudden breakthrough in the "dirty little *Rue Saint-Thomas de l'Enfer*," when the thought of defiance "rushed like a stream of fire over my whole soul; and I shook base Fear away from me forever." "It is from this hour that I incline to date my Spiritual New-birth"—a crisis and recovery which he equates with dying to youth to be reborn to early maturity: "Perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a Man" (pp. [166](#)-8, [185](#)). After a series of "Temptations in the Wilderness," the process culminates in a spiritual event of self-destruction and re-creation, described in explicit analogy to the Biblical Apocalypse. In a deep and healing sleep the "Annihilation of Self" was finally accomplished, and "I awoke to a new Heaven and a new Earth." But this new earth is simply the old earth redeemed by the mind of man, whom Carlyle, following Novalis, calls "the 'Messias of Nature' " (pp. [186](#), [220](#)). Like other writers in the tradition of the Augustinian confession, Carlyle has throughout been occupied with the relation of time to eternity; now he is able to discern that eternity lies all about us, if we but succeed in piercing through the perceptual illusions, or cognitive "Thought-forms," of "Space and Time" (pp. [260](#)-6).

These events raise the problem of what is "at present called Origin of Evil," an ever-recurring question which each age must resolve anew, "for it is man's nature to change his Dialect from century to century; he cannot help it though he would." Carlyle's solution is very much in the dialect of his own age, for it transfers the problem of theodicy to the private life, and justifies sorrow and suffering as the necessary conditions for achieving the wisdom, resignation, and power of insight which are the attributes of maturity. But where Wordsworth's justification of the discipline of suffering had its roots in Christian Stoicism, Carlyle's is a secular version of the ancient recourse to the Passion of Christ as paradigm. To Carlyle the wisdom of maturity is based on the recognition of the sacredness of suffering and "Divine Depth of Sorrow," and also on the renunciation of "pleasure" and the "Love of Happiness" in order instead to "find Blessedness" through a salutary and self-validating "Worship of Sorrow."

To the "*Worship of Sorrow*" ascribe what origin and genesis thou pleasest, *has* not that Worship originated, and been generated; is it not *here*? Feel it in thy heart, and then say whether it is of God!

(pp. [189](#) -94)

Despite his reversion to the Augustinian conversion in an instant of time, Carlyle sees the overall history of his protagonist in accordance with the Romantic model of stages of growth to maturity. We have "followed Teufelsdröckh through the various successive states and stages of Growth ... into a certain clearer state of what he himself seems to consider as Conversion," in which his "spiritual majority ... commences" (pp. 198-9). And this spiritual majority, we are told, had to be achieved "before his apostolic work ... could begin." His crisis thus turns out to have been a crisis of identity, resolved in the discovery that there had been a hidden design shaping his life toward the vocation of "Authorship as his divine calling." "Awake arise! Speak forth what is in thee," in an "Art" which is also a "Priesthood"; for it is an art used, as the editor says near the end, to marshal the "Happy few! little band of Friends" to join with him in the "highest work of Palingenesis," of which the aim is nothing less than the "Newbirth of Society" (pp. [185](#), 198- [200](#), [268](#) -70).

All this while the editor has been more and more assuming the ideas and accent of his author. The book closes with the ironic hint that its two personae, the unruly protagonist and his dogged biographer, may in fact be one, and that this one may even now be in London, laboring at his apostolic work of man's spiritual redemption. In "these dark times" of the Paris revolution of 1830, Teufelsdröckh has disappeared from his haunt in the coffee-house *Zur Grünen Gans* in the town of Weissnichtwo, leaving as his last cryptic words "*Es geht an* (It is beginning)"—that is, the French Revolutionary song, *Ça ira*. He is "again to all appearance lost in space!" but

our own private conjecture, now amounting almost to certainty, is that, safe-moored in some stillest obscurity, not to lie always still, Teufelsdröckh is actually London!

(pp. [292](#) -7)

Carlyle wrote his remarkable book in 1830-31, twenty-five years after *The Prelude* was completed, but twenty years before it was published. In dwelling on the parallels between these two works, we must not forget how wide is the division between the Romantic poet-seer and the Victorian prophet. As an indication of their difference, we might note that Wordsworth's evangel centers in a visionary quietism—"the calm mood of holy indolence/ A most wise passiveness"—but that Carlyle's issues in a strenuous economic activism: "Up and work!" "Produce! Produce!" ⁹³

9. WORDSWORTH AS EVANGELIST

Admirers of Wordsworth who hold the modern view of poetry as poetry and not another thing go counter to his claim in the *Prospectus* to sing "of blessed consolations in distress," in the prayer that his verse may "cheer/ Mankind in times to come." ⁹⁴ But for the most sensitive critics in the generation or so after Wordsworth's death, it was precisely his extraordinary success in bringing consolation to a "time of dereliction and dismay" that gave him a status below only Shakespeare and Milton. Matthew Arnold asked in *Memorial Verses*,

Where will Europe's latter hour
Again find Wordsworth's healing power?

