

WORDSWORTH'S EARLY BALLADRY:
A CRITICAL STUDY

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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WORDSWORTH'S EARLY BALLADRY: A CRITICAL STUDY

by

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

William Wordsworth's early balladic poetry (1798-1800) reveals a reactionary as well as an innovational dimension in its use of language. The language of this poetry fluctuates, in varying proportions, from the language of denotation to the language of implicitness. A study of Wordsworth's balladry is quite revealing, for it lies at the core of his literary manifesto. When he embodies the explicitness of the broadside ballad in his early poetry, he is not being novel; his use of language is part of the denotative tendency which pervaded previous literary taste. When he embodies the implicitness of the ballad of tradition, his use of language constitutes an innovation. Some of his early ballad poems are mainly "direct," some are mainly "oblique," while yet others are both "direct" and "oblique" in part. Wordsworth's unevenness in his early balladry as a whole stems basically from the fluctuation in his use of language.

An analysis of The Idiot Boy, Peter Bell, Goody Blake and Harry Gill, and Simon Lee the Huntsman reveals a didactic concern for illustrative subject matter. The emotional reactions of the

persona are made explicit, and the reader's response is controlled and directed through overt authorial statement. Expostulation and Reply and The Tables Turned emerge as gnomic ideological statements which share this explicitness.

The Thorn, The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman, Lucy Gray, Anecdote for Fathers, We Are Seven, and Her Eyes Are Wild—all evidence a certain concern for the implicit, either through understatement and/or figurativeness, as well as the explicitness of the poems mentioned above.

The "Lucy" and "Matthew" poems evidence a radical divergence from the principally denotative use of language. The use of symbol and understatement in these poems, characteristic of the ballad of tradition rather than the broadside, points to "oblique" poetry. It is in these poems that Wordsworth emerges as an "innovator" in the use of language in poetry. It is here that the modern reader finds himself most at home.

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Chapter I: Introduction

William Wordsworth's literary reputation has oscillated from the bardolatry accorded to Shakespeare to the scornful condescension accorded to Longfellow. The reasons for this critical phenomenon are hydra-headed, but, with a reasonable minimum of oversimplification, these can be reduced to four: (1) unevenness in Wordsworth's thought and poetic expression (within specific works and within his total work); (2) uncritical "hopping" from text to Wordsworth's prose commentaries; (3) dissimilarity of critical premises brought to the poetry; and (4) arbitrary selection of quotation from various works, particularly for their specifically intellectual content. The purpose of this essay is not to analyze the approaches which critics have adopted in explicating Wordsworth's value and significance, but to attempt an analysis of certain aspects of Wordsworth's early (1798-1800) balladic poetry itself. The study of his balladry affords a fruitful approach to the critical evaluation of his early poetical output, for the ballad is at the heart of the "innovations" he proposed; the ballad stands at the core of Wordsworth's literary manifesto.

A study of what Wordsworth adapted from the ballad genre—both the broadside ballad and the ballad of tradition—is quite revealing. Wordsworth emerges as a man vacillating

between the "direct" and the "oblique" in his use of language. When he embodies the explicitness of the broadside ballad in his early poetry, he is not being novel; his use of language is part of the denotative tendency which pervaded previous literary taste. When he embodies the implicitness of the ballad of tradition, his use of language constitutes an innovation. Some of his early ballad poems are mainly "direct," others are mainly "oblique," while yet others are both "direct" and "oblique" in part. Wordsworth's unevenness in his early balladry as a whole stems basically from this fluctuation in his use of language.

An analysis of The Idiot Boy, Peter Bell, Goody Blake and Harry Gill, Expostulation and Reply, The Tables Turned, and Simon Lee the Huntsman forms the body of the following chapter. The purpose of the chapter is to analyze critically these poems with special regard to their denotative method of communication. These poems reveal a didactic concern for illustrative subject matter; the emotional reactions of the persona are made explicit; and the reader's reaction is controlled and directed through overt authorial statement. Expostulation and Reply and The Tables Turned will emerge as gnomic

ideological statements which share this explicitness.

The third chapter consists of an analysis of The Thorn, The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman, Lucy Gray, We Are Seven, Anecdote for Fathers, and Her Eyes Are Wild, poems which evidence a certain concern for the implicit, either through understatement and/or figurativeness, as well as the explicitness of the poetry treated in the previous chapter.

In the fourth chapter, I shall attempt to demonstrate in the "Lucy" and "Matthew" poems a radical divergence from the principally denotative use of language. The use of symbol and understatement in these poems, characteristic of the ballad of tradition rather than the broadside, points to "oblique" poetry. It is in these poems that Wordsworth emerges as an "innovator" in the use of language in poetry.

A definition of terms (as I shall use them) appears necessary to avoid misunderstanding. By "ballad" I mean a form of verse adapted for singing or recitation and primarily characterized by its presentation in simple narrative form of a dramatic or exciting story. The broadside ballad and the ballad of tradition are the principal divisions of this form.

Gordon Hall Gerould's definition of the ballad of tradition as "...a folksong that tells a story with stress on the crucial situation, tells it by letting the action unfold itself in event and speech, and tells it objectively with little comment or intrusion of personal bias,"¹ provides a useful and critically acceptable formulation. It is anonymous; the supernatural is likely to play an important part in events; slight attention is paid to characterization or description; transitions are abrupt; action is presented in brief flashes; incremental repetition is common; concentrated dialogue is frequently used to develop action; mythical symbol, ellipsis, and understatement are common; the incidents are usually such as happen to common people, and often have to do with domestic episodes. Edward, Edward and Sir Patrick Spens are outstanding examples in Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry.

Any ballad that was printed on a broadside or slip may be called a broadside,² but a common style and

¹The Ballad of Tradition (New York, 1957), p. 11.

²Cf. Leslie Shepard, The Broadside Ballad (London, 1962), pp. 1-20.

common outlook do emerge from the mass. The broadside ballad invariably begins with a direct address to the reader (or listener), and it ends with a brief didactic note. It is often completely didactic, with some aspect of ascetic theology as its principal concern. It is often argumentative and polemical. An aura of sentimentality and conventional piety permeates much of the broadside ballad, with a tawdry optimism and cozy materialism as customary corollaries. At times the broadside is frankly bawdy and sensationalistic. It is full of names, places, and other pedestrian circumstances, by way of attesting the novelty and veracity of the story. The focus is diffuse and the development of the narrative is wordy. There is a growing concern for characterization and named emotion. The broadside may be anonymous or of known authorship. Jemmy Dawson (William Shenstone), Jane Shore (tentatively attributed to Thomas Deloney), and The Children in the Wood are examples from Percy's Reliques.

The literary (or, art) ballad is a term used to distinguish the ballads of known authorship from those of unknown authorship. A broadside ballad, then, provided it is of known authorship, may also be termed

a literary ballad. La Belle Dame sans Merci by Keats, Rosabelle by Scott, and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Coleridge are examples.

Addison's Chevy Chase papers are inevitably cited by critics who wish to demonstrate that the early eighteenth century was not uncongenial to the ballad of tradition, and that the very consideration of this "ancient ballad" must be considered a form of incipient romanticism.³ Perhaps this is the case. But it must be kept in mind that in these papers Addison underlines the heroic aspect of the ballad, and that the "defence" is couched in terms consonant with contemporary eighteenth-century aesthetic criteria. Chevy Chase becomes a heroic poem, structured and elevated. The ballad of tradition, on the whole, does not exert a vital influence on the sophisticated literature of the period. It is only after the publication of Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) that the collection and appraisal of traditional ballads gained popularity in sophisticated literary circles.⁴ What does exert a considerable force

³Cf. Albert B. Friedman, The Ballad Revival: Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated Poetry (Chicago, 1961), pp. 84-113.

⁴P. A. O'Flaherty, The Ballad Revival in the Eighteenth Century, M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1960.

on the literature of the eighteenth century is the broadside ballad. The upsurge of the broadside at this time indicates the growing emphasis on bourgeois-orientated literature. (This, of course, is not to say that bourgeois-orientated literature did not previously exist.) Its influence can be traced in the works of Dekker, Deloney, Nashe, and later, Rowe, among many. The style and manner, as well as the matter, of these ballads was adopted by a large proportion of the sentimental poetry of the mid-eighteenth century: Gay's Sweet William's Farewell to Black-eyed Susan, Tickell's Colin and Lucy, Mickle's Sorceress, Shenstone's Jemmy Dawson, and Goldsmith's Edwin and Angelina are but a few examples.

Interest in balladic subjects, themes, techniques, and general outlook is characteristic of many Romantic poets; witness the adaptations of Keats, Scott, Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth. The interest generally varies from the broadside ballad to the ballad of tradition to the contemporary literary German horror ballad. A modern critic, W. J. Entwistle, has gone far, perhaps too far, in asserting that "...since the coming of Romanticism the debt of literature to the ballads has been comparable

to that of the Renaissance to the Greek and Latin classics...."⁵ The Romantic interest in the preternatural, in primitive violence, in folk history, in "medievalism," in the long-ago-and-far-away, in an elemental simplicity of matter and expression, is reflected in the growing popularity of the ballad of tradition in sophisticated literary circles. But why this interest? Partly because of the Rousseauist persuasion regarding the basic goodness of the natural and the bucolic; partly because of the desire to escape social and literary convention; partly as a protest of feeling and imagination against the mechanical categories of exclusive reason; partly as a return to nature in face of the growing encroachments of an industrial society. "The whole movement of Romanticism," writes William Barrett, "is at bottom an escape from Laputa."⁶

In the Advertisement to the 1798 Edition of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth writes:

The majority of the following poems are to be considered as

⁵European Balladry (Oxford, 1939), p. 119.

⁶Irrational Man (New York, 1958), p. 120.

experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure.

He berates the "gaudiness and inane phraseology" of modern writers, and he states that his poetry "...contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents...." In the Preface to the 1800

Edition of Lyrical Ballads, he elaborates:

The principal object then which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that situation our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from these elementary feelings; and from the necessary character of rural occupation are more easily comprehended; and more durable; and lastly, because in that situation the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language too

of these men is adopted...because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived, and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the action of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions.

That Wordsworth should choose the ballad for the initial experiment thus becomes quite understandable. The desire to reform the diction of poetry and to describe the elemental leads naturally to the simple literature of the unsophisticated folk relatively untainted by the urban and the conventional. Wordsworth's interest is in the natural (as opposed to the conventional), the simple, the common.

The title Lyrical Ballads provides some difficulties. A lyric is a brief, emotional, subjective poem, whereas a ballad is a simple, objective, narrative poem. The ostensible contradiction is somewhat clarified by Wordsworth's remark in the 1800 Preface:

...but it is proper that I should mention one other circumstance which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein

developed gives importance to
the action and situation and not
the action and situation to the
feeling.

The mere telling of a story interested Wordsworth less than the feelings and reflections which they might stimulate. The poems in the 1798 and 1800 editions of Lyrical Ballads cannot, then, strictly be classified as ballads. However, certain aspects of the genre—from both the ballad of tradition and the broadside ballad—are transmuted in a personal literary key. In the "Lucy Poems," for example, certain aspects of the ballad of tradition are present, but the narrative element is virtually completely suppressed.

**Chapter II: Poetry as Direct Statement: The Influence
of the Broadside Ballad**

In the Essay, Supplementary to the Preface of the 1849-50 edition of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth mentions his indebtedness to "the old ballad" of Bishop Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, with its "true simplicity and genuine pathos"; and he commends Percy for his "fine sensibility," while placing him above Bürger on this basis. Such remarks have a tendency to leave us with the impression that the ballad of tradition alone exercised a considerable influence on Wordsworth, and Carl Woodring in his recent study of the poet seems to have tacitly accepted the poet's words at face value: "That Wordsworth...had the folk ballad prominently in mind we know both from the expression of gratitude to Percy and from the extensive use...of the commonest ballad stanza of the fifteenth century...."¹ S. B. Hustvedt presents a more accurate position when he suggests that "...Wordsworth says just enough about his indebtedness to the ballad to make us wish he had exposed himself more fully...";² and that "...aside from the simplicity of style and the frequent use of the ballad stanza, there is little in Wordsworth's poems

¹Wordsworth (Boston, 1965), p. 25.

