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On the *Lucy* Poems

The calm existence that is mine when I
Am master of myself.-- W.Wordsworth

Seiji Takenaka

Besides Wordsworth's apparent concern with innovation in terms of literary technique such as is professed in *Preface*, the chief of all the significance of his bid in the co-operative work on *Lyrical Ballads* lies, I think, in the need he stood of drawing upon the interests and sympathies of common life in order to save himself from the sense of isolation from his fellow men, a result of his having had his faith in humanity damaged through his experiences during the French Revolution, and also of the subsequent over-concentration on his inner self, the nightmarish self-consciousness. By nature he was a great solipsist who in childhood found it very hard to realize that there was anything outside him, but then he was also a man of 'natural piety' with a strong sense of filial obligation to what had nourished him, body and soul, closely bound up with the nature and cultural atmosphere of the Lake District community. The main line of his struggle to restore his moral strength after his return from France had been in trying to find his identity in his spiritual home-coming. All the vagrants,

solitaries and other social outcasts in Wordsworth's poetry represent his effort to find consolation not in the suffering of these figures which should be redeemed in some ultimate balance sheet of the human community in which they suffer, but in the interchange of a sympathetic consciousness between the poet and the sufferers. Placing the *Lucy* poems in this light, we see that they, too, constitute a series of variants rendered on the theme of human suffering, but with the characteristic difference that the scenes here lack the sufferers except the poet himself who is the protagonist of such experience. The fact goes to qualify these ballads in a peculiar way: the lyrical aspect of the poems is emphatically personal. Nevertheless, what is remarkable with Wordsworth is that a full experience of human suffering makes the protagonist more than a mere solipsist, for

The thought and feelings which have been infus'd
Into my mind
which brought forth
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself₁)

assure him of access to universal human experience.

Following the heels of these lyrics began the writing of *The Prelude*, a history of his personal mind, whilst he had just accomplished the *Tintern Abbey* lines, a poem equally personal,

presenting a self-diagnosis of his mind in a critical stage of growth, which would not lose its significance on the test of modern psychoanalysis. Under such circumstances the *Lucy* poems naturally share with the longer ones, both resulting from self-introspection, a good deal which is uniquely Wordsworthian. They represent in common the quality of the experience of a poet who started off from no myth, no received philosophy or conceptual matrix but from his own direct experience by remaining

A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,-- both what they half creat,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. 2)

In his relationship to the English intellectual and social view of the world Wordsworth stood on one hand within the solid framework of the English empirical tradition ultimately derived from Locke, but on the other the very empiricism set the poet, equipped with a particular sensibility of his own,

upon a sceptical exploration of the human world with his own self at its centre. However, the most remarkable aspect of his position was his reaction against the associationist explanation of the human mind which regards it as something whose function is mechanical and passive at the mercy of exterior influences. This Wordsworth found repugnant because it contradicted the truth of his personal experience, especially in relation to his creative activity. Such reaction was worked out, and won partial triumph, in poetic realization as an assertion of value, or a particular recognition of humanity, by his trying to strike a certain balance against the compelling laws of physical nature. I take the *Lucy* poems to be highly significant as revealing some aspects of what such an effort attained.

In reading each of the *Lucy* poems we see easily that the poet is throughout concerned with the mortality of the maid. What is remarkable, however, is that although a sense of loss is sharply felt by the poet there is no hint of bitterness on his part. *The Prelude* records that young Wordsworth did have the feelings of fear and awe towards nature, but they never turn into spite or inimicality. We, then, may take it that there is no ambivalence in the poet's attitude to nature, a point to be kept in mind in exploring the extent and variety of Wordsworth's view on the relationship between man and nature. Wordsworth

never complains to or about nature whose influences he had to consider to be destructive as well as formative: it fosters youth, beauty and maturity in men yet eventually destroys and reduces them to 'things'. What is left for the poet to do, then, is to take the loss to heart. But Wordsworth says that 'an eye that hath kept watch o'er man's mortality' can draw from the meanest flower 'thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears'. Despite the controversial identity of Lucy, and though I believe she had a basis in biographical fact, the growth and death of the maid, each in accordance with the laws of physical nature, is heightened, both in the active imagination of the poet and the poems resulted, to a symbolic status, which in its turn brings home to us anew the poignant realization that what happens to the poet, as well as to Lucy, may happen to us all at any time. Poignant because of the seemingly antithetic forces of nature which are presented in the scenes of most of these lyrics.

The most dramatic of all from this view-point is perhaps *Three years she grew in sun and shower*. Here nature, explicitly a personified agent, is seen engaged in educating the maid with affectionate care. What makes the poem particularly significant in the series is that here nature discloses a system of curriculum in much detail, such as would be unthinkable without

the poet's close and affectionate observation of natural phenomena. Wordsworth clarifies what qualities are to constitute the whole being of this maid which the poem presents as something like an idealized portrait of the 'child of nature'. It is possible to point out the vital idea underlying this educational programme in terms of the dialectics of 'liberty and order', 'stillness and activity', 'ecstasy and calm' --- illustrations of categories by which, according to Coleridge's version of Kantian idealism, the human mind renders value to what it perceives. However, the whole story of nature the *foster mother* would be too optimistic for a poet of Wordsworth's honesty and awareness, at least, for the Wordsworth of those years of spiritual crisis resulted from his involvement in the French Revolution, if the significance of the last stanza of this poem were not given its due in relation to what precedes it:

Thus Nature spake --- The work was done ---
How soon my Lucy's race was run!
She died, and left to me
This heath, this calm, and quiet scene;
The memory of what has been,
And never more will be.