Leslie Stephen held that "Wordsworth is the only poet who will bear reading in times of distress," and that his persistent concern with the possibility of transmuting sorrow into strength is "the single topic which ... can really be called consolatory." What he does, said John Morley, "is to assuage, to reconcile, to fortify . . . to give us quietness." ⁹⁵ More than this: Wordsworth in the *Prospectus* had undertaken to "arouse the sensual from their sleep/ Of death" (echoing Psalm 13, in which awakening from "the sleep of death" is paralleled to "salvation"); and *The Prelude* begins with the claim that he is "singled out, as it might seem,/ For holy services" and ends with the behest to Coleridge to carry on with him, as a prophet

of nature and of the mind of man, the work of men's "redemption, surely yet to come." It is interesting to inquire: to what extent did Wordsworth succeed as an evangelist of nature and mind?

Wordsworth's first recorded success was with Coleridge himself, on whom he called to be the Virgil of his pilgrimage through his inner life:

A Traveller I am,

And all my Tale is of myself...

... And Thou, O honor'd Friend!

Who in my thoughts art ever at my side,

Uphold, as heretofore, my fainting steps. ⁹⁶

But it was Coleridge who faltered—in fact, he had begun to falter even before Wordsworth asked him to uphold his fainting steps. And when in January 1807 Coleridge, sunk in spiritual torpor, first heard the poet read his *Prelude* through, he recorded the event in the ode *To William Wordsworth*, a remarkable summary of that "more than historic, that prophetic lay" as it appeared to one who had played an important part in its genesis. Coleridge called it an "Orphic song" (line 45), and given Coleridge's interest in the Orphic mysteries and his precision in language, Professor Stallknecht may be right in taking the phrase to imply that the poet has been revived from spiritual death by his own song. ⁹⁷ As Coleridge listened, at any rate, it effected in him an unmistakable, if temporary, passage from the sleep of death back to life:

Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn,

The pulses of my being beat anew:

And even as Life returns upon the drowned,

Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains-

Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe

Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart.

And when the reading was over, "I found myself in prayer."

John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* is an austerely secular account of his intellectual development—the autobiography of a steam engine, Carlyle called it. Yet its fifth chapter, "A

Crisis in My Mental History. One Stage Onward," shows that even a steam engine can break down. The title of the chapter also indicates that Mill, like Carlyle himself, adapted the Augustinian crisis-pattern to the contemporary design of life as ascending stages of self-formation. Mill compared the sudden and total apathy and anomie into which he fell at the age of twenty to the state "in which converts to Methodism usually are, when smitten by their first 'conviction of sin.' ... I seemed to have nothing left to live for"; and he illustrated his condition by lines from Coleridge's crisis-poem, *Dejection: An Ode*: "A grief without a pang, void, dark and drear." The first relief from his "dry heavy dejection" came with the reading of a scene from Marmontel's *Memoires*—significantly, for a son dominated by an autocratic father, the scene in which young Marmontel, his father newly dead, gives his family to feel, as Mill says, that he "would supply the place of all that they had lost." But even more decisive for his recovery was his introduction to Wordsworth's collective *Poems* of 1815. These were "a medicine," says Mill, "for my state of mind," because they represented the interchange between nature and mind; or in Mill's associationist terms, because "they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought colored by feeling, under the excitement of beauty." Especially important was the *Intimations Ode*, in which Mill recognized the design of crisis, loss, and compensatory gain attendant upon the growth from youth into maturity. In the *Ode*

I found that he too had had similar experience to mine; that he also had felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting; but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way in which he was now teaching me to find it. The result was that I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never again subject to it. [98](#)

Wordsworth's poetry also played a role in the genre of Victorian confessions of despair and recovery, of conversion and deconversion. *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* is the semi-fictional account of his own life by William Hale White, one of the numerous men of the age who broke free from

evangelicalism by a reverse form of the conversion experience which was central to evangelical piety. The book, like Mill's *Autobiography*, was written before *The Prelude* was published, and the immediate agency for White's experience was an encounter with Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. These poems hardly seem radical to us, but only because Wordsworth's revolutionary program for poetry has been so thoroughly successful. On William Cullen Bryant, for example, *Lyrical Ballads* had something of the effect Wordsworth intended, to arouse the reader from the sleep of death and reveal a new heaven and earth. "I shall never forget," wrote Richard Henry Dana in 1833, "with what feeling my friend Bryant, some years ago, described to me the effect produced upon him [when still young] by his meeting for the first time with Wordsworth's *Ballads*.... He said, that upon opening Wordsworth, a thousand springs seemed to gush up at once in his heart, and the face of nature, of a sudden, to change into a strange freshness and life." ⁹⁹ On William Hale White the effect of these poems was a conversion from the Christianity of his childhood, in an experience which he defined by reference to the prototype of all conversions to Christianity: "It conveyed to me no new doctrine, and yet the change it wrought in me could only be compared with that which is said to have been wrought on Paul himself by the Divine apparition" on the road to Damascus. In Wordsworth, White said, "God is nowhere formally deposed"; yet the deity in a personal form has faded away, leaving his attributes to be assimilated by nature, which is then confronted by a mind with an appropriately altered attitude:

