

CHAPTER FOUR

ADVENTURES ON SALISBURY PLAIN

In A Night on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth had attempted to reconcile abstract political theory and Jacobin rhetoric with the immediacy and intensity of human experience. The poem's structure, a polemical framework surrounding and commenting on the dual narrative, had produced an unresolved tension between intention, form and content. Moreover, the poem's rhetorical framework had tended to dull the poignancy of the narrative of the old traveller's journey, and the female vagrant's tale.

The two narratives had intertwined, and concluded with the old traveller and the female vagrant finding deliverance from the suffering occasioned by the inhumanity of war and the injustices of legal and political institutions in a mutual, selfless, love. However, the conclusion, with its assertion that millennial change of society was to occur through dispassionate reason, seemed to be at variance with Wordsworth's championing, in the dual narrative, of compassion and charity, as the means of personal salvation. A Night on Salisbury Plain, then, concludes in some confusion with Wordsworth advocating seemingly distinct and incompatible means for bringing about the moral renewal of the individual and society. However, Wordsworth implicitly does attempt to identify Godwin's notion of benevolent action founded on reason with his own recognition of the redemptive power of compassion.

Recognizing the short-comings of the poem, Wordsworth proceeded, between late September and early November 1795, to extensively revise the poem. As a letter dated the 20 November, 1795 shows, the result of these alterations was the creation of a new poem:

Since I came to Racedown I have made alterations and additions so material as that it may be looked on almost as another work.¹

The extensive revisions to A Night on Salisbury Plain occupied Wordsworth from late 1795 to at least February 1799.² Surviving in manuscript form and under the new title of Adventures on Salisbury Plain, it remained unfinished and unpublished despite Wordsworth's intermittent attempts to prepare the poem for publication. Guilt and Sorrow, the only version of the Salisbury Plain poems to see publication, appeared in 1841, its relevance to the events in England of the seventeen-nineties lost in further alterations.

1 W. Wordsworth, The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth 1787 - 1805, ed. De Selincourt (Oxford, 1967), p.159.

2 See Wordsworth, Letters, 27 February, 1799, p.256. Though Wordsworth had shown the manuscript to Coleridge amongst others, The Female Vagrant was published in Lyrical Ballads, separate from the main body of Salisbury Plain.

Besides dissatisfaction with aesthetic imperfections, the political climate in England during 1794 and 1795 would almost certainly have contributed to Wordsworth's recasting of the poem. In May 1794, the leaders of the London Corresponding Society, Thomas Hardy, John Thelwall and Horne Tooke had been arraigned on charges of high treason. In a letter dated 23 May 1794, following soon after the arrests of the leading English radicals, Wordsworth refers to the reactionary measures introduced by the Pitt Government, as "doctrines which are now enforced by banishment, imprisonment, and pregnant with every species of misery"¹. Subsequently, in September 1794, the Jacobin novelist and playwright Thomas Holcroft² was arrested on the same charge, and Godwin narrowly avoided the same fate. Wordsworth's letters reveal his interest in the trials of the leading Jacobins. In a letter to William Matthews, dated 24 December 1794, Wordsworth rejoices at the acquittal of the radicals, "I rejoice with you on the acquittal of the prisoners, and on the same grounds"³. For Wordsworth, the cause of liberty and enlightenment had temporarily triumphed over the forces of repression and ignorance, though its public voice was now effectively silenced.

The repression and persecution of radicals and sympathizers with the French Revolution had been instigated by Pitt. A secret parliamentary committee appointed to examine the paper of the London Corresponding Society reported evidence of a plot, and on the strength of this report, Pitt had asked for a suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act. However, despite the acquittal of Hardy, Tooke, and Thelwall on the grounds of insufficient evidence, William Windham, Secretary of War, had declared that there certainly did exist in England "a numerous and active party infected to the bone with French principles and intent on the subversion of the British Constitution"⁴. Later, on October, 1795, the King was mobbed on his way to Parliament. Pitt's immediate response was to draft two bills, the "Two Acts", purportedly intended to protect the King against further outrages, but actually to make any criticism of the monarchical form of government a crime against the state.

While not completely suppressing Jacobin literature⁵, the pressure which

1 Wordsworth, op.cit., p.119.

2 See Hazlitt's account of Holcroft's trial and imprisonment in Memoirs of Thomas Holcroft, ed. William Hazlitt, The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed.P.P. Howe, Centenary Edition, Vol.III. pp.127-154.

3 Wordsworth, op.cit. p.136.

4 Lucyle Werkmeister, A Newspaper History of England 1792-3, Lincoln, (1976), p.420. See Betty T. Bennet, British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815, New York, 1976, for an anthology of poetry, Ballads, and song, dealing with, and directed at, current events in 1795. Poetry attacking the Pitt Government and its policies is generally anonymous.

the Pitt Government now exercised contributed directly to new, covert styles of writing, in which radical political thought was disguised or implied. Censorship and the threat of imprisonment, even death, led to the exploration of indirect, allegorical and symbolic modes of expressing radical political and moral philosophies.

In "Night the First" of Vala or the Four Zoas, Blake, through Tharmas, depicts the effects which the censorship exercised by the Pitt Government had on the poet's, or artist's, creative and critical impulse. The form of art which Tharmas represents is painting which chooses its subjects matter from the outward world. In Pitt's England, more specifically, Tharmas is the journalist or pamphleteer who utters boldly his honest alarm as the times grow worse and who is primarily concerned with immediate questions. As Erdman points out, "Tharmas is the commentator who must publish at once in some fashion or cease to exist"¹. However, Blake's urgent impulse to depict the age in which he was living was thwarted by censorship. Later, in Jerusalem, Blake expresses his recognition that in revolutionary times, antagonistic public opinion kills the free press and stifles poetic inspiration, "Luvah slew Tharmas, The Angel of the Temple"².

In the context of Night I of the Vala, Tharmas quarrels with his "emanation", Enion, who represents that aspect of nature which supplies his inspiration. In the England of Pitt, the offspring of visionary beauty which the union of Tharmas the artist, and his subject matter, Enion, had once produced are "Lost! Lost! Lost!"³, murdered by censorship. The anguish and frustrations of the poet, divorced from his subject matter, the England of the seventeenth-nineties, and denied the right to express himself by censorship and adverse public opinion, burst forth: "We are become a victim to the living, we hide in secret"⁴. The poet can hide his Utopian vision in silence, "I have hidden Jerusalem in silent contribution"⁵. Alternatively, labyrinthine allegories that conceal more than they reveal, allowed the artist and prophet to express his ideals: "I will build thee a labyrinth also"⁶. However, the complex of myth, allegory, and symbolism through which Blake contrived to convey yet conceal his vision of society and its Utopian potential, inevitably lead to solipsism and the artist's and prophets's inability to communicate his vision to the public: "Jerusalem ... lay secret in the soft recess of darkness and silence"⁷.

1 David Erdman, Blake: Prophet Against Empire (Princeton, 1954), p.299.
 2 W. Blake, The Complete Poems, ed. W.H. Stevenson (Longman, 1972), Jerusalem, l.63-5, p.758.
 3 ibid., Vala, or the Four Zoas, Night the First, l.17, p.294.
 4 ibid., l.18, p.294.
 5 ibid., l.19, p.294.
 6 ibid., l.20, p.295.
 7 ibid., l.21, p.295.

Blake's poetry of this period, like Wordsworth's, reveals a conflict between his desire to express his vision of an ideal state of existence, the knowledge that society is increasingly turning aside from the path towards Utopian redemption and liberation, and shows awareness of the restraints placed upon his prophetic voice by censorship. For Blake, censorship obstructed the process of intellectual enlightenment and liberation through which a Utopian state would come into existence.

The apparently increasing opposition to political reform, and the repressive measures of the Pitt Government, had also forced Southey to renounce Pantisocracy¹, the vision of a free society which he and Coleridge had hoped to realize in America. This was a turning point in Southey's poetic career. No longer expressing his revolutionary zeal through inflammatory poetry² and plays designed to incite the public to rebellion, he turned instead to history, myth, and epic through which he could indirectly voice his criticism of society. Increasingly his outlook was to change from radical Jacobinism to staunch conservatism. Likewise, Coleridge's ardour for reform was soon stifled by Pitt's censorship. The Two Acts put a stop to Coleridge's public lectures on religion and politics³ in Bristol in 1795. Though still decrying tyranny and prophesying revolution, Coleridge's poetry⁴ became increasingly abstract, visionary, and obfuscated by apocalyptic symbolism and allusions. Nevertheless, his major Jacobin poetry, Religious Musings, the Destiny of Nations, and Ode to the Departing Year, were composed in defiance of Pitt and the Two Acts.

- 1 See R. Southey, The New Letters of Robert Southey, ed. K. Curry, New York, 1965. See letters August 1794, pp.70-4, September, 1794, pp.75-80, October, 1794 pp.81-2, November, 1794, pp.85-6 for Southey's pantisocratic idealism. By November 1795, Southey had abandoned Pantisocracy, and had fallen out with Coleridge, letter, October 1795, p.101. See also Coleridge's denunciation of Southey's "Prudence", S.T. Coleridge, Letters, ed. E.L. Griggs, (Oxford, 1956) i.171, 13 November, 1795. See also J.R. MacGillivray in Studies in English by members of University College, Toronto, ed. M.W. Wallace (Toronto, 1931), 131-69.
- 2 In particular Joan of Arc, written originally in 1793, in collaboration with Coleridge, and prepared for the press during 1795. It combines misanthropic jacobinism with pantisocratic idealism. For a response to Southey's Joan of Arc, see Bennet, op.cit., p.198, "Lines written by Anna Seward, After Reading Southey's 'Joan of Arc'". The Fall of Robespierre, composed with Coleridge in 1794, a play, Wat Tyler, a play, composed in 1794, and The Botany Bay Eclogues, composed by Southey in 1794.
- 3 See S.T. Coleridge, Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion. ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, (Princeton, 1971) See, in particular, "Conciones ad Populum", pp.21-75, "Lectures on the Two Bills", pp.257-277, "A Moral and Political Lecture", pp.2-21.
- 4 In particular, Religious Musings, 1795, The Destiny of Nations, 1796, Coleridge's revised contributions to Joan of Arc, and Ode to the Departing Year, 1796. The Destiny of Nations was not published until 1817 in Syllable Leaves.

In his letter of 20 November, 1795, Wordsworth had stated the purpose of the revised version of Salisbury Plain: "Its object is partly to expose the vices of penal law and the calamities of war as they affect individuals"¹. In Adventures on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth was to absorb his condemnation of the law and the war with France into the plot and structural design of the poem. The plot reveals a major shift of focus, concentrating more on the tragedy of the sailor. In doing so he could furnish an implicit commentary on contemporary events. At the same time, by employing a realistic mode of description to depict the physical hardships and mental anguish of the victims of social and political injustice, Wordsworth was able to present an accurate picture of social injustice while retaining the formal pretence of fiction. Presenting the subject matter, the plight of the alienated and persecuted poor, in the form of a long narrative poem with the action set outside society, allowed Wordsworth ostensibly to detach the events of the poem from the identifiable, immediate present, while yet implicitly commenting on it.

Adventures on Salisbury Plain may be seen as a continuation and development of Wordsworth's earlier, descriptive, peripatetic poems, An Evening Walk, and Descriptive Sketches. Ostensibly, it describes a landscape, and the journeying, and meeting, of several people on it. The landscape of Salisbury Plain, and the ensuing narrative of the old sailor and the female vagrant, tend, on the surface, to confine the scope of the poem's concern. However, the occasional intrusion of the poet's voice into the narrative enables the reader to recognize the wider significance of events within the narrative. A tenuous, often implicit, link is established between events on Salisbury Plain and their distant cause, the oppressive institutions of government and law. The poem, then, functions on two levels, on the level of the accepted and established genre of landscape poetry, and on the level of social commentary. Through a subterfuge, of which the reader is occasionally made aware by the poet's intrusive voice, Wordsworth has the poem simultaneously develop on two levels, political reality and fiction. In effect, the realism with which Wordsworth described the social context, and the events of the poem, makes the dividing line between these two levels indistinct, allowing Wordsworth to present fiction as thinly disguised fact.

Adventures on Salisbury Plain commences with a detailed description of

1 Wordsworth, op.cit., p.159.

the sailor which immediately and implicitly sets the political and historical background of the poem in the immediate past. The old sailor's emaciated physical condition, his tattered coat, "stuck miserably o'er with patch and shred ... scarce showed the Soldier's faded red"¹, denote neglect and suffering resulting from poverty. The old man's physical appearance introduces one of the poem's principal themes, the destitution² forced on the individual by social injustice. The stark realism of the description of the old man is followed by an account of the events which have led to his present state, an account of "how he with the Soldier's life had striven/And Soldier's wrongs"³. The brief biographical sketch through which Wordsworth established the old man's identity reveals the old man's present suffering as the outcome of one nation's waging war on another and, by implication, as the consequent result of a society divided against itself:

A Sailor he, the sailor's evils shared,
 ... Home he return'd enflamed with long desire
 ... the ruffian press gang dire
 Hurried him far away to rouse the battle's fire.⁴

Already, in his brief summary of the old man's former life, Wordsworth is alerting the reader to the manner in which the law sanctions a nation's ambitions in war while denying the individual his rights.

Through the press gang, the instrument of an oppressive government, Wordsworth shows how the common man is denied his rights in time of war, and how the inherent value and dignity of human life are disregarded in the

1 W. Wordsworth, The Salisbury Plain Poems, ed. S. Gill, (New York, 1975) Adventures on Salisbury Plain, p.123, ll.8-9. All subsequent quotes are from this edition.

2 See, Bennet, op.cit., pp.122-3, "The Tender's Hold, or Sailor's Complaint", 1794, and, p.191-5, "Reason uttering a Soliloquy Over a Field of Battle", 1797, for similar, contemporary, examples of anti-war, anti-government, poetry.

3 Wordsworth, op.cit., ll.20-21.

4 *ibid.*, ll.76-81. c f. Southey, Poetical Works, Vol.2, p.81. "Botany Bay Eclogue III" ll.9-10.

"The Sailor has no place of safety in store;
 From the tempest at sea, to the press-gang on shore."
 and pp.79-9, "Botany Bay Eclogue II" which described in revealing detail the corrupt methods used by recruiting officers to trap their victims c.f. also, Bennet, op.cit., p.96, "Effects of War" and p.146, "Reflections on the Present War". See also Coleridge, ConSciones Ad Populum, Collected Works, Vol. I. p.71, on crimping and other tactics employed by recruiters.

light of the political¹ ambition of a small minority. The victimization of the old man by the press gang enables Wordsworth to link his principal themes of the abuses of law and the inhumanity of war, and reveal how they interact in undermining and overpowering man's natural rights and free-will. Similarly, in "London", Blake depicts "hapless Soldiers" whose "sigh Runs in blood down Palace walls"². Later, in Jerusalem, Blake throws light on the state of mind of the unwilling victims of the press gangs:

We were carried away in thousands from London and in tens
Of thousands from Westminster and many borne in ships clos'd up:
Chain'd hand and foot, compell'd to fight under the iron whips
Of our captains; fearing our officers more than the enemy.³

The subsequent years spent fighting, have served only to brutalize the sailor. Ominously, the narrator refers to him as "Death's minister"⁴. It is only his release, the promise of reward, and the hope of domestic peace so denied to him by war and the law, that temporarily restores his humanity. However, in the sequence of illusory expectation and its denial, which recurs throughout the poem, the old man is disappointed:

He urged his claim; (this bloody prize of victory); the slaves of office
spurn'd
The unfriended claimant; at their door he stood
In vain, ...⁵

Wordsworth restates the theme of social division that had earlier preoccupied him in The Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff. In Adventures on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth views this theme in the context of war, revealing how the politically powerful coerce the populace into furthering their ambition, only to defraud them of their due. By implication, the law acts in the interests of the powerful and rich alone allowing them to fully exploit the poor and

- 1 See Bennet, op.cit., p.108, "Effects of War", p.146, "Reflections on the Present War", p.191, "Reflections on the Field of Battle", for other Jacobin poetry expressing a similar point of view on the causes of the war.
- 2 Blake, op.cit., p.214, "London", ll.11-12.
- 3 Blake, op.cit., Jerusalem, l.65-8, p.468, c.f. Coleridge, Religious Musings, ll.293-5, "...o'ye to Glory's field, Forced or ensnored, who, as ye gasp in death, Bleed with new wounds beneath the vulture's beak!"
- 4 Wordsworth, op.cit., l.84.
- 5 *ibid.*, ll.190-5, c.f. Southey, Botany Bay Eclogues, op.cit. pp.84-5, particularly, p.85, ll.18-25.

the powerless. The law discriminates against the common man, with the result that the old man is powerless to press his claim.

This act of injustice, and the old man's consequent disappointment, disenchantment, and desperation, precipitate a chain of tragic events which culminate in his suffering, and eventually, in his death, as well as in the ensuing destruction of his family. Brutalized by a war in which he was forced against his will to fight, alienated from an unjust society, and, driven by the need to provide for his neglected family, he was:

In sight of his own house, in such a mood

That from his view his children might have run¹.

The returned sailor's confused state of mind is such that he commits an act which is sanctioned by war, yet transgresses law in time of peace:

He met a traveller, robb'd him, shed his blood.²

Through the cycle of events in which the sailor is now inescapably caught up, Wordsworth explores the tragic consequences of a legal system which perpetuates inequality, sanctioning the murderous ambition of the politically powerful while dealing unsympathetically with the common man and his harsh lot.³

The poems of war, law, social division, and injustice, which had dominated and developed through Wordsworth's earlier writings, tentatively in Descriptive Sketches, in The Letter to the Bishop of Llandoff, and in A Night on Salisbury Plain, receive a new treatment in Adventures on Salisbury Plain. Previously, Wordsworth had dealt with them from the viewpoint of external forces intruding into, and disrupting, the life of the individual. Now, in Adventures on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth views their effects on the individual from within

1 Wordsworth, op.cit., ll.95-6

2 *ibid.*, ll.97-8. c.f. Coleridge, Religious Musings, ll.275-8,

"O ye numberless,

Whom foul Oppression's ruffian gluttony

Drive from life's plenteous feat! O though poor Wretch

Who mersed in darkness and made wild by want,

Roamest for prey, yea thy unnatural hand

Dost lift to deeds of blood!"

3 c.f. T. Holcroft, Hugh Trevor, Oxford, 1973, vol. IV, ch. XIV, where Holcroft exposes the flaws in the law and legal procedures leading to the corruption and injustice. Written in 1794, Hugh Trevor argues for the extensive reform of social and political institutions.

the psyche of the sailor. These external forces had fortuitously combined to drive the sailor to an act which was unnatural to him. Subsequently, Wordsworth traces the old man's mental anguish as he attempts to escape from the inevitable, tragic, consequences of his act.

In Adventures on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth provides a cursory description of the old man's immediate reaction to his deed:

And when the miserable work was done
He fled, a vagrant since, the murderer's fate to shun.¹

In an earlier revision of A Night on Salisbury Plain, which reveals Wordsworth exploring new directions for developing the poem, he provides a fuller account of the old man's state of mind during and after the murder:

... phrenzy-driven he dipped his hand in blood
Yet till that hour he had been mild and good
And when the miserable deed was done
Such pangs were his as to relenting mood
Might melt the hardest - since has he run
For years from place to place nor known one.²

In this transitional stage of the poem, Wordsworth was exploring the psychology of guilt and sorrow. He had not yet fully combined his growing interest in the human mind with his social themes, showing how they were interrelated. Subsequently, in Adventures on Salisbury Plain, he adopts and develops not the Burkean psychology of his earlier poems, but takes the associationalist psychology of Hartley as a model for his study of the guilt and sorrow which social injustice causes to the individual. The combination of Hartleyan psychology with radical political tenets, first explored by Wordsworth in 1794, in revision which he made to An Evening Walk, underlies the portrait of the old sailor's state of mind.³

- 1 *ibid.*, 38v, p.115, c.f. Coleridge, Conciones Ad Populace, p.70, "if in the bitter cravings of Hunger the dark Tide of Passions should swell, and the poor wretch rush from despair into guilt, then the GOVERNMENT indeed assumes the right of Punishment though it had neglected the duty of Instruction, and hangs the victim for crimes, to which its own wide-wasting follies ... had supplied the cause and the temptation".
- 2 Cf. D. Hartley, Observations on Man, 1749. Arthur Beatty in his William Wordsworth, His Doctrine and Art In Their Historical Relations (Madison, 1922) suggests that Wordsworth first read Hartley in 1795, Ch. VI, pp. 97-128. Hartley's influence is certainly apparent in Adventures on Salisbury Plain. However, revisions to An Evening Walk, ll.65-85, 127-75, point to 1794, for Wordsworth's first exploration of Hartleian ideas.
- 3 See An Evening Walk, Wordsworth's Poetical Works, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1940), vol. I, p.13, ll.127ff. "See common forms prolong the endless chain/of joy and grief..."

In A Night on Salisbury Plain, the themes of memory, past happiness and present misery had dominated Wordsworth's description of the states of mind of the poem's two principal characters. These themes are reintroduced in Adventures on Salisbury Plain, but from an altered perspective. Whereas in the earlier poem some form of restoration takes place, in the later version, the soldier's crime irrevocably divides the past and present. Memory can only serve to intensify his guilt and sorrow at the irretrievable loss of his past domestic happiness.

The sight of a gibbet with "A human body that in irons swang" (1.115), precipitates a random association of ideas in the already guilt-ridden mind of the old man.

Nor only did (it) for him at once renew
 All he had feared from man, but rouzed a train
 Of the mind's phantoms, horrible as vain.¹

The gallows is not only a testimony to the barbarity of the legal code, but an ominous reminder to the old man of his inescapable destiny. At the same time, it reveals Wordsworth's deepening understanding of the psychology of guilt and persecution, and their relationship with rebellion against the moral order.