²Ballad Books and Ballad Men (Cambridge, 1930), p. 99.

to suggest the older ballads...."³ One must always remember that only approximately one-ninth of Percy's Reliques are ballads of tradition. The collection contains Jemmy Dawson and Jane Shore as well as Sir Patrick Spens. When, in the famous Preface to the 1800 Edition of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth argues that the naked speech in everyday use is a suitable poetical medium, he instances the broadside ballad, specifically, a stanza from The Babes in the Wood:

Those pretty babes with hand in hand
Went wandering up and down,
But never more they saw the Man
Approaching from the Town.

Dr. Johnson had parodied the passage:

I put my hat upon my head
And walked into the Strand
And there I met another man
Whose hat was in his hand.

The ballad stanza is "admirable," claims Wordsworth, while the parody is

a fair example of the superlatively contemptible. When arises the difference? Not from the metre, not from the language, not from the order of words; but the matter expressed in Dr. Johnson's stanza is contemptible.

³Ballad Criticism in Scandinavia and Great Britain during the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1916), pp. 294-295.

And Sir Cauline, a rather insipid piece of broadside fame in the Percy collection, Wordsworth considers "exquisite."⁴ Wordsworth's concern here, of course, is with the matter of the broadside, not with its method. An analysis of some of the early ballad adaptations, however, reveals that the broadside ballad also exerted an influence in the methodological explicitness in evidence here.

In his English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (1809), Lord Byron made a polemical, yet telling, critique of Wordsworth's early poetic output:

The simple Wordsworth, framer of a lay
As soft as evening in his favourite May,
Who warns his friend 'to shake off toil
and trouble,
And quit his books, for fear of growing
double;
Who, both by precept and example, shows
That prose is verse, and verse is merely
prose;
Convincing all, by demonstration plain,
Poetry should delight in prose insane;
And Christmas stories tortured into
rhyme
Contain the essence of the true sublime.
Thus, when he tells the tale of Betty Foy,
The Idiot mother of 'an idiot boy';
A moon-struck, silly lad who lost his way,

⁴Cf. C. W. Stork, "The Influence of the Popular Ballad on Wordsworth and Coleridge," PMLA, XXIX (1914), 299-326; and P. G. Brewster, "The Influence of the Popular Ballad on Wordsworth's Poetry," SP, XXXV (1938), 588-612.

And, like the bard, confounded night
 with day;
 So close on each pathetic part he dwells,
 And each adventure so sublimely tells,
 That all who view the 'idiot in his glory'
 Conceive the bard the hero of the story.

Although The Idiot Boy (1798) was always one of Wordsworth's favourites, posterity has generally agreed with Byron. The poem's "heavy-handed pleasantry,"⁵ "ungenial humour,"⁶ and "persistent didactic urge"⁷ have been singled out for particularly acid criticism. But what becomes evident on analysis is that Wordsworth's much-celebrated ineffectiveness in The Idiot Boy can be traced to certain broadside influences in the poem.

The Idiot Boy begins felicitously with lines resembling the first stanza of Christabel (not yet written) in its onomatopoeitical evocation:

'Tis eight o'clock,—a clear March night,
 The moon is up,—the sky is blue,
 The owlet, in the moonlight air,
 Shouts from nobody knows where;
 He lengthens out his lonely shout,
 Halloo! Halloo! a long halloo!

⁵Martin S. Day, History of English Literature, Volume II (New York, 1963), p. 338.

⁶Marian Mead, Four Studies in Wordsworth (New York, 1964), p. 199.

⁷J. E. Jordan, "Wordsworth's humour," PMLA, LXXIII (1958), 92.

⁸The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, edited by T. Hutchinson, revised edition (London, 1936). Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

The narrator then directly addresses (as the nominative of address in line 8 indicates) three questions to Betty Foy, giving the reader the impression that he is not the omniscient narrator. But in the next twenty-three lines, he gives us a detailed explanation of the situation, an explanation requiring an omniscient narrator. Old Susan Gale is ill and requires medical attention; and since

There's not a house within a mile,
No hand to help them in distress,

and

Betty's husband's at the wood,
Where by the week he doth abide,

Betty Foy decides to send her Idiot Boy to fetch the town doctor. She prepares the pony, hoists her son aboard, gives him directions, and gazes proudly on him "till he's out of sight." Johnny rides in joy. His

lips they burr, burr, burr,
As on he goes beneath the moon,

we are told in an anti-climactic attempt at comic effect; they burr "as loud as any mill, or near it." Thus informed, we are alert for further irony as Betty proudly assures Susan that her boy will return with the doctor before eleven o'clock. By one o'clock, Betty has passed

through moods of vile reflection on her son, "a little idle sauntering Thing" (line 159). Susan then unhappily expresses a fear that Johnny

may perhaps be drownded;
Or lost, perhaps, and never found;
Which they must both for ever rue.
(179-181)

After the necessary attentions to the sick friend have been performed, Betty hastens in pursuit of her dear child. Intermittently, she curses the pony (lines 227-231), old Susan (lines 232-236), and even the doctor (237-242). Arrived at the doctor's house, she learns from the sleepy, grumbling man that he has not seen her brat, and she falls into a typical broadside lamentation:

'O woe is me! O woe is me!
Here will I die; here will I die;
I thought to find my lost one here,
But he is neither far nor near,
Oh! what a wretched Mother I!
(262-266)

Susan forgotten, Betty would knock to ask again about Johnny, but she does not have the "heart," or, as we would say, the nerve. She wanders distractedly in her search (lines 273-302), until she reflects on where the pony might choose to go (lines 303-311). Here is certainly the "idiot mother of 'an idiot boy.'"

The action until now has been described rather wordily. We are given a detailed chart of a distraught mother's physical and psychological peregrinations. We are given explicit and detailed reasons for the actions depicted, and we are informed of the inner psychological states of these characters in rather matter-of-fact fashion. The actions of the drama are not allowed to speak for themselves. Wordsworth intends to delineate the elemental passions, and he strives toward this end through direct means, the overt description of these passions, rather than suggesting them in the sound, sense, and action of the poem.

In line 312, when we anticipate the dénouement, the narrator interrupts (and in an inappropriate tone). With a flat drollery, he protests that apprenticeship of fourteen years to the Muses gives him a right to expect the greater inspiration he needs for telling the adventures of boy and pony (lines 337-346). Wordsworth has none of Chaucer's piquancy in this matter. A comparison with Chaucer is most revealing in determining Wordsworth's powers as a raconteur here. In lines 204-206, Wordsworth had used the favourite Chaucerian rhetorical device, occupatio:

And how she ran, and how she walked,

And all that to herself she talked,
Would surely be a tedious tale.

He now proceeds, of course, to describe just these actions. The irony is that whereas Chaucer succeeds in transforming tedious matter, Wordsworth succeeds in becoming tedious. Wordsworth's attempt to effect the humour of the mock-epic falls flat; he is too concerned with serious illustration of the elemental passions. Chaucer's is the suggestive slyness of non-explicit thesis writing (if one can posit any thesis at all in Chaucer). Johnny's pleasures, Wordsworth seems to insist, are basic, healthy, natural feeling; they are only limited. Meanwhile, before the happy ending, he gives another turn to the screw. Susan's fret and fears, by a kind of allopathic medicine, have healed her body sufficiently for her to hobble off in search of the pony, Johnny, and Betty. The confusion, seemingly in vain, has proved curative.

The emotion of the poem is named emotion. The work "joy" occurs eight times; "love," four times; "good" (in the sense of "kind"), five times; "happy" (including "bliss," "glee," "delight," "merry," and "laughter"), fourteen times; "poor" (in the sense of "pitiful"), ten times; "pain," "woe," "tearful," "dread," "mild," "wild," and "wretched" are other named emotions.

A characteristic passage of discursively communicated emotion describes Betty's reaction on finding her son:

A few sad tears does Betty shed."

She kisses o'er and o'er again
Him whom she loves, her Idiot Boy;
She's happy here, is happy there;
She is uneasy everywhere;
Her limbs are all alive with joy.
(386-391)

Wordsworth's The Idiot Boy is a poem of wordy development and explicit emotion. In his attempt to portray sympathetically the alogical, elemental passions which he considers truly human, Wordsworth describes as a psychoanalyst would. He is concerned with descriptive alogicality of subject matter. The emotion involved is not conveyed implicitly in figurative language. Wordsworth's poem does not evoke a series of alogical associations through the poetic emotionalism of suggestion.

The Idiot Boy is diffuse. The focus is not on one crucial situation. The total situation is totally described, and the action progresses in a continuous flow. There are no flashes here. And there is much empty filling and meaningless repetition; witness the following stanza:

And he is all in travelling time,—

And, by the moonlight, Betty Foy
 Has on the well-girt saddle set
 (The like was never heard of yet)
 Him whom she loves, her Idiot Boy.
 (37-41)

This information—moonlight, horse, saddling, and mother's affection—has been given in stanza two. Its repetition recapitulates the introductory stanzas, thus resuming the flow of the narrative which had been awkwardly interrupted in the third stanza to explain the situation to the reader.

The ballad of tradition provides a striking contrast to the prolixity of The Idiot Boy. Concentration (as well as other structural qualities) is evident in a traditional ballad such as Johnie Cock (114).⁹ In nearly all the extant versions the ballad begins with a domestic scene. Johnie's mother, evidently fearful of what harm the seven foresters of Peckerram may do to her son, implores him to stay home that day. Typical of youth, he ignores the warning, and, keener than ever, he leaves for the hunt. The hunt is successful, whereupon he and his hounds gorge themselves and fall asleep. An unexplained old man observes him and reports his presence to the seven foresters. The foresters rush to the scene,

⁹Numbered according to F. J. Child, English and Scottish Popular Ballads, 5 volumes (Boston, 1882-1898).

and a struggle ensues. The fight is amazingly syncopated,
yet very vivid:

O the first y stroke that they gae him,
They struck him off by the knee;
Then up bespake his sister's son:
'O the next'll gar him die!'

The nephew's appearance is as mysterious as that of the
old man. There follow three stanzas of defiance, stirring
and yet pathetic, after which:

He has killed the Seven Forsters,
He has killd them all but ane,
And that wan scarce to Pickram Side,
To carry the bode-words hame.

Two more stanzas more complete the ballad. First, Johnie
speaks:

'Is ther never a boy in a' this wood
That will tell what I can say;
That will go to Cockley's Well,
Tell my mither to fetch me away.'

There was a boy into that wood,
That carried the tidings away,
And may ae was the well-wight man
At the fetching o Johnny away.

The actions move swiftly, creating an effect of continuity.
There is a shift of scene from Johnie and his hounds to
the foresters' hut, but it is executed without sacrificing
the sense of continuity. There is nothing irrelevant,
but there is a good deal left unexplained. The events
are flashed on the screen of the mind, each frame sharp

and each revealing one further step in the development of the story. Hodgart has appropriately termed this the "montage method."¹⁰ What lies before and after can only be inferred. The narrative is unified in the sense that the frames are directed on the imaginative and emotional essentials of a story focused on a simple, single, central situation.

There is another quality of the ballad of tradition which is closely related to the narrative method I have described above and which provides a striking contrast to the narrative technique of The Idiot Boy. A startling effect is often produced by ellipsis or understatement. All that is given of the culminating scene of Sir Patrick Spens,¹¹ for example, is this:

O our Scots nobles wer richt laith
To weet their cork-heild schoone;
Bot lang owre a' the play wer playd
Their hats they swam aboone.

Or consider the simple effectiveness of Bonnie George Campbell (210). The gallant gentleman riding out flashes on the screen. The next frame shows the steed coming home. The next frame shows the laments of his sisters (or mother, depending on the version), and of his wife. It is simple

¹⁰M. J. C. Hodgart, The Ballads (Toronto, 1962), p. 28.

¹¹Volume the First, Book the First, Percy's Reliques: No. 52 of Child's collection.

and poignant. The story leaves little doubt as to what took place, yet the ballad does little more than hint at the story. Much is left unsaid.