Instead of an object of worship which was altogether artificial, remote... God was brought from that heaven of the books, and dwelt on the downs in the far-away distances, and in every cloud-shadow which wandered across the valley. Wordsworth unconsciously did for me what every religious reformer has done,—he re-created my Supreme Divinity. ¹⁰⁰

Wordsworth, as we know, declared that all his poems relate to the high argument he set forth in the *Prospectus*. Which of Wordsworth's writings has in fact served his prophetic enterprise has varied with the temper and needs of the individual

reader, as well as with the works available to him. When John Stuart Mill "looked into the Excursion" he "found little in it." [101](#) But when William James fell into a spiritual crisis, it was "the immortal Wordsworth's *Excursion*" [102](#) which helped rescue him. The symptoms of his soul sickness, which began in the autumn of 1869, are familiar to us—"a disgust for life," the loss of all feeling of conviction, the ebbing of the will to carry on, and a weariness with the burden of the mystery which tempts him to yield up moral questions in despair. "Today I about touched bottom, and perceive plainly that I must face the choice with open eyes: shall I *frankly* throw the moral business overboard, as one unsuited to my innate aptitudes, or shall I follow it and it alone...?" "Can one with full knowledge and sincerely ever bring one's self so to sympathize with the total process of the universe as heartily to assent to the evil that seems inherent in its details?" By March of 1873, however, the father was able to report to Henry James his brother's spiritual rebirth:

He came in here the other afternoon when I was sitting alone, and ... exclaimed "Dear me! What a difference there is between me now and me last spring this time.... It is the difference between death and life." ... I ventured to ask what specially in his opinion had promoted the change. He said several things: the reading of Renouvier (specially his vindication of the freedom of the will) and Wordsworth, whom he has been feeding upon now for a good while. [103](#)

That the power of Wordsworth's evangel has not in our time been exhausted is shown by an autobiography published in the 1950s, Bede Griffiths' *The Golden String*. "One of the decisive events of my life," the author tells us in his Prologue, occurred on an evening of his last term at school, when the chorus of birds, the sight of hawthorns in full bloom, the soar and song of a lark struck him with a surprise as great as though he "had been brought suddenly among the trees of the Garden of Paradise." "It was as though I had begun to see and smell and hear for the first time. The world appeared to me as Wordsworth describes it with 'the glory and the freshness of

a dream,' " and nature "began to wear a kind of sacramental character for me."

As time went on this kind of worship of nature began to take the place of any other religion... I had begun to read the romantic poets, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, and I found in them the record of an experience like my own. They became my teachers and my guides, and I gradually gave up my adherence to any form of Christianity. [104](#)

Among these Romantic "prophets" of a "new religion," he later makes clear, Wordsworth was *facile princeps*. "The religion of Wordsworth, as I found it expressed in the '*Prelude*' and in the '*Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey*' had a deeper meaning for me than anything else I had ever known, because it came nearer to my own experience." Later in his development, however, came a time when "the splendour of St. Augustine's *Confessions* broke upon me" and "penetrated into the depths of my soul."

It is only now after thirty years that the full meaning of that which was revealed to me that day at school has become clear to me. That mysterious Presence which I felt in all the forms of nature has gradually disclosed itself as the infinite and eternal Being, of whose beauty all the forms of nature are but a passing reflection... I know now the meaning of St. Augustine's words, "O thou Beauty, so ancient and so new, too late have I loved thee, too late have I loved thee." ... I had sought him in the solitude of nature and in the labour of my mind, but I found him in the society of his Church and in the Spirit of Charity. And all this came to me not so much as a discovery but as a recognition. [105](#)

All process, Romantic thinkers believed, moves forward and also rounds back. Wordsworth's absorption of the personal God into a sacramental nature in communion with an apotheosized faculty of mind, which had resolved his own crisis and assisted other men to resolve theirs, and which had converted Mill from Benthamism and William Hale White from Augustinianism, now helped put Bede Griffiths on the way back to

the prototype of the mind's religious colloquy with nature. You will recall the passage in which Augustine addressed himself to the speaking face of earth and heaven:

And I said to all the things that throng about the gateways of the senses: "Tell me of my God, since you are not He." ... And they cried out in a great voice: "He made us." My question was my gazing upon them, and their answer was their beauty.