In May 1794, Godwin had published Caleb Williams, a novel exposing the social evils which were making political reform a necessity. Through it, Godwin was attempting to eradicate prejudice, and, in doing so, endeavouring to effect the moral reform, which, as he had stated earlier in Political Justice², must accompany the political. As Rudolf Storch³ has pointed out, Caleb Williams reveals the psychological link between private guilt and social policy. Seen in these terms, Caleb Williams becomes a study of how social injustice and inequality precipitate rebellion against the established order. The consequent loss of innocence, inherent in the act of revolt, brings with

1. ibid., 11.120-3, See Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth, A Biography, The Early Years, (Oxford, 1957) p.11 and p.256, and Enid Welsford, Salisbury Plain, (Oxford, 1966) p.6. When Wordsworth was six, he encountered a gallows. The memory haunted him, reappearing in Adventures on Salisbury Plain, and, eventually in the Prelude. It is one of Wordsworth's "spots of time". See Prelude, 1805, Bk 11, 11.278-327.
2. William Godwin, Political Justice, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Pelican, 1976), p.251, p.273.
3. Rudolf Storch, "Metaphors of Private Guilt and Social Rebellion in Godwin's Caleb Williams", E.L.H., 34, 1967, p.189.

it guilt and remorse, as well as society's persecution and revenge. In the "series of adventures of flight and pursuit"¹ which makes up the plot, Godwin treats the theme of justice and innocence from a relative point of view. The revised conclusion of 1795 attributes guilt more to Caleb the rebel than to Falkland, the embodiment of social order, effectively stating that innocence is impossible when individuals and societies are at war. Moreover, Godwin's increasing doubt about "things as they are" in 1795, and his growing pessimism about the fate of reform in England and the Revolution in France, are expressed through the tragic plot and conclusion of the novel, where pursuit and persecution end in flight and destruction.

In Adventures of Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth draws on Godwin's Caleb Williams and its association of the public and private realms of rebellion and guilt. In effect, Wordsworth's revisions to the earlier poem amount to a reconstruction of the plot of Salisbury Plain around "a series of adventures of flight and pursuit"², similar to those in Caleb Williams. The themes of persecution and guilt, and the loss of innocence through transgressing arbitrary and unjust laws³ find expression in a plot of similar, tragic, dimension.

Caleb's guilt, and his self-recrimination at having betrayed Falkland, his master, had transformed his view of life, and of England, into one dominated by anxiety, persecution, and imprisonment. Caleb's guilt and anguish had created in him a sense of imprisonment both from within and from without. In the last thirty pages of Book III the themes of rebellion and guilt receive their most concentrated treatment. The symptoms of delusion and persecution caused by guilt become unmistakable. The world becomes cold and hostile: "The greatest aggravation to my present lot was that I was cut off from the friendship of mankind"⁴. When he offers affection to others, he is repelled. However, it is not the world that is cold but himself. By cutting himself off from mankind, he brings isolation and alienation upon himself. Driven by his guilt to commit further crimes, Caleb is literally imprisoned, and

1 William Godwin, Fleetwood, (Oxford) Preface, "I bent myself to the conception of a series of adventures of flight and pursuit ...", Fleetwood appeared in 1805.

2 *ibid.*

3 c.f. Godwin, Caleb Williams, (Oxford, 1972) p.210, Caleb in prison offered Godwin a chance for a tirade against injustice: "This is society. This is the object, the distribution of justice, which is the end of human reason. For this sages have toiled, and midnight oil has been wasted. This!"

4 *ibid.*, p.357.

experiences a similar isolation: "Thus was I cut off forever from all that existence had to bestow - from all the high hopes I had so often conceived - from all the future excellence my soul so much delighted to imagine ..."¹ Through Caleb's experiences, Godwin links the private and public realms of guilt and rebellion. Caleb, in effect, was subjected to a double punishment, his conscience, and the corrupt justice of society. His persecution and punishment were disproportionate to his actual "crime": "My offence had merely been a mistaken thirst for knowledge"².

The journey of the old sailor over the desolate Salisbury Plain, which in the earlier poem had signalled the isolation and alienation of the poet, as well as the despair of the common man dispossessed of his rights, takes on a new significance in the revised poem. In the light of the old man's febrile imagination and his sense of guilt and persecution, Nature seems animated and hostile:

1 ibid., p.211.

2 ibid., p.153. Like the Solitary of Bks III and IV of Wordsworth's The Excursion, Joseph Fawcett, a contemporary and friend of Godwin had provided Wordsworth with a Source for the Solitary in the The Excursion. See "the Fenwicke note" of 1843 to the The Excursion, Wordsworth's Poetical Works, ed. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1940). Wordsworth fell under the influence of the rationalist and dissenter Fawcett, in 1793, during the course of Fawcett's lectures at the Old Jewry. Fawcett may have provided Godwin with ideas for Political Justice, particularly those on general benevolence, the liberating influence of truth and reason, and the instrumentality of reason in ending war. Wordsworth absorbed these ideas either directly from Fawcett's lectures or indirectly through Political Justice, and expressed them in A Night on Salisbury Plain. By 1795, Fawcett had published several poems dealing with the French Revolution and England's war with France. "Ode on the French Revolution", 1792, "War Elegy", and "On Visiting the Gardens of Versailles", in 1793, and The Art of War, 1795. Wordsworth's response to this poem is recorded in the Fenwicke Notes to the The Excursion. In The Art of War, Fawcett condemns war as an instrument of policy, removes war's illusory surface of heroism and idealism, and denounces the social and moral order which had elevated war to the status of an art. For Fawcett, war is "murder methodized to art", its reality dignified and disguised with the name of a profession, and falsely celebrated in art and song. Particularly relevant to Adventures on Salisbury Plain are Fawcett's identification of war with murder, the use of war by the rich to exploit the poor, and the instrumentality of reason in bringing peace and justice. The similarity between Wordsworth's ideas and those of Fawcett, as well as Wordsworth's allusions to, or borrowing of, some lines, suggest Wordsworth's knowledge of The Art of War.

The stones, as if to sweep him from the day,
Roll'd at his back along the living plain.¹

The isolation of the old man in a bleak landscape intensifies his feeling of rejection and exile from his fellow man, the inevitable result of his crime. Overwhelmed by the force of his uncontrollable conviction of guilt, the old man collapses: "His soul in such anguish had been toss'd"².

In Adventures on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth discards the limiting, outmoded conventions of Augustan poetry³ and turns towards Nature itself for metaphors denoting the old sailor's state of mind. Wordsworth changes his mode of seeing Nature. The turbulence of the old man's emotional state is not so much correlated with a separate, external, reality, but identified with it. His mental anguish is seen as a natural phenomenon, a storm interspersed with periods of obliviousness, "His mind was still as a deep evening stream"⁴. After his brief encounter with Stonehenge, a storm breaks out. While it is an event in the narrative, it also functions metaphorically to convey the return of an even deeper level of despair and isolation to the old man:

... through rain and blinding storm
Three hours he wilder'd on, no moon to stream
From gulf to parting clouds one friendly beam.⁵

1 Wordsworth, op.cit., ll.123-4. These two lines indicate another source for the poem, and for the change in plot, The New Annual Register for 1786, Part II, pp.27-8. This relates how Garves Matchan, a sailor, murdered Benjamin Jones, a drummer boy. Garvis' guilt preys upon his mind, until caught in a storm he imagines that the stones on the road are hurling themselves at him: "then the stones (one of which appeared with two eyes, like Matchan's), turned over towards Matchan all the way till they came near to an inn, where he imagined he saw his Saviour, on one hand, and the drummer boy, which he had murdered)". Matchan, terrified, immediately confessed to the murder, was jailed, tried, and hanged. The Annual Register has this to add about Matchan and his guilt: "From that fatal hour he had been a stranger to all enjoyment of life or peace of mind, the recollection thereof perpetually haunting his imagination and often rendering his life a burthen almost insupportable". (p.27) There are obvious parallels between the real life account of Garvis' crime and torment, and that of Wordsworth's old sailor. Gill., op.cit., p.310, believes that Wordsworth would almost certainly have been acquainted with the events of the murder either through hearsay or The Register. See also, The Prelude, (1805), XI, ll.278-327.

2 loc.cit.

3 In his earlier poems, An Evening Walk, and Descriptive Sketches, Wordsworth had drawn on the picturesque, clichéd representations of Nature of Neoclassical pastoral poetry to provide metaphors for emotional states.

4 ibid., 1.128.

5 ibid., ll.166-8.

The revisions to Salisbury Plain had emphasized the tragic separation of the old man from the community of men, from Nature, and from grace. Whereas in the earlier versions of the poem, the cause of the old man's isolation and unease had remained unidentified, it is now attributed to the crime of murder, and the transgression of natural law. Again, the image of the old man exposed to the violence of the storm continues the idea of persecution from without and from within. The old man is beset from within by his conscience, now directed against him in all its force. The storm reifies the conflict in the old man's mind.

The alternating violence and starkness of the mood and imagery indicate the extent of Wordsworth's own self-questioning. They reveal the sombreness and conflict resulting from Wordsworth's own uncertainty about rebellion against the established social order¹. For Wordsworth, the guilt which the old man experiences after his crime is representative of the collective guilt which the new society would inherit from the overthrow of the old order, and which would haunt and eventually divide it². Again, on another level, the guilt and sense of persecution which the old man suffers may represent Wordsworth's attempt to describe the collective guilt of the French, whose act of regicide had come as the culmination of a rebellion against the established, divinely sanctioned, social order³. The blood-guilt which they had brought upon themselves with the execution of Louis XVI was soon followed by their fear of its consequences. In effect, the laws of a divinely ordained world order which they had violated in an assertion of political idealism were now turned against them. England and Austria could now justify their war against France even though the French had believed that the injustice and inhumanity of monarchical government had driven them to such an extremity. The old man's plight, then, functions on at least three separate levels, all of which are ultimately connected, and have their origins in the political uncertainties surrounding the French Revolution. The old man's tale may be seen as a case study of the desperate lot of the common man confronted

1 c.f. The Prelude, X, ll. 227-274, 306-345, X, 848-878.

2 Godwin's Caleb Williams lends itself to an allegorical interpretation in which Caleb represents justified rebellion which can only establish itself with the complete overthrow of the old order, represented by Falkland. However, Caleb is ultimately unable to bring himself to destroy Falkland. Guilt ridden, Caleb sympathizes with him. Caleb Williams, p. 323.

3 Wordsworth, The Prelude, Bk X, ll. 331-374. See also Edmund Burke, Letters on a Regicide Peace, Burke's Works, Bohn's Standard Library, vol. 5. Written in 1796, Burke defends in these letters the sacred purpose of England's war against France. Burke had attacked the French from the outbreak of the Revolution, and by 1795, Wordsworth was also recognizing the chaotic reality of revolution.

with the inhumanity of an unjust society. At the same time, it also reveals Wordsworth's apprehensions about social change and political idealism, and expresses his doubts about the course of the French Revolution, first articulated in the Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff.

The poet is caught between alienation¹ and a feeling of powerlessness, and the possibility of taking a course of action which will result in the overthrow of an order established upon divine law. This unresolved conflict between extremes perhaps gives rise to the turbulent imagery which surrounds the old man's journey away from Stonehenge, a long-standing symbol of tyranny.

At the height of the old man's confusion and despair, Wordsworth introduces the female vagrant into the narrative.² In the revised version of Salisbury Plain, the female vagrant's tale³ serves to reinforce Wordsworth's earlier claim, in the old man's tale, that society is unjust and oppressive. Again, the central theme of the female vagrant's tale is the inhumanity of war and the injustice of law. The female vagrant's tale repeats, from the perspective of the woman, events similar to those which had formed the basis of the old man's tale. The theme of youthful innocence and domestic happiness destroyed by a corrupt society reverberates through the female vagrant's account of her misfortunes. The dual perspectives of the old sailor's tale, and that

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- 1 Wordsworth attempted to solve this dilemma in The Borders, begun in 1796. The themes of action, and inaction, murder and passive obedience to moral imperatives to dominate the play's plot, and its two central characters, Rivers and Mortimer. See Prelude, 1805, Bk X, II.136-140, where Wordsworth, in retrospect, implies that he had contemplated an act which would have changed the course of events in the revolutionary war. Later, Prelude, 1805, Bk II.888-904. Wordsworth abandons his revolutionary plans in despair. In his article "Wordsworth as Heartsworth", in The Evidence of the Imagination, ed. D.H. Raiman, (New York, 1978) David Erdman throws a further, though conjectural, light on this period in Wordsworth's life. See pp.12-34.
 - 2 At various stages in the revision of the poem, Wordsworth attempted to introduce, and substitute, a new tale in place of that of the female vagrant. See Wordsworth, Letters, p.256 (27 February 1799): "I am resolved to ... invent a new story for the woman". In any event, Wordsworth did not, and the poem was left incomplete. In his edition of the poem, Gill substitutes "The Female Vagrant" of the Lyrical Ballads. I have followed Gill in taking the female vagrant's tale as the central section of the poem, making Adventures on Salisbury Plain, a continuation and development of A Night on Salisbury Plain, rather than a new poem in its own right.
 - 3 During his revisions to Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth had also revised the Female Vagrant's Tale, heightening the fall from innocence to experience caused by the oppressive and unjust nature of society. The alterations from the early version in Salisbury Plain are more along aesthetic rather than polemical lines. Wordsworth had omitted the Female Vagrant's Tale from his manuscript. In his reconstruction of the poem, Gill had used the version in the Lyrical Ballads.

of the female vagrant, mirror and complement each other, uniting to form a powerful indictment of social and moral evils. However, in Wordsworth's restructuring of Adventures on Salisbury Plain, the significance of the Female Vagrant's Tale takes second place to that of the sailor.

Impoverished by the injustice and pitilessness of a society vitiated by mercantile pragmatism, the female vagrant finds herself forced to compromise the moral convictions of her youth:

... What afflicts my peace with keenest ruth,
Is, that I have my inner self abused,
Foregone the home delight of constant truth,
And clear and open soul, so prized in fearless youth.¹

In A Night on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth had presented the female vagrant as a figure relatively untainted by crime. In Adventures on Salisbury Plain, her tale, together with that of the old man, portray Wordsworth's recognition that injustice must ultimately corrupt its victim.

In A Night on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth had portrayed the old man and the female vagrant as characters resilient to oppression and its corrupting influence. Through compassion and the regenerating influence of Nature they were able to reenter society. However, in Adventures on Salisbury Plain, the weight of injustice is such that it overpowers both protagonists. Threatening their very existence and forcing them to go against their innate moral convictions, it drives them inexorably to crime. Both are powerless to resist the courses of action forced upon them by historical reality and the nature of society.

This theme also appears in other Jacobin poetry. In the fourth of the Botany Bay Eclogues, published in 1794, Southey presents the protagonist Frederick in a similar situation:

If I have sinn'd against mankind, on them
Be that past sin; they made me what I was.
... What if I had warr'd upon the world? the world
Had wrong'd me first: I had endured the ills
Of hard injustice; all this goodly earth
Was but to me one wide vast wilderness:
I had no share in Nature's patrimony:²

1 Wordsworth, op.cit., 11.546-9.

2 Southey, op.cit., p.88, Frederick continues:
"Blasted were all my morning hopes of youth,
Dark Disappointment followed on my ways,
Care was my bosom inmate, Penury
Gnawed at my heart."

Whereas Southey depicts Frederick in a state of extreme isolation and alienation, Wordsworth's two vagrants are able at least to find a temporary reprieve from suffering in mutual compassion:

... discourse ensued of various kind
Which by degrees a confidence of mind
And mutual interest fail'd not to create.
... (They were) now to natural sympathy resign'd ¹

In the context of the old man's preceding tale, the female vagrant's confessional narrative takes on a new function. It serves to arouse sympathy in the old man, drawing him out of the imprisoning grip of self-pity and memory. Sympathy enables the old man to escape the torment of his self-consuming sense of guilt and persecution. At the same time, narrating the tragic circumstances of her life provides the female vagrant with a cathartic release from the anguish of memory:

I will relate the rest, 'twill ease my burden's mind ².

Again, as in A Night on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth maintains his belief that altruism and compassion will release the individual from the imprisonment and torment of selfhood, with its attendant isolation and alienation. The two vagrants, though fugitives from the law, are capable of a detached benevolence which is not to be found in society with its "looks where common kindness had no part"³, its "service done with careless cruelty"⁴, and its "bounty ... now given, now utterly refused"⁵.

The female vagrant, however, does not despair entirely of man's humanity. "The rude earth's tenants"⁶, a group of wandering artisans whom she encounters, live in a Godwinian form of anarchism. Dispossessed, they live in perpetual liberty, in a state of "vagrant ease".⁷ The communal division of property ensures economic and political equality: "all belonged to all, and each was chief"⁸.

1 Wordsworth, op.cit., 11.256-9.

2 *ibid.*, 1.423.

3 *ibid.*, 1.492.

4 *ibid.*, 1.493.

5 *ibid.*, 1.544.

6 *ibid.*, 1.506.

7 *ibid.*, 1.507.

8 *ibid.*, 1.509.

These lines may be seen as Wordsworth's criticism of the pantisocratic ideal, and as his recognition that such Utopian ventures could never really survive on the harsh and corrupt political climate of the 1790's.

To all appearances, their Utopian existence is supported by Nature:
 ... the yellow sheaf
 In every vale for their delight was stowed
 For them, in Nature's meads, the milky udder flowed.¹

However, Wordsworth soon pierces the illusion of idyllic ease with the revelation that these vagrants subsist through theft:

But ill it suited me, in journey dark
 O'er moor and mountain, midnight theft to hatch.²

Wordsworth does not state his disapproval, but, through the female vagrant's unease, expresses his doubt. Wordsworth draws an implicit parallel between these vagrants at war with society,³ and the soldiers preying off the land, who had appeared earlier in the female vagrant's tale. Effectively, Wordsworth is stating his awareness that the Utopia proposed by proponents of Jacobinism is unattainable in a society which makes property the basis of its moral values. A society which seeks equality through the even distribution of property cannot coexist with the divisiveness and guarded self-interest of a social order founded upon property and pragmatism. As the female vagrant's subsequent narrative shows, these values destroy compassion, which otherwise would be instinctive:

... kindred of dead husband are ~~the~~^{at} best
 Small help, and, after marriage such as mine,
 With little kindness would to me incline.⁴

As in the earlier version, the female vagrant's tale concludes in anguish at her rejection by society, and with her loneliness and want vented in a poignant cry for love and direction in a now desolate and purposeless life:

And now crossing^{ing} this moor my steps I bend -
 Oh! tell me whither - for no earthly friend
 Have I.⁵

The growing bleakness in Wordsworth's outlook in the period between the first and second drafts of Salisbury Plain reveals itself again in the new direction which the narrative takes after the female vagrant's tale. The female vagrant's act of recounting her tragic past has had the cathartic effect of releasing her from the torment of grief-filled memories. It has brought about a liberation of the present from the terror of the past. The

1 *ibid.*, 1.512-3.

2 *ibid.*, 11.523-4.

3 c.f. Godwin, Caleb Williams, p.250. Caleb encounters a band of robbers "who are thieves without a license at open war with another set of men, who are thieves according to lay".

4 Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, 11.535-7.

5 *ibid.*, 11.553-5.

female vagrant's newly found serenity is signalled metaphorically by the ray-lit approach of dawn:

Meanwhile her sorrow failed not to relent,
And now with crimson fire kindled the firmament.¹

The subject in the second line is not stated, but in a deliberate ambiguity, may be carried over from the first line. The female vagrant's joy radiates and illumines everything around her.

Purged of fear and grief, her perception of the good in the world is renewed. In contrast to the "new delight and solace new"² which the female vagrant feels, the old man experiences only a resurgence of guilt and anguish:

... forth he came and eastward look'd: the sight
Into his heart a () anguish threw:
His wither'd cheek was ting'd with ashy line
He stood and trembled both with grief and fear ...³

Daylight exposes the old man once more to his inevitable destiny. In the earlier version of Salisbury Plain, dawn had brought with it moral renewal for both the old man and the female vagrant. However, in Adventures on Salisbury Plain, the old man's crime precludes him from such grace, and his memory binds him to the past:

... nothing could beguile
His thoughts, still cleaving to the murdered man.⁴

At the same time, the old sailor's guilt and sorrow imprison him in an introspective, self-centred, frame of mind. Consequently, he is not able to return the affection which the female vagrant now shows to him:

She with affectionate and homely art
His peace of mind endeavour'd to restore:
... the more he griev'd, she loved him still the more.⁵

The old man is caught in a dilemma. He wishes to find release from the torment of the memory of his crime by confessing to the female vagrant. However, his affection and pity for her, and his desire to retain her love, prevent him from unburdening his guilt. The old man's inability to overcome his self-absorption precludes the possibility of mutual compassion, which Wordsworth had earlier suggested as a means for overcoming the soul-destroying tendencies of social injustice. The female vagrant recognizes the extent of the sailor's grief and endeavours to discover the cause. She attempts to console him

1 ibid., ll.565-6.
2 ibid., 1.569
3 ibid., 1.570-4
4 ibid., 11.596-7.
5 ibid., 11.590-4.

with the thought of the ultimate release from wordly sorrow, death:

"Why you should grieve," she said, "a little while
And we shall meet in heaven".¹

Again, this serves only to remind the sailor of his inevitable fate. By implication, Wordsworth is also stating that without even the possibility of compassion and benevolence, life loses its purpose and value. Without love, death is the only remaining means for overcoming the torment and burden of social injustice.

The sailor and female vagrant continue their journey of expiation and exile over the plain: "To them the sight was pleasant but a scream/Thence bursting shrill did all remark prevent".² The peace and freedom from society which they had sought in self-exile on the plain is quickly interrupted. They encounter a domestic altercation, with a father assaulting his son. The sailor intervenes: the father unintentionally, yet prophetically, reminds the sailor of his fate: "The gallows would one day of him be glad".³ Tending to his son, the sailor is reminded of his own rash act. The sailor's obsessional disorder is now uncontrollable, each event now links itself with another, forming a web of association of such overpowering imaginative force that the sailor feels that his tragic destiny is inescapable. Wordsworth employs violent imagery to describe the new assault on the sailor's confused state of mind, which results from the sight of the boy's injuries:

... Through his brain
At once the griding iron passage found:⁴

The father's act of unnatural cruelty and the random association of past events which the sight of the fallen boy evokes, cause the sailor to erupt with the full force of his anger and grief:

... with a voice which inward trouble broke
In the full swelling throat, the Sailor them bespoke.⁵

The sailor presents a portrait of contemporary morals which, in its pessimism,

1 *ibid.*, 11.590-4. ,11.590-4.