The Not-Browne Mayd,¹² a broadside ballad which circulated widely in the eighteenth century and which was reprinted in Percy's collection, on the other hand, provides a parallel to The Idiot Boy in its use of language as a discursive medium. In the first twelve lines the narrator states the present opinion men have of women: they are coy, fickle, and unfaithful. But the narrator takes exception to contemporary opinion and decides to enter the lists on the side of womankind:

I say nat may, but that all day
 It is bothe writ and sayd
 That womans faith is, as who sayth,
 All utterly decayd;
 But, neverthelesse, ryght good wytnesse
 In this case might by layd,
 That they love true, and continue:
 Recorde the Not-browne Mayd:
 Which, when her love come, her to prove,
 To her to make his mone,
 Wolde nat depart; for in her hart
 She loved but hym alone.
 (23-24)

In lawyer-like fashion, he proposes to put his case forward:

Than betwaine us late us dyscus
 What was all the manere
 Betwayne them two: we wyll also

¹²Volume the Second, Book the First, Percy's Reliques.

Tell all the payne, and fere,
That she was in.
(25-29)

Thirty-two lines have elapsed before the thread of the narrative itself begins:

'I am the knyght: I come by nyght,
As secret as I can;
Sayinge, Alas! thus standeth the case,
I am a banyshed man!'

But in lines 37-44 the knight restates the purpose of the story. The repetition is quite meaningless and awkward. At best, its function can be considered forensic.

The verbal thrusting and parrying between the knight and the maid begins in earnest in line 49. And for the next 300 lines or so, the knight outlines possible problems which might arise were she to follow him into the greenwood: he is an outlaw; he will never be able to provide her with a luxurious home; people will consider her a slut; she will end her days on the gallows; she will have to eat insipid food. Finally, he presents her with the ultimate objection: he has another paramour. The maid remains true. She replies, giving her solution to each obstacle as it is presented. She states her true motives. The knight retorts by analyzing the motives which he thinks (feigningly, of course) prompt each suggested solution:

Nay, nay, nat so; ye shall nat go,
 And I shall tell ye why,—
 Your appetyght is to be lyght
 Of love, I wele espy.
 (241-245)

The debate continues, and the knight, who is "an erlys son" and not an outlaw, concedes. Womankind, it has been illustrated, is "meke, kynde, and stable." He will marry her.

The debate in The Not-Browne Mayd proceeds on the level of objection and explanation. The speeches begin in most cases with the syntactical ligatures "if," "yet," and "though." The situation is explained and the motives are explicitly stated. The poem is a study of the psychology of love, with the vindication of woman-kind as its end.

The narrator proposed to "tell all the payne, and fere," the emotions experienced by the maid on seemingly being rejected, and he delivers just this. The poem is replete with stated emotion. "Blysse," "greve," "paynes hard," "fere," "care," "sorrow," "dystresse," "hevynesse," "delyght," "pyte," "cold," "joy," "drede and awe"—are but a few of the listed emotions; and "love" is repeated twenty-six times. This use of denotation is characteristic of the broadside ballad.

It is interesting to note the use of language

in Matthew Prior's Henry and Emma (1709), a literary ballad whose source is The Not-Browne Mayd. It does not differ significantly from Wordsworth's Idiot Boy or from its broadside counterpart in this respect. Prior's poem is 784 lines long, 261 of which are used in establishing the narrative setting. The function of the prologue and epilogue is to locate the dialogue between the two lovers-to-be in a specific historical time and place, and to reduce it to the central episode in what Karl Kroeber has termed "a semi-epical, courtly romance."³ The beginning and ending descriptive passages, however, only succeed in diffusing the concentration on the crucial situation. The procession of the heroic couplets is slow-paced, characteristic of epic development. It is a poem of logical explicitness. Speeches vary from thirteen to fifty-three lines, depending on the complexity of the ideas and feelings to be expressed. Prior sustains a syllogistic coherence through the use of syntactical ligatures similar to those described in my explication of The Not-Browne Mayd. The unity of Henry and Emma is the unity of interlinking stages of a continuously developing debate. Prior supplies reasons for all

¹³Romantic Narrative Art (Madison, 1960), p. 14.

that happens. Henry states the reason for his banishment (killing a man), and he attempts to justify the emotional torture he inflicts on Emma; and Emma is forced to explain and to justify her feelings; she eventually falls into maudlin sentimentality. The intensity of the poem is sustained only by progressively exaggerating Henry's cruelty and Emma's affection. Henry finally appears sadistic, and Emma becomes offensively self-righteous, then frantic:

Wanting the scissors, with these hands I'll tear
 (If that obstructs my flight) this load of hair;
 Black soot, or yellow walnut, shall disgrace
 This little red and white of Emma's face,
 (499-502)

and eventually, hyperbolically self-pitying:

Yet, when increasing grief brings slow disease;
 And ebbing life, on terms severe as these,
 Will have its little lamp no longer fed;
 When Henry's mistress shews him Emma dead;
 Rescue my poor remains from vile neglect;
 With virgin honours let my hearse be deckt,
 With decent emblem; and at least persuade
 This happy nymph, that Emma be laid
 Where thou, dear author of my death, where she
 With frequent eye my sepulchre may see.¹⁴
 (614-624)

Prior's concern is for the way his characters feel about situations; the situations do not speak for themselves. And the poem is full of adjectives attributing emotional

¹⁴ The Literary Works of Matthew Prior, Volume I,
 edited by H. B. Wright and M. K. Spears (Oxford, 1959).

qualities even to the inanimate: "weary steps," "tedious way," "happy race," "dejected eyes," and "wounded stone." The emotion of the poem is explicit. It is presented factually and discursively. In addition, there is, as in The Not-Browne Mayd, an avowed illustrative or didactic intent, the vindication of womankind's faithfulness:

Of Female Passion feign'd, or Faith decay'd;
Henceforth shall in my Verse refuted stand,
Be said to Winds, or writ upon Sand.
(17-19)

In short, Prior's poem is diffuse and explicit in its use of language. Its unity is that of a logically structured debate; its progression is that of a purely representational motion picture.

In The Idiot Boy, a certain wordiness, a certain explicitness, a certain concern for detailed psychological characterization for the purpose of direct illustration—all indicate a divergence from the ballad of tradition; they point to an affinity for the method of the broadside. The direct poetry of The Idiot Boy hardly constitutes an innovation. The view of language as a discursive medium in poetry has not been altered in The Idiot Boy. In this respect, Wordsworth's poem shares the view of previous literary taste, as the contrast with the ballad of tradition, and the comparison with a representative broadside ballad,

The Not-Browne Mayd and with Matthew Prior's early
eighteenth-century adaptation, indicate.

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After writing The Idiot Boy, Wordsworth began, in 1798, writing a much longer poem in the guise of a narrating persona. Too long for Lyrical Ballads, this poem, Peter Bell, was held back until 1819, when it met universal ridicule. A few days before Wordsworth's poem was published, John Hamilton Reynolds printed Peter Bell, a Lyrical Ballad, a savage burlesque upon Wordsworth's egoism and his "moral thunder from buttercups"; his Peter Bell proses over the tombstones of Betty Foy, Goody Blake, Martha Ray, the Ancient Mariner, and even "W.W." And Shelley's Peter Bell the Third (1839) has probably completed for most readers the interment of the second (Wordsworth's) Peter Bell. The burlesques raise two questions: Is the burial deserved? And, if it is deserved, what are the internal causes of death?

In the discussion of "the two cardinal points of poetry" in Chapter XIV of the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge tells us that his responsibility to the Lyrical Ballads was to transfer from our inward nature such human interest as to make credible for the reader "persons and characters supernatural," while Wordsworth's responsibility was "...to give the charm of novelty to things of every

day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us." Wordsworth, in his public apology for Peter Bell, addressed to Southey on its publication in 1819, suggests that he had composed the poem in 1798 as the obverse of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner:

The Poem of Peter Bell, as the Prologue will show, was composed under a belief that the Imagination not only does not require for its exercise the intervention of supernatural agency, but that, though such agency be excluded, the faculty may be called forth as imperiously, and for kindred results of pleasure, by incidents within the compass of poetic probability, in the humblest departments of daily life.

And, accordingly, the narrator of the prologue, speaking to his flying boat, the vehicle of heavenly flight, states:

'Long have I loved what I behold,
The night that calms, the day that cheers;
The common growth of mother-earth
Suffices me—her tears, her mirth,
Her humblest mirth and tears.

'The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
I shall not covet for my dower,
If I along that lowly way
With sympathetic heart may stray,
And with a soul of power.'

(131-140)

The everyday is to be the subject of Peter Bell; and the

contomitant method, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, is to be the direct, the literal.

Shelley's remonstrance of dull prosiness in Part the Seventh of Peter Bell the Third, if not excessive, is substantially correct. Consider, for example, the three following stanzas randomly chosen from Wordsworth's poem:

'A prize!' cries Peter—but he first
Must spy about him far and near;
There's not a single house in sight,
No woodman's hut, no cottage light—
Peter, you need not fear!

There's nothing to be seen but woods,
And rocks that spread a hoary gleam,
And this one Beast that from the bed
Of the green meadow hangs his head
Over the silent stream.

His head is with a halter bound;
The halter seizing, Peter leapt
Upon the Creature's back, and plied
With ready heels his shaggy side;
But still the Ass his station kept.
(386-400)

The following is a passage from Jane Shore,¹⁵ a broadside attributed to Thomas Deloney:

In maiden yeares my beautye bright,
Was loved dear of lord and knight;
But yet the love that they requir'd,
It was not as my friends desir'd.

¹⁵Volume the Second, Book the Second, Percy's
Reliques.

My parents, they, for thirst of gaine,
 A husband for me did obtaine;
 And I, their pleasure to fulfillle,
 Was forc'd to wedd against my wille.

To Matthew Shore I was a wife,
 Till lust brought ruine to my life;
 And then my life I lewilye spent,
 Which makes my soul for to lament.
 (4-16)

The matter of the two excerpts obviously differs, but the use of language is quite similar. The passages present us with verse, not poetry. The odd inversion of syntactical order, the use of rhyme, rhythm, and alliteration add nothing essential to what could be expressed as well in prose. That the authors chose to express themselves in a medium which does utilize rhyme, rhythm, inversion, and alliteration is certainly their prerogative; but these techniques are not essential in the communication of what the authors describe. In both excerpts words serve the function of pointers, signposts of specific matter.

In the first two stanzas of the First Part of Peter Bell, Wordsworth suggests a dilemma which he faced in the poem's composition. The narrator begins the tale itself in medias res:

All by the moonlight river-side
 Groaned the poor Beast--alas! in vain;
 The staff was raised to loftier height,
 And the blows fell with heavier weight
 As Peter struck--and struck again,
 (191-195)

but, in an interruption reminiscent of Chaucer, the Squire cries out:

'Hold!'...'against the rules
Of common sense you're surely sinning;
This leap is for us all too bold;
Who Peter was, let that be told,
And start from the beginning.'
(196-200)

In a language that is prosaic, the Squire protests that there is to be no leaping from frame to frame. The situation must be explained fully and consecutively from the beginning. Wordsworth, in the Advertisement to the First Edition of Lyrical Ballads (1798), declared his intention to offer "the middle and lower classes of society" a new kind of ballad containing "...a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents."¹⁶ And Peter Bell is (as are Jane Shore in particular and the broadside ballad in general) didactic; witness the following stanza of Wordsworth's poem:

But might I give advice to you,
Whom in my fear I love so well;
From men of pensive virtue go,
Dread Beings! and your empire show
On hearts like that of Peter Bell,
(771-775)

and the conclusion:

And Peter Bell, who, till that night,
Had been the wildest of his clan,

¹⁶My italics.

Forsook his crimes, renounced his folly,
And, after ten months' melancholy,
Became a good and honest man.
(1131-1135)

Peter Bell is a didactic tale directed to the middle class, and, in accordance with the Squire's demands, the tale must be detailed, explained, and literal. The twenty-four stanzas following the Squire's interruption are a conscious exaggeration to tell all. There is an obviously "peasant humour"—the naive, slightly drole, mock-serious view of the peasant—involved in the extended amplification of lines 210-230, and in the startled response of lines 280-282:

'Nay, start not!—wedded wives—and twelve!
But how one wife could e'er come near him,
In simple truth I cannot tell.'