2. WORDSWORTH: THE LONG JOURNEY HOME

I have "never read a word of German metaphysics, thank Heaven!" Wordsworth wrote to Henry Crabb Robinson.⁴⁵ This claim is no doubt the literal truth; yet as Robinson several times remarked, Wordsworth's thinking frequently parallels that of his philosophical German contemporaries. Prominent in Wordsworth, for example, is his version of the great commonplace of the age: unity with himself and his world is the primal and normative state of man, of which the sign is a fullness of shared life and the condition of joy; analytic thought divides the mind from nature and object from object, and this division, if absolute, kills the object it severs and threatens with spiritual death the mind from which it has been severed. In the second book of *The Prelude* Wordsworth praises Coleridge as one to whom "the unity of all has been reveal'd," and who is therefore free from the slavery "Of that false secondary power, by which,/ In weakness, we create distinctions" that we mistake for real divisions. He goes on to oppose to "analytic industry" his own "observations of affinities/ In objects where no brotherhood exists/ To common minds," with the eventual result that "in all things/ I saw one life, and felt that it was joy." In a manuscript passage he adds that "by such communion" he was "early taught" that the separate "forms and images" evident to passive perception, as well as the divisive processes of active "thought/ Prospectiveness, intelligence or will," seem but "relapses"—that is, a falling away—from the undifferentiated oneness of self with nature, and of both these with God:

Such consciousnesses seemed but accidents
Relapses from the one interior life
Which is in all things, from that unity
In which all beings live with God, are lost
In god and nature, in one mighty whole
As undistinguishable as the cloudless east

At noon is from the cloudless west when all
The hemisphere is one cerulean blue. [46](#)

Some two years earlier, in a passage intended for *The Ruined Cottage*, Wordsworth's Pedlar had denounced the false kind of "science" which, instead of serving "the cause/ Of order and distinctness" (that is, by distinction without division), murders, by disconnecting, both the objects seen and the self that sees:

For was it meant

That we should pore, and dwindle as we pore ...
On solitary objects, still beheld
In disconnection dead and spiritless,
And still dividing and dividing still,
Break down all grandeur ...

waging thus

An impious warfare with the very life
Of our own souls?

"Let us rise," he cries, "From this oblivious sleep"—patently this is the "sleep of Death" from which Wordsworth undertook to waken "the sensual" in his *Prospectus*—and reunite the severed parts in a resurrective interchange in which (as Coleridge was to phrase it in his *Dejection*) the life of all things will be the eddying of our living soul:

Thus disciplined

All things shall live in us and we shall live
In all things that surround us....
For thus the senses and the intellect
Shall each to each supply a mutual aid ...
And forms and feelings acting thus, and thus
Reacting, they shall each acquire
A living spirit and a character
Till then unfelt. [47](#)

In *The Fountain* (1799) Wordsworth gave to the old man Matthew a memorable statement about the unhappy consciousness of self-divided and knowingly mortal man and the happy

self-unity of creatures who act by instinct, and without memory or anticipation:

The blackbird amid leafy trees,
The lark above the hill,
Let loose their carols when they please,
Are quiet when they will.

With Nature never do *they* wage
A foolish strife; they see
A happy youth, and their old age
Is beautiful and free.

Like Schiller and Coleridge, Wordsworth here expresses, through the medium of an invented character, man's discontent with being human and civilized. When he speaks in his own person, however, Wordsworth conceives the mature mind as an integrity of disparate elements which is the product of a growth that necessarily involves self-division and conflict. His general norm is a unity which retains individual identity, and his particular ideal of life (as John Jones has put it) ⁴⁸ is to sustain solitude in relationship. Thus Wordsworth proclaimed, in one version of his Prospectus,

Of the individual mind that keeps its own
Inviolate retirement, and consists
With being limitless, the one great Life
I sing. ⁴⁹

The great distinction of Wordsworth's *Prelude* in its age is that it is not (as Coleridge tried to make it) a philosophical poem, nor an extended cosmic myth, nor a symbolic or allegorical fable, but the presentation of a particular person, unique yet humanly representative, as he develops from infancy to maturity through his evolving experience with his natural environment, with other men, and with the great public events of his time. Wordsworth nevertheless claimed that his poetry possessed a systematic intellectual ground; as he said of *The Recluse* of which *The Prelude* was a part, while "it is not

the Author's intention formally to announce a system ... the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself." ⁵⁰ His confidence in the reader is perhaps excessive; but our present point of vantage enables us to discern in *The Prelude* a coherent understructure of ideas and a sustained evolution of images which mark its consonance with the thought and design of a number of other, and very diverse, Romantic works of literature and philosophy.