2 *ibid.*, 11.608-9.

3 *ibid.*, l.637.

4 *ibid.*, 11.645-6. These two lines allude to, or are a borrowing from, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Bk.VI, 11.327-30.

5 *ibid.*, 11.656-7.

has affinities with Hobbes' portrait of man's unregenerate depravity:

Tis a bad world, and hard is the world's law:

Each prowls to strip his brother of his fleece ...¹

Recalling Wordsworth's bleak view of man's existence in society, first put forward in the introductory section of A Night on Salisbury Plain, these lines also recall episodes with which Wordsworth has surrounded the sailor's life. They depict the depravity to which the poor in reality were reduced by oppressive government. The sailor's portrait of things as they are takes the form of a series of paratactic statements, with no underlying cause and connection suggested. Images denoting man's predatory nature, earlier associated with military life, and later with man's existence in society, are now reiterated in presenting a portrait of man reduced by oppression to a bestial level of existence with his innate moral sensibility repressed by the very need to survive. Moreover, the sailor points to the arbitrary concurrence of effects which surround, and intrude into, the common man's existence. In effect, the sailor is defining the dilemma confronting man in society. Injustice drives the individual to prey on his fellow man. Necessity forces him to renounce his dignity as a being capable of moral choice. At the same time, a barbaric penal code, formulated solely to protect property, indiscriminately punishes the wrongdoer who has no means of redress.

As the sailor proceeds, his voice merges with that of the poet. His condemnation of an unjust society echoes Wordsworth's own changing, Jacobin, point of view. Moreover, his belief that love, "the bond of nature"², provides the only refuge from oppression and degradation reverberates with Wordsworth's faith in the sustaining power of compassion and detached benevolence. Again, echoing Wordsworth, the sailor points to the deracination, spiritual desolation and physical suffering which will ensue from a life deprived of the sustaining relationships nurtured within, and outside, the family:

Else can ye hope but with such num'rous foes

Your pains shall ever with your years increase.³

1 Wordsworth, op.cit. 11.658-9. This view is consistently put forward in Wat Tyler, p.27,33,37, Coleridge's Ode to the Departing Year, 11.135-48, Religious Musings, 11.276-286, Destiny of Nations, 11.235-250, 11.381:2, and Blake, in Europe: A Prophecy. c.f. also Bennet, op.cit., pp.140-42, "Ode on the Present Times", and pp.142-144, "January, 1795".

2 *ibid.*, 1.661.

3 *ibid.*, 11.663-4.

Experience and privation have made the sailor aware of the central, sustaining role which love within the family plays in bringing meaning and purpose to life. Denied the sense of solidarity inherent in domestic life, the sailor has fallen victim to the alienation and despair of a fragmented, solitary life. Consequently, he recognizes the need for domestic harmony, and urges the father to reconcile himself with his family.

Disclosing "these homely truths"¹ brings a cathartic release to the sailor: "A correspondent calm stole gently on his words"². Up to this point, the pattern of the narrative has consisted of an alternation between tranquillity newly found in Nature and unease originating from contact with the inhabitants of the plain. They encounter a hospitable cottager and his wife. However, the sailor then resolves to turn shortly towards the sea, and remains behind while the female vagrant begins her solitary journey onward over the plain. The parting brings sorrow to the female vagrant, revealing the extent of the bond of compassion and friendship which have grown between them. However, in Wordsworth's changing view of "things as they are", neither can hope to escape suffering.

The female vagrant discovers a wagon nearby in which a dying woman lies. The female vagrant immediately responds with instinctive sympathy, the "homefelt force of sympathy sincere"³. With increasing irony and the sense of imminent tragedy, the narrative continues as the dying woman recounts her past life. In a variant of the theme of the "war-widow", Wordsworth develops around her the tale of an abandoned widow. In lines reminiscent of Langhorne's Country Justice, Wordsworth sees her as a victim of social injustice:

The overseers placed me in the wain,
Thus to be carried back from stage to stage,
Unwilling that I should with them remain:⁴

It emerges that the widow and her children were the victims of indifferent parish authorities and had suffered unjustly for an act of murder committed near their cottage:

One was found by stroke of violence dead
And near my door the Stranger chanced to lie;
And soon suspicion drove us from our shed.⁵

1 *ibid.*, l.665.

2 *ibid.*, l.666.

3 *ibid.*, l.704. c.f. Coleridge, Destiny of Nations, ll. 163-215, where Joan reveals her solidarity with the dispossessed family.

4 *ibid.*, ll.735-7, c.f. Langhorne, Country Justice, ll. See also Wordsworth, The Prelude, (1805), Bk.VIII. 533-41.

5 *ibid.*, ll.752-4.

As she proceeds, she describes the villagers' lack of charity and the hostility which had eventually forced her to leave her children and search for her father.¹

Her tale echoes that of the female vagrant, and that of the sailor, reinforcing the theme of man's indifference and injustice to man, and reveals Wordsworth's preoccupation with the psychology of suffering. Despite the injustices which the wife has unjustly born for her husband's crime, she, nevertheless, forgives him, emphasizing his benevolent nature:

... but he was kind and good.

... He'd not have robb'd the raven of its food.²

Ironically the sailor has now joined the group and overheard the dying woman's tale. In a variant of tragic anagnorisis, Wordsworth portrays the sailor's reaction. Her revelation of the devastating consequences of her husband's act and his flight rekindle the sailor's remorse. By now, he has recognized his wife, and contrite, begs for her forgiveness. She dies before she can forgive him. However, she has recognized the sailor's voice, and his urgent plea for forgiveness:

A sudden joy surprised expiring thought.

And every moral pang dissolved away ...

... A look was on her lips which seem'd to say.

Comfort to thee my dying thoughts have sent.³

By revealing his presence to the dying woman, in an attempt to bring consolation to her, the sailor has sacrificed his own safety, and anonymity. However, the forgiveness of his wife does not lessen the sailor's despair and self-recrimination at being the cause of his wife's death. "Oft he groan'd aloud, 'Oh God that I were dead'."⁴

Up to this point, the plot has developed around a series of seemingly random encounters on the plain. However, the sailor's chance meeting with his dying wife reveals an underlying fatalism in the plot, a product of Wordsworth's necessitarian⁵ beliefs. The injustice and indifference of society which had driven the sailor to murder has set off a chain of tragic events. Throughout the narrative the sailor has tried to evade the consequences of this crime.

1 c.f. Bennet, op.cit., pp.204-5, "The Female Exile", pp.1008-110, "Effects of War".

2 Wordsworth, op.cit., ll.760-2.

3 ibid., ll.777-782.

4 loc.cit.

5 Wordsworth's belief in Hartleyan associationalism, as well as his awareness of similar mechanistic psychological and scientific theories proposed by Joseph Priestly and Erasmus Darwin, would have led him to this position as it also did for Coleridge.

However, the isolated life of a fugitive¹ only intensifies his guilt and fear. A series of encounters, culminating in the meeting with his dying wife, serves as a repeated reminder to the sailor of his crime. Unable to escape from the past and obsessed with guilt and grief, the sailor's final tragic act is one dictated by inner compulsion, rather than external force. Throughout the narrative, Wordsworth has portrayed events from the point of view of the sailor's guilt-ridden, subjective, association of otherwise unrelated occurrences. The approaching, tragic, conclusion of the poem, then, is the product of both external events and internal, psychological, forces combining to drive the sailor to atone for his act of murder. For the sailor, in an unjust society, the only freedom to be found is in death.

Up to this point in the narrative, the solitude of a man rejected by society has been the real punishment for the sailor's crime. Though physically free, his guilt, his self-exile from society and his fear of his fellow man has virtually transformed England into a prison.² At the same time, Wordsworth has presented the sailor as a Cain figure, perpetually wandering in an attempt to avoid the gaze of God and man.³ In effect, Wordsworth is revealing the psychological reality of liberty gained through rebellion and bloodshed. Wordsworth shows through the sailor that physical liberty is an illusion concealing the imprisoning grip of conscience, of responsibility for one's acts, the fear of retribution from others, and the anxiety of being deprived of freedom. In this light, the sailor decides on a final act of expiation. He gives himself up to the law and its harsh judgment:

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- 1 c.f. Joseph Fawcett, The Art of War, pp.227-237. Fawcett describes the guilt complexes arising from killing in war. Fawcett employs an associationalist psychology to describe the guilt and persecution mania. His analysis of guilt probably provided Wordsworth with a model for the behaviour of the sailor.
- 2 c.f. Godwin, Caleb Williams, p.357.
- 3 See Gill pp.208-9 for drafts of A.S.P., in which Wordsworth describes the old sailor as a traveller to whom "God has given much trouble and sorrow." The old sailor, like Cain, is driven on by God's wrath. c.f. also, Fawcett, op.cit., p.234 "when there's war/Nought hostile to him save himself, he fears;/flees unpursued; and unsuspected, reads in every eye discernment of his crime." In The Borderers, Mortimer is driven by remorse to seek expiation and peace of mind in exile. The implication in Wordsworth's study of guilt in this play is similarly bleak. Mortimer, the protagonist, can only ever find peace, and the justice he had upheld so vehemently, in death. The sailor, as solitary and innocent victim compelled by circumstances, anticipates Wordsworth's ultimate study of guilt ridden individuals in The Borderers.

Confirm'd of purpose, fearless and prepared,
 Not without pleasure, to the city strait
 He went and all which he had done declar'd.¹

Wordsworth concludes the stanza describing the sailor's surrender to the course of institutionalized law with a denunciation of its injustice:

Blest be for once the stroke which ends, tho' late,
 The pangs which from thy halls of terror came,
 Thou who of Justice bear'st the violated name.²

Wordsworth, in summary, is drawing the conclusion from his initial premise that it is the law itself which, in its injustice and bias, nurtures crime. The plot of the narrative, with Wordsworth's penetrating studies of remorse, grief and fear, have revealed the tragic consequences for the common man of the injustices committed and sanctioned by the law. In his belief that law corrupts and victimizes, Wordsworth reveals affinities with, and the influence of, Godwin. In his introductory outline of contemporary institutions, in Political Justice, Godwin sees the origin of crime in the outmoded and ossified institutions of a disintegrating, tyrannical government: "A numerous class of mankind are held down in a state of object penury, and are continually prompted by disappointment and distress to commit violence upon their more fortunate neighbours. The only mode which is employed to repress this violence, and to maintain the order and peace of society, is punishment. Whips, axes and gibbets, dungeons, chains and racks are the most approved and established methods of persuading men to obedience, and impressing upon their minds the lessons of reason"³. Wordsworth has developed Godwin's thesis, transforming political theory into the realistic, concrete, portrayal of the tragic plight of an individual in a divided and disintegrating political order. Moreover, Wordsworth adopts a Godwinian perspective on the means by which an unjust society deprives its victims of their human dignity, even in death. The themes of man's deliberate inhumanity and injustice to others coalesce in the final stanza. The sailor is: "hung high in iron case"⁴, as an example

1 Wordsworth, op.cit., ll.811-813. c.f. Fawcett, op.cit.,p.234.

"His life an heavy weight upon him lies
 He can no longer bear; with wither'd look,
 Parch'd by the fever of remorse, he comes
 A witness 'gainst himself; and refuge seeks
 In the dire executioner, from one
 More dire within; ..."

2 *ibid.*, ll.87-9. See Gill's introduction to the Cornell edition of Salisbury Plain (New York, 1975) p.11 for a discussion of Wordsworth's planned revisions to this section.

3 Godwin, Political Justice, p.87.

4 Wordsworth, op.cit.,l.820.

to deter others from murder. He is ultimately to serve the law in death which had been so unjust to him in life. Ironically his fate also serves as a reminder of the injustices perpetrated by society under the sanction of a barbaric law, the social contract in which the individual sacrifices his natural rights to society in return for justice.

In Adventures on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth has repeatedly asserted that the sailor's crime was the isolated act of an otherwise good man. However, the law had judged the sailor on his crime alone, meting out punishment arbitrarily according to precedent and not according to the circumstances surrounding his crime. In Book VII of Political Justice, entitled "Of Crimes and Punishment", Godwin had condemned the law for its tendency to pass judgement on the individual for his crime, without taking into consideration his subsequent and former life: "To punish him upon any hypothesis, for what is past and irrecoverable, and for the considerations of that only, must be ranked among the most pernicious exhibitions of an untutorized barbarism"¹.

Godwin had viewed the defects of the penal code, and of juridical procedure, as one aspect of a corrupt and tyrannical political order. Godwin's belief that the origins of, and solutions to, injustice, lay in the realms of politics

1 Godwin, Caleb Williams, p.635. See, The Province of Jurisprudence Determined, John Austin, lecture II, "A punishment, as a solitary fact, is an evil: the pain inflicted on the criminal being added to the mischief of the crime". In a subsequent chapter of "Political Justice of the Application of Punishment", Godwin again condemns the law for the disparity between its power and its shortcomings. Godwin points out the absurdity of the law's pretention to classify crimes and punishments when the circumstances and motives of any two crimes or criminals are unlike (p.650). The judgements of authority are flawed: "Who is it that in his sober reason will pretend to assign the motives that influence me in any article of my conduct, and upon them found a grave, perhaps a capital penalty against me?" (p.653). Moreover, Godwin follows Beccaria in his belief that the law and its practitioners could never possess the full knowledge of human psychology and of individual motives necessary to judge and punish: "What a vast train of actual and possible motives enter into the history of man, who has been incited to destory the life of another" (p.653). Godwin had also seen the tragic potential of the law to turn society against the innocent and the misundeerstood: "... every consideration tends to show that a man tried for a crime is a poor deserted individual with the whole force of the community conspiring his ruin" (p.653). For Godwin, the solution to the shortcomings of the law, and of legal procedure, lay not in "bringing every offense to be compared with a certain number of measures previously invented, and compelling it to agree with one of them" (p.652), not in the "sovereign contempt of equity and reason", but in having recourse "to injustices and barbarity in the penal code in "men's determining to govern themselves" (p.652) in the gradual abolition of the political order which would accompany the universal enlightenment and liberation of the human intellect.

and psychology, dominated Polital Justice and were dramatized in Caleb Williams. Wordsworth, too, attributes the injustices perpetrated by the legal code to their origins in a corrupt and despotic social order. The concluding stanzas to Adventures on Salisbury Plain, reveal Wordsworth's recognition of the need for the political liberation and intellectual enlightenment of the masses. After the sailor's execution and gibbeting¹, "dissolute men, unthinking and untaught"², cavort around the gallows unaware of the causes underlying the sailor's tragedy, and in their folly ignore the threat that the law and social injustice pose to their own lives. Godwin, too, had recognized the terrifying consequences of an arbitrary and omnipotent law: "Who does not know that there is not a man in England, however blameless a life he may lead, who is secure that he shall not end it at the gallows?"³ Wordsworth concludes by implying that without political and legal reform, and the intellectual awakening of the "idle thousands"⁴, the law will continue to claim its victims. The final lines of Adventures on Salisbury Plain reveal Wordsworth approaching a Nietzschean pessimism in his prophetic description of a cycle of eternal recurrence in which the law repeatedly corrupts and punishes victims of social and political injustice, victims of its own creation.

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- 1 The sources for this are Fawcett's Art of War, and in the Annual Register's account for Garvis Matchan. See Gill, op.cit., Appendix I.
 - 2 Wordsworth, op.cit., 1.821.
 - 3 Godwin, op.cit., pp.655-6. The trials of Horne Took, John Thelwall, Thomas Hardy, are immediate reminders of the truth of Godwin's statement.
 - 4 Wordsworth, op.cit., 1.823. Wordsworth is not specific as to the exact nature of these reforms.

CHAPTER FIVE

"THE ONE LIFE"THE BEGINNINGS OF WORDSWORTH'S REDEMPTIVE VISION OF MAN

The poems which Wordsworth had completed or left unfinished in 1796 and 1797 reveal a preoccupation with, and exploration of, earlier ideas. Wordsworth had developed from a poet absorbed by political and social events into one whose main concern was the human mind and the effect of suffering upon it. In effect, as the Salisbury Plain poems, and subsequently, "The Convict", and "The Borderers" show, Wordsworth incorporated his understanding of social affairs into the analysis of the human mind. Increasingly, Wordsworth focuses less on the distant political events and social conditions which shape a man's life. Instead they recede into the background, and though still present, receive less emphasis than Wordsworth's exploration of the states of mind which they produce. This transition is already apparent in A Night on Salisbury Plain, and Adventures on Salisbury Plain, where the poems become detectably less centred on society and focus more on individual suffering¹. Two subsequent poems, "The Convict", and "Incipient Madness" show the poet searching for a new means of dramatically expressing the state of mind to which a certain political and social milieu gives rise. The poems of this period also reveal the growing fragmentation of the poet's consciousness. On the one hand, Wordsworth reveals his despair at the persistence of oppression; on the other, there is a growing sense of the mystery of life. Wordsworth's attempts to grasp it end in incomplete and partial glimpses of the "one life".

In "The Convict", Wordsworth explores the double ordeal to which the law subjects its victims. The law condemns the convict not just to physical suffering but to a death in life. His fetters "link him to death".² Wordsworth's description of the "thick-ribbed walls that o'ershadow the gate"³, emphasizes

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- 1 c.f. Wordsworth, The Prelude 1805, ed. J. Wordsworth et.al., Bk X, ll.422-9:
 "Then was the truth received into my heart
 That under heaviest sorrow earth can bring,
 Grievs bitterest of ourselves or of our kind,
 If from the affliction somewhere do not grow
 Honour which could not else have been - a faith,
 An elevation, and a sanctity -
 If new strength be not given, or old restored,
 The blame is ours not Natures'."
- 2 William Wordsworth, The Lyrical Ballads, ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones, (London, 1981) pp.111-2, ll.16. Originally composed in 1796, it dramatizes Godwin's concern for the reformation of the penal laws.
- 3 *ibid.*, l.9.

the convict's separation from life and from the spiritually nurturing presence of Nature. Wordsworth deplores the inhumanity with which society punishes the transgressor by placing him in isolation from the renewing force of Nature and the warmth of human compassion; the convict is an "outcast of pity"¹ isolated like the old sailor of Adventures on Salisbury Plain.

While society exacts its punishment by inflicting physical discomfort², the convict's own conscience and remorse have also become a source of torment. The convict's self-recrimination feeds on his will to live. Developing a theme explored through the sailor of Adventures on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth presents a stark, realistic, portrait of the human psyche divided against itself:

His bones are consumed, and his life-blood is dried,
With wishes the past to undo ...³

For Wordsworth, the convict has atoned for his crime with the suffering and self-questioning brought about through his remorse. Condemning the unnecessary deprivations which society gratuitously inflicts on the criminal, Wordsworth states his belief that conscience alone is sufficient to ensure retribution. Following Godwin, and developing views which he had earlier put forward in the Salisbury Plain poems, Wordsworth states that the punishment dealt out by the law unjustly and unnecessarily deprives the individual of his human dignity.

In "The Convict", Wordsworth presents himself in the ministering role he had earlier developed around the female vagrant. Through a redemptive love, or compassion, he hopes to restore to the convict a sense of worth, allaying the dehumanizing tendencies of the law. Wordsworth, the persona, like the female vagrant, sees himself as

One whose first wish is the wish to be good,
Who comes as a brother thy sorrow to share ...⁴

For Wordsworth, compassion offers the possibility of moral renewal. In effect, the theme of regeneration is implicit in the poem's structure. "The Convict" opens with Wordsworth portraying himself in a country landscape:

The glory of evening was spread through the west;
On the slope of a mountain I stood,
While the joy that precedes the calm season of rest
Rang loud through the meadow and wood.⁵

1 *ibid.*, l.12.
2 *ibid.*, l. 35.
3 *ibid.*, ll. 21-2.
4 *ibid.*, ll.47-8.
5 *ibid.*, ll.1-4.

However, behind the exuberance and simplicity of the pastoral of the opening lines lies Wordsworth's political interpretation of Hartleyan psychology.

In his Observation of Man¹, Hartley had stated that the environment conditions mind and behaviour by a process of association. In revisions made to An Evening Walk in 1794, Wordsworth had already incorporated the associationism of Hartleyan psychology into a belief that Nature can ennoble man intellectually and morally. In lines later echoed in the Ruined Cottage² and The Prelude, Wordsworth had stated his belief that receptivity to the influences of Nature can enlighten man, through:

A heart that vibrates evermore, awake
To feeling for all forms that Life can take,
That wider still its sympathy extends
And sees not any line where being ends;
Sees sense, through Nature's rudest forms betrayed,
Tremble obscure in fountain rock and shade,
And while a secret power these forms endears
Their social accents never vainly hears.³

As Wordsworth develops what will become the conceptual foundation of his later poetry, he holds that Nature extends its benign influence into every aspect of man's existence:

The powers of Nature in each various mould,
Like the Sun their love surrounds
The various world to life's remotest bounds, ...⁴

The opening stanza of "The Convict", then, reveals the joy that issues from the harmony of man with Nature.

The second stanza introduces a contrasting section describing the convict's two-fold torment in prison. Again, Wordsworth draws on Hartleyan psychology in his bleak portrait of the suffering which the convict's environment brings

1 See Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, (Pelican, 1972) Ch.8. "David Hartley and Nature's Education", pp.133-50.

2 See The Ruined Cottage ed. J. Butler, Cornell, 1979, Ms.B. pp.46-8, 11.76-105, describing the Pedlar. See also The Prelude, 1805, Bk.XII, 11.223-248, and 11.370-9.

3 William Wordsworth, Poetical Works, vol.I. ed. E. De Selincourt (Oxford, 1940) p.10, An Evening Walk, revisions to 11.72-85.