Wordsworth evidently realized the banality of the descriptive explanation; by feigning a beginning in medias res he tells us that he knows how to tell an artistically constructed tale, but that an artistic tale would be ineffective as teaching the "middle and lower classes of society." To teach the truth of "human passions, human characters, and human incidents" to this reading public, one must be explicit, Wordsworth here claims. He is well aware that in striving to achieve this end he foregoes the artistic.

In the broadside ballad, the emotion involved is

stated; we are told what emotions are felt by the characters, and we are instructed how we are to feel as well. The emotionalism of Peter Bell offers a parallel in this respect. "Heart" is repeated fourteen times; "joy" (including "mirth," "delight," and "pleasure"), nineteen times; "felt," five times; "fear" (including "dread"), nine times; "sorrow" (including "gloom," "grief," "compunction," and "remorse"), thirteen times; "fury" (including "wrath"), five times; "poor" (in the sense of "pitiful"), nine times; and "pity," three times. There is a profusion of broken hearts, mournful groans, and burning tears—all in the cause of fostering a respect for that heart at peace with man and nature.

Peter Bell qua poem has been described as grotesque, laboured, and ludicrous.¹⁷ The description of the "grinning" Ass turning his "long left ear" "upon the pivot of his skull," and turning "the eye-ball in his head," lends a certain validity to this condemnation. However, as I illustrated, there is a strain of conscious peasant humour in the poem. The question is whether Wordsworth succeeded in maintaining a balance between humorous and serious tonality in speaking of a matter

¹⁷See A. E. Swaen, "Peter Bell," Anglia, Bd. XLVII, N.F. XXXV (1923), 126-184.

which was evidently close to his heart and head. From line 286 there is nothing to indicate that Wordsworth has tongue-in-cheek; the poem henceforth speaks of high moral seriousness. The above description of the Ass occurs at a crucial point in Peter's gradual conversion. We are therefore left to conclude that the apparent ludicrousness in this instance (to the modern reader) stems from Wordsworth's desire to describe too accurately rather than from a conscious attempt at humour on his part.

The description of growing fear, guilt, and repentance in the first, second, and third parts respectively, stem from a desire to delineate the psychological transitions involved. As a result, the odyssey of Peter's heart and soul is told directly as illustration. Peter Bell need be read but once, and the edification is forever culled, convincingly or otherwise. This poem, in its explicitness, differs from that other odyssey, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, a poem with a different purpose, which in its suggestive figurativeness spreads concentric circles of meaning.

Peter Bell is cousin to the broadside ballad. It contains much psychological motive-probing, a pinch of sensationalism (the twelve wives and the description

of a seduction followed by death before childbirth), and a generous portion of pedestrian detail (names, ages, places, and exact distances). The emotional dimension of the poem is communicated discursively. Its direction is didactic, and its development is prolix. It is hardly a story of intense concentration—either in style or content. While it is true that Peter Bell is a tale, not a ballad, it is equally true that in an artistically well-executed tale the chief concern is also with the story and with the characters of its heroes only in so far as they are revealed in the plot. The artistically well-executed tale is also closely knit; it has a simplicity and brevity that in the hands of the best writers give it a real charm. This is characteristic of the best of Gower's tales, for example. It is nevertheless quite ~~tyre~~ true, as an analysis of the text indicates, that Peter Bell shares the artistic weaknesses of the broadside ballad, weaknesses bred by the urge to analyze, to state, to teach.

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Simon Lee the Old Huntsman (1798) is a direct plea for meditation on the humble and the elemental. Having spent sixty lines describing Simon Lee, his wife, their past and present, Wordsworth addresses the reader:

My gentle Reader, I perceive
How patiently you've waited,
And now I fear that you expect
Some tale will be related.

O Reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle Reader! you would find
A tale in every thing.
What more I have to say is short,
And you must kindly take it:
It is not a tale; but, should you think,
Perhaps a tale you'll make it.
(61-72)

It is a hopeful expression that the brief incident to be related will evoke a heartfelt response within the reader, a response which will make the reader a better individual. The reader will hopefully draw out the real significance of the incident for himself and thus give the incident its total significance and bring it to completion. The incident is then related; the narrator had helped the old man to sever a tangled root, and Simon had expressed his heartfelt gratitude in words and tears. The narrator then provides the reader with the significance of the tale in the rather pedagogic tone of the concluding four lines:

—I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds

With coldness still returning;
 Alas! the gratitude of men
 Hath oftener left me mourning.

The significance of the incident is stated. The real relevance is elaborated for the reader.

Simon Lee shows a dual concern. The first sixty lines are evidently an attempt to elicit sympathy for Simon and his wife, "the poorest of the poor," while the last twenty-four are concerned with an incident illustrating the human emotion of gratitude. There is no organic necessity for the initial extended descriptions; the final incident is complete in itself. The descriptions, however, do serve the function of indicating in detail that the suppositum of gratitude is the unassuming and the humble. The language of the descriptions is denotative.

Simon

is lean and he is sick;
 His body, dwindled and awry,
 Rests upon ankles swollen and thick;
 His legs are thin and dry....

The naked monosyllables draw a realistic portrait. Simon's emotional reactions are explicitly named. Simon "loves," "rejoices," and cries tears of gratitude:

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

(89-91)

The subject matter of the poem, on the whole, even in its directness, does evoke a certain non-discursive sympathy, but as I indicated previously, the direction of this sympathy is overtly guided in the final four lines. The method of communication is principally that of denotation.

In another ballad adaptation, Goody Blake and Harry Gill (1798), Wordsworth portrays the lamentable passions generated by poverty and the vicious treatment of the underprivileged. Desperately seeking some faggots to keep herself warm, Goody Blake pulls some sticks from Harry Gill's hedge at night. From his secret vantage point, Harry leaps on her,

And fiercely by the arm he took her,
And by the arm he held her fast,
And fiercely by the arm he shook her,
And cried, 'I've caught you then at last!'
(89-92)

Goody falls on her knees and prays:

'O God! who art never out of hearing,
O may he never more be warm!'
(99-100)

Chills thereupon leave Harry in ceaseless misery. The poem then ends with a didactic flourish typical of the broadside ballad:

Now think, ye farmers all, I pray,
Of Goody Blake and Harry Gill!

As in The Idiot Boy and Peter Bell, the word "poor" is

used frequently. "Old Goody Blake was old and poor" (line 21); "how poor a hut she had" (line 24); "she spun in her poor dwelling" (line 25). "Poor" is here used in the sense of "poverty." It is also utilized in the sense of "pitiful": Goody Blake is a "poor Woman" (line 36); her "poor old bones do ache" (line 58); and even "Poor Harry Gill" (line 124) is allotted a share of pity (but a pity which, through fear, discourages imitation of the evil deed). The didactic plea indicates the work's intention: the arousal of sympathy and fear in the reader for the purpose of ameliorating the position of the underprivileged. The emotionalism of the poem is didactic.

The story of Goody and Harry is, in the words of Florence Marsh, "a curious literal anecdote that fails to spread concentric circles of meaning."¹⁸ There is no symbol or metaphor in the poem for the power of the imagination comparable to the faery lady as a symbol of beauty in La Belle Dame sans Merci, or to the mariner's odyssey as a symbol of the human soul's spiritual pilgrimage in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. The narrative technique shares this literalness. No conclusion is left unstated:

¹⁸ Wordsworth's Imagery (New Haven, 1952), p. 15.

And all who see him say, 'tis plain,
That, live as long as live he may,
He never will be warm again.'
(117-119)

This had been made quite evident in the preceeding stanza, although implicitly. Wordsworth insists on directly telling all. His is a fundamentally empirical interpretation of language in this poem. Alan Grob places the following words on the poet's lips:

For a publication to truly influence
men's moral habits, it must offer
accurate pictures of human life
and depend upon language which
raises clear and familiar images
in the minds of its readers.¹⁹

To teach, the poet must be direct.

¹⁹"Wordsworth and Godwin: A Reassessment,"
Studies in Romanticism, VI (1967), 98-120.

Four of Wordsworth's doctrinal poems of 1798—Lines Written in Early Spring, To My Sister, Expostulation and Reply, and The Tables Turned—are characterized by their simple diction, earnest declaration, and overt didacticism. Although the poems are written in a modification of the traditional ballad stanza, a modification achieved by cross-rhyming (a4, b3, a4, b3—The Tables Turned) and by extending the second line to four feet (a4, b4, a4, b3—the other three poems), the narrative technique of the traditional ballad is completely abandoned. These poems offer cryptic, explicit statement; they embody plain talk and cool judgment. Their directness has been attested to by their frequent use as illustrations in critical works directed to elucidating Wordsworth's "philosophy."

These poems have an undeniable attraction traceable to their earnestness. Each poem isolates a specific situation and particularizes it; one individual encounters another in a determined spatial and temporal setting. In none of the four poems, however, does Wordsworth conceal himself behind the guise of a narrating persona. In Expostulation and Reply, the discussion is divided between William, presumably Wordsworth himself, and Matthew, his

"good friend." The poem avoids the pitfall into which, in the estimation of Coleridge, Wordsworth was wont to fall at times in his dramatic poetry, i.e., having a persona speak but a part of the dialogue:

Either the thoughts and diction are different from that of the poet, and then there arises an incongruity of style; or they are the same and undistinguishable, and then it presents a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking, while in truth one man only speaks.

(Book XXII of Biographia Literaria)

The function of Matthew's speech, which extends for three stanzas, is to set up the "straw man" which Wordsworth proceeds to knock down in the four concluding stanzas. Only to this extent is the charge of "ventriloquism" justifiable in this poem. The other three doctrinal poems see Wordsworth speaking directly, but in a high pitch which gives the argument an inspired validity and depth.

The language of the four poems is naked; they embody no figurative language. All are aphoristic: "One moment now may give us more/ Than years of toiling reason"; "We murder to dissect." They contain gnomic phrases, often combining for epigrammatic effect ostensibly contradictory or incongruous words: "wise passiveness"

and "spontaneous wisdom" are outstanding examples. They urge overtly: "Come forth and feel the sun." This aphoristic force is emphasized by the shortened line of each stanza. With the exception of The Tables Turned, one of these shortened lines is repeated in the final line of the poem, thus functioning as a refrain: "We'll give to idleness"; "And dream my time away"; "What man has made of man." The basic simplicity recedes temporarily in certain instances, and metrically subtle lines lead to and emphasize a cluster of monosyllables:

A freshening lustre ~~w~~ellow
Through all the long green fields has spread.

The "meddling intellect" is subdued and pacified by the mere simplicity of the four poems. In Expostulation and Reply, Matthew, the voice of the dissecting intellect, admonishingly questions William:

'Why, William, sit you thus alone,
And dream your time away?

'Where are your books?—that light
bequeathed
To Beings else forlorn and blind!
Up! Up! and drink the spirit breathed
From dead men to their kind.'

(3-8)

William retorts:

'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.'
 (21-24)

In the second poem, The Tables Turned, the situation is reversed, not within the poem itself but in relation to the preceding poem. Here, it is William who challenges Matthew:

Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;
 Or surely you'll grow double;
 Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;
 Why all this toil and trouble?

The sun, above the mountain's head,
 A freshening lustre mellow
 Through all the long green fields has
 spread,
 His first sweet evening yellow.

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife;
 Come, hear the woodland linnet,
 How sweet his music! on my life,
 There's more of wisdom in it.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
 He, too, is no mean preacher;
 Come forth into the light of things,
 Let Nature be your Teacher.
 (1-16)

Dessicated rationalists have promoted progress through books, but they have only succeeded in depriving man of his elemental communication with a vital universe. As a result, mankind has wallowed in commercialism. The universe is permeated with an élan vital. Why should man alone be without joy? Legalism, theoretical science,

and business know-how have initiated a period of pain and sorrow. Only through "wise passiveness" can mankind ameliorate the present situation.