I remarked in Chapter Two that, on one recurrent level of narrative, Wordsworth undertakes to represent the growth of a poet's mind—just as German philosophers undertook to construct the development of generic and individual consciousness—within the limits of a two-term scheme of reference: the interactions between subject and object, mind and nature. Unlike the German Idealists, however, Wordsworth does not posit an initial One, or absolute, which subdivides into the knowing mind and the object known, but instead begins, as he says in the Prospectus, with a "Mind" which is fitted to "the external World" and an "external World" which is "fitted to the Mind." In the early books of *The Prelude* he sets out to show the slow and complex workings of "those first-born affinities that fit/ Our new existence to existing things" (I, 582-3), in the process by which the mind of the child, through the mediation of its senses, grows into community with its environing world. Natural objects enter, flow, are received, and sink down into the mind, while the mind dwells in, feeds on, drinks, holds intercourse with, and weaves, intertwines, fastens, and binds itself to external objects, until the two integrate as one. These are Wordsworth's recurrent metaphors, the essential lexicon he developed to enable him to say, about the development of man's cognitive and emotional involvement with the milieu into which he is born, what had never been explicitly said before, and with a subtlety that has not been exceeded since. In the crowning figure of this metaphoric complex the babe, in the security of his mother's arms, evolves into awareness of a world which is so thoroughly humanized that the pull of gravity is experienced as a familial relationship. "In one beloved presence,"

there exists

A virtue which irradiates and exalts
All objects through all intercourse of sense.
No outcast he, bewilder'd and depress'd;
Along his infant veins are interfus'd
The gravitation and filial bond
Of nature, that connect him with the world.

(II, 255-64)

The dynamic element in the growth of the mind in nature is a play of polarities which is not, in Wordsworth, a systematic dialectic, but instead operates, as Charles J. Smith has said, as "a very strong habit of thinking in terms of paired opposites or contraries. Everywhere in nature, in individual man and in society, [Wordsworth] saw a constant interplay of opposing forces." ⁵¹ Chief among the contraries in nature, we already know, are those which Wordsworth introduces in his opening lines on his interaction with the natural scene: "I grew up/ Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear" (I, 305-6). Related to this opposition between incitation by beauty and discipline by terror are other contraries which constitute the poles between which flow the forces of "this active universe." "Calmness" and "emotion," "peace and excitation," "stillness" and "energy" —"these two attributes/ Are sister horns that constitute her strength."

In Wordsworth's account, his community with the natural milieu precedes, and is instrumental to, his development of a community with other men: "Love of Nature" leads to "Love of Mankind." The integrity of mind that he has achieved receives its first serious test in London, both on his first brief visit, when he "felt in heart and soul the shock/ Of the huge town's first presence" (1850; VII, 66-7), and during the period of his later residence there. The "blank confusion" of the metropolis terrified Wordsworth by a double threat to his sense of individuation-in-unity: by fragmenting community into an anarchy of unrelated parts, and by assimilating the parts into a homogeneity in which no individuality survives,

melted and reduced

To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end.

But the strength of the integral fabric of consciousness wrought by his earlier education in nature enabled him to manage even this "unmanageable sight," as one who "sees the parts/ As parts, but with a feeling of the whole." "The forms/ Perennial of the ancient hills," changeless in "the changeful language of their countenances," had provided him with a model for reconciling "multitude,/ With order and relation"; and now "the Spirit of Nature" remained "present as a habit," and served to diffuse through

the press

Of self-destroying, transitory things
Composure and ennobling harmony.

(VII, 695-740)

This development "Of intellectual power, from stage to stage/ Advancing, hand in hand with love and joy,/ And of imagination," is shattered by the "over-pressure of the times/ And their disastrous issues" (XI, 42-8). Wordsworth describes the process of his breakdown as the cumulative fragmentation and conflict of once integral elements. He turned to abstract reason to furnish support for his failing hopes, but this was in effect to foster a divisive inner "war against myself," in the attempt "to cut off my heart/ From all the sources of her former strength" and to unsoul by logic "those mysteries of passion which have made ... / One brotherhood of the human race" (XI, 74-88). Analytic reason divides, but it cannot reunify, for it sets up the kind of inert contraries which cannot be resolved: "Sick, wearied out with contrarities," I "Yielded up moral questions in despair. This was the crisis of that strong disease" (1850; XI, 304-6). At the same time the "life of nature," which should have sustained and guided him, had itself succumbed to the same work of "logic and minute analysis." Hitherto he had rejoiced in its passion and its life, in which he had participated because he had confronted nature with unified and cooperative faculties and feelings,

now all eye

And now all ear; but ever with the heart
Employ'd, and the majestic intellect.