4 *ibid.*, p.13, Wordsworth proceeds to state that Nature's enlightening influence is not inimical to domestic life, but enters into it

"Yet not extinguishes the warmer fire
Round which the close domestic train retire,
If but to them these forms an emblem yield,
Home their gay garden and the world their field ..."

upon him. The convict inhabits "the comfortless vault of disease".¹ Implicit in Wordsworth's realistic portrayal of the barbarity of imprisonment is Godwin's assertion that punishment and torture cannot rehabilitate the criminal. They can only deprive him of his humanity. Wordsworth, like Godwin, had believed that instead of exacting revenge on one individual for his crime, society would benefit from the criminal's rehabilitation and reintroduction into society.

The penultimate stanza marks the commencement of the poem's third section. Wordsworth draws together Godwinian and Hartleyan concepts, combining them with the theme of the renewing influences of compassion, a belief which he had explored earlier in the Salisbury Plain poems. Possibly influenced by Southey's Botany Bay Eclogues, Wordsworth concludes "The Convict" with a humanitarian solution to the horrors of criminal punishment:

My care, if the arm of the mighty were mine,
Would plant thee where yet thou might'st blossom again.²

In the Botany Bay Eclogues³, Southey had adopted a classical genre to express his criticisms of social and political injustice. Like Wordsworth, Southey had portrayed the law victimizing the innocent. However, while society had viewed transportation as punishment, Southey had seen in it the potential for the rehabilitation of the criminal. Transportation effectively removed the criminal from the sources of corruption and injustice. Though Southey had transposed the eclogue into an ironic commentary upon prevailing social conditions, he nevertheless asserts that though the harsh terrain of Botany Bay is not the pastoral idyll of Virgil, it furnishes the means for moral renewal through Nature. In the first Eclogue, Elinor, the protagonist, welcomes the possibility for atonement which the wilderness offers:

... Welcome, wilderness,
Nature's domain! for here, as yet unknown
The comforts and crimes of polished life,
Nature benignly gives to all enough,
Denies to all a superfluity.
... On these wild shores the saving hand of Grace
Will probe my secret soul, and cleanse its wounds,
And fit the faithful penitent for Heaven.⁴

1 Wordsworth, "The Convict", 1.32.

2 *ibid.*, 11.51-2.

3 Southey composed the Botany Bay Eclogues in 1794.

4 Robert Southey, Poetical Works, vol.2 (London, 1840) p.73.

Each of the four Eclogues presents its own perspective, which in turn complements or contrasts with the others. In Southey's criticism of society, crime and punishment, transportation is a means of restoring the criminal to life and virtue. It is preferable to imprisonment which can only bring misery and the deadening of the individual's moral sensibility. However, it is, in itself, immoral. It separates the individual from those aspects of communal life which bring fulfilment. Transportation is only one of the many means by which a corrupt and unjust society inflicts suffering on victims of its own making. In the third Eclogue, Samuel expresses discontent at his present condition as a convict in a penal colony:

When I think what I've suffer'd, and where
I am now,
I curse him who snared me away from the plough¹

For Southey, transportation is symptomatic of the need for urgent political and legal reform and for the liberation of the common man from the corrupting injustices of an oppressive society.

Likewise, in the final couplet of "The Convict", Wordsworth employs imagery drawn from Nature, denoting transplanting to convey his belief in the beneficial effects of removing the convict from the corrupting influences of a repressive society. At the same time, Wordsworth expresses his belief in the resilience and innate moral good of the human soul. The final image expresses Wordsworth's belief that moral regeneration is possible, due to the inherent goodness of man's soul. He would "plant"² the convict where he might "blossom again"³. In a fusion of Godwinian meliorism and Hartleyan psychology, he asserts that transplanting or transportation, rather than imprisonment, will bring renewal and fulfilment to the convict, and so benefit society.

"The Dungeon"⁴, a poem in which Coleridge had collated verses from his two plays Osorio⁵ and Remorse⁶ echoes Wordsworth's "The Convict". Composed a year later than "The Convict", "The Dungeon" repeats Wordsworth's Godwinian condemnations of imprisonment as a form of punishment, and advocates in its

1 Southey, op.cit., p.85.

2 Wordsworth, op.cit., 1.52.

3 *ibid.*, 1.52.

4 Coleridge composed "The Dungeon" in 1797. It was published in The Lyrical Ballads in 1798, together with Wordsworth's "The Convict".

5 Coleridge wrote Osorio in 1797, March. In "The Dungeon", he drew on Act V, I, 107ff.

6 Remorse, 1797. Act V L.121 ff, contributed to "The Dungeon". Osorio and Remorse are two versions of the same play.

place the restitution of the criminal to the healing powers of Nature. Implicit in the opening quatrain is a Godwinian mistrust of legal procedure:

This is the process of our love and wisdom,
To each poor brother who offends against us.
Most innocent, perhaps - and what if guilty?
Is this the only curse?¹

The second quatrain repeats Wordsworth's portrayal of the mental anguish which imprisonment inflicts upon the convict. However, Coleridge's treatment of the theme is distant and abstract, contrasting with Wordsworth, who had presented a sympathetic, concrete, portrayal of human suffering:

Each pore and natural outlet shrivell'd up
By Ignorance and parching Poverty,
His energies roll back upon his heart,
And stagnate and corrupt; ...²

Like Wordsworth, Coleridge sees only the detrimental effects of imprisonment. It has caused a destructive division within the human psyche. Enclosed, isolated, and deprived of the possibility of reaching out to the nurturing presence of Nature, the mind is drawn in upon itself, becoming "a jarring and a dissonant thing"³. The convict "lies /circuled with evil, till his very soul unmoulds its essence, hopelessly deform'd/By sights of ever more deformity!"⁴.

Coleridge had initially stated his doctrine of the "One Life" in Religious Musings. Subsequently, in the "Conversation Poems", Coleridge had explored further the interpenetration of the mind and Nature. In "The Dungeon", he develops these personalized, meditative accounts of revelation through the transcendent unity of mind and Nature, adapting them to a larger social context.

Again, Coleridge like Wordsworth draws on Hartleyan psychology in showing the morally uplifting and spiritually soothing effects of the "fair forms"⁶ of Nature.

1 S.T. Coleridge, Poetical Works, Oxford, 1912, "The Dungeon", p.185, 11.25

2 *ibid.*, 11.6-9.

3 *ibid.*, 11.26-7.

4 *ibid.*, 11.16-9.

5 See M.H. Abrams "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric", in From Sensibility to Romanticism ed. F.W. Hilles and Harold Bloom, New York, 1965, p.531.

6 Coleridge, *op.cit.*, 1.23. Wordsworth had arrived at this position in 1794 in revisions to An Evening Walk. Coleridge had been profoundly influenced by Hartley in 1795 and 1796, even naming his son after him. For Coleridge's account of Hartley's influence on him, see Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson, Everyman, 1982, pp.56-78.

With other ministrations thou, O Nature!
 Healest thy wandering and distemper'd child:
 Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,
 ... Till he relent, ... His angry spirit heal'd and harmony'd
 By the benignant touch of Love and Beauty.¹

"The Dungeon" complements and contrasts with "The Outcast", a poem which Coleridge had written in 1794 and published in 1796. Composed before his first meeting with Wordsworth, in September 1795, it reveals Coleridge independently exploring the themes of social injustice, crime and mental torment. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge's Jacobin enthusiasm had found expression in the poetry of social protest. Moreover, "The Outcast" has affinities with the Salisbury Plain poems in that both depict a corrupt and oppressive society with its pretences to morality and its desperate and tormented victims:

Pale Roamer through the night! though poor Forlorn!
 ... Betrayed, then cast ^{thee} forth to Want and Scorn!
 The world is pitiless ... And Vice alone will shelter
 Wretchedness.
 ... And force from Famine the caress of Love ...²

In A Night on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth had expressed his growing awareness of the transcendent relationship between the human mind and Nature. In Religious Musings, written in the following year, Coleridge had formulated his doctrine of the One Life. At the same time, both poets were becoming preoccupied with the devastating effects of social injustice on the human mind. Wordsworth had recognised the beneficial effects of mutual compassion in alleviating the misery caused by a corrupt and tyrannical society. Both poets were simultaneously reaching towards a solution for the alienation and deracination experienced by the common man dispossessed of his political rights and deprived of moral choice. Coleridge had described the torment and frustration of a society disintegrating into revolution in abstract terms, while Wordsworth had focused on the plight of individual victims within an unjust society. By 1796 both Wordsworth and Coleridge were bringing together these themes, previously explored separately in individual poems. In "The Convict" and "The Dungeon", both poets were stating the redemptive possibilities of the relationship between the human mind and Nature. They saw this interchange as a means of bringing about the moral renewal of the individual. In subsequent poems, and, ultimately, in the Prelude and the Ancient Mariner, Wordsworth and Coleridge would extend the significance of the revelational interchange

1 Coleridge, op.cit., 11.20-30.

2 Coleridge, Poetical Works, (Oxford, 1912) p.71 "The Outcast", 1. 1-10.

between the human mind and Nature to encompass the moral and spiritual regeneration of man. In "The Convict" and "The Dungeon", Wordsworth and Coleridge were beginning to explore the revolutionary social and political implications of Nature's revelation to man.

At the same time, while Wordsworth was exploring the possibilities of the spiritually enriching exchange between mind and Nature, he was also attempting to develop aspects of the Salisbury Plain poems. Two fragments entitled "XVIa and b"¹, dating from between late 1795² and late 1796, may represent Wordsworth's tentative attempt to replace the female vagrant's tale in Adventures on Salisbury Plain with a separate, though similar, account of poverty, deracination, and social injustice. "XVIa" is one of Wordsworth's first examples of blank verse. It narrates, from the point of view of the first person, the struggle of a lone woman against the fury of a storm. Wordsworth draws on the landscape surrounding Racedown to describe the desolation that engulfs the lone woman:

The road extended o'er a heath
 Weary and bleak: not cottager had there
 Won from the waste a rood of ground, ...³

Similar to the openings of the Salisbury Plain poems, the fragment portrays more intensely the isolation, desperation and helplessness of the woman as she confronts the vast and hostile forces of Nature:

My loose wet hair and tattered bonnet flapped
 With thought-perplexing noise, that seemed to make
 The universal darkness that ensued
 More dark and desolate.⁴

In "Fragment XVIIb", Wordsworth reverts to a debased Spenserian stanza. The first section of the fragment repeats "XVIa", though in the third person. However, this fragment goes on to develop social themes previously stated in the Salisbury Plain poems. From what takes place, it is clear that Wordsworth had considered the unfinished fragment as a continuation of his poetry of social protest. The woman traveller stumbles upon a cottage "a dwelling wild", drawn there by:

1 Gill, op.cit., p.288.

2 See Carol Landon on the dating of these two fragments from Wordsworth's Racedown period. Carol Landon "Wordsworth's Racedown Period: Some Uncertainties Resolved", Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LXVIII (1964), pp.100-09.

3 Wordsworth, op.cit., 11.20-3.

4 *ibid.*, 1.30.

a sound of singing ...

So plaintive sad and the cadence might agree

With one who sang from very grief of soul ...¹

Besides an earlier parallel with the Salisbury Plain poems in which the woman hears the clock toll out "from the minster tower"², there is also a parallel in situation. The traveller, possibly a vagrant, is generously welcomed into the cottage by an impoverished mother:

Strait to the door a ragged woman came

... With arms linked and huddling elbows press'd

... That showed a skin of sickly yellow hue.

'With travel spent', she cried, 'you needs must be'

If from the hearth arrived; come in and rest with me.³

The impoverished widow then proceeds to give an account of her plight. Her tale has many similarities to that of the female vagrant in the Salisbury Plain poems, and the widow of the Ruined Cottage:

How could I fear that I, whose winter nights

Once stole such merry festivals from sleep,

Should pine, in youth outliving youth's delights,

Here in the eye of hunger doomed to weep?⁴

The anonymous female traveller takes on the sympathetic attributes of the female vagrant, and the function in the narrative of the old sailor. The situation itself is a fusion of the details in Adventures on Salisbury Plain from the episodes where the sailor and the vagrant encounter the woman whose husband maltreats their child. In Adventures on Salisbury Plain, the sailor's sympathy had encouraged the female vagrant to continue her account.

Wordsworth now repeats the narrative strategy with the female traveller's sympathy drawing the mother on to tell her story: "So willing seemed her ear, she gan her tale repeat"⁵.

1 Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, ll.31-3. This situation and mood anticipate The Ruined Cottage, composed in the following year, 1797.

2 *ibid.*, l.26.

3 *ibid.*, ll.31-9

4 *ibid.*, ll.46-9, c.f. A Night on Salisbury Plain, ll.235-252, The Ruined Cottage, ll.172-184.

5 *ibid.*, l.81.

Like the female vagrant, the widow had lived as a child in harmony with Nature:

Our farm was sheltered like a little nest,
 No greener fields than ours could eye survey,
 Pleasant the fields without, and all within^{was} gay¹

Her marriage had brought fulfilment through child-bearing and a continued contentment with the bounty of Nature:

From homely labour and appearance plain
 Round the light heart such steady pleasure shone
 Thankful I lived, nor tongue pronounced me vain.²

The stoicism and rustic innocence of agrarian life were later to sustain the woman as they had previously strengthened the female vagrant in her ordeal. However, the tale comes abruptly to an end before the widow can relate the catastrophe which had deprived her of her husband³ and domestic happiness. Again, from what exists of the tale, Wordsworth's recognition of the vulnerability of the relationships within the family to external forces is made clear in the tale of domestic tragedy. That Wordsworth intended the tale as a fusion of social criticism and tragedy is revealed by the narrative's concentration upon the relationship between the impoverished mother and her ailing son:

... from a mat of straw a boy she roused
 Who seemed though weak in growth three winters old,
 And with a fruitless look of fondness gazed
 One his pale face; ...⁴

Wordsworth is attempting to evoke in his audience a sense of pity at the plight of the mother and her son, and, by implication, transform it into anger at social injustice. Though Wordsworth had explored this use of poetry as propaganda earlier, in the Salisbury Plain poems, it is still a dominant feature in his subsequent poetry. At the same time, this fragment anticipates The Ruined Cottage in its attempt not so much to attribute human suffering to social and political causes but in its endeavour to reconcile the hardship and torment of life with man's purpose in the larger moral order of Nature.

1 *ibid.*, 11.88-90

2 *ibid.*, 11.91-3

3 c.f. Bennet, *op.cit.*, pp.204-5, "The Female Exile", (1797), and "Effects of War" (1794) pp.108-9.

4 Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, 11.59-62.

Two more fragments dating from the later half of 1796 reveal Wordsworth still exploring aspects of the vagrant's life of deracination and alienation. "Incipient Madness"¹ and "Argument for Suicide" deal with the anguish and despair of life deprived of hope. The pessimistic vision of life which informs both poems is at once a continuation of the isolation, remorse and mental conflict experienced by the sailor of the Salisbury Plain poems, and an anticipation of Wordsworth's study of the nihilism and moral dislocation of revolutionary idealism in The Borderers.

"Incipient Madness" is composed of a series of unrelated incidents given a tentative unity by the dramatic speaking voice of the poem. In the fragment, Wordsworth attempts to develop the character of the speaker through the subtle and ironic portrayal of distinctive psychological traits. The mood of the poem is retrospective, and its setting recalls the gothic atmosphere of A Night on Salisbury Plain. The narrator's estrangement from life is conveyed through his desperate attempt to find meaning in a series of isolated, unconnected events, which his mind attempts to link together. The first of these incidents takes place after the narrator crosses a "dreary moor", which also seems to be a correlative for the narrator's state of mind. He enters an abandoned hut:

... within the ruin I beheld
 At a small distance, on the dusky ground
 A broken pane which glittered in the moon
 And seemed akin to life.²

To the speaker's deranged mind, the shattered glass becomes associated, and identified with, his own fragmented life. Wordsworth takes Hartleyan associationism and uses it to explore a state of mind verging on schizophrenic collapse³.

In the context of Wordsworth's earlier and contemporary poetry of social protest, this fragment reveals the psychological consequences of a divided and fragmenting society. As in earlier poems, Wordsworth is showing that

1 Wordsworth, Poetical Works, Vol., ed. E. De Selincourt (Oxford, 1940), pp.3145. For the dating of these fragments, see, M.L. Reed, Wordsworth, The Chronology of the Early Years, Cambridge, 1967, pp.344-5, Appendix XVI.

2 *ibid.*, p.314, 11.4-7

3 See R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, (Penguin 1981), p.69. "The Unembodied Self", "The body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than the core of the individual's own being".

a society which destroys its own nucleus, the family¹, through war, unjust laws, and the substitution of mercantile morality for traditional agrarian values, will deprive the individual of his identity and dignity. "Incipient Madness" reveals the loss of identity, and as a consequence, the displaced sense of self which result when the individual is cut off from society. Deprived of the traditional means of defining his sense of identity and moral values, and without the fulfilment which comes through human relationships, the speaker feels depleted of his humanity. He identifies himself with an object, "a broken pane."

Wordsworth continues his analysis of the persona's deranged psychological state. ~~Like~~ ^{As with} the sailor of Adventures on Salisbury Plain, intensity of suffering brings with it an intermittent peace, and an occasional brief insight into life. In "Incipient Madness", overwhelming grief and the desperate struggle for meaning and identity combine with the memory of the sight of the broken glass to bring to the narrator a brief glimpse into his own mind:

... There is a mood
 A settled temper of the heart, when grief,
 Become an instinct, fastening on all things
 That promise food, doth like a sucking babe
 Create it where it is not.²

The moonlight reflected upon the broken pane gives the narrator a momentary insight into his grief and the mental processes creating his suffering. However, Wordsworth employs irony to separate the meaning which the persona attributes to his experience and that which the audience is to see in it. For the narrator, the fragment of glass reflecting the moon is a symbol of the mind irradiating everything which surrounds it with grief.³ Conversely, in the context⁴ of the rest of the poem, Wordsworth sees the fragment of glass reflecting the light of the moon as a symbol of the mind illuminated by Nature⁵. The ironic distance between the distorted and partial perception of the narrator and the implied wholeness of the poet's vision acts as a corrective and gives rise to a dual interpretation of events within the poem. Whereas the persona sees reality in the single dimension of his consuming grief, Wordsworth presents the possibility that the same incidents may also be seen from a more enlightened point of view.

1 See Bennet, op.cit., "Effects of War", pp.108-9.

2 Wordsworth, op.cit., 11.7-11.

3 See also "The Ancient Mariner", where moonlight rather than sunlight is the harbinger of spiritual illumination.

4 See Wordsworth, op.cit., 11.35-8.

5 See Coleridge, "The Eolian Harp", and Wordsworth, The Prelude 1805, Bk XII, 11.41-116, Wordsworth's ascent of Mount Snowden in moonlight, and his subsequent revelation.

Later, in lines that anticipate The Ruined Cottage¹, the persona describes the tranquillity and release from torment which he experiences amidst Nature. Solitude, and a prolonged exile from society, make the narrator more receptive to Nature, and deepen his perception of it.

Three seasons did a blackbird build his nest
 And then he disappear'd. On the green top
 Of that tall ash a linnet perch'd himself
 ... Two summers and then vanish'd.²

The narrator, and, by implication Wordsworth through him, is beginning to express his recognition that Nature only appears transient and inimical to life when perceived through a consciousness which is solely absorbed with the self. The narrator's self-consuming grief has distorted and limited his perception of reality. Increasingly, he becomes aware that his life is not separated from the forces of Nature, but a part of it. His sense of transience gives way to an intimation of transcendence. This redefining of the sense of identity in terms of a universal harmony brings with it a release from the imprisoning bond of selfhood, and a jubilant reciprocation with Nature:

... I alone
 Remained: the winds of heaven remained: with them
 My heart claimed fellowship and with the beams
 of dawn and of the setting sun that seemed
 To live and linger on the mouldering walls.³

Wordsworth shares Coleridge's belief that a moral world's cohesion is lost and evil created when men lapse into a self-centred perception of reality.⁵ This shatters the whole into a chaos of disinherited, solitary, sensual and mutually alienated selves. Wordsworth had seen the fragment of a broken pane as a symbol of individual and universal alienation. Similarly, Coleridge, in the abstract, theological diction of Religious Musings had stated that:

... we become
 An Anarchy of Spirits! Toy-bewitched,
 Made blind by lusts, disherited by soul,
 No common centre Man, no common sire
 knoweth! A sordid solitary thing,
 Mid countless brethren with a lonely heart
 Through courts and cities and the smooth savage roams
 Feeling himself, his own low self the whole.⁴

1 Wordsworth, The Ruined Cottage, Ms.D., 11.494-538.

2 *ibid.*, 11.30-4.

3 *ibid.*, 11.34-8.

4 See Coleridge's rejection of Godwinism and growing disenchantment with revolution in The Watchman No.V. April 2, 1796. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge was turning from revolution to spiritualism.

5 Coleridge, Poetical Works, vol.1, ed. E.H. Coleridge (Oxford 1912) "Religious Musings", 11.143-52.

However, in the act of all-comprehensive sympathy, man "all self-annihilated", shall reintegrate the alienated parts and effect a millennial redemption in the universal harmony of the One Life¹:

When (man) by sacred sympathy might make
 The whole one Self! Self, that no alien knows! ...
 Self, spreading still! Oblivious of its own,
 Yet all of all possessing! This is Faith!
 This is the Messiah's destined victory!²

In 1794, Coleridge had composed Religious Musings, an outline of human history in which mankind's highest good had been "to know ourselves/Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole."³ In order to give public voice to his political, religious and philosophical beliefs, Coleridge had adopted a visionary and oracular persona in accordance, as he was later to state in the Dedication to his "Ode to the Departing Year"⁴, with the practice of the ancients when "the Bard and the Prophet were one and the same character"⁵. Attempting to endow his subjects with the appropriate evaluation, drama, and passion, Coleridge had compounded Biblical prophecy, Milton's hieratic stance, and the formal, intoned rhetoric of Gray and Collins.