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**Chapter III: Poetry as Direct and Oblique Communication:
The Influence of the Broadside Ballad
and the Ballad of Tradition**

The poems which I shall treat in this chapter—
The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman, The Thorn,
Lucy Gray, We Are Seven, Anecdote for Fathers, and Her
Eyes Are Wild—evidence a concern for the oblique as
 well as the explicit in their use of language, but in
 varying proportions. Characteristic aspects of both
 the broadside ballad and the ballad of tradition are
 found within the same poems.

The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman (1798)
 is the portrayal of the psychological state of a woman
 awaiting death, a state in which the distinction between
 illusion and reality is initially blurred but eventually
 clear. The poem maintains a strict consistency in its
 revelation of a subjective state; at no time is there
 authorial interjection. The character speaks for
 herself, and Wordsworth makes no attempt to indicate
 specifically what the reader's reactions are to be. The
 inner workings of the character, however, are related
 both directly and obliquely.

The first stanza is a masterful presentation of
 the blurred distinction between the murky land of dream
 and the land of consciousness, and of the gradual
 emergence of the latter:

Before I see another day,
 Oh let my body die away!
 In sleep I heard the northern gleams;
 The stars, they were among my dreams;
 In rustling conflict through the skies,
 I heard, I saw the flashes drive,
 And yet I am alive;
 Before I see another day,
 Oh let my body die away!

The description of the "northern lights" has a certain granitic, crystalline sharpness and brightness. The accented rough consonants of "northern," "rustling," "conflict," "stars," and "drives" inform it with an aloof harshness; while the stressed words, "gleam," and "flashes," suggest a sharp luminousness. This "rustling conflict" is perceived by the inner eye (indicating a state of inner turmoil), but it is also perceptible to the outer:

And yet they are upon my eyes,
 And yet I am alive.

The disquietude of the inner reality and the disquietude of the outer are co-extensive. And the aloofness suggested in the description of the natural phenomena relates most relevantly to the aloneness of the speaker's present condition. The repetition of the first two lines at the end of the stanza effectively emphasizes the regret at still being alive and the positive desire for death.

In stanza 2, the speaker turns her attention to

her surroundings:

My fire is dead: it knew no pain;
 Yet it is dead, and I remain:
 All stiff with ice the ashes lie;
 And they are dead, and I will die.

The death-like finality of the blunt monosyllables in the first two lines speaks of a hopeless resignation in face of oncoming death. Once again the aloofness of nature is suggested: it is inanimate, feeling no pain. And now she is alone. The finality of this aloneness is implied by the position and the rhythm of "I remain." The words come at the conclusion of the couplet (it is the final fact), and the accented syllables have the sonorous quality of doors irrevocably closing. The fire-life metaphor is most appropriate, and it serves later (in line 55) as an indication of the transition from the inner world to the outer. The next lines,

When I was well, I wished to live,
 For clothes, for warmth, for food,
 and fire;
 But they to me no joy can give,
 No pleasure now, and no desire,

are an overt revelation of feeling. This directness, however, is reinforced by two alliterative clusters—"When," "well," "wished," "warmth," and "for," "for," "for," "food," "fire." The same reinforcing function on the non-discursive level is served by the four stressed

"n's" of the last two lines. Sound and sense are fused in communicating the desire for negation of life. The last two lines of stanza 2,

Then there contented will I lie!
Alone, I cannot fear to die,

illustrate an effective use of rhyme to echo the fire-life metaphor which began the stanza. As "the ashes lie," so will she. The use of "Alone" as the initial word in the concluding line, followed by the personal conclusion, "I cannot fear to die," effectively conveys the psychological process of fearless resignation. This is the situation as it truly stands: her fate is that of the fire. Calm resignation is best.

Stanzas 3 and 4 see the woman in a state approaching delirium. She deliriously apostrophizes the absent Indian band, and she protests that she was strong enough to have continued with them. The desire to live reasserts itself:

And oh, how grievously I rue,
That afterwards, a little longer,
My friends, I did not follow you!

These two stanzas contain denotatively communicated emotion, and there is no organic relationship between the sound and the sense of the lines, with the exception of the two

which conclude the third stanza:

For strong and without pain I lay,
Dear friends, when ye were gone away.

The use of "lay" echoes two previous lines:

All stiff with ice the ashes lie, (line 13)

and

Then here contented will I lie! (line 19)

The relationship between her calm resignation, her delirious assertion of the desire to live, and the icy fact of death is crystallized in the echo. And the final "when ye were gone away" underlines once again the fact of aloneness.

In stanzas 1 and 2, the foresaken Indian woman focuses on nature; in stanza 3, she focuses on the Indian band, her friends; and now, in stanzas 4-7, she naturally turns her gaze to that which is closest to her heart, her child. Her thoughts pass from the remote to the intimate. A mother's last thoughts as she approaches death must eventually turn to her child. The portrayal is psychologically convincing. But it is in these stanzas also that suggestiveness is displaced by denotation in the communication of emotion.

In stanza 6, the woman awakes from her deliriousness with lines echoing the fire-life metaphor of stanza 2:

My fire is dead, and snowy white
 The water which beside it stood:
 The wolf has come to me to-night;
 And he has stolen away my food.
 For ever left alone am I;
 Then wherefore should I fear, to die?

The hard facts of reality are reasserted. The wolf, the harbinger of death, has come. She is alone, without her child. And the first 8 lines of the final stanza expand this reassertion. She wishes to hold her child once again, but she realizes, "thou, dear Babe, art far away." The poem began with a death wish,


Before I see another day,
 Oh let my body die away!

and it ends with the calm resignation that her wish is to become a reality:

Nor shall I see another day.

In her psychological wanderings, she has come full circle—from reality, to illusion, to reality.

As in the ballad of tradition, there is no explicit didacticism in The Complaint. Much of the poem's power of communication lies in the non-explicit. The fire-life metaphor is handled skillfully; rhythm, rhyme, and meaning are often fused; and sound echoes serve a structural function. The character relates her situation (at times) without explicitly naming her reaction. The central portion of



of the poem, however, is characteristically broadside;
it is relatively devoid of suggestiveness; denotation is
here the method of communication.

The Thorn, another Wordsworthian ballad adaptation published in the 1798 Edition of Lyrical Ballads, also blends the obliqueness of figurative language with the directness of denotative language. The poem begins with the words of the narrating persona; he has ascertained as fact that the woman who often sits beside the stunted tree and cries, "Oh woe is me! oh misery!", was deserted by her lover just when she expected to marry him twenty-two years ago. The narrator asks his auditor to notice beside the thorn ("Not higher than a two years' old child"—line 5), "a mossy heap of earth like an infant's grave in size" (line 52), and nearby a muddy pool. Beyond this, the narrator must rely on what "they say," which is that six months after her desertion, the woman was big with a child now buried under the heap of earth. Some say that she hanged the infant on the tree, some that she drowned it in the pond, and others that the redness of the moss came from the baby's blood (203-220). Some have seen the shadow of the baby glaring from the moss; others have heard at night from the direction of the thorn, voices of the living and the dead (162-163). The villagers have nourished these unkind thoughts; but when they approach the area with spades, the "beauteous hill of moss" begins (so they say) to stir. None since, except the narrator (and that, by a blunder),

has ever gone close enough to the thorn when the woman Martha Ray was there, to hear her cry "oh misery!"

The first two stanzas and the last concentrate on the "aged thorn," "a wretched thing forlorn," held so fiercely by the clutching moss which seemingly tries to drag it earthward. The wretched thorn can be construed as a symbol of the contagion of community superstition through a low but effective form of the "pathetic fallacy."¹ There is a general correspondence between man and nature in The Thorn. Martha's predicament begins in the summer when nature is green (line 123), and as winter comes so does death:

'And all that winter, when at night
The wind blew from the mountain-peak,
'Twas worth your while, though in the dark,
The Churchyard path to seek:
For many a time and oft were heard
Cries coming from the mountain head:
Some plainly living voices were;
And others, I've heard many swear,
Were voices of the dead.
(155-163)

And, as the narrating persona climbs the mountain to see Martha, a storm erupts (line 175). Nature is cold and gray (lines 70-74, 84-85); the countryside is mountainous,

¹J. V. Logan, "Wordsworth and the Pathetic Fallacy," MLN, LV (1940), 187-191. See Josephine Miles, Pathetic Fallacy in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1965), pp. 10-56.

jagged, and cruel (particularly lines 182 ff.). The thorn, in its ugliness, is emblematic of Martha Ray in her misery, and all nature shares in this. The universe reflects the human predicament. To the villagers, as represented by the narrator, the thorn is both emblem and evidence of human crimes culminating in child-murder. But the effect of the symbol on the reader differs considerably. To the reader, the thorn is a symbol of sympathy in purpose.

This use of symbol indicates a divergence from the literalness of the broadside, and a penchant for the implicitness of the ballad of tradition. "The unearthly power and beauty of some of the folk ballads," writes Leslie Shepard, "...is due to the combination of ancient oral style with the archetypal images of birth, death, the changing seasons, and the human situation."² Consider, for example, the folk mythology with its concomitant symbol in the following stanza from Tam Lin (39 A, 5):³

She had na pu'd a double rose,
A rose but only twa,
Till up then started young Tam Lin,
Say, Lady, thou's pu nae mae.

²op. cit., p. 19.

³Numbered according to the Percy collection.

The taboo against plucking flowers is a folklore motif. A spiritual being is summoned when the young girl breaks this taboo. There is also a possibility here of seeing the rose as an erotic symbol. Its use in this way dates at least from the Roman de la Rose, and its frequent appearance in medieval folksong and love-poetry reveals its popularity. The effect of the unobtrusive use of symbol in Tam Lin is similar to that achieved by Blake in O Rose, thou art sick. The Wife of Usher's Well (79 A, 5, 6)⁴ provides another notable image of symbolic effect:

It fell about the Martinmass,
When nights are lang and mirk,
The carlin wife's three sons came hame,
And their hats were o the birk.

It neither grew in syke nor ditch,
Nor yet in only sheugh;
But at the gates of Paradise,
That birk grew fair enough.

Folklore tells us that the birch tree was considered an embodiment of the spirit of life;⁵ the image, as it is used here, has preternatural overtones. But, as G. G. Coulton has indicated, the image has a wider meaning; the birch is "the familiar tree of their [the ballad-singers]"

⁴Numbered according to the Child collection.

⁵Sir James G. Frazer, The New Golden Bough (Anchor Books Edition, New York, 1961), edited by T. H. Gaster, p. 46.

own native valley, the earliest to come out in real splendour of spring green, and there a tree is mystical in its significance."⁶ It thus serves the function of a poignant contrast with the wife's dead sons who have returned from the grave. This form of implicitness is in the imagery, but, as I have illustrated in the previous chapter, this suggestiveness also extends to the narrative technique of the ballad of tradition in general.

The repetition evident in The Thorn has an accumulative rather than a progressive effect. And, in this respect, the poem is much like the broadside ballad, The Not-Browne Mayd. The cry of the distraught Martha Ray,

'Oh misery! oh misery!
Oh woe is me! oh misery!,'

at the end of stanzas six, seven, eighteen, and twenty-two does not achieve the intensification of a progressively mounting dramatic action; it merely serves to emphasize through restatement. The repetition of the grave-child simile in lines 52, 61, and 93 serves to make obvious the suggestive. This is also the case with the poem's repeated epithets. The thorn is invariably "old and gray" (lines

⁶Mediaeval Panorama (Cambridge, 1938),
p. 100.

lines 4, 34, 166); the heap of moss is always "beauteous" (lines 36, 51, 57, 209, 230). There is a profusion of stated sentiment in The Thorn. We see a "poor Thorn" (line 17), a "poor Martha" (line 117), and a "poor child" (line 146). The thorn (line 9) and the woman (line 68) are both "woeful" and "wretched." And the curiosity of the narrating persona seeks an explanation for the situation; he sees and describes the events, and he relates their corresponding emotion. The emotion of the poem is mainly emotion of illustrative subject matter; it is hardly subliminal.