But inner division became inner conflict and resulted in a state in which "the eye was master of the heart" and "often held my mind in absolute dominion" (XI, 96-180). The consequence of such division between mind and nature, and the resulting enslavement of the mind by "the laws of vulgar sense," was to destroy "a world of life" and transform it into "a universe of death" (XIII, 102-3, 138-41).

The poet's recovery, correspondingly, is represented as a gradual reintegration of all that had been divided: his faculties, senses, and feelings, his past and present self, and his mind and outer nature. My sister, Wordsworth says, "Maintained for me a saving intercourse/ With my true self," while "Nature's self ... led me back" to the earlier "counsels between head and heart" (1850; XI, 335-54); the persistence in memory of "spots of time" helped him to reestablish continuity between the self that he is and the self that he was; and he finally reachieved the integrity of being that he had lost, although now on a level of consciousness which preserved the critical experiences through which he had passed.

Behold me then

Once more in Nature's presence, thus restored
Or otherwise, and strengthened once again
(With memory left of what had been escaped). [52](#)

It is time to notice that Wordsworth's account of unity achieved, lost, and regained is held together, as various critics have remarked, by the recurrent image of a journey: like a number of works by his contemporaries, Wordsworth's "poem on my own poetical education" [53](#) converts the wayfaring Christian of the Augustinian spiritual journey into the self-formative traveler of the Romantic educational journey. The poem in fact opens, as Elizabeth Sewell has said, "with the poet in a prospect of wide landscape and open sky," on a literal walk which serves as "the great over-all poetic figure or trope of a journey which he is about to undertake." [54](#) In the course of this episode the aimless wanderer becomes "as a Pilgrim resolute" who takes "the road that pointed toward the chosen

Vale," and at the end of the first book the road translates itself into the metaphorical way of his life's pilgrimage:

Forthwith shall be brought down

Through later years the story of my life.
The road lies plain before me....

(1850; I, 91-3, 638-40)

The Prelude is replete with "the Wanderers of the Earth," [55](#) and after the period of childhood, its chief episodes are Wordsworth's own wanderings through the English countryside, the Alps, Italy, France, and Wales—literal journeys through actual places which modulate easily into symbolic landscapes traversed by a metaphorical wayfarer. This organizing figure works in two dimensions. In one of these, *The Prelude* represents the life which the poet narrates as a self-educative journey, "from stage to stage/ Advancing," in which his early development had been "progress on the self-same path," the crisis following the French Revolution had been "a stride at once/ Into another region," and the terminus was his achievement of maturity in "the discipline/ And consummation of the Poet's mind." [56](#) In the second application, the poet repeatedly figures his own imaginative enterprise, the act of composing *The Prelude* itself, as a perilous quest through the uncharted regions of his own mind.

At times the vehicle for this latter poetic journey is a voyage at sea, connoting the wanderings of Odysseus in his search for home:

What avail'd,

When Spells forbade the Voyager to land,
The fragrance which did ever and anon
Give notice of the Shore? ...
My business was upon the barren sea,
My errand was to sail to other coasts. [57](#)

Elsewhere Wordsworth's implied parallel is to Dante, who "Nell mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" had been granted a visionary journey, with a relay of guides, through hell and the earthly paradise to heaven:

A Traveller I am,

And all my Tale is of myself; even so,
So be it, if the pure in heart delight
To follow me; and Thou, O honor'd Friend!
Who in my thoughts art ever at my side,
Uphold, as heretofore, my fainting steps.

(III, 196-201)

At the beginning of the ninth book, "as a traveller, who has gained the brow/ Of some aerial Down" and "is tempted to review/ The region left behind him," Wordsworth turns back to his earlier youth, before he moves reluctantly on into the discordant "argument" that begins with his residence in France — "Oh, how much unlike the past!" ⁵⁸ The eleventh book, narrating the process of Wordsworth's recovery, opens in a parallel to Milton's description of his epic journey back from hell to the realms of light (XI, 1-7; see *Paradise Lost*, III, 13-20). And through all these regions the imagined presence of Coleridge serves both as auditor and guide, heartening the exhausted poet in his pilgrimage and quest:

Thou wilt not languish here, O Friend, for whom
I travel in these dim uncertain ways
Thou wilt assist me as a Pilgrim gone
In quest of highest truth.

(XI, 390-3)

The last book of *The Prelude*, in symmetry with its first book, also opens with a literal walk which translates itself into a metaphor for the climactic stage both of the journey of life and of the imaginative journey which is the poem itself. This time 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. As in Hegel's *Phenomenology* the spirit, at the close of its educational journey, recognizes itself in its other, so Wordsworth's mind, confronting nature, discovers itself in its own perfected powers:

A meditation rose in me that night
Upon the lonely Mountain ...

and it appear'd to me

The perfect image of a mighty Mind.