In the following year, 1795, Coleridge had composed "The Eolian Harp", the first of the conversation poems. In the conversation poems, Coleridge was developing a form which combined the dramatic immediacy and subjectivity of the first person with the sequential yet circular structure of religious meditation. The conversation poem, or extended lyric, provided Coleridge with a form through which he could express his experience of the interaction of the human mind with Nature. Moreover, it was to become the vehicle through which Coleridge could not only define the "One Life" but could also, at the same time, evoke the moods and states of mind with which the doctrine of the "One Life" was associated. In "The Eolian Harp". Coleridge described the joy which "Peace and this Cot, and thee, heart-honoured Maid"⁶ bring to him. In the context of the rest of the poem, these become symbols, physical embodiments, of a transcendent unity of being. Coleridge employs the analogy of "that simplest Lute ... by the desultory breeze caress'd"⁷ to describe

1 See Coleridge, Religious Musings, 11.127-131.

2 *ibid.*, 11. 153-8.

3 *ibid.*, 11. 127-9.

4 "Ode to the Departing Year", 1796.

5 Coleridge, *op.cit.*, p.160.

6 Coleridge, Poetical Works, Oxford, 1912, p.100, 11.64.

7 *ibid.*, 1. 12.

the interchange between Nature, the mind, and the senses. The receptive mind, together with Nature, resonate with the spirit of God, creating a universal harmony in the reconciliation of opposites:

O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light is sound, a sound-like power in light
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere.¹

In the second section of "Incipient Madness"², Wordsworth had depicted the persona's rapture as he recognizes the unity of his life with the forces of Nature. Like Coleridge³, Wordsworth was experimenting with the fluidity of blank verse and the dramatic immediacy, and subjectivity, of first person narrative. "Incipient Madness" may be seen as Wordsworth's exploratory attempt to develop a vehicle through which he could represent the states of mind which accompany the individual's transition from alienation from Nature and society to an acceptance of, and merging with, the "One Life". However, despite sharing several features with the conversation poems of Coleridge, particularly the unaffected diction and rhythms and everyday speech, and the focusing upon common objects, "Incipient Madness" is also an expression of Wordsworth's dissatisfaction with society. Wordsworth draws on the experience of victims of social injustice, beggars, vagrants, the impoverished. "Incipient Madness", then, differs from Coleridge's conversation poems in its preoccupation less with the poet's own experience than with aspects of the lives of the lower classes and the dispossessed which he observes around him⁴. He draws attention to the suffering of the poor and lonely, while also seeking a solution to it. Coleridge's doctrine of the One Life had furnished Wordsworth

- 1 *ibid.*, 11. 26-9, See also Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. Watson, pp.173-4.
- 2 "Incipient Madness", due to its fragmentary state does not have a recognizably stanzaic form. I have termed the three divisions within the poem "sections".
- 3 See Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson, Everyman, 1982, Ch.IV, pp.48-9. Coleridge comments on the impression which A Night on Salisbury Plain had made upon him. In retrospect his comment also applies to Wordsworth's subsequent poetry: "It was the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere and with it the depth and height of the ideal world, around forms, incidents and situations of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dewdrops."
- 4 By 1797, Wordsworth had moved to Alfoxden, and would have been drawing on the lives of the poor cottagers and vagrants living in the area. See Moorman, Wordsworth: The Early Years, Oxford, 1957, pp.325-7.

with an alternative to political change¹. The repressive measures taken by the Pitt Government, and the destructive chaos of the French Revolution had by now precluded the possibility of individual salvation through political reform, whether gradual or violent. Instead, the individual could now find fulfilment and release from misery through the redemptive interchange between mind and Nature. However, as "Incipient Madness", and Coleridge's Conversation Poems make clear, this can only take place with the radical refocusing of consciousness from the Self to Nature².

The third section of "Incipient Madness" contrasts with the second and returns to the exploration of derangement, alienation, and isolation of the first section. The narrator encounters a woman whose "rebellious heart to its own will/Fashions the laws of Nature"³. Enveloped in her own self-hood and unreceptive to the liberating influence of Nature, she perceives reality in terms of her own suffering. Cut off from the vitality of Nature, "By misery and rumination deep"⁴ she is "tied to dead things"⁵. Her misery dominates her to such an extent that she is only conscious of each new incident that afflicts her:

... by strong access
Of momentary pangs driven to that state
In which all past experiences melts away ..."⁶

Ironically, the narrator who described his encounter with her is also subject to the same self-centered and unbalanced perception of reality. He interprets the passing of a baker's horse as a symbol of a fragmented reality in which events have little coherence:

... I have seen the Baker's horse
As he had been accustomed at your door
Stop with the loaded wain, ... and you were left as if
You were not born to live ...⁷

- 1 See Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1805, Bk X, 11.904-940, for Wordsworth's retrospective assessment of the influence which Coleridge first exerted on his views on the previously divided realms of policy and Nature.
- 2 Geoffery Hartman terms this process "antiselfconsciousness", in his article "Romanticism and Antiselfconsciousness", *The Central Review*, vol.6, 1962, pp.553-65. c.f. also the conclusion to "France an Ode".
- 3 Wordsworth, op.cit. 11.64-5.
- 4 *ibid.*, 1.54.
- 5 *ibid.*, 1.55.
- 6 *ibid.*, 11.61-3.
- 7 *ibid.*, 11.39-42.

In the self-absorbed extremity of alienation, the narrator views himself as the centre of a hostile world¹. Each unrelated event strengthens this delusion. The woman also shares his deranged belief: "That waggon does not care for us"². The narrator's description of the woman's psychotic state also applies, ironically, to himself:

The words ... bespoke a mind
Which being long neglected, and denied
The common food of hope, was now become
Sick and extravagant ...²³

Reminiscent of the plight of the sailor and female vagrant of the Salisbury Plain poems, this passage reiterates the narrator's own grief and despair in the first section, and reasserts Wordsworth's protest against social conditions which deprive man of his dignity and the promise of life.

In "Argument for Suicide"⁴, another fragment dating from slightly later than "Incipient Madness", Wordsworth employs satire and rhetoric to condemn the callousness with which society discards human life. Central to the "argument" is the discrepancy between the power of social and political institutions and their inability to recognize their duty to, and the rights of, the common man. The halting blank verse of the opening lines provides a vehicle for the rage and sarcasm of the poet as he castigates the double standards permitted to society's institutions by unjust laws:

Send this man to the mine, this to the battle,
Famish an aged beggar at your gates,
And let him die by inches - but for worlds
Lift not your hand against him ...⁵

Again, Wordsworth sees the inequalities within society contributing to the victimization of the helpless, the dispossessed, and the impoverished. Wordsworth reiterates a theme which has become the basis of his poetry of social protest. As in the Salisbury Plain poems and subsequent fragments, society is both directly responsible for the individual's suffering, and indirectly, through its neglect and its denial of the dignity and the rights of the common man.

1 See R.D. Laing, *op.cit.*, p.129 "True and False Guilt".

2 Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, 11.56.

3 *ibid.*, 11.57-61.

4 Wordsworth, Poetical Works, vol. 1, ed. E. De Selincourt, p.316.

5 *ibid.*, 11.1-4.

Wordsworth ironically presents a philosophic argument based on negation to convey his anger at the hopelessness and misery which social injustice causes. Misery can be escaped neither through death nor life. On the one hand, life provides access to means by which man may take his own life and so avoid the torment to which society and existence subject him. Alternatively, death raises the possibility of damnation. Confronted with a dilemma reminiscent of that facing Shakespeare's Hamlet, the poet's anger at society and his sympathy for its victims lead him to lament "alas /Has Misery then no friend?"¹ To all appearances, the suffering caused by injustice has no solution. However, in the concluding lines, Wordsworth draws together the preceding steps of the argument, from the opening statement of disenchantment with a society which condemns its members to death through neglect and indifference, to the balancing of the claims which life and death have to release man from his misery. Wordsworth suddenly reverses the ironic negativity of the argument, making what had previously seem repugnant, attractive:

... till we have learned

To prize (Life) less, we ne'er shall learn to prize

The things worth living for.²

The final paradox which Wordsworth presents suggests the radical refocusing of consciousness which must occur if man is to enter into the "One Life".

In the context of Wordsworth's earlier poems depicting the plight of the victims of society, the individual must avoid self-pity, the psychological trauma which results from absorption with one's suffering, and become instead, receptive to, and unified with, the forces of Nature. This is as much a result of Wordsworth's despair and introspection as a depiction of social man. Though "Argument for Suicide" is an explicit example and continuation of Wordsworth's poetry of social protest, it also reveals Wordsworth's growing belief that victims of social injustice can find release from suffering beyond society in Nature. This is a concept that had had its origins in and developed from the Salisbury Plain poems, and was soon to inform the Lyrical Ballads. "Incipient Madness", and "Argument for Suicide", then, may be seen as occupying the intermediate position between Wordsworth's earlier poetry of social protest, and later extended narratives, and as leading up to the Lyrical Ballads.

Moreover, the paradoxical position which Wordsworth had adopted in the conclusion of "Argument for Suicide" was soon to form the nucleus of a series of poems,

1 ibid., 1.9.

2 ibid., 11.13-15 c.f. The Prelude 1805, Bk XIII, 11.134-143. Bk XII, 11.69-110, and The Prospectus to the Recluse or The Preface to the Excursion.

beginning with "The Old Man Travelling".

"The Old Man Travelling", composed during 1795, and its sequel "The Old Cumberland Beggar" reveal Wordsworth attempting to reconcile two emerging tendencies in his poetry - overt social criticism and the redemptive vision of the "One Life". Both poems were inspired by Wordsworth's distress at the introduction of harsh poor laws, and by Wordsworth's deeply felt compassion for the vagrant poor. However, as in Salisbury Plain, there is a recognition of a mysterious redemptive attitude of acceptance which allows the individual to surmount suffering. The overt social criticism which had informed Salisbury Plain becomes implicit in Wordsworth's depiction of solitaries and outcasts isolated from their society. They are object lessons on the need for compassion and benevolence while also conveying Wordsworth's increasing perception of the transcendent acceptance of Nature and suffering as a central element in human existence. Effectively, while both poems condemn the institutions responsible for suffering, they also convey a redemptive vision of acquiescence to the greater forces of Nature underlying existence. In these poems, Wordsworth attempts to reconcile human suffering with his vision of the "One Life" and how it expresses itself in the life of the individual.

In "Old Man Travelling", Wordsworth attempts to portray the "wise passiveness" of a solitary outcast from a society which has effectively condemned his son to death in war at sea:

Sir! I am going many miles to take
A last leave of my son, a mariner,
Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
And there is dying in an hospital."¹

Despite the extent of the old man's loss, "Long patience that has such wild compassion given"² results in acquiescence Nature, and a vision of the One Life, has brought tranquillity to the old man who in his turn becomes a lesson in resignation and transcendence to those around him:

... He is by nature led
To peace so perfect, that the young behold
With envy, what the old man hardly feels.³

1 William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads, ed. R.L. Brett (Methuen, New York, 1963) p.197, Ll.17-20.

2 Wordsworth, op.cit., 1-10.

3 *ibid.*, 11.12-4.

In effect, Wordsworth's description of the old man tends to reinforce the sense of separation from human society and grace bestowed on those who have gained, and existed in, harmony with Nature. Self-centredness and a sense of individuality have vanished to such an extent that the old man has become the embodiment of Nature and of a wisdom gained through suffering:

A man who does not move with pain, but moves
 With thought - He is insensibly subdued
 To settled quiet ...¹

In the "Old Cumberland Beggar", Wordsworth condemns more vehemently the lack of compassion in the common man. The sense of mystery, of acquiescence and communion with Nature surrounding the old beggar are, for Wordsworth, an object lesson in moral conduct:

... 'Tis Nature's law
 Than none, the meanest of created things,
 Of forms created the most vile and brute,
 The dullest or most noxious, should exist
 Divorced from good, a spirit and pulse of good,
 A life and soul to every mode of being
 Inseparably link'd².

The beggar, as Wordsworth later states, has in "the eye of Nature liv'd"³. He is of more value to man for his mendicancy and fostering of benevolence and participation in the one life than the rationalist stance of politicians and economists would allow:

But deem not this man useless - Statesmen! ye
 Who are so restless in your wisdom, ye
 Who have a broom still ready in your hands
 To rid the world of nuisances ...⁴

In both these poems Wordsworth was calling for a readjustment of perspective and change in consciousness from the narrow utilitarianism and rationalism of abstract theory to an acceptance of the deeper mystery of man's existence in, and as part of, Nature. Wordsworth, in effect, is revealing his attainment of such a redemptive vision, while also writing to bring about such an enlightened view of existence in his public. The imaginative, concrete, mode of expression and perception in these poems is a continuation of the trend developing from the Salisbury Plain poems. At the same time, Wordsworth was still maintaining

1 *ibid.*, ll.7-9.

2 *ibid.*, p.207, ll.73-9.

3 *ibid.*, l.188.

4 *ibid.*, ll. 67-70.

an interest in the more discursive, rhetorical poetry of social criticism to be found in his Imitations of Juvenal.

Between late February 1795 and April 1796, Wordsworth had collaborated with Francis Wrangham¹, in producing an imitation of Juvenal's eighth satire². Juvenal had directed his eighth satire at corrupt Roman officials and the dissolute nobility. Wordsworth had attempted to imitate Juvenal, adapting his scathing indictment of incompetence and debauchery to the England of the mid-seventeen-nineties. At the same time, Wordsworth was also drawing on the Juvenalian satire of Pope and Johnson³. His sense of the heroic couplet, with its epigrammatic incisiveness, derives from their accommodation of Juvenal's searing denunciations of vice and folly to native English verse forms:

Ye Kings, in wisdom, sense and power, supreme,
 These freaks are worse than any sick man's dream.
 To hated worth no Tyrant e're design'd
 Malice so subtle, vengeance so refin'd.⁴

In the fourth line, Wordsworth's use of oxymoron in two paratactically linked half-lines echoes that of Pope. Moreover, his use of end-rhyming and ironic undercutting in the second line of each couplet are techniques borrowed from Pope.

Wordsworth's imitation of Juvenal's eighth satire brings the social criticism of Wordsworth's previous writing, The Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, and the Salisbury Plain poems into sharper focus. Whereas, previously, Wordsworth had made generalized condemnations of aspects of society and the state, he now brings the full force of his anger, despair and sense of helplessness at the oppression of the common man to bear on the individuals responsible.

- 1 Frances Wrangham was a contemporary of Wordsworth at Cambridge. At that time, they were unknown to each other, and only met later. See Moorman, *op.cit.*, p.92. In Wordsworth, The Letters 1797-1805, a series of letters from 1795 to 1796, charts the course of their never-finished collaboration on Juvenal's eighth satire. See Wordsworth, Letters 1787-1805, 20 November 1795, pp.157-9, 7 March 1796, pp.167-8, 25 February 1797, pp.172-7. In his Chronology, Reed offers earlier dates for the Imitation of Juvenal, which I have followed, pp.25-6. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge contributed to Wrangham's first volume of poetry.
- 2 Wordsworth, Poetical Works, vol.1, ed. E. de Selincourt, pp.302-6. See also, Reed. *op.cit.*, Appendix XIV, pp.340-1, for a description of what survives of the manuscript, and the dating of the Fragments.
- 3 Johnson had written "London, a Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal" in 1741.
- 4 Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, p.302.

In the surviving fragments of the poem, Wordsworth's denunciation of corruption and vice extends to the whole of English society. The poem's structure reflects Wordsworth's wide-sweeping, penetrating gaze. It consists of a series of satiric portraits, reminiscent of Pope and Johnson. Wordsworth takes as targets for his trenchant satire, William Eden, Sir James Lowther, Thurlow, Grenville, Frederick Duke of York, the Duke of Buckingham, and the Prince of Wales, "the nation's hope":

The nation's hope shall shew the present time
As rich in folly as the past in crime.¹

In particular, Wordsworth condemns the hypocritical standard of England's legislators:

But ye who make our manners law and sense
Self-judged can with such discipline dispense,
And at your will what in a groom were base
Shall stick new splendour on his gartered grace.²

Wordsworth's imitation of Juvenal's eighth satire also addresses itself to the issues of the widespread ignorance of the poor, the abolition of monarchy, and the corruption fostered by the privilege and favouritism resulting from a society divided into the powerful and the powerless. Invariably, these issues extend back to 1793, and to Wordsworth's condemnation of them in Descriptive Sketches and The Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff.

Wordsworth's imitation of Juvenal's eighth satire continues the trend of moral pessimism and disenchantment with a corrupt government and its despotic oppression of the poor which had so forcefully manifested itself in the Salisbury Plain poems. However, in his scathing condemnation of English society, Wordsworth does not offer an alternative model of society, nor does he suggest a means of social renewal. In its bleakness, it approaches and heralds the nadir of Wordsworth's alienation and despair in The Borderers.

In the tenth book of The Prelude, Wordsworth, in retrospect, describes the crisis through which he had passed in 1795 and 1796. He attributes his inner turmoil to both extraneous and intrinsic factors:

... a shock had then been given
To old opinions, and the minds of all men
Had felt it ... my mind was both let loose,
Let loose and goaded ...

1 *ibid.*, 11.119-20.

2 *ibid.*, 11.53-6.

From the first
 Having two natures in me (joy the one,
 The other melancholy), and withal
 A happy man, and therefore bold to look
 On painful things.¹

Wordsworth's disenchantment with the Pitt Government, and his growing recognition of, and disaffection with, radical political philosophies combined with one aspect of his nature, the melancholic. His imitation of Juvenal's eighth satire clearly reveals the combination of pessimism, sadness and anger, resulting from frustrated idealism. As the following lines reveal, despair of the future and the unsuccessful search for a means of alleviating social injustice compound each other, driving Wordsworth to an increasingly bleak and fragmented outlook on man and society:

... slow, somewhat, too, and stern
 In temperemant - I took the knife in hand,
 And, stopping not at parts less sensitive,
 Endeavoured with my best of skill to probe
 The living body of society,
 Even to the heart. I pushed without remorse
 My speculations forward: yea, set foot
 On Nature's holiest places.²

Wordsworth's imitation of Juvenal, then, can be seen as an attempt to "probe/The Living body of society." In The Borderers, Wordsworth was to follow this course "setting foot/On Nature's holiest places." In 1795 and 1796, Wordsworth's poetry is dominated by social criticism and alienation on one hand, and by a search for unity with, and renewal through, Nature, on the other. As yet, Wordsworth had not been able to fully and consistently reconcile the opposing aspects of his vision of man and society. This conflict would continue into The Borderers, and would eventually be resolved in the Ruined Cottage and the Lyrical Ballads, where Wordsworth's fragmented vision would eventually find a new cohesion in his poetry of the "One Life" and the role of the imagination in it.

1 Wordsworth, The Prelude 1805, Bk X.11.860-3. Wordsworth's satiric vein was to emerge intermittently in The Prelude, and most noticably in Book Seven: "Residence in London".
 2 Wordsworth, op.cit., 11.867-78.

CHAPTER SIXTHE BORDERERSWORDSWORTH'S REJECTION OF REVOLUTION

By 1796, the spirit of social protest which had informed Wordsworth's poetry since the Salisbury Plain poems had become diverted into two channels. The poetry of overt social criticism was by now reduced in its impact by Wordsworth's inability to find an effective poetic form in which to couch it, and by an increasingly introspective concern with states of mind. At the same time, the fragments composed during 1795 and 1796, together with the completed poems later to appear in the Lyrical Ballads, reveal Wordsworth grasping after a poetic form with which to express his vision of the redemptive role of Nature in the life of man.

Rather than attempting to make the public more aware of oppression and injustice, Wordsworth was seeking to enunciate an emergent vision of Nature as a means of transcending the suffering inflicted on the individual by society. Both trends in Wordsworth's poetry were the product of a turning point in Wordsworth's concept of man and society. Rejecting the dystopian Jacobin and Godwinian philosophies, Wordsworth was advocating the inward transformation of man's perception of his relationship with the external world.

In The Borderers, Wordsworth was to chart his turbulent course from idealistic, revolutionary enthusiast to the nadir of his disenchantment with the aberrant, revolutionary theories of the Jacobins, and the rationalized anarchy of Godwin. In Representations of Revolution, Ronald Paulson, though referring to The Prelude, makes an observation pertinent to The Borderers:

Wordsworth's writings on the Revolution are about the experience of coming to terms with the French Revolution, not simply the representation of the phenomenon itself.¹

Paulson proceeds to suggest that the truly revolutionary experience is that of coming to terms with one's inability to come to terms with, and represent, the phenomenon itself.²

1 Ronald Paulson, Representations of Revolution, 1789-1820 (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1983), pp.270-1.

2 loc.cit.,

In The Prelude, Wordsworth retrospectively comments on his course from enthusiasm to disillusionment and apostasy:

... Time may come
 When some dramatic story may afford
 Shapes livelier to convey ...
 What then I learned - or think I learned of Truth
 And the errors into which I was betrayed
 By present objects, and by reasonings false
 ... misguiding and misguided.¹

This passage taken from The Prelude throws light on the period of confusion from which The Borderers emerged and with which it dealt.² The origins and the force of the play may be seen to lie in the moral crisis during which Wordsworth abandoned the vistas offered by Utopian rationalism, and, instead, turned to Nature as the true ground of man's being. The Borderers may also be seen as Wordsworth's attempt at reconciling the divergent tendencies in his thought and poetry.

Two documents make clearer the autobiographical connection between Wordsworth and the play: the Fenwicke notes on The Borderers, written while Wordsworth was preparing the play for its publication in Poems Chiefly of Early and Late Years, in 1842, and the prose preface "On the Character of Rivers" of 1797.