Bernard Groom has stated that in The Thorn, "the poet unleashed the whole force of his imagination to work its will on the tree and the mossy mound, and seldom have natural objects been described with such disturbing power."⁷ This is somewhat of an enthusiastic overstatement, but it correctly points to a certain figurative felicity. There operates within the poem a correspondence between the natural and the human condition. There is an element of the ineffable here. But while the symbols of thorn and moss-covered grave do have a certain evocative

⁷The Unity of Wordsworth's Poetry (New York, 1966), p. 32.

power, the emotion associated with them is, to a considerable extent, overtly stated.

The Thorn can also be seen as a psychological study of the simple narrator's reaction to the events concerned,⁸ and his interjection on hearing of the father's (Stephen Hill) unthinking infidelity would seem to substantiate this position:

O guilty Father—would that death
Had saved him from that breach of faith!
(132-133)

The sympathetic reaction of the narrator suggests the identical reaction on the reader's part. The poem is a study of sympathy, and the emotion in both the narrator's reactions and Martha's piteous situation are directly conveyed. Even the symbolic correspondences are illustrative to a degree. The oblique is partly made direct.

As a whole, The Thorn reflects the manner of the broadside ballad. The supernatural aura of the events is tinged with local sensationalism; the protagonists are named; the focus is dual—on the narrator's reactions and Martha's predicament; the symbol is partially explicated within the poem itself; the emotion is communicated directly;

⁸Stephen Maxfield Parrish, "Dramatic Technique in the Lyrical Ballads," PMLA, LXXIV (1959), 90.

and the development is rather verbose. The poem, however, is not entirely direct. As I have illustrated, there is an enigmatic, suggestive quality in the poem's symbols. The Thorn thus blends both the direct and the oblique in its use of language.

In Lucy Gray, or, Solitude (1800), the influence of the broadside ballad wanes considerably. It is, on the whole, a poignant, evocative poem which indicates little broadside-ballad influence with the exception of the description following the climax. A contrast with The Children in the Wood,⁹ a broadside relating the murder of two children, makes this quite evident. In the broadside, a dying father and mother place their two children in the care of an uncle, who promises to take care of them. The uncle then hires two ruffians to destroy his wards, under pretence of sending the children to a school in London. The ruffians choose to perpetrate the crime in the woods, but one of them relents. A struggle ensues. The survivor abandons the children. The children eventually die of exposure. God's anger is kindled: the uncle's goods are destroyed, and his children are killed through various calamities. The story is followed by a moral:

You that executors be made,
And overseers eke
Of children that be fatherless,
And infants mild and meek;
Take you example by this thing,
And yield to each his right,
Lest God with such like miserye
Your wicked minds requite.

⁹Volume the Third, Book the Second, Percy's Reliques.

The effect of the ballad is similar to that of the homiletic stories in the Gesta Romanorum. It progresses on a purely denotative level. The Children in the Wood is a sensational piece of journalism followed by a moral lesson. The emotional reactions of the characters are always explicitly named, and the action is related in detail. As in Peter Bell and Goody Blake and Harry Gill, the purpose of the story is to instill a fear of vice in the reader; and the reader is explicitly directed toward this reaction.

Lucy Gray also relates the death of a child, but much differently. Wordsworth's ballad is hardly journalistic or didactic. The narrator begins:

Oft I had heard of Lucy Gray:
And, when I crossed the wild,
I chanced to see at break of day
The solitary child.

He has seen Lucy, and he recalls her to mind:

No mate, no comrade Lucy knew;
She dwelt on a wide moor,
—The sweetest thing that ever grew
Beside a human door!

You yet may spy the fawn at play,
The hare upon the green;
But the sweet face of Lucy Gray
Will never more be seen.

The reader's attention is immediately arrested. He has seen her, yet we may not—but why? The story begins and the answer unravels itself. The action progresses in

suggestive flashes of bare statement for the next five stanzas: the father asks Lucy to take the lantern home; the child accepts; Lucy leaves; a storm suddenly comes upon her; and

And many a hill did Lucy climb:
But never reached the town.
(lines 31-32)

In stanzas 9-14, however, Wordsworth, in broadside fashion, describes the parents' reaction and the ensuing search—both in detail. A certain diffuseness introduces itself here, and, I suggest, for the purpose of psychological illustration. The climax, Lucy's death, in its understatement, leaves the reader with a sense of finality. Printed separately, stanzas 4-8 would create the impression of a complete ballad of tradition. But the description of the action which follows the child's death serves to fragment the focus of the poem. The focus turns to the parents and their specified reactions. And yet, even with this elaboration, there is still a greater concentration in the poem as a whole than there is in The Children in the Wood.

The story has been told, but there is more. The death of Lucy Gray has a deeper significance:

—Yet some maintain that to this day

She is a living child;
That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
Upon the lonesome wild.

The narrator must agree with those who maintain this, for he also has seen her (stanza 1). "Lonesome wild" and "sweet Lucy Gray" harken back to the first three stanzas. Lucy, like nature, is alone and burden-free. She now shares a faëry-like life of unrestricted spirit. The final stanza is an outstanding example of the effective use of understatement:

O'er rough and smooth she trips along,
And never looks behind;
And sings a solitary song
That whistles in the wind.

The fact is given without elaboration; it suggests much. The use of "smooth" and "trips along," and the use of light stresses in the first line of this stanza lend it a floating, carefree, nimble, ethereal quality. "And never looks behind" is rather enigmatic in effect; a freedom from apprehensiveness and oppression is implied in the statement of bare fact. The haunting sibilant "s's" and the whispering "w's" of the final alliterative clusters end the poem on a note of unrestricted ethereality. Lucy is now as free as the wind in her solitude. And this is communicated non-discursively.

In We Are Seven (1798), Wordsworth barely conceals his pedagogical intent. The rhetorical question of the first stanza is really a statement of position:

—A Simple Child,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

A simple child, natural and full of life, pays no heed to death. And the incident to be related illustrates this thesis. Lines 5-11 contain a description of the child: she has an air of natural vitality about her. Line 12 is an overt statement of the narrating adult's reaction to her:

—Her beauty made me glad.

A dialogue between the child and the adult ensues:

'Sisters and brothers, little maid,
How many may you be?'
'How many? Seven in all,' she said,
And wondering looked at me.

'And where are they? pray you tell.'
She answered, 'Seven are we;
And two of us at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea.

'Two of us in the church-yard lie,
My sister and my brother;
And, in the church-yard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother.'

'You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea,

'Yet ye are seven! I pray you tell,
Sweet Maid, how this may be.'

Then did the little Maid reply
'Seven boys and girls are we;
Two of us in the church-yard lie,
Beneath the church-yard tree.'
(13-32)

The dialogue is similar in technique to that of the ballads of tradition Lord Randal and Edward, Edward, for example. The question-answer method leads to our progressive enlightenment without elaboration of detail. Everything essential to communicating the child's view of life-death is contained here, but not explicitly. The dialogue continues, however, and a full explanation is forthcoming. Her sister Jane, who lay moaning on her bed before "God released her of her pain," and her brother John, who used to play near Jane's grave, are now buried "'Twelve steps or more from my mother's door.'" The child relates how she now sits near the grave at dusk, knits, sings, and eats her supper there. The adult, thinking he has now forced the child through her own statement of the "facts" to admit that they are but five, questions the little Maid once again:

'How many are you, then,' said I,
'If they two are in heaven?'
Quick was the little Maid's reply,
'O Master! we are seven.'

With a rather obtuse insensitivity, the adult pursues the matter yet further:

'But they are dead; those two are dead!
 Their spirits are in heaven!'
 'Twas throwing words away; for still
 The little Maid would have her will,
 And said, 'Nay, we are seven!'

This insistence serves to underline the difference between the child's and the adult's perception of the meaning of death and life. The former has a basic insight into the true reality, while the adult's perception is clouded. The explicitness of the final stanzas of We Are Seven stems from this pedagogical concern, this desire for illustration.

In stanzas 3-7, which reveal a dialogue technique similar to that of the ballad of tradition, there are also several elemental, evocative correlatives—"sea," "churchyard," and "churchyard tree." But these are not developed beyond stanza 8, where the ballad-of-tradition influence wanes, and the broadside-ballad influence reveals itself strongly. The meter and rhyme of the poem are superadditions; they do not function in organic correlation with the poem's intellectual sense. The diction of the poem, however, is quite appropriate for a child and an adult who is attempting to converse on the child's speaking

level.

A second poem of didactic anecdote in Lyrical Ballads (1798) which pits the dullness of an adult against the vitality of a child is Anecdote for Fathers. The poem's technique is very much like that of We Are Seven. When a grown person asks him, a boy of five chooses Kilve by the sea over the farm at Liswyn, where he now is. The adult asks why, but the boy cannot answer. The adult pursues the point. Pressed so hard for an answer, the boy looks about, and, noticing a gilded weather-vane on the housetop, declares that he prefers Kilve because "At Kilve there was no weather-cock." The questioning gradually reveals a mounting tension in the adult, and, when the boy evidently lies (the subtitle in the 1798 edition is "shewing how the art of lying may be taught"), the climax is achieved. The poem's momentum comes to a halt. The point has been made. But the pedagogical intent asserts itself in the concluding stanza:

O dearest, dearest boy! my heart
For better lore would seldom yearn,
Could I but teach the hundredth part
Of what from thee I learn.

The point must be made completely explicit in order that it may teach. And, as in We Are Seven, this poem is devoid of imagery and organically functional rhyme and

rhythm. It is a prosaic conversation with rhyme and meter superadded.

Both We Are Seven and Anecdote for Fathers embody oblique and direct methods of communication. Both poems reveal an implicitness in the question-answer dialogue, with its evocative statement without explanation, characteristic of the ballad of tradition. Both also reveal the directness of didactic illustration, characteristic of the broadside ballad.

In Her Eyes Are Wild (1798), Wordsworth presents us with a poem bearing striking resemblances to The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman. Both present us with a view of the inner workings of a mother's mind; both are concerned with maternal love; both progress without authorial interjection; and both reveal an absence of explicit didacticism. However, whereas The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman blends the direct and the oblique in its communication, with the latter predominating, Her Eyes Are Wild inverts the predominance. The language of Her Eyes Are Wild is non-figurative. Nevertheless, the total effect of the poem, with its psychological subtleties, creates an impression which is not demanded through direct statement.

The first stanza, as an introduction to the subject of the poem, appears de trop. Her sense of aloneness, her having a child in her arms, her "wild" appearance, and her being in the country, are all revealed unobtrusively as the woman gradually relates her inner thoughts. This stanza implies a separate narrator, and yet, this narrator is neither necessary nor useful throughout the remainder of the poem. The poem is a monologue, not a narrative.

The second stanza begins the monologue with a passage of named emotion:

'Sweet babe! they say that I am mad,
But nay, my heart is far too glad,
And I am happy when I sing
Full many a sad and doleful thing:
Then, lovely baby, do not fear!
I pray thee have no fear of me;
But safe, as in a cradle, here
My lovely baby! thou shalt be:
To thee I know too much I owe;
I cannot work thee any woe.'

Implicit in this passage, however, are the reasons for the mother's apparently pressing concern for retaining the child's affection. Is she not trying to convince herself rather than the child when she reassures it of her devotion? Does she perhaps fear that she may eventually do the child harm? A sense of desperate necessity informs her words.

In stanza 3, the hallucinations of insanity are drawn in strokes recalling Fuseli's "Nightmare." The mother recalls a past fit:

'A fire was once within my brain;
And in my head a dull, dull pain;
And fiendish faces, one, two, three,
Hung at my breast, and pulled at me.'

On waking, the sight of her "little boy of flesh and blood" (not a hallucination) was a joy for her to see. And why?

—"For he was here, and only he." No longer alone with the fiendish hallucinations plaguing her, she saw her child, and this reestablished her equilibrium.

In stanza 4, the mother returns to the present, and she speaks to the child who is feeding at her breast. The very physical contact with the child looses the bond of insanity which grips her tightly. The significance of this contact is later underlined in stanza 7:

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

The child is the only person with whom she can communicate on an intimate level. In her desperation, she has "sought" the child's "father far and wide," and she continues to seek him (line 98). Meanwhile, she is alone with the child, her other love.