In the earliest stage of its development Wordsworth's "Babe,/ Nurs'd in his Mother's arms" had not only acquired "The gravitation and the filial bond ... that connect him with the world," but had also, as "inmate of this *active* universe," established the beginnings of the reciprocative power by which his mind ...

Creates, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.—Such, verily, is the first
Poetic spirit of our human life.

(II, 265-76)

On Mount Snowdon, in an evident parallel and complement to this early passage, his mind recognizes, in that image of itself "which Nature thus/ Thrusts forth upon the senses" the same power, which has now developed into "the fulness of its strength." As mist and moonlight transform the natural scene, so higher minds by a similar "Power"

can send abroad

Like transformation, for themselves create
A like existence, and, whene'er it is
Created for them, catch it by an instinct ...
Willing to work and to be wrought upon

by the works which they behold. An essential alteration, however, is that the mature poetic mind, whose infant perception had been a state of undifferentiated consciousness, has acquired self-consciousness, and is able to sustain the sense of its own identity as an individuation-in-unison with the objects it perceives. In Wordsworth's terse rendering,

hence the highest bliss

That can be known is theirs, the consciousness
Of whom they are habitually infused
Through every image, and through every thought,
And all impressions.

(XIII, 84-111)

I have already remarked (Chapter Two, Section i) that *The Prelude* has a circular organization. This circularity of its form,

we now see, reflects the circularity of its subject matter. In the opening passage of *The Prelude* the narrator is confirmed in his vocation as a poet-prophet and, in response to an impulse from the autumnal wood, chooses as his goal "a known Vale, whither my feet should turn," in the assurance "of some work of glory there forthwith to be begun." "Keen as a Truant or a Fugitive,/ But as a Pilgrim resolute," and also (in a complementary pedestrian metaphor) "like a home-bound labourer," he then pursued his way until a three days' walk "brought me to my hermitage" (1850; I, 71-80, 90-107). At the end of *The Prelude* Wordsworth, having taken up his "permanent abode" (XIII, 338) in this hermitage, calls "back to mind" the occasion of its beginning. But *The Prelude* has a complex function, for it is designed not only as a poem in itself, but also as a "portico" to *The Recluse*. The spiritual journey thus circles back at its conclusion to the literal journey with which it had originated; but this beginning at once turns over into the opening book of Wordsworth's "work of glory," *The Recluse* proper, which describes his way of life in the chosen vale. ⁵⁹ Only now does he identify the aspect of the vale which had all along made it the goal of his tortuous literal, spiritual, and poetic journey. That goal, as in all the ancient genre of the circuitous pilgrimage, is home— *Home at Grasmere*.

The initial passage of *Home at Grasmere* makes it clear that the place to which the poet has returned is not his literal home but one which, on his first overview of the "Vale below" when, solitary, he had chanced across it as "a roving School-boy," he had recognized to be his spiritual home. "Perfect was the Spot ... stirring to the Spirit"; and he had immediately felt that "here/ Must be his Home, this Valley be his World." Throughout his youth the vale had lingered in memory, "shedding upon joy/ A brighter joy," and now the home of his imagining has become his actual home (the word reverberates through the opening passage):

And now 'tis mine, perchance for life, dear Vale,
Beloved Grasmere (let the Wandering Streams
Take up, the cloud-capt hills repeat, the Name),
One of thy lowly Dwellings is my Home. ⁶⁰

The place in which, "on Nature's invitation" (line 71), Wordsworth's literal and metaphoric wanderings have terminated is identified, after the venerable formula, as a home which is also a recovered paradise. In his Pisgah-sight of it as a schoolboy he had looked upon it as a "paradise before him" (line 14); and it remains, after he takes up his abode in it, an "earthly counterpart" of heaven (line 642), which he describes in terms echoing Milton's description of the Garden of Eden, and in which Wordsworth and Dorothy, "A solitary pair" (line 255) are somewhat incongruously the Adam and Eve. The journey to this ultimate stage has taken him through "the realities of life so cold," but this had been a fortunate fall into experience, for "the cost" of what he has lost from the earlier stage of his life is greatly outweighed by "what I keep, have gain'd/ Shall gain," so that

in my day of Childhood I was less
The mind of Nature, less, take all in all,
Whatever may be lost, than I am now.