In The Fenwick note, Wordsworth points to the play's central concern, the vulnerability of human reason:

The study of human nature suggests this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart, and the perversion of the understanding to which they may carry their slaves.³

Effectively, what Wordsworth, in retrospect is defining, is his intention to account for the seemingly inexplicable reversion of the impulse and potential for human and social perfection to the self-interest of political opportunism

1 William Wordsworth, The Prelude, (1805) ed. J. Wordsworth, et al, (London and New York, 1979), Bk X, ll.878 ff.

2 See Carol Landon "Wordsworth's Racedown Period: Some Uncertainties Resolved", B.N.Y.P.L., LXVII (1964), pp.100-9.

3 William Wordsworth, The Borderers, ed. R. Osborn (Cornell University Press, New York, 1982) p.813.

and to bloodshed:

During my long residence in France, while the revolution was rapidly advancing to its extreme of wickedness, I had frequent opportunities of being an eye-witness of this process, and it was while that knowledge was fresh upon my memory that the tragedy of *The Borderers* was composed.¹ The "perversion of the understanding",² the revolutionary appeal to reason as the basis for violent social upheaval, indicates Wordsworth's disillusionment with the ideals which had seduced and betrayed a whole nation. Moreover, Wordsworth looks back on his own experience of revolution, in part portrayed through Rivers, as a reflection of the greater changes taking place in society:

I had observed a transition in character and the reflections I had been led to make during the time I was a witness of the changes through which the French Revolution passed.³

In the Preface to the Borderers of 1797, Wordsworth had portrayed in more depth the course from susceptibility to Utopian political theories, through to revolutionary enthusiasm and complete disregard for moral conventions.

Again in the Preface, Wordsworth looks to the individual's intellect as both the most vulnerable and destructive aspects of revolutionary man:

Let us suppose a young man of great intellectual powers, yet without any solid principles of benevolence. His master passions are pride and love of distinction.⁴

Though, in part, presenting a portrait of Wordsworth, the revolutionary enthusiast, the Preface is essentially a study in alienation, providing the reader of the play with the background to River's character and actions in the play.

The psychological study of Rivers, is limited in scope not just to one individual but, in effect, also becomes a study of the consciousness of a whole generation. The reality of betrayal is seen as central, both to River's subsequent state of alienation and that of Wordsworth's contemporaries. The Preface traces how one event in River's life had irremediably turned him against man and the moral conventions of society:

He goes into the world and is betrayed into a great crime ... his talents are robbed of their weight ... and he quits the world in disgust.⁵

1 loc.cit.

2 loc.cit.

3 loc.cit.

4 William Wordsworth, Preface to the Borderers, "On the Character of Rivers", in The Borderers, ed. R. Osborne, p.62.

5 loc.cit.

Rivers shares some similarities with the Solitary of The Excursion.¹ Through both, Wordsworth presents studies of disenchantment. However, Rivers is brought to a more extreme state of alienation by his betrayal than is the eventually reconciled Solitary. Wordsworth, in lines reminiscent of those describing his own moral crisis in The Prelude, portrays the mind of an individual rejecting established norms, confused by society's paradoxical strictures on, and concepts of, good and evil, virtue and vice:

In his retirement, he is impelled to examine the reasonableness of established opinions and the force of mind exhausts itself in constant effort to separate the elements of vice and virtue.²

The extremity of introspection resulting from Rivers' sense of betrayal mirrors Wordsworth's retrospective account in The Prelude of his own period of doubt and intellectual turbulence:

... Thus I fared,
 Dragging all passions, notions, shapes of faith,
 Like culprits to the bar, suspiciously
 Calling the mind to establish in plain day
 Her titles and her honours ... till, demanding proof,
 And seeking ~~in it~~ ^{there} everything, I lost
 All feeling of conviction ...³

Through the use of forensic metaphors, Wordsworth plays out his intellectual

1 By 1797, Wordsworth and Coleridge were in the initial stages of a literary partnership that was to produce the Lyrical Ballads. Wordsworth had read some of The Borderers to Coleridge. There is the possibility that Wordsworth may have had some acquaintance with The Fall of Robespierre, a play on which Southey and Coleridge had collaborated in 1794. Robespierre is seen as a tyrannical figure whose fall was to herald the true reign of liberty. There is a parallel between Robespierre and Rivers, both insidious and bloody minded figures prepared to sacrifice others in the search for power. The death of both is met with jubilation. See S.T. Coleridge, Complete Poetical Works, ed. E.H. Coleridge, (Oxford 1912), Vol.II, pp.515-7 in particular:

... He caught
 The listening crowd by his wild eloquence
 His cool ferocity that persuaded murder,
 Even whilst it spoke of mercy, (Act III, ll.199-202).

The play ends with a firm Jacobin note:

... (France) shall blast
 the despots pride, and liberate the world! (212-3).

Though Coleridge was later to renounce his Jacobin sympathies in 1796, he employed Schiller as a model for subsequent plays: Osorio (1797) and The Piccolimini a Translation of Schiller's Wallenstein.

2 loc.cit.

3 Wordsworth, The Prelude, (1805), Bk.X, ll.888 ff.

struggle to grasp the truth and right course of action. The use of a public metaphor for private conflict calls to mind the suspicion and defensiveness of the public trials for sedition and treason then current in England and France. At the same time, both passages reveal Wordsworth's discovery of the limits of reason in guiding action. The Preface implicitly becomes a plea for Wordsworth's redemptive vision.

However, while in Wordsworth's own case, his disenchantment with Godwinian rationalism led to a temporary retreat into abstract speculation, then a turning toward Nature, Oswald unregenerately embraces a philosophy that to all appearances resembles rationalized anarchy. In actuality, however, it is a self-interested attempt to expiate a morbid guilt. In effect, The Borderers explores the consequences for revolutionary man of life lived in absence from the regenerative interchange between mind and Nature.

Without the redeeming influence of Nature, Rivers, in full alienation, abandons conventionally defined concepts of good and evil:

It is his pleasure and his consolation to hunt out whatever is bad in actions usually esteemed virtuous, and to detect the good in actions which the universal sense of mankind teaches us to reprobate.¹

The Preface to the Borderers is more than Wordsworth's analysis of Rivers' character, it is a study of the radical intellect functioning in isolation from the true ground of man's being in Nature, and its consequent tendency to invert the moral order. Rousseau and his disciples, Robespierre and the Jacobins, had believed that man acting through reason in isolation from the established moral order could create the fabric of a new society that could be transformed according to the general will. They believed that external reality could be shaped through the abstraction of mind.² They believed that in a completely secularized society man would act either in accordance to the will of the majority or in isolation, "a law unto himself".

Through Rivers, and to a degree the misled Mortimer, Wordsworth reveals the vulnerability of having the human intellect, unaided, determine action.

1 Wordsworth, op.cit., p.64.

2 See Lyn Hunt, Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution, (California, 1984), pp.19-52, 149-80. See earlier p. 159.

For Rivers, the moral parameters of good and evil have ceased to exist. Godwin's notion of benevolence is revealed in the play to be at best little more than enlightened self-interest, and, at worst, a cynical justification for destructive egotism. As Rivers retreats in anger within himself, Wordsworth comments:

... in this state, pressed by recollection of his guilt, he seeks relief from two sources, action and meditation.¹

Ostensibly, Rivers acts like some revolutionaries in his mistaken belief that by violence he serves an ideal, that of justice, and that by repressing remorse he has made a decisive step toward individual freedom. As Hannah Arendt has commented in her study of revolution:

Rage is not only impotent by definition, it is the mode in which impotence becomes active in its last stage of final despair.²

In the plot of The Borderers, Rivers' despair drives him to obtain satisfaction by vicariously repeating the crime and attempting to justify it with a radical, anarchist philosophy. As action becomes dominated by abstract thought, Rivers', and implicitly Wordsworth's, alienation from society leads him to a complete disregard for socially established conventions. In opposition to the selflessness of "the One Life", the revolutionary mentality, represented by Rivers asserts the primacy of individual self-hood:

He has rebelled against the world and the laws of the world, and he regards them as tyrannical masters; convinced that he is right in some of his conclusions, he nourishes a contempt for mankind the more dangerous because he has been led to it by reflexion.³

Rivers' sense of isolation, guilt and betrayal, dealt with in the third and fourth acts of the play, lead him to such a state of alienation that he sees the whole world of men as inimical to him:

... he views the world as a body
which is in some sort at war with him
... he looks at society through an optical
glass of peculiar tint.⁴

1 *ibid.*, pp.62-3.

2 Hannah Arendt, On Revolution, (Penguin, 1973), p.111.

2 Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, pp.63-4.

4 *ibid.*, p.65.

Wordsworth repeatedly stresses that the introspective intellect without the guidance of Nature leads to a dissociation with socially perceived reality. In an oblique reference to Godwin's concept of an anarchic society, Wordsworth points to the dangers of the individual intellect focused in upon itself and acting for itself:

His imagination is powerful, being strengthened by the habit of picturing possible forms of society where his crimes would be no longer crimes, and he would enjoy that estimation to which from his intellectual attainment, he deems himself entitled.¹

Wordsworth reveals an Augustan mistrust of the imagination as an essentially deceiving aspect of the human psyche. He points out the individual's susceptibility to the imagination's tendency to disguise cynical, private motives as ideals. Misled, and unable to distinguish between the real and the imagined, Rivers chooses the fabrication of his intellect, rejecting socially perceived reality and its moral conventions:

He has shaken off the obligations of religion and morality in a dark and tempestuous age.²

Amidst the uncertainty of the 1790 s Wordsworth had clearly perceived how guilt and self-interest could be rationalized into their opposites. In this process of rationalization, conscience is overridden and vice can be justified as virtue, self-interest as altruism. In retrospect, Wordsworth identifies revolt with crime and immorality, and underlines the disastrous consequences of following the intellect alone:

... it seems to bring back again the moment of liberty and choice; it banishes the idea of repent^aance, and seems to set remorse at defiance.³

By appealing to an agent beyond man, conscience can easily be manipulated for the ends of self-interest. Wordsworth provides a final culminant comment on man's susceptibility to moral codes, drawing on any authority whether it be divine, human, social or intellectual:

This superstition of which I have spoken is not without its use; yet it appears to be one great source of our vices; it is our constant^e engine in seducing each othr[^]. We are lulled asleep by its agency, and betrayed before we know that an attempt is made to betray us.⁴

1 ibid., p.64.

2 ibid., p.65.

3 ibid., p.66.

4 ibid., p.67.

The idea of betrayal had not only informed The Borderers and its Preface at this time, but also the fragment, the Gothic Tale.¹ This poetic fragment had dealt with the attempted murder of an older by a younger man. Essentially, the Gothic Tale contains in embryonic form the plot of The Borderers. Moreover, the Gothic Tale had focused on a premeditated crime against the moral order which had been prevented by the intervention of the supernatural.

Both murderer and victim are without any established identity, though it becomes apparent that the assailant is an innocent, though confused, young man driven against his will to commit an act of betrayal against an innocent old man who had placed his trust in him. Before the abrupt ending of the fragment, the innate compassion of the young man for the defenseless old man leads to the avoidance of what would have been the ultimate betrayal of life and trust. However, Wordsworth in The Borderers changes the plot, having the betrayal culminate tragically in the death of the old man. The transformation of the plot of the Gothic Tale into tragedy in The Borderers reveals the depth of Wordsworth's feelings of betrayal at revolution and pessimism at man's unregenerate nature.

While the Gothic Tale, a poem, contains the nucleus of The Borderers, it was Wordsworth's reading of Shakespeare and the "Storm and Stress" plays of Schiller that largely transformed the dimensions and nature of the plot,² making it an appropriate vehicle for Wordsworth's pessimistic study of the revolutionary intellect. Central to the plots of Hamlet, King Lear, Julius Caesar and Othello are the tragic consequences arising from betrayal

1 "The Gothic Tale" was composed between 1795 and 1796. It draws on themes earlier explored in Wordsworth's first major poem "The Vale of Esthwaite". Composed in 1788 this long narrative poem shows Wordsworth experimenting in verse with the topoi of the Gothic novel - ruined castles, dungeons, a phantom, stormy landscape, betrayal and murder. Wordsworth was later to incorporate these into the Salisbury Plain poems from which the "Gothic Tale" was an off-shoot. In the earlier poems, Gothic conventions were employed mainly for spectacle rather than the expression of morbid psychological states.

2 Another possible source is Mrs. Radcliffe's Romance of the Forest published in London in 1791. The philosopher villain, the Marquis de Monalt upholds a philosophy similar to that of Rivers:

There are ... people of minds so weak, as to shrink from acts they have been accustomed to hold wrong, however advantageous. They never suffer themselves to be guided by circumstances ... (p.272).

and misguided ideals of justice. Though the sources for Rivers may be found in Claudius, Edmund, Brutus and Iago, as well as the Spiegelberg of Schiller's Robbers, Rivers is also the Apostle of a new revolutionary morality, a Robespierre. Wordsworth tempers his borrowing of sources with the reality of revolution and his own experiences resulting from it. Mortimer, essentially the Wordsworth figure in the play, too, has his sources in these plays. He can also be seen as a Cain figure, as the betrayed Robber Moor of Schiller's Robbers, and as man betrayed by the very springs of his humanity into committing an irredeemable crime against the moral order. Mortimer also represents Wordsworthian man recognizing his betrayal by revolutionary idealism, seeking expiation and redemption in Nature.

In his capacity as deceiver, Rivers derives most obviously from Iago - the manner in which Rivers, Mortimer's deceiving confidant, usurps the position of Herbert and Matilda as Mortimer's moral guardian is clearly modelled on the rivalry between Iago and Desdemona for the possession of Othello's trust - River's ability to distort and eventually invert the values of Mortimer to the extent that he tragically rejects the dictates of his own innate moral sensibility parallels the moral change wrought on Othello. In Othello Iago poses as the guardian of precisely those ideals of honesty, chastity and reputation which he most despises: "Whip me such honest knaves," she was a wight if ever such wight were/to suckle fools and chronicle small beer." (I.ii.1.49, II. i.11.158-60.)

In the same way, though with a far more abstract, rhetorical kind of ingenuity, Rivers dominates Mortimer and the outlaw band in the first two acts of The Borderers by assuming a position of moral supremacy as the advocate of sacrificial "justice", though he himself believes the principles of "moral law" to be absurd in a world governed by chance.

Wordsworth's indebtedness to Schiller can be measured by the extent to which the Iago - like Rivers also resembles the cynical and treacherous Spiegelberg of the Robbers. Spiegelberg prompts the idealistic hero of the Robbers, Karl Moor, to increasingly immoral, and eventually damnable acts in the name of liberty and justice. Spiegelberg like Rivers, has detached himself from accountability for his acts through his belief in the autonomy and unaccountability of reason. Like Rivers, the pyrrhonist Spiegelberg carries out his own essentially immoral acts by betraying the naive Karl Moor into committing them. Spiegelberg shares with Rivers an intellectual pride that

leads him to treat all men with contempt and to disregard the most sacred of ties between man and God.¹

The pattern of seduction, betrayal, and a fall from grace, is inherent in Wordsworth's dramatic sources for the play. A major poetic source for the plot and the character of Rivers lies in Milton's Paradise Lost.² Satan, himself a fallen being, attempts to exact vengeance on his creator through the betrayal of man into the same illusion of supremacy above, and detachment from, the moral order. As in Paradise Lost, the malefactor of The Borderers, has an initial fall from grace. He then initiates an innocent victim into a further fall in an attempt to regain and exercise his original status and power. Godwin had adopted this pattern of an initial crime against the moral order and an ensuing series of falls in the plot of Caleb Williams. Wordsworth, following both Milton and Godwin, had elevated his malefactor Rivers to a stature suitable to convey both the cosmic consequences of River's crimes and the tragic social and psychological effects of the victim's guilt. At the same time, Wordsworth established characters through whom he could express and explore the struggle between his own revolutionary consciousness and his innate moral sensibility, and also point to the universality of this struggle in already existing literary tradition.

Surviving prose drafts of the earliest stages of the composition of The Borderers - the "Ur Borderers"³ - indicate that the play as originally conceived was to be a sentimental Gothic melodrama. In the earliest surviving

- 1 c.f. Schiller, The Robbers, translated by F.J. Lampert (Penguin, 1974), in particular Act I, sc.III. pp.71-7 where Spiegelberg reveals his totally corrupt and dispassionate nature. Frere and Canning had attacked Schiller's Robbers and its revolutionary implications in a parody of it entitled The Rovers. This appeared in the Anti-Jacobin in June, 1796. In The German Idea, Rosemary Ashton notes that translations of the Robbers had appeared in England in 1795.
- 2 For a detailed discussion of Milton's influence on Wordsworth, particularly regarding the idea of the fall, see R. Woodman, "Milton's Satan in Wordsworth's vale of Soul-Making", Studies in Romanticism, 23, 1984, pp.3-28.
- 3 In his introduction to the Cornell edition of The Borderers, Osborn postulates the existence of a lost sketch of The Borderers' action. The "Ur-Borderers" had emphasized "the spectacle of action and suffering". (p.15). Subsequent drafting had led to a shift in focus from a dramatizing of guilt to deeper concern with moral and autobiographical issues.

drafts, Rivers' function was merely to initiate the sequence of melodramatic experiences to which Mortimer was exposed. The central importance given to Rivers' character and motives in the finished play reflects the sophistication which had taken place in Wordsworth's intention and approach to the plot of The Borderers under the influence of his reading of Shakespeare and Schiller.

In reorganizing The Borderers in its surviving form,¹ Wordsworth eliminated much of the Gothic detail present in the early drafts. He reduced the digressions on the theme of sentimental morality, and greatly expanded the intervals between the main dramatic events in the play, the attempted murder at the castle, Herbert's abandonment on the heath, and the discovery that Herbert had been innocent. The effect was to place new emphasis on the natural, emotional, and intellectual pressures brought to bear on Mortimer. Rivers becomes the experienced protagonist in what is at first a drama of initiation, becoming subsequently a drama of alienation and rejection. Through the refocusing of the plot, Wordsworth was able in its dramatic representation to give greater clarity to his own inner conflict.

While the literary antecedents of Rivers contributed to his eventual, central role in The Borderers, the models and sources for Mortimer are also significant. Hamlet, Othello and Karl Moor experience betrayal through a misguided passion for justice. The tragic situation in which each of the isolated and alienated men find themselves is one in which society or the nature of the "wrong" for which he must exact justice denies him any appeal to an ordinary institution of law. In exacting justice beyond the law they each must rely upon their intellect and conscience. Their tragedy lies in the fallibility of these. Mortimer at the insistence of Rivers takes it upon himself to exact justice on the maligned Herbert. Though Mortimer is the victim of Rivers' seductive reasoning and the susceptibility of his conscience to a passionate sense of justice, he is nevertheless guilty of the tragic and fatal sin of presumption. The Borderers traces the tragic consequences of intellectual and moral presumption.

Mortimer's passionate and idealistic nature is established early in the play. What seems virtue and nobility of soul in the protagonist quickly becomes a flaw which Rivers soon discovers and exploits. In the lawless,

1 The "Early Version" composed in 1796-7. See Osborn pp.10-17.

anarchic border region between England and Scotland which is the play's setting, Mortimer already sees himself as, and is revered as, an executor of justice. It takes little prompting from Rivers to misguide and totally blind Mortimer to the truth and have him commit a life betraying act.

Rivers and Mortimer may be seen as betrayer and victim. Neither is purely good or evil. Wordsworth's growing sophistication in realistically delineating psychologically complex characters and their motives has given rise to two characters, neither of whom can be held fully responsible for their acts as they are the products of a deterministic view of human psychology.

While Wordsworth was bringing his reading of Shakespeare and Schiller to bear on the characterization of Rivers, recent historical events had also acted as a catalyst in the formation of Rivers' motives and actions. Fletcher Christian had, in 1789, lead a mutiny aboard the "Bounty" against the tyrannical Captain Bligh. Later in the play, in Act IV, Rivers recounts his own act of mutiny which had lead to his alienated state of mind and betrayal of Mortimer.

Wordsworth's reworking of the plot and remoulding of Rivers' character in the light of historical reality and fictional sources resulted in the play's action pivoting on the central scene where Rivers reveals his past. Rivers' mutiny had occurred many years before the action of the play begins. But it is Rivers' belief that he was oppressed and betrayed that leads him to betray Mortimer and view it as an act of justice.

By Act IV, Scene ii of The Borderers, Rivers believes Mortimer to be so thoroughly seduced by his reasoning and ideals that he reveals his history. Rivers' account of his life and the events which led him to form his essentially anarchist values reflects very strongly the fall of the anonymous idealist described in Wordsworth's prose preface to The Borderers. Believing that by this stage Mortimer had killed the innocent Herbert and that his "conversion" has been complete, Rivers reveals his own guilt:

I am a murderer.¹

The young Rivers had been the embodiment of his society's morality:

In my youth

I was the pleasure of all the hearts - the darling of every tongue ...²

1 Wordsworth, The Borderers, ed. Osborn, Act IV, Sc.ii.1.4.

2 *ibid.*, 11.5-7.

In part, resembling Falkland in Caleb Williams, Rivers had placed a great emphasis on "Honour", to the extent that his defensiveness of this ideal leads him to commit an act disruptive of the moral order:

... You've heard
 That I embarked for Syria - on our voyage
 I was convinced a foul conspiracy
 Was laid against my honour, that the captain
 Was the prime agent ...¹

Exhibiting an essentially paranoid state of mind, Rivers broods in isolation, dissociating himself from reality. The intensity of Rivers' alienation is described in terms foreshadowing the isolated and angst-ridden sailor of the Ancient Mariner,² Nature mirrors Rivers' tortured soul:

... for many days
 Beneath the burning sky on the dead sea
 I brooded o'er my injuries - deserted
 By man and nature.³

The sense of utter isolation and alienation expressed by Rivers is fittingly and starkly couched in terms of the listlessness of the ship and the brooding stillness of the sea. Nature mirrors Rivers' confusion and despair, but does not bring the redemptive grace needed to save his stagnating soul. Needing guidance but finding none, needing a feeling of solidarity but encountering only solitude, Rivers turns in all his suppressed rage and angered pride against the moral order he had previously upheld:

If a breeze had blown
 It might have found its way into my heart
 And I had been no matter ...⁴

As Rivers proceeds to recount the conditions under which his alienation burgeoned into a crime against the established order, the absence of any supporting grace is reinforced through a series of negatives denoting complete physical and spiritual privation:

1 *ibid.*, ll.5-7.