Stanza 5 sees the mother reassuring the child (herself, really) of her solicitude for his welfare:

'And do not dread the waves below,
When o'er the sear-rock's edge we go;
The high crag cannot work me harm,
Nor the leaping torrents when they howl.'
(43-46)

The tortured quality of "high crag" and "leaping torrents... howl" is quite appropriate to the perception of a person

touched with madness. The child saves for her her "precious soul" (line 48). Why? Because without her the child would die (line 50). She is needed. And, for the next three stanzas, the mother continues to reassure the child that no harm will come to him. This insistence implicitly reveals her inner anxiety: she will perhaps harm the child one day. But now she relates how she will teach him the beauties of nature, "the sweetest things" (line 81). But there is a sudden break. The child has stopped feeding. The intimate communion has ceased, and hallucinations impinge on her consciousness once again:

—Where are thou gone, my own dear child?
What wicked looks are those I see?

The distorted perception is within her, but she can no longer distinguish reality from illusion, and she bemoans the possibility that her madness is hereditary and that her child is mad also. The distorted perception she considers to be objective fact.

The final stanza reveals a nobility and sensitivity in the woman. She has suffered much in search for her husband, and she will continue to search. In a sense, she is most sane. She is undaunted in her destitution. In the woods, she, along with her child, will find the

father (perhaps in the form of the child?). A sense of desperate optimism tints the concluding lines:

Now laugh and be gay, to the woods away!
And there, my babe, we'll live for aye!

In Her Eyes Are Wild much is implicit: the significance of her insistence on her solitude is unstated. The language of the work, however, is non-figurative. There are no evocative images (with the exception, perhaps, of "high crag" and "leaping torrents" in stanza 5); and the metre and rhyme do not bear any evident relationship to the poem's intellectual meaning. Despite this, the work does reveal a psychological state the significance of which is communicated non-discursively. The situation speaks for itself. No explicit direction is given the reader.

**Chapter IV: Poetry as Oblique Communication: An Aspect of
the Influence of the Ballad of Tradition**



"Before the second and third editions of Lyrical Ballads in 1800 and 1802," states Carl Woodring, "Wordsworth practised new refinements of lyric simplicity," and he cites the five elegiac pieces known as the "Lucy Poems" as substantiation.¹ The statement is accurate. Here the lyric strain gains complete control, and the objectivity of ballad narration fades. Coleridge in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Christabel, and Keats in La Belle Dame sans Merci succeeded in adapting the aspects of the ballad of tradition consonant with their particular poetic inclinations. Their poetry is figurative. With their power of "negative capability," the capability "of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and Reason,"² they could portray the fact saying much more, even in narration of considerable objectivity. This is not the case with Wordsworth. His poetry becomes oblique when he adapts the elemental simplicity of the ballad of tradition and abandons completely objective narration

¹op. cit., p. 43.

²Cf. W. J. Bate, "Negative Capability," Keats: Collection of Critical Essays, edited by W. J. Bate (New Jersey, 1964), pp. 51-70; and J. D. Wigod, "Negative Capability and Wise Passiveness," PMLA, LXVII (1952), 383-390. Keats' view of Coleridge is hardly substantiated when one considers The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

(which he never achieved in any case, as his emulation of the broadside ballad in this respect indicates).

Four of the "Lucy Poems," "which have claims to be regarded as abbreviated ballads,"³ are in the cross-rhymed ballad stanza—a⁴, b³, a⁴, b³—the most characteristic stanza form in the Percy collection.⁴ The exception, Three years she grew in sun and shower, extends the stanza to six lines by the creation of couplets—a⁴, a⁴, b³, c⁴, c⁴, b³. Wordsworth adapts the stark nakedness of the ballad of tradition in both incident and diction, with its inference, understatement, compression, and figurativeness, along with the ballad metre. The fact in the "Lucy Poems"—particularly in She dwelt among the untrodden ways, A Slumber did my spirit seal, and Three years she grew in sun and shower—is eloquent. A brief record of facts evokes concentric circles of meaning. The statement leaves much unsaid.

³Albert B. Friedman, The Ballad Revival: Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated Poetry (Chicago, 1961), p. 275.

⁴Cf. Herbert Hartman, "Wordsworth's 'Lucy' Poems: Notes and Marginalia," PMLA, XLIX (1934), 134-142; also, Brewer, op. cit., pp. 588-612.

The following is the text of what is perhaps
the most famous of the "Lucy Poems":

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye;
—Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!

The outstanding quatrain is, of course, the second, with its mutually clarifying metaphors, which illuminate the logical sense of the first stanza. Lucy was half-hidden like the violet, solitary like the star. Violet and star gain in loveliness, one by seclusion and the other by aloneness. It is not that Lucy seems more fair for having no rivals. First, she is fair despite her situation; her loveliness overcomes the hindrance of rusticity. Next, to tell you how exceptionally fair she is, she is fairer than a violet and star can be. Lucy's isolation is retirement; only the isolation of the star enables it to emerge into beauty equal to the retired Lucy's.

The use of "Dove" and "love" as rhymes in the first stanza, whether conscious or not on Wordsworth's part, serves to crystallize an intellectual tension within a physical, alogical frame. "Dove" ostensibly refers to the Dove River in Derby, but the rhyme with "love" sets up associative reverberations which suggest yet other meanings. The dove is a Christian symbol of inspiration and gentleness; and in secular literature it is associated with true, innocent love. The short "u" sound of the rhymes suggests the delicate smoothness of a love relationship. The accented syllables, "none" and "few" in the parallel construction of lines 3 and 4, serve to reinforce the logical connection by auditory means. A sense of aloneness is emphasized by and embodied in the very sound of both accented words. We are given the bare fact of her isolation in a relatively uninhabited area, but the facts say more than themselves. The first stanza tells us of an isolated woman, but of an isolated woman capable of evoking an innocent love—so it is suggested. The aloneness, beauty and implied innocence are suggested in the very sound of the words. Meaning and sound are fused. The unconscious associations are part of the logical sense of the poem, although they go

beyond literal statement.

The second stanza continues to fuse the rhythm and sound of words with the logical sense. The physical juxtaposition of "violet" and "mossy stone" serves to set the flower in a contrasting background, as one sets a single brilliant gem on a purple cloth of rich texture in order to accentuate its beauty. The alliterative sibilants of "mossy stone" suggest a plush, slippery, bucolic greenness, while blending adjective and substantive on an alogical level. The consonance of "fair" and "star" in the third line of the stanza serves a similar purpose, as does the "shi-"-"sky" assonance of line 4; and the final accented rhyming syllables, "sky" and "eye," serve to transfer the sparkling brilliance of the accented "shi-" to "eye." Logical clarification is co-extensive with the auditory and the associational. There is a deep richness and brightness concentrated in four brief lines.

The "unknown" motif continues in the third stanza. Lucy was unknown when alive, and, therefore, few could know when she passed away. The assonance of "ceased" and "be" must be considered a poetical felicity, as the relationship between cessation and being, that which the

poem is about, is given auditory connection. The transition from the rather abstract concept of "to be" in the second line of the stanza to the physical immediacy of "But she is in her grave," concretizes the situation, thus effecting a more immediate response. The seemingly dispassionate statement of the first ten lines of the poem leads to the revelation of the terrible fact of actual death and deep sorrow. As the ballad of tradition often does, She dwelt among the untrodden ways triumphs by understatement in the last two lines, where it achieves full power:

But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!

The "oh" and the final exclamation point are admittedly overt signs of emotion; nevertheless, much is left unsaid. The exact emotional reaction is not stated, and a sense of poignancy is evoked.

She dwelt among the untrodden ways, like the ballad of tradition, is a poem of suggestive concentration. We are given the bare facts in bare language, but the facts are pregnant with suggestion. The emotional, alogical, unconscious dimension of the poem is implicit; it co-exists with the logical statement.

The second "Lucy Poem" I shall treat, A Slumber did my spirit seal, is a particularly controversial piece. Here is the text:

A Slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears;
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

John Crowe Ransom has pointed to the language of the second stanza, "...with its 'motion,' 'force,' and 'earth's diurnal course,'" as being very "close to the language of Newtonian physics....,"⁵ and he has interpreted the second stanza thus: "How right are these mechanical philosophers, for Lucy herself is in the grip of their forces and revolutions—now that she is dead."⁶ The interpretation of irony in A Slumber did my spirit seal stems from Cleanth Brooks' seminal remarks on the poem. Brooks finds that it conveys "agonized shock" at "horrible inertness," and that the final image of the rotation of the earth suggests

⁵William Wordsworth: Notes on an Understanding of Poetry," Wordsworth Centenary Studies, edited by G. T. Dunklin (Princeton, 1951), p. 101.

⁶Ibid., pp. 101-102.

meaningless motion, "motion that is mechanically repetitive."⁷ David Ferry has followed suit in a more recent study of Wordsworth. "The poet," he writes, "gets exactly what he bargained for, shockingly and in an expected form.... The poem has the structure of a serious joke."⁸ The interpretations are, in my estimation, too arbitrary and ill-conceived, particularly in view of Wordsworth's conception of the intimate relationship of man and the universe, of the phenomenal and the noumenal. The words "motion," "force," and "earth's diurnal course" are certainly in the Newtonian vocabulary, but I suggest that they are equally in Wordsworth's "nature" vocabulary; and, as such, they carry a very different weight. Wordsworth's concept of the cosmos becomes evident in the following excerpt from Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey:

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

⁷"Irony and 'Ironio' Poetry," College English, IX (1948), 236.

⁸The Limitations of Mortality (Middleton, Connecticut, 1959), P. 77.

And rolls through all things.
(93-102)

This is hardly a mechanical view of the universe. The forceful sway of the spirit's motion in the heavens is pictured in a way quite alien to the historical Newtonian spirit despite the fact that Newtonian terms are utilized. There is a cosmic spiritual grandeur, and the spirit that permeates the sympathetic cosmos permeates man. The irony in A Slumber did my spirit seal, if there is any irony at all, is the irony of death-as-part-of-life. In the words of Florence Marsh, "...the final image places the girl's intimacy within the movement of the larger world she has joined."⁹ Wordsworth is not being Newtonian; man's spirit and nature are co-extensive. "Naturalism is...compressed into sublimity."¹⁰

The dissociation of the conscious and the unconscious implied in the intellectual, pragmatic view of reality is contradicted by the poetic medium itself. The triple sibilant alliteration of the first line incorporates "Slumber," "spirit," and "seal" into an auditory as well as a logical whole. The attribution

⁹op. cit., p. 56.

¹⁰Woodring, op. cit., p. 47.

of an active function ("seal" has a direct object) to a usually passive one provides a metaphorical process of unusual appropriateness. It is only fitting that a lack of apprehension should be effected indirectly through omission; the direct is implicit in the indirect. This figurativeness is also evident in the last two lines of the first stanza, where "earthly years" are said to "touch." Wordsworth's apprehension of the phenomenal (and this includes Lucy herself) being submerged, he had viewed Lucy on a purely "earthly" basis, a basis where

She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

It is significant that he calls her a "thing." But

No motion has she now, nor force,
She neither hears nor sees.

She no longer exists in the way he viewed her. She is now part of the universal spirit. She now rolls

round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

He now sees her as he would have seen her had his spirit been "unsealed." The spirit is everywhere, as the three accented syllables of the last line suggest.

The force of the poem goes beyond statement.

When the fact is stated, as is the case in the second stanza, there is another dimension to the fact. Much is left unsaid; the poem must be reread frequently, and each reading reveals another aspect. The language of the first stanza is figurative and associative, while the grandeur of the last suggests the pervasiveness of the noumenal in the phenomenal. The poem's obliqueness remains implicit in concentrated expression.