For him, man's ancient dream of felicity has been brought down from a transcendent heaven and located in this very world-

the distant thought

Is fetch'd out of the heaven in which it was.
The unappropriated bliss hath found
An owner, and that owner I am he.
The Lord of this enjoyment is on Earth
And in my breast. [61](#)

Here he dwells, therefore, as a second and more fortunate Adam, because unlike his predecessor he possesses an Eden which has been gained:

The boon is absolute; surpassing grace
To me hath been vouchsafed; among the bowers
Of blissful Eden this was neither given,
Nor could be given, possession of the good
Which had been sighed for, ancient thought fulfilled

And dear Imaginations realized
Up to their highest measure, yea and more. [62](#)

As in comparable passages in Hölderlin and Novalis (in Blake the parallel is more with Beulah than with the New Jerusalem), all the natural scene becomes alive, human, and feminine, and encloses the poet in an embrace of love:

Embrace me then, ye Hills, and close me in....
But I would call thee beautiful, for mild
And soft, and gay, and beautiful thou art,
Dear Valley, having in thy face a smile
Though peaceful, full of gladness.

(lines 110-7)

And when the solitary pair had first entered this valley together in the winter season, its elements had addressed them as fellow beings:

"What would ye," said the shower,
"Wild Wanderers, whither through my dark domain?"
The sunbeam said, "be happy." When this Vale
We entered, bright and solemn was the sky
That faced us with a passionate welcoming,
And led us to our threshold

—a threshold which in an earlier version of the text had been that of "a home/ Within a home, which was to be" (lines 168- 73, and footnote).

This terminus of all the poet's journeyings is not only home and paradise, but also a recovered unity and wholeness which he had experienced nowhere else except "as it found its way into my heart/ In childhood"; for this "blended holiness of earth and sky" is

A termination, and a last retreat,
A Centre, come from wheresoe'er you will,
A Whole without dependence or defect,
Made for itself; and happy in itself,
Perfect Contentment, Unity entire.

(lines 135-51)

And only here does he find a genuine human community. Man "truly is alone" only in the "vast Metropolis," where he is "doomed/ To hold a vacant commerce ... / With objects wanting life, repelling love," and where "neighbourhood serves rather to divide/ Than to unite." In this rural place, however, all is on a human scale, a multitude-in-unity in which individuality is preserved in a society which is a family writ large, and which finds itself thoroughly at home in its natural milieu.

Society is here

A true Community, a genuine frame
Of many into one incorporate....
One household, under God, for high and low,
One family, and one mansion ...

possessors undisturbed

Of this Recess ... their glorious Dwelling-place.

(lines 592-624)

The poet's spiritual home, however, remains ineluctably a paradise of this earth, for in the vale man differs "but little from the Man elsewhere" and exhibits the common qualities of "selfishness, and envy, and revenge ... / Flattery and doubledealing, strife and wrong" (lines 347-57). But, he asks, is there not a strain of words that shall be "the acknowledged voice of life," and so speak "of solid good/ And real evil" in a higher poetic harmony than that of the unalloyed pastoral fantasy-

More grateful, more harmonious than the breath,
The idle breath of softest pipe attuned
To pastoral fancies?

(lines 401-9)

For this poetry of real life he dismisses the poetry of wish-fulfillment, "All Arcadian dreams/ All golden fancies of the golden Age" engendered by man's "wish to part/ With all remembrance of a jarring world" (lines 625-32). Confident of "an internal brightness," he assumes "his office" as a mature artist and announces his manifesto: in this "peaceful Vale ... / A Voice shall speak, and what will be the Theme?" (lines 660-90, 751-3).

Home at Grasmere concludes with the answer to this question, in the passage Wordsworth later excerpted to serve as the Prospectus to the subject and argument of *The Recluse* and all its related poems. This statement in fact epitomizes, and proclaims as valid for other men, what the poet himself has learned from the long and arduous journey of his life that has terminated in Grasmere Vale. The subject, he tells us, will incorporate the narrative of that life itself, in the account of "the transitory Being" who had beheld the "Vision" which constituted his poetic credential, and which it was his unique mission to impart. This vision is of "the Mind of Man," through which he will undertake a poetic journey that must ascend higher than Milton's heaven and sink deeper than Milton's hell. Of this audacious poetic enterprise it will be the high argument that we can re-create the experienced world, and that this new world, despite the inescapable fact of evil and anguish—no less evident in the solitude of "fields and groves" than when they are "barricadoed ... / Within the walls of cities"—will provide a sufficient paradise to which we have immediate access. Here we return to Wordsworth's central figure whose complex genealogy, widespread currency, and personal significance I undertook, two chapters back, to explicate. Only let a man succeed in restoring his lost integrity, by consummating a marital union between his mind and a nature which, to the sensual in their sleep of death, has become a severed and alien reality, and he shall find "Paradise, and groves Elysian ... A simple produce of the common day."

3. ROMANTIC LOVE

One cannot leave the great Romantic subject of the divided and reunited mind without reference to *Prometheus Unbound*, and Shelley's masterpiece gives occasion for specifying the conditions which fostered this pervasive view of radical good and evil. The Romantic era was one of technical, political, and social revolutions and counter-revolutions—of industrialization, urbanization, and increasingly massive industrial slums; of the