2 S.T. Coleridge, "The Ancient Mariner", S.T. Coleridge, Poetical Works, ed. E.H. Coleridge (Oxford, 1974), ll.143-291.

3 Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, ll.15-19.

4 *ibid.*, Act IV. sc.ii. ll.18-20.

There was no food, no drink, no grass, no shades
 No tree nor jutting eminence, nor form
 Inanimate ...¹

In such an unrelentingly harsh situation men act rashly. Rivers is struck by the Captain, and knowing the crew to be sympathetic with himself, he abandons the Captain on a desolate island in the full expectation that he will die:

... A man by men deserted,
 Not buried in the sand - not dead nor dying,
 But standing, walking, stretching forth his arms,
 In all things like yourselves, but in the agony
 With which he called for mercy - and even so,
 He was forsaken.²

Like Milton's Satan and Godwin's Falkland, wounded pride resulting from an exaggerated sense of honour, leads to a revolt and fall. The vulnerability of River's pride together with an increasing retreat into the isolated world created by his intellect lead to a gradual though complete aversion to conventional morality. Rivers attempts to rationalize his callous act of mutiny, resulting in growing self-deception and belief that his act is beyond social accountability. Moreover, Rivers' rationalization of his crime drives him to construct a systematic philosophy of human action based on this one central act of betrayal in his life, an act which was spontaneous, irrational, and unjustifiable. He justifies his harsh treatment of the Captain and the essential premise of his philosophy of sedition with the simple statement:

I had been deceived
 ... I had been betrayed
 ... my plans of heroism, my lofty hopes,
 All vanished ...
 I sunk into despair.³

Following a period of despair and detachment from reality Rivers had lapsed into a period of visionary madness. During this period of liminality, Rivers' perception of reality, and the nature of his consciousness and self-consciousness had radically changed. His intellectual turmoil is a semi-autographical depiction of the confusion and rejection which Wordsworth

1 *ibid.*, ll.24-6.
 2 *ibid.*, ll.44-9.
 3 *ibid.*, ll.68-78.

was later to recount in The Prelude.¹ During this period of introspection the fabric of his consciousness had been restructured:

Three nights ... Did constant meditation dry my blood,
Three sleepless nights I passed in sounding on
Through words and things, a dim and perilous way.²

Rivers, like Rousseau, Robespierre and the Jacobins, perceives man's estate to be one of physical, spiritual and intellectual bondage. Rivers sees superstition and institutionalized codes of morality as a limitation on what he conceives to be man's god-like potential. For Rivers, enlightenment through a revolution of consciousness is called for if man is to realize fully his semi-divine powers of intellect:

... I beheld
A slavery, compared to which the dungeon
And clunking chain are perfect liberty.
... I saw that every possible shape of action
Might lead to good. I saw it burst forth
Thirsting for some exploit of power and terror.³

Whereas Wordsworth had turned to Nature and his redemptive vision of man's relationship with it, Rivers in all his recalcitrance turns against man and the moral order.

For Rivers, betrayal and revolt have lead to the birth of an anarchic, revolutionary consciousness. Hegel, in Phenomenology of the Mind had acknowledged the failure of the French Revolution and condemned the terror which followed it, yet had also seen the evolution of a revolutionary consciousness, such as Rivers, as a necessary stage in the growth of the modern political state.

Hegel had expressed his recognition, as Wordsworth was ultimately to do in the conclusion of The Borderers, of the fact that the freedom of the individual proposed by Rousseau necessarily involved the repression of other individuals, and authoritarian rule over one's fellow citizens. Commenting on the Jacobins' interpretation of, and attempt to realize, the libertarian doctrines of Rousseau, Hegel remarked that the revolutionaries wished for

1 See Wordsworth, The Prelude, (1805), Bk.X.11.879-904 and Wordsworth's more detailed analysis of his moral crisis in The Prelude (1850) Bk XI 11.306-368.

2 Wordsworth, op.cit. 11.102-3.

2 *ibid.*, Act IV, sc.ii, 11.104-110.

universal freedom and equality. However, in fact, they could not articulate any particular political structure in place of the old:

Only by destroying something do they feel themselves to exist ... it is the freedom of the void, which in the Hindu ideal of pure contemplation, gives rise to the ascetic negation of the world. On the political level, it is the fanaticism which ends in the destruction of the whole political order ...¹

Through *Rivers*, Wordsworth pre-empted Hegel in his exploration of the birth, nature, and limitations of the libertarian impulse within man, and his coming to consciousness of them. For *Rivers*, as for Robespierre and the Jacobins, good can only be brought into being through the complete and violent overthrow of the previously existing order in an act of "power and terror".

Believing himself now enlightened and freed from moral restraint or obligation to his society, *Rivers* in the utter intoxication of Hubris believes himself capable of totally changing society:

I felt I had been fettered by a straw,
I stood astonished at myself - my brain
Was light and giddy, and it teemed with projects
Which seemed to have no limit.²

Rivers had achieved self-consciousness, and the revolutionary impulse within him has become a conscious spring to action. However, his self-consciousness is a deceptive one, akin to the existential concept of bad faith, of "mauvaise foi". In a Blakean³ sense, *Rivers* has recognized his own and man's divine potential, but ultimately, as the action of the play bears out, this is not Wordsworthian man's ultimate destiny. The play, in effect, suggests at times a Burkean orthodoxy permeating Wordsworth's idea of man and society. *Rivers'* inability to recognize the limitation of conventional morality allows Wordsworth

1 G. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J.B. Bailie, (London, 1931), "Absolute Freedom and Terror" pp.599-610. In this chapter, Hegel states his belief that the French Revolution was modern man's coming to self-consciousness. Wordsworth believed that revolution was only a part of this process. Revolution had necessarily to be followed by, and guided by, revelation.

2 *ibid.*, ll.114-7.

3 In Blake's depiction of the cycle of revolution, *Rivers* approximates to the early *Los*, particularly in his shaking off the bonds of superstition, c.f. The Book of Los, Chapter II, ll.60-75.

to illustrate the central deceptive flaw in the revolutionary's consciousness:

I had within me
 A salient spring of energy, a fire
 Of inextinguishable thought - I mounted
 From action up to action with a mind
 That never rested ... my very dreams
 Assumed a substance and a character.¹

Rivers' comment on the freedom of the intellect and what follows, is analogous to, if not derived from passages from Godwin's Political Justice:

The genuine and wholesome state of mind is to be unloosed from shackles, and to expand every fibre of its frame according to the independent and individual impressions of truth upon that mind. How great would be the progress of intellectual improvement, if men were unfettered by the prejudices of education, unseduced by the influence of a corrupt state of society, and accustomed to yield without fear to the guidance of truth, however unexplored might be the regions and unexpected the conclusions to which she conducted us?²

Earlier in Act IV, while congratulating Mortimer for having murdered Herbert, Rivers, in similarly Godwinian terms, enunciates the central premise of his philosophy of autonomous reason:

Today you have thrown off the tyranny
 Of moralists and saints and lawgivers;
 You have obeyed the only law that wisdom
 Can ever recognize, the immediate law
Flashed from the light of circumstances
Upon an independent intellect.³

In the light of Rivers' previous statement about reason bringing into reality what were dreams unfounded on concrete reality, it can be seen

1 Wordsworth, op.cit. Act IV, Sc.ii, ll.118-124.

2 Godwin, Political Justice, (2 Vols.Londond, 1796) II.p.195.

3 Wordsworth, op.cit.,Act III, Sc.V. ll.26-31. Wordsworth was possibly indebted to Destutt de Tracy, a member of the Ideologues, for this particular aspect of Rivers' ideology - The Ideologues were a political group active in the early revolutionary years. They eventually became affiliated with the Girondists. Tracy's Memoires published in 1798 are his major written legacy. Through Rivers, Wordsworth was condemning the rationalist Ideologues.

that the human intellect for Rivers and the revolutionary, has no accountability. It has the freedom to perpetrate both the greatest and most ignoble of acts on the grounds of an unguided impulse. Eventually, the plot of The Borderers reveals how inadequate and tragic a false self-consciousness can be.

In the full intoxication of having discovered the transcendent power of reason, Rivers believes himself able to penetrate the physical and temporal limitations of the human condition:

I seemed a being who had passed alone
Beyond the visible barriers of the world
And travelled into things to come.¹

Two seemingly unrelated and conflicting factors seem to have contributed to Rivers' coming to self-consciousness: alienation from society and its moral institutions, and a recognition of the role of Nature in the formation of human consciousness. On the one hand, Rivers is able to perceive the reflection of external nature in the forming of the fabric of the human intellect:

In these my lonely wanderings I perceived
What mighty objects do impress their forms
To build up this our intellectual being.²

On the other hand, perceiving the boundless extent of temporal and spatial magnitude of the universe, he rejects the moral restrictions which seem to prevent man from taking part in the infinite. For Rivers, it is only by destroying these restrictions by acts of "power and terror" that man can assume his destiny:

I felt that to be truly the world's friend,
We must become the object of its hate.³

To a limited extent, Rivers' moral growth shares aspects of Wordsworth's moral growth later described in The Prelude. However, there is one essential difference. Whereas Wordsworth was able to reconcile Nature, the moral order and the human intellect, Rivers can only perpetuate the alienation of man from the moral order initiated by his betrayal of the Captain. In other words, Rivers and his beliefs are a projection of Wordsworth the alienated radical, had he been unable to find a redemptive harmony between mind and Nature. Rivers' philosophy is essentially a reactionary philosophy of alienation,

1 Wordsworth, op.cit., Act IV, Sc.ii.ll.143-5.

2 *ibid.*, ll.133-6. c.f. Prelude, VI, ll.512-72, The Simplon Pass.

3 *ibid.*, ll.156-7.

no matter under what liberal and enlightened rhetoric it is disguised. Though stating his motives to enlighten and liberate man in essentially philanthropic terms:

Henceforth we are fellow labourers - to enlarge the intellectual empire of mankind.¹

Rivers' real motive, as his acts testify, are destructive and are the product of a man bent on revenge against a society which had unintentionally wounded his pride. In the extensive study of Rivers' motives, Wordsworth reveals the reality of sordid personal motives underlying the rhetoric of revolution.

What stands as one of the central mysteries of the play is Rivers' various attempts to inspire in Mortimer the god-like exercise of power. Rivers' concealed and ambiguously presented motives reveal little desire for his own personal aggrandisement. Instead, Rivers seems content in his roles as revolutionary prophet and deceiver initiating action through others. His earlier mutinous uprising against the Captain reveals that cowardice is not a major motive for avoiding action. It seems that he has found in Mortimer a man whose ability to lead, idealism and potential for moral greatness, far exceeds his own. Mortimer's ability to transform his high, mainly abstract, ideals of justice into actions attracts Rivers. He sees in Mortimer an idealist sufficiently ingenuous to fall prey to his philosophy of pragmatic individualism concealed under a veneer of moralizing rhetoric.

Rivers, the arch-pragmatist and opportunist takes advantage of every meeting with Mortimer so that he can gradually remould, "guide", his outlook. Primarily, Rivers gains Mortimer's confidence through flattery. He commends the results of Mortimer's idealism, praising the prevalence of justice in what was formerly a lawless, faction-torn border area:

Rivers: ... Happy are we
Who live in these disputed tracts that own
No law but what each man makes for himself.
Here justice has indeed a field of triumph
... Your single virtue has transformed a hand
Of fierce barbarians into ministers
Of beauty and of order ...³

1 *ibid.*, Act IV.Sc.ii.11.188-9.

2 In his initial incitement of Mortimer to kill Herbert, there are several parallels with *The Robbers*, particularly with Spiegelberg and Franz Moor, the hero's satanic brother. In Act II, Sc.i. Rivers' satanic leaning are clearly revealed:

It is in darkness and intempest that we seek
The majesty of the Almighty
... the wholesome ministry of pain and evil (11.65-72).

3 *ibid.*, Act II, Sc.i, 11.52-4.

Rivers' comment would imply that the enlightened anarchy he seeks is already potentially present in the acts of the outlaws and inspired by Mortimer himself: "no law but what each man makes for himself." However, the spontaneity of acting according to the immediate dictates of human reason is not sufficient. Rivers believes in liberating the god-like potential of man in acts of moral magnitude:

It is/In darkness and intempest^{that} we seek
The majesty of the Almighty.¹

Rivers redefines the heroic, discarding traditional notions of heroic endeavour where acts of prowess are performed by desperate men struggling against the overwhelming odds of a situation they have been forced into. In its place, Rivers believes man should create, "seek", such situations which will in turn, liberate and realize his divine potential. Rather than seeking to promote traditional Christian virtues of benevolence and self-sacrifice, Rivers in his amorality acknowledges the presence of evil and pain in his redefined concept of the heroic:

Benevolence that has not the heart to use
The wholesome ministry of pain and evil
Is powerless and contemptible.²

In weighing up means and ends, it appears that Rivers' morality entails strictures on both. "Pain and evil", human suffering, must be the means adopted by man to achieve his apotheosis. Elsewhere Rivers condemns the superstitious fear which had bound man and frustrates the potential for greatness within him. For the Satanic Rivers, man's path to self-realization must be one of betrayal and suffering, not one's own but that of others.

While pandering to Mortimer's vanity and idealism, Rivers also manipulates his sense of injustice by defaming the saintly old pilgrim, Herbert. In the opening act, Rivers seeing Mortimer in love with, and worshipping Herbert's daughter, Matilda, misrepresents her and her father to Mortimer. In Rivers' imagination, perverted by his own thoughts of betrayal, Herbert becomes the corruptor and prostitute of his own daughter. It is ironic that Rivers should choose the corruption and betrayal of innocence and virtue as the story with which to beguile Mortimer for it is an intimation of his own intentions towards his auditor.

1 *ibid.*, 11.68-71.

2 *ibid.*, 11.52-67.

In making Mortimer rebel against, and seek the life of, a paternal figure, Rivers attempts vicariously to replicate his own crime and subsequent fall from innocence. By leading Mortimer to commit an act of violence and terror on a blameless, blind, old man, Rivers believes that he is shaping Mortimer for a future role as liberator of man from the tyranny of repressive traditional morality and consciousness.¹ Playing on Mortimer's outrage at Herbert's purported betrayal of innocence and his love for Matilda, Rivers is able to push Mortimer into a damnable act of vengeance through which his consciousness will be transformed:

Today you will assume a character
More awful and sublime ...²

Reminiscent of Karl Moor's pronouncements on the discovery of what he believes to be absolute liberty, Rivers' incitement differs in one respect. In The Robbers, Karl Moor and his brigands perceive themselves to be divine instruments of God, and especially agents for his wrath. Rivers, however, has no such limiting factor in his view of man. Rivers believes Mortimer will become god-like with his murdering of a crippled old man. In its tone of defiance, Rivers' prophecy echoes Satan's defiant exhortation to the fallen angels:

Our puissance is our own, our own right hand
Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try
Who is our equal.³

Milton's Satan had corrupted and betrayed sinless Eve by leading her to defy God's prohibition against the tasting of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Similarly, Rivers will reveal man's divine potential by having Mortimer repeat his own crime and, more importantly, by defying the oldest of moral conventions governing man, the prohibition against killing: "Thou shalt not kill." However, while the act may be considered in its immorality and enormity, it is still a petty act, if man's divinity is to be revealed through it. Similarly, Satan's attempt to reveal his divinity was to be achieved through an act of spite rather than one revealing what purported to be his innate superiority. It seems, then, that though Rivers believes in man's potential divinity, his motives in misleading and beguiling Mortimer

1 Rivers terms this as "looking but though the spectacle of form". Rivers' ideology entails man prising open the narrow categories of thought which by tradition limit man's consciousness.

2 *ibid.*, Act II. Sc.i, ll.77-8. Rivers, like Edmund Burke, conceives the sublime to be essentially the feeling of terror man experiences when confronting the anarchic and mighty forces of Nature.

3 Milton, Paradise Lost, Bk.V, ll.864-6.

are more of a personal nature, a vengeance against his own betrayed innocence.

As Rivers' rhetoric begins to prevail, a change in consciousness begins to take place within Mortimer. Rivers argues that the killing of Herbert is an "act of reason", a deliberate and premeditated killing, an act of defiance against the moral order and conventional morality. At a moment of extreme confusion, torn between love for Matilda and deadly hatred for her father, and yielding to Rivers' Satanic prompting, Mortimer sees into his soul:

Mortimer: If I ever knew
My heart, and naked saw the man within me,
'Tis at this moment ... there is something
Which looks like a transition in my soul,
And yet it is not.¹

At that moment when Mortimer yields to Rivers, he falls and a change, "transition", occurs within him. However, Rivers has not completely triumphed. An element of Mortimer's pristine innocence remains, and at times asserts itself against the fallen element of his soul.

Implicit in this moment of self-analysis is Mortimer's acknowledgement that the potential for evil as we would see it, has been present within him only awaiting the occasion to realize itself in action. As Rivers aligns evil with greatness, it may also be seen that Mortimer deludedly believes his innate potential for greatness has now asserted itself.

Shortly afterwards, while Rivers is outlining the morality of Mortimer's punishment of Herbert, he draws a distinction between conventional morality which subordinates means to an end, and his own anarchic lack of morality which in its sponteity and unaccountability looks purely to the isolated act, to the means.

Rivers incites Mortimer to what he believes is an unpremediated act of justice. Mortimer is to lead Herbert to the heath and there execute him without compassion. Paradoxically, Rivers pictures this gratuitous betrayal into sin as a means of reverting to innocence:

By shewing that you calculate, and look
Beyond the present object of the sense -
A few leagues hence we shall have open field,
And tread on ground as free as the first earth
Which nature gave to man.²

1 Wordsworth, op.cit., Act II, Sc.i.11.87-92.

2 Wordsworth, op.cit., Act II. Sc.i, 11.110-114.

Rivers, like his revolutionary counterparts, Robespierre, Danton, and Marat, misguidedly believed that man could be returned to his natural unity with Nature through calculated acts of terror, through the liberating power of human reason.

As the plot develops around Mortimer's betrayal, Wordsworth introduces a counterplot to establish Herbert's innocence, moral stature, and the consequent culpability of Mortimer and Rivers. The counterplot is largely developed through the pilgrims who from time to time appear and perform a chorus-like function revealing the innocence and saintliness of Herbert's past, in opposition to Rivers' lies. In particular, the old pilgrim who had known Matilda and Herbert at the time of his dispossession bears witness to his goodness if not saintliness.¹ He also brings with him belated tidings of Herbert's reinstatement and possible hope of renewing his former glory.

Through River's seduction and betrayal of Mortimer the plot explores the inevitable effects of this central event. Mortimer pursues his misguided course of vengeance until, eventually, his innate natural goodness triumphs over the Satanic rationalism of Rivers. Effectively, there are two forces active in redeeming Mortimer's conscience and natural goodness, his love for Matilda and his recognition of his victim, Herbert's, saintliness.

Even before leading Herbert on to the heath for execution, Mortimer is overwhelmed by an undeniable sense of the innocent old man's grace:

And yet in plumbing the obysse of vengeance
 Something I strike upon which turns my thoughts
 Back on myself - I think again - my breast
 Concenters all the terrors of the universe,
 I look at him and tremble like a child.²

Until Herbert's eventual death, caused indirectly rather than directly by Mortimer, the plot consists of affirmative decisions to realize Rivers' revolutiona promptings in the act of murder, and withdrawals from action as innate compassion momentarily overrides the impulse to kill.

Mortimer's early self-questionings, his increasingly more conscious recognition that Herbert radiates an aura of saintliness, eventually lead him to abandon Herbert to die rather than execute him. It is only after Herbert has died that Mortimer's conscience struggles free of the corrupting bonds of Rivers' murderous rationalism.

1 See Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, Act II. Sc.ii, ll.45 ff.

2 *ibid.*, Act II. Sc.iii, ll.61-5.

On a more abstract level, Wordsworth can be seen to be realistically tracing the conflict between his belief in man's natural goodness and the destructive, yet seductive, claims of revolutionary ideologies and concepts of human consciousness. The conflict between man's redemptive goodness and the corrupt ideals of manipulative, revolutionary rhetoric increasingly become focused on Mortimer.

Throughout Act II. Sc.iii and Act 3, the audience, like Mortimer, is presented with two distinct perspectives: the distorted, abstract and unfounded perspective of Rivers and revolutionary reason, and the clear, concrete, vision of traditional morality betrayed. The protagonist attempts to confront this dichotomous perspective. He struggles to suppress his common moral sensibility in favour of Rivers' more radical creed, and distances himself from commonly perceived virtue and in doing so loses the audience's sympathy. Throughout, Herbert remains the basis for the audience's moral vantage point, as Mortimer's betrayal and delusion become increasingly desperate and extreme. The dual perspective on the action charts the extent to which radical idealism had and could become distant from man's natural, innate, moral sensibility. The condemnation is implicit. Mortimer's innate sense of goodness causes the first two attempts on Herbert's life to fail. Conscience and guilt prevail, for a while, over seductive, inflammatory rhetoric.

In a final attempt to betray Mortimer, Rivers reveals the detachment from morality to which abstract reasoning has brought him. The act of murder, as an abstract concept is cynically detached from its motive and its victim:

Murder! What, of Whom?

Of whom - or what? We kill a toad a newt

A rat ...¹

Rivers unintentionally reveals the flaw in his philosophy in his failure to distinguish between good and evil, man and beast.

The vicarious repetition of an event in his own life, his fall, comes again to the fore in his rationalizing of betrayal:

I have been what he

This boy when he comes forth with his bloody hands

Might envy and am now - but he shall know

What I am now.²

1 *ibid.*, Act II. Sc.iii, ll.203-7.

2 *ibid.*, ll.238-41.

However, Mortimer emerges into plain view, his act of justice once again uncompleted. Rather than sanctioning Rivers' morality as Rivers had overconfidently expected, Mortimer's innate sense of compassion again momentarily triumphs. To a large extent, this scene mirrors the major thrust of the plot which focuses on Mortimer's vacillations between murderous idealism and moral goodness, between Rivers' Satanic promptings and Mortimer's innate goodness.