The elegiac piece that begins Three years she grew in sun and shower shares the oblique poetical qualities of She dwelt among the untrodden ways and A Slumber did my spirit seal. It blends cosmic sublimity and associativeness in a poetic whole of subtle concentration. Of the poem's 42 lines, 35 comprise the speech of Nature when she took in hand the child Lucy, aged three, a flower as lovely as any ever sown. In the delineation of the gradual development of Lucy's physico-psychic self in the first six stanzas, Nature predicts her growth into a stately, shapely woman. "Thus Nature spake—The work was done—" (line 37). But how soon, the poet thinks and says, Lucy

died, and left to me
This heath, this calm, and quiet scene.
(39-40)

The tremendous tribute to the young woman, and the understatement once again (as in She dwelt among the untrodden ways) of the poet's loss are poignantly expressed. This understatement, however, is a little undone by nudges in the final lines:

The memory of what has been,
And never more will be.
(41-42)

The six-line stanza betrays the elegist into talking

beyond a muted close. But the effect can certainly be likened to the last lines of La Belle Dame sans Merci. Also, in the words of Carl Woodring, "he altogether avoids the macabre that would have resulted from explicit statement of what we sufficiently sense, that after she fostered the girl's growth, Nature took Lucy even closer into her bosom."¹¹ The flower metaphor of line 2 enriches the meaning of this divine benevolence and providence. Lucy was a flower raised, nurtured, and protected by the force which permeates the universe, the force which is "vital," with its implication of ancient myth that the gods reserve the most beautiful of earth's creatures for themselves.

The mention of the beautiful girl's name and age, significantly, does not give the impression of raw "realism" as do the pedestrian details of the broadside ballad and Wordsworth's broadside adaptations. The facts of Three years she grew in sun and shower are presented unobtrusively, and they are projected from a distant booth. The person viewed is part of a sublime cosmos,

¹¹op. cit., p. 46.

The Girl, in rock and plain,
 In earth and heaven, in glade
 and bower,
 Shall feel an overseeing power
 To kindle or restrain,
 (9-12)

where the phenomenal dimension bears no greater relevance than the noumenal.

Once again we observe Wordsworth reflecting certain oblique aspects of the ballad of tradition—suggestive concentration, figurativeness, and understatement. The emotion of the poem is generally muted (with the exception, of course, of the nudge in the last two lines) and conveyed implicitly.

In the "Matthew" pieces, Matthew, The Two April Mornings, and The Fountain (all composed in 1799 and published in 1800), written in a slight variation of the ballad stanza—a4, b3, a4, b3—, more dramatic in structure than the Lucy elegies, the focal nostalgia is assigned away from the poet. The last two have a subtler structure and finer emotional resonance, qualities which have long been overlooked in the tendency to focus attention on the more famous and popular lyrics, and the monumental works of autobiographical bent.

The Two April Mornings begins on a bright holiday morning. The poet and Matthew are walking. Matthew stops, looks at the "bright and red" sun, and, in a fit of recollective abstraction, declares:

'The Will of God be done!'

The walk resumes, and the poet grows curious:

'Our work...was well begun,
Then from thy breast what thought,
Beneath so beautiful a sun,
So bad a sigh has brought?'

(13-16)

The narrator evidently wants an explanation, but Matthew only remarks that he observes a cleft cloud, and he

stops once again. This time he verbalizes his thoughts. The cloud reminds him of an April morning thirty years ago, a morning much like the present one, when, on returning from a day of fishing, he stopped to visit the grave of his recently deceased daughter. She had died when

'Nine summers had she scarcely seen,
The pride of all the vale.'
(33-34)

On returning from the grave, he recalls, he saw

'A blooming Girl, whose hair was wet
With points of morning dew.'
(43-44)

He was absolutely enchanted on seeing her, and his heart went out to her; and, yet, as he tells the narrator, he "did not wish her" his (line 56). But why did Matthew act thus? The narrator does not ask, and an answer is not stated. Evidently, his love for Emma, his daughter, precluded any replacement, and, secondly, he could not choose to risk a second such loss. The final stanza,

Matthew is in his grave, yet no,
Methinks, I see him stand,
As of that moment, with a bough
Of wilding in his hand,

creates the effect of yet a third April morning, a morning when, in "that moment" of associational

recollection, the narrator (presumably Wordsworth) recalls Matthew. The final image, with its startling finality, is highly evocative. The "bough of wilding" is probably a limb cut from a wild or crab-apple tree for climbing the hills. It suggests variation from mechanical urbanization, preparation for a walk or pilgrimage, and it parallels the rod and line of the earlier morning.

The Two April Mornings is a representation of recollection through association. The initial associational recollection of the daughter's death, followed by a requested explanation to the narrator, is expressed rather wordily in comparison to the "Lucy Poems," but rather compactly in comparison to The Idiot Boy and The Thorn. The details of the poem are appropriate.. A father recollecting his deceased daughter is likely to mention specific details in describing the situation to a listener. One is tempted to judge the narrator's request for explanation in light of an authorial desire to illustrate, but this possible intent is never stated.

In The Fountain, the second "Matthew" piece I shall treat, the poet (it is presumably he who is relating the incident) on a specified occasion of leisure

beneath a spreading oak,
Beside a mossy seat,

asks Matthew to recite "That half-mad thing of witty rhymes" (line 15) which he had "made" last April. Instead, Matthew, using the prerogative of his seventy-two years, turns his gaze to the fountain breaking at their feet, and comments on its permanence:

'No check, no stay, this Streamlet fears;
How merrily it goes!
'Twill murmur on a thousand years,
And flow as now it flows.'
(21-24)

The matter of permanence serves to emphasize the ephemerality of the human condition, and Matthew recalls when he was a "vigorous man." He bewails the fact that man does not accept old age as do the blackbird and the lark (lines 40-41), with placidity and quiet joy. Instead,

'...we are pressed by heavy laws;
And often, glad no more
We wear a face of joy, because
We have been glad of yore.'
(45-48)

He then indulges in a little self-pity:

'If there be one who need bemoan
 His kindred laid in earth,
 The household hearts that were his own;
 It is the man of mirth.'
 (49-52)

It is the man of joy who feels most poignantly the absence of "household hearts." None of his living friends, he continues, loves him enough (lines 53-56). Understandably offended, the young poet retorts:

'And, Matthew, for thy children dead
 I'll be a son to thee!'
 (61-62)

But Matthew replies: "Alas! that cannot be" (line 64). The situation of The Two April Mornings is repeated. Why Matthew chooses to answer thus is unexplained. The conversation stops with Matthew's answer, and they

rose up from the fountain-side;
 And down the smooth descent
 Of the green sheep-track...did glide;
 And through the wood....
 (65-68)

Previously, Matthew had become nostalgic on associating contrastingly the permanence of the fountain stream's motion with the transitory nature of human life and joy. This stanza and the final one suggest that Matthew's existential situation contradicts his stated position: man's happiness is, unknowingly, as profound and as permanent as the stream's.

The motion described in the penultimate stanza, I suggest, is an emulation of the stream's motion. The poet and Matthew rise from the edge of the fountain, and they glide down a defined sheep-track leading from the fountain. "Glide" (line 67) does not suggest the motion of walking; rather, it suggest flowing. The alliterative sibilants of line 66, and the "green"- "glide" alliteration of line 67 give the effect of slippery, flowing wetness. As does the gurgling stream, Matthew and the poet flow from the fountain, down the bank in a defined path, and into the woods. In the last stanza, Matthew unwittingly breaks into his "witty" song:

And ere we came to Leonard's rock,
 He sang those witty rhymes
 About the crazy old church-clock,
 And the bewildered chimes.

The poem ends on an evocative note of "crazy" humour. But what does this mean in terms of the whole? Evidently, there is a permanence in the "man of mirth." Matthew, despite his equation of old age with sadness, unconsciously defies this equation. His motion, like that of the stream, has "no checks, no stay." With a deep sense of the humour and joy of his situation, he sings. Wordsworth suggests that human emotion has a permanence, a relevance,

whether the individual is aware of it or not. He does not state this explicitly, however. The matter of the poem is "human" in its fullest sense, and it is appropriate that the communication evoked a "human" response. Logical expression and implicit suggestion are fused.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The ingenuousness of Wordsworth's early balladry makes clear an essential dilemma which he had to face as a poet, a "maker" dealing in the medium of words. In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1798 edition), Wordsworth says, in effect, that if a style or a language lacks certain conventional poeticisms (which are unnatural and confer impermanence on language), it is essentially the language of prose. He presents us with a kind of equation: the language of poetry — conventional poeticism = x. His solution is: x = the language of prose.¹ The simplest way, perhaps, to realize this dilemma is to notice the positive correlation between Wordsworth's feeling for the simpler language he was endorsing in poetry and the feeling that the Royal Society in the seventeenth century had for the kind of language which its members were to adopt in dealing "boldly with substantial things." Thomas Sprat, in The History of the Royal Society, states that language was to be "...a close, naked, natural way of speaking," using "positive expressions, clear senses...preferring the

¹Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Anglistica, Volume IX, edited with an introduction and commentary by W. J. B. Owen (Copenhagen, 1957), pp. 21-23.

language of...countrymen before that of Wits"; and its aim was "to return back to the primitive purity and shortness when men delivered so many things almost in an equal number of words."² Walter Raleigh has worded the problem thus:

Wordsworth's devotion to the mere fact, his fixed and jealous gaze on truth, brought him into difficulties and dangers unlike those which beset poets who indulge the imagination with freer course.... But the mere fact which says everything, comes perilously near also to saying nothing.³

This naked speech points at and labels objects, relations, processes, and it does not obscure this indicative function of speech by "muddling" it up with the language of suggestion, with its subtleties of imagination, feeling, and thought. Such speech must be explicit; it must name, describe, and explain accurately. It is a denotative, direct form of expression, but it is a particularly dangerous form; for, if the fact is seen to be insignificant, incapable of saying more than itself,

²Second edition, pp. 111 ff. Cited in Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (New York, 1935), pp. 210-213.

³Wordsworth (London, 1928), p. 115. Cf. René Wellek, Confrontations (Princeton, 1965), pp. 12-13; William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity (London, 1930), p. 151; and Alec King, Wordsworth and the Artist's Vision (London, 1966), pp. 132-134.

the record ceases to be oblique, suggestive statement, and becomes direct statement only, a prosaism.

Much recent criticism seems essentially an attempt to understand how intellectual ideas fit into poetry. If I may oversimplify considerably, the possibilities seem to be three: the ideas may be stated and illustrated; the ideas may be implicit within figurative language; or the ideas may be presented as an integral part of the poem's total pattern. The first possibility—of ideas stated and illustrated—is obviously the closest to prose, and is, at least to contemporary sensibility, most likely to seem prosaic. In the case of didactic poetry, if the ideas are not subordinate to a total pattern that includes them but are the dominant element, illustrated and elaborated, the modern reader tends to wonder where the poetry is. John Crowe Ransom calls such poetry Platonic, objecting to it that poetry beginning with a thesis "does not contain real images but illustrations."⁴

Wordsworth's early ballad adaptations of 1798-1800 reflect a fluctuation between the oblique and the direct use of language. His affinity for the broadside

⁴The World's Body (New York, 1938), p. 128.

ballad is understandable in terms of the didactic-illustrative bent of much of his early work and of his concern for the common. The language of the broadside-orientated poems is not innovational; rather, it is reactionary. In The Idiot Boy, Peter Bell, Goody Blake and Harry Gill, Simon Lee, Expostulation and Reply, and The Tables Turned, the prosaic quality of the language harkens back to the denotative tendency of the previous literary age. The didactic element prevails here, and the adverse reaction of the modern reader is to be expected. It is when Wordsworth is reactionary, when his language communicates principally on the denotative level, that he is unfavourably criticized by modern literati.

The Thorn, The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman, Lucy Gray, We Are Seven, Anecdote for Fathers, and Her Eyes Are Wild are transitional poems. A figurative quality, traceable in part to the influence of the ballad of tradition, introduces itself here. The didactic bent is suppressed, and direct and oblique poetry alternate within the poems in varying proportions.

The "Lucy" and "Matthew" poems are revolutionary.

They communicate principally through non-discursive means. The rhyme, rhythm, and implicitness of the ballad of tradition are adapted in figurative expression. It is here that Wordsworth's use of language is innovational, and it is here that the modern reader finds himself most at home.

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