When Rivers questions Mortimer over his failure to act, Mortimer's response reveals several factors at work:

There was something in his face the very
counterpart of Matilda.¹

An obvious inference is made to Mortimer's love for Matilda, which has been one of the most malleable characteristics through which Rivers has been able to turn him against Herbert. The second, less obvious, is Mortimer's as yet incompletely repressed ability to recognize goodness and the mark of grace. Rivers had attempted to dupe Mortimer into believing that there was no direct filial relationship between Matilda and Herbert. Yet intuitively Mortimer had recognized the relationship although still unable to counter act and shake off Rivers' monstrous maligning of Herbert.

As in the manuscript fragment, The Gothic Tale,² just as Mortimer is about to deliver the death blow to Herbert in the dungeon, there is a mysterious supernatural intervention:

I cast my eyes upwards, and through a
crevice in the roof I beheld a star twinkling
over my head, and by the living God,
I could not do it³

The recognition of a power higher than that of human reason, grace, for a moment gives the lie to Rivers' previously self-contained view of revolutionary reason and man's innate, divine potential. In this brief moment of illumination, Mortimer recognizes the spiritual dimension of reality to which Rivers' ideology had blinded him.

1 *ibid.*, ll.272-3.

2 William Wordsworth, "The Gothic Tale", in The Borderers, ed. R.Osborn, pp.750-7 especially p.756, ll.196-8.

Above the dungeon's roof a star beheld,
Whose sparkling lustre through the crevice shed
Sent to his fluttering heart a momentary dread.

3 Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, Act II. Sc.iii, ll.290-3.

This moment of failure and recognition marks the height of Mortimer's belief in Rivers and alienation from Nature, and also the beginning of Mortimer's reconciliation with the as yet untarnished deeper element of Nature within man. A period of confusion now ensues as Mortimer seeks certainty in either of two conflicting perspectives on reality: the rationalist and the supernatural. Rivers' hold over Mortimer does not weaken, and his attempts to justify rationalism do not diminish. After his moment of enlightenment Mortimer rejects the necessity of having to kill Herbert as the formative, initiating act of a new world and mode of consciousness. Though still not fully believing in Herbert's guiltiness he does nevertheless recognize his goodness and Matilda's innocence. He recognizes Rivers' duplicity and guilt:

Not I alone -

Thou, too, art deep in guilt.¹

With the awakening of guilt, the natural, moral, sensibility within him asserts itself and Mortimer's redemption begins.

After Act II, the plot focuses on three areas: Rivers' increasingly desperate attempts to justify himself, Mortimer's increasing detachment from Rivers, and his love for Matilda, a force which eventually bring about his redemption

Mortimer's confusion leads to an ever-deepening cynicism. In his speeches, he maintains the rhetoric of Rivers, though his actions reveal an increasing detachment from Rivers' ideals. When the outlaw band reassembles around its leader, Mortimer, approaching the depth of his uncertainty reveals a bleak outlook on life:

The world is poisoned at the heart.²

Rivers at the same time proceeds to open a debate on justice, reason, and wisdom - an intuitive sense of just action:

Wisdom, of justice speaks the word, beats down

The Giant's strength, and at the voice of Justice

Spares not the worm.³

Rivers' detachment from reality, and his capacity to deceive himself is underlined in this encounter. He fails, in his blindness, to perceive Mortimer's growing rejection of his creed. This is reinforced in the following lines where Rivers again reveals his ignorance of Mortimer's increasing belief in the innocence of Herbert. River, however, for the moment, is able to convince

1 *ibid.*, 11.296-7

2 *ibid.*, Act II. Sc.iii, 1.345.

3 *ibid.*, 11.385-7.

the band that Herbert must be sacrificed to justice, an abstraction:

Rivers: We recognize in this old man a victim
Prepared already for the sacrifice.

Lacy: By Heavens! his words are reason
... This monstrous crime should be laid open -
here, / Where Reason has an eye that she can use
And men alone are umpires
... He shall be sacrificed.¹

Despite the appeal of Rivers' rhetoric in this instance, the band, too, turn against Rivers for his inhumanity. They choose an intuitive sense of good over Rivers' harsh ideal of abstract justice. Their function as a chorus, and as representatives of what may loosely be termed the general will, is to underline Mortimer's turning towards a truer perception of good and justice.

A redemptive movement within the plot begins during the third act and eventually reaches a redemptive recognition of Nature and man's intuitive sense of right. Mortimer and his band of outlaws are caught up in this, while Rivers becomes totally isolated from this saving knowledge. By the close of the third act, the way of reason has become extreme, uncompromising and patently false. In one heavily ironic moment, while Herbert is being brought to the camp for judgement, Rivers soliloquizes on reason and intuition:

... methinks
It were a pleasant pastime to construct
A scale and table of belief, as thus -
Two columns, one for passion, one for proof,
Each rising as the other falls.²

However, Rivers discounts either alternative, believing that both cause a fixity that precludes the spontaneity of reason. For Rivers, true reason, and happiness through it, lies beyond calculation of cause and effect, of means and ends. He sees that the spontaneity to which he has prompted Mortimer has caused misery and confusion. Mortimer's struggle will provide a case study for Rivers' revolutionary mode of consciousness:

This stripling's mind,
It hath been rudely shaken, and the dregs -
Float on the surface.³

1 *ibid.*, ll.390-405.

2 *ibid.*, Act III. Sc.ii, ll.4-8.

3 *ibid.*, ll.20-22.

The very cynical, dispassionate detachment with which Rivers views his victim's plight reveals the immorality of his cause. In lines later rebutted in "The Tables Turned", Wordsworth, through Rivers, poses the question of how far reason can intrude into man's moral being:

We dissect/The senseless body, and why not the mind
... the mind of man upturned is a strange spectacle.¹

As Rivers' inhumanity approaches its extremity, his total lack of compassion and moral sensibility becomes obvious to the band of outlaws. Just as Mortimer's confusion reveals the beginnings of his redemption, so Rivers' increasing detachment and inhumanity become the means by which his cause is lost with the band, and his life taken at their hands.

Alone with Herbert on the heath, Mortimer is offered the possibility of confronting Herbert's innocence and dispelling Rivers' malign influence. However, the mutual claims of misguided reason and intuition are of such a conflicting nature that Mortimer eventually decides to leave Herbert's fate to the supernatural - to God. Proof of Herbert's innocence is convincing; however, reason can not alone establish its validity - faith is ultimately called for:

... It might be proved,
My eyes are weak - there is a judge above -
It dawns on me - I see the end for which
An arm invisible hath led me hither ...
I have led thee hither
To save ~~the~~ spirit from perdition.²

Before abandoning Herbert, Mortimer is given another push away from reason towards faith in the supernatural beyond. He sees Herbert's staff upon which Matilda has engraved passages from scripture which are prophetic:

Ha! what's here! carved by he hand
"I am Eyes to the blind saith the Lord"
"He that puts his trust in me shall not fail"
Yes, be it so - repent and be forgiven.
God and that staff are now ~~the~~ only guide.³

1 Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R.J. Brett, "The Tables Turned", ll.25-8.
Sweet is the love which nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things;
- We murder to dissect.

2 Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, Act IV. Sc.iii, ll.120-5. Wordsworth's 1842 revisions of this speech make much of an orthodox concept of Providence. Wordsworth lengthens this speech to include the idea of remorse which must arise when the guilty individual perceives his fate to be in the hands of Providence.

3 *ibid.*, ll.149-153.

Guilt at having abandoned Herbert, and eventual remorse at having brought about his death together with an acknowledgement of, but not faith in, God and love for Matilda now operate in Mortimer's soul to defeat the insidious influence of Rivers. With Matilda's inscription, Wordsworth has made more clear Matilda's role in Mortimer's redemption, and at a more abstract level, the redemption of the revolutionary from the misguided belief in the autonomy of reason. Matilda is the embodiment of the meeting of the natural and supernatural. She radiates an almost divine love and compassion. Her literary precedents, as the inscription on the staff suggests, are the heroines of the Biblical old dispensation. Like them, she suffers in a cruel and corrupt world, and has the capacity to redeem others through her love, and their love for her.

Throughout acts four and five, the outlaw band functions as a chorus providing the background and atmosphere of the play. They help establish the setting in twelfth century crusading Europe. The outlaws, dispossessed noble men, convey the cynicism and confusion of men who have fought for a cause, an ideal, only to find that their ideals have collapsed under the weight of reality. Their idealism had received renewal under Rivers' inspirational rhetoric, but now, once again destroyed, they have gained an objectivity lacking to Mortimer.

Mortimer abandons Herbert to a trial by ordeal on the heath. He has reached the lowest ebb of his doubt both in reason and God. He relinquishes the dealing out of justice to Nature and God. He sees it now as ultimately beyond man. He now seeks certainty alone amidst nature on the heath. At this stage, the choric band of outlaws enters and proceeds to point out that Rivers' claim to represent reason is a disguise for aggressive ambition - the Nietzschean will to power. Wordsworth has the outlaws depict Rivers in terms later used by Nietzsche in his portrayal of the "obermann".¹

... Power is life to him,
 And breath and being; where he can not govern
 He will destroy - you know he hates us all.
 ... When the name of God is spoken of
 A most strange blankness overspreads his face.²

1 See Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, ed. Walter Kaufmann, (Penguin, 1978), "On the Higherman." pp.286-96.

2 Wordsworth, op.cit., Act III. Sc.iv, ll.11-22.

Rivers' satanic lust for power and its consequent contempt for life and ultimately God, are strongly supported by the preceding movement of the plot.

At this stage, Wordsworth attempts, through the chorus, to alienate the audience successfully from Rivers. We now see Rivers for what he is and what he represents, the revolutionary's unrestrained lust for personal and absolute power made attractive by a specious ideology. In these lines, Wordsworth reveals his disillusionment with, and distrust of, revolutionary ideologies.

The plot now charts the revelation of the absolute evil of revolution, disenchantment with the reality of revolution, a perception of the reality obfuscated by idealism, and a simultaneous growth toward redemption. The plot now has a dual movement exploring both Rivers' increasing hybristic contempt for others and cynicism, and Mortimer's crisis of conscience, rejection of reason and revolution, and redemption through guilt, love of Matilda, and eventual expiation. In this dual plot, Wordsworth depicts the stages of his own disenchantment and redemption through love for Nature and through Nature within man. At the same time, he charts this moral rebirth in its relationship with the ultimately self-destructive course of the revolutionary lust for power.

After recognizing that Rivers is to sacrifice Mortimer to his idol of reason, the outlaw band are prepared to execute him:

... What if he means to offer up our Captain,
An expiation, and a sacrifice
To those infernal fiends?
... That heart of his shall have as many wounds
As there are daggers here.¹

At the same time, Rivers' rejection of compassion and assertion of action and suffering reveal more clearly to Mortimer the monstrous nature of his mentor and beguiler:

Compassion! pity! pride can do without them,
And what if you should never know them more!
He is a puny soul, who, feeling pain,
Finds ease because another feels it too.²

1 *ibid.*, ll.38-44.

2 *ibid.*, Act III. Sc.v. ll.74-7.

Rivers advocates spontaneous action and the overriding of conscience only to be met by Mortimer's reluctance and eventual resistance. Rivers' major speech on revolutionary rationalism falls on deaf ears. Mortimer has, as Rivers terms it, in his speech "experienced the after vacancy and wondered at himself betrayed".¹ However, Mortimer's rejection of Rivers does not lead to a redemption but to a deep pessimism and confusion of values:

... In terror,
Remembered terror, there is love and peace.²

The turning point in Mortimer's rejection of Rivers comes in Act III, Sc.v, when Matilda brings news of Herbert's reinstatement and verification of his innocence. Mortimer, who by this stage has abandoned Herbert on the moor to die, sees her love and feels remorse:

... my brain shall burn for hours
Ere I can shed a tear.³

As Mortimer perceives his betrayal of trust and love, he falls at once into the depths of despair and a clear perception of Rivers' betrayal of him. In effect, Mortimer's self-reproach stems more from an act of negligence and cowardice rather than blood guilt:

Oh! misery! the scrip which held his food!
And I forgot to give it back again -⁴

In abandoning Herbert to an ordeal by Nature, Mortimer had believed he was acting as an agent of justice. He now perceives that he is a murderer and has perpetrated an act of supreme injustice.

Herbert's death scene forms an ironic backdrop to the intellectual debate taking place between Rivers and Mortimer. Rivers' attempt to justify his actions and his claim "to enlarge/The intellectual empire of mankind"⁵ is seen as specious against the reality of Herbert's approaching death. Robert, a peasant, sees the dying old man and contemplates taking him to his cottage - an act of Godwinian benevolence.

In contrast to this, Rivers attempts to rationalize Mortimer's guilt:
Enough is done to save you from the curse
Of living without knowledge that you live.
... Therein for ever you must yield to me.⁶

1 *ibid.*, 11.62-3.
2 *ibid.*, 11.3-4.
3 *ibid.*, 11.138-9.
4 *ibid.*, 11.167-8.
5 *ibid.*, 11.169.
6 *ibid.*, 11.204-5.

Confident that Mortimer is indebted to him, Rivers reveals what Mortimer has for some time intuitively realized:

... What I have done in darkness
I will avow before the face of day.
Herbert is innocent.¹

Mortimer's immediate response is not to acknowledge Rivers' moral supremacy but to seek out Herbert and atone for his crime:

Innocent! Oh my heart! Alive or dead,
I'll find him.²

The irony underlying River's isolation from reality is reinforced by his refusal to acknowledge Mortimer's change of heart. In Act V. Sc.ii, in an aside, he states that he will not relinquish his hold on Mortimer:

... Henceforth I'll have him
A shadow of myself, made by myself.³

His unfounded confidence in god-like powers is ironically undercut by the audience's knowledge that Rivers is shortly to be tried by the outlaw band and that Mortimer's remorse will alienate him from Rivers. The extent of Mortimer's remorse and compassion for Herbert is revealed when, later in the scene, he meets with Robert, who reveals that Herbert is just alive. Mortimer in full anguish at his betrayal, perceives that his crime has alienated him from both man and God:

At my worst need: my crimes have brought
a judgement.⁴

By the end of the scene, Herbert's death has brought Mortimer to a full recognition of himself and his crime. Robert's call for justice reinforces a major idea which the play was explored and will attempt to resolve in the final act - justice and its arbitration:

Robert: It was most heinous,
And doth call for vengeance.⁵

In the final act, Robert's separate call for vengeance is followed by the arrival of Mortimer at the cottage and his confrontation with Matilda. At first he disguises to Matilda that he is her father's assassin. However,

1 *ibid.*, ll.217-9.
2 *ibid.*, ll.220-1.
3 *ibid.*, Act IV. Sc.iii, ll.31-2.
4 *ibid.*, Act V. Sc.ii, ll. 5-6.
5 *ibid.*, Act V, Sc.iii.ll.8-9.

he also turns completely against Rivers, denouncing him and his code:

... there was a plot,
 A/damned plot against the soul of man:
 'Tis baffled - I have baffled it.¹

These lines bring out more overtly the Satanic nature of Rivers and revolutionary thought for which he stands.

Wordsworth's manipulation of dramatic irony in this scene is complex and effective. While the audience has been witness to Mortimer's guilt, Matilda is still unaware of it. As Robert, the outlaws, and Mortimer have previously done, she, too, calls for retributive justice on her father's murderer, little realizing that it is her lover Mortimer. Her cry is prophetic of Mortimer's eventual destiny:

Hear me, ye Heavens ... may vengeance haunt the fiend
 For this most cruel murder - let him live
 And move in terror of the elements.²

Mortimer, still keeping his guilt concealed from Matilda, calls for retribution on the murderer, on himself:

Mortimer: Aye, and found him,
 And he must perish ...
 He must be put to death, ...³

Increasingly, the burden of guilt becomes too unbearable, to the extent that his actions betray his crime to Matilda:

Art thou not here the friend of all the helpless.⁴

Again, Wordsworth's manipulation of dramatic irony allows the audience to see the tragic misguidedness and ignorance of both Mortimer and Matilda. Through this manipulation of point of view, the audience is enabled to see the inevitability of Mortimer's and Matilda's defeated love.

Mortimer's now conscious recognition of the monstrosity of his betrayal of innocence leads to an insight into his crime against the moral order:

... I am curst,
 All nature curses me and in my heart
 Thy curse is fixed ...
 I am the murderer of thy father.⁵

1 ibid., ll.28-30.
 2 ibid., ll.65-69.
 3 ibid., ll.80-84.
 4 ibid., l.85.
 5 ibid., ll.93-5.

In a further ironic twist, Matilda and Robert try to establish Mortimer's innocence. As far as they are concerned, the elements rather than Mortimer's negligence, are responsible:

Robert: The old man died of cold -
You are not the master of the elements.¹

In the 1797 manuscript,² Wordsworth, still exploring the Godwinian themes of social injustice and benevolence, has the beggars who had benefitted from Herbert's generosity enter and comment on the effects of his demise. During this scene, in the early manuscript, Mortimer seeks vengeance for Herbert's and his own plight on the Baron St. Clair, a depraved lord who tyrannizes the borderland. At the moment when remorse seems most to have shaken off the malign, retributive, influence of Rivers, Mortimer seeks to follow in Rivers' anarchic path. With an act of unfounded revenge, he believes he will regain his manhood:

I am a man again.³

Rivers who has re-entered at this stage, reasserts his claim over Mortimer, only to find that Mortimer's increasingly desperate, illogical, and alienated frame of mind has created a force greater than its originator:

Rivers: Beyond my expectations.⁴

Wordsworth's manipulation of irony is forceful in the closing moments of the play. As Rivers exalts his creation of a founder of a new morality, the outlaw band arrives to try him, and implement justice. However, the voice of reason has little say in Rivers' fate. He perishes in the anarchic "light of circumstance flashed upon an independent intellect". He is brutally butchered, a victim to his own school of ethics. Even so, his inability to repent and his defiant pride, leave him in his final moment with a Satanic heroism:

I die without dishonour ...
A fool and coward blended to my wish.⁵

The choric voice of the band makes it clear that Wordsworth condemns Rivers and the revolutionary consciousness which he had represented. Mortimer, too, becomes the voice of the poet as he warns against the audience following

1 *ibid.*, ll.176-7.

2 This scene is largely removed from the revised version of 1842.

3 *ibid.*, l.224.

4 *ibid.*, l.247.

5 Act V. Sc.iii, ll.255-6.

revolution and its apocalyptic mentality:

Mortimer: Raise on this lonely Heath a monument
That may record my story for warning.¹

Inevitably, so Wordsworth maintains, the course of revolution can only lead to isolation, alienation, confusion, martyrdom of the innocent, guilt, remorse and finally defeat and death.

Mortimer's closing speech brings Wordsworth's exploration of justice and conscience, or reason, to its conclusion. Rather than dividing them, Wordsworth believes that justice is a product of the interrelationship of man's inner nature with the moral order. Mortimer, now, alienated by self-imposed guilt from his inner nature and the moral order, chooses to punish himself with a life of self-exile and expiation:

Unnamed by man! and I will wander on
Living by mere intensity of thought,
A thing by pain and thought compelled to live
Yet loathing life, till heaven in mercy strike me
With blank forgetfulness - that I may die.²

Mortimer's disillusionment has led to an absolute alienation from life and he seems, unlike his later Wordsworthian successor, the Solitary, at least for a time, to be incapable of a moral regeneration, his introverted egoism will prevent this:

... all the uncertain way
Shall be as darkness to me, as a waste
Unnamed by man!³

Mortimer chooses the "via negative", the life of denial, as a means of evading the guilt he had been betrayed into. Unlike Wordsworth, who in The Prelude depicts his redemption through Nature, Mortimer is so enclosed by the fetters of egoism that he can still only live in terms of the intellect rather than coming to terms with the external world. Until Mortimer overcomes self-pity and remorse, and is able to achieve a balance between his mind and the external world, he denies to himself for a time, the possibility of moral growth. However, throughout the play, Mortimer has retained a vestige of unfallen goodness, and so has the possibility of moral regeneration open to him.

1 *ibid.*, ll.262-3.

2 *ibid.*, ll.271-5. See Prelude (1805), Bk XI, ll.75-105.

3 *ibid.*, ll.269-271.

The conclusion of The Borderers reveals Wordsworth's belief that guilt and abstract ideologies of justice and liberty could only alienate man's innate moral sensibility from its harmonious relationship with Nature.¹ Implicitly, The Borderers expresses Wordsworth's growing belief in social amelioration through "wise passiveness" rather than through violent upheaval, revelation rather than revolution.

It is significant that while completing The Borderers in the early months of 1797, Wordsworth was composing The Ruined Cottage, and was in the process of redrafting The Old Cumberland Beggar. The old beggar, in contrast to Mortimer's life of conscious suffering, postulates an existence in total harmony with Nature and society. Though this poem is an attempt to reconcile Godwin's ideal of benevolence with Wordsworth's vision of the one life, there is still a tension between reason and the absence of conscious thought. Rather than the life of reason which Wordsworth had rejected in The Borderers, the beggar, an out cast lives through inner Nature, a higher intuitive mode of consciousness, that harmonizes man's being:

... 'Tis Nature's law
That none ... should exist
Divorced from good, as spirit and pulse of good
A life and soul to every mode of being
Inseparably link'd...(living) in th eye of Nature.²

For Wordsworth, The Borderers, and the experiences leading to its writing, entailed a recognition that revolution must take place in the consciousness of the individual rather than in society.

1 See also "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew Tree" composed during the same period. In this poem, Wordsworth deals with the sin of intellectual pride, condemning its tendency to alienate man from nature:

"... pride sustained his soul
In solitude ... and so, lost man!
On visionary views would fancy feed,
Till his eye streamed with tears ..."

Like, The Solitary of The Excursion, he must find reconciliation with life through humility:

"... he, who feels contempt
For any living thing, hath faculties
Which he has never used;

... true knowledge leads to love." ll.40-57.

2 Wordsworth, "The Old Cumberland Beggar", ll.73-9. c.f. Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, "Expostulation and Reply", ll.2i. ff:

"Nor less I deem that there are powers,
Which of themselves our minds impress,
That we can feed this mind of ours,
In a wise passiveness. "