The crucial point is the apparent abruptness, even the

ruthlessness, with which the 2nd line of the stanza begins. Yet I consider it to be one of these cases with Wordsworth in which reticence and calm of utterance are paradoxically indicative of an intensity of feeling and thought. The poet is fully aware, and with much pain at heart, that nature never fails to destroy what she achieves taking so much time and so much care. All Wordsworth does here is to put forwards the plain fact of the forces of nature acting on man's destiny, which may seem to be contradictory in the human eye. He attempts no sentimentalizing commentary as some critics would have him do.³⁾ We might say that here Wordsworth stands, as it were, on both sides of the world: nature and humanity. From the standpoint of the former, both the growth and decay of Lucy are in perfect accordance with its own laws, untouched by human joy or sorrow. Nevertheless, the feeling of the poet is there to indicate that it is in the very nature of humanity to be capable of being moved to see nature accomplish its work by bringing our physical existence to an end. But the poet, while he stares straight at man's final destiny on one hand, demonstrates on the other that man's very capacity of deep sorrow is in itself a proof that human life is real, that by the very shock we receive because of being sensitive to the loss of Lucy, 'this heath', 'this calm', 'quiet scene' are something more than just

physical objects, that they are humanized, beings of a higher order, 'half created' by the poet's mind which confronts and operates on the actuality of Lucy's death. Higher because they are valuable to the poet, valuable because he loved, and still loves, Lucy though the present quality of the feeling is not the same. All the corollary points to the way how the human mind can be autonomous and free from, yet concordant with, the physical nature of which man is a part. Indeed much of the power of this poem derives not only from the demonstration of the antithetical forces of nature placed in such striking contrast to each other, but from a modest but confirmative assertion of human perception which is creative of value. Accordingly I disagree in reading this particular poem and *A slumber did my spirit seal* with those who would emphasize the poet's desire to assimilate himself to nature in his almost subconscious attempt to forget the status of a living being which the poet was, and so overlook the pain deeply felt which keeps the poet quite alive to the actual.⁴⁾ The wrong reading of the latter poem is perhaps ascribable to an apparent oddity in the last stanza:

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.

The condition of the poet described in the 1st stanza is obviously something like the state of unconsciousness whose virtue is to secure safety from every conceivable fear that 'the flesh is heir to', that is, a total insensibility. However, the next two lines which imaginarily describe Lucy in her posthumous state by

She seemed a thing that could not feel

The touch of earthly years....

indicate that this unconscious state is in reality incomplete. We may think therefore that the state of the poet is that of half waking, half sleeping, that is, a figurative way of describing a dull consciousness, --- a state in which we are neither perceptive of nor responsive to the outside world as well as to the inner processes of our own mind, --- in the terms of the poet's own, a state in which we are incapable of the 'heart's affections by which we live'. Upon these grounds I think that here Wordsworth implies that both the state of 'having no human fears' and the consequent impression of Lucy as a being unaffected by the natural processes of growth, maturity and decay is merely imaginary (not imaginative), a fancy or a freak: This 1st line is the premise of vital significance to what follows. Further, it is possible to reinforce this reading from another angle. The grammatical tense of the verbs 'did', 'had', 'seemed'

in the 1st stanza, when placed by those in the 2nd which all appear in the present tense, seem to throw an illuminating light on the essential meaning of the poem. That is, Wordsworth in the 2nd stanza is wide awake to the fact of Lucy's death and he is feeling the pain of loss to the full. It is then a fully conscious mind of the poet in this stanza that is criticizing the state of the mind described in the 1st. Moreover, what the awake mind of the poet in the 2nd stanza states cannot be defeated even in the light of modern astronomy; he is living up to his programme of intellectually keeping up with the science of his time. 'Diurnal' is a bold word of an educated man and poet who knows the shock it can produce in the context where it stands. The total emotional effects these last lines exert upon us make us feel as if Lucy were enjoying rolling with rocks, stones and trees eternally in the grand pattern of the universe. The sensation we experience here is indeed a triumph of Wordsworthian art. The power of the poem, then, is based upon a tension derivative from the dual nature of antithetical elements: a conscious mind criticizing a less conscious mind which *was* his own. Both standpoints have been aethetically worked out by the poet's imagination, but the conceptualization of the whole poem must necessarily be made from the maturer one.

The idea which motivated *She dwelt among the untrodden ways*

is essentially the same as in the preceding ones. Also, as in the last one, the Wordsworthian style of condensation is striking while the feeling evoked is of a more tender quality. This is partly ascribable, perhaps, to the situation of the protagonist in the poem, that is, to the fact that here Wordsworth stands more on the side of humanity and is more explicitly positive about what the human mind is capable of creating. Some may think, because of the expression, 'she ceased to be', that by not saying, 'she died', Wordsworth is trying again to blur the border between the world of the dead or inanimate and that of the living, so as to moderate the painful shock of Lucy's death, to forget the world where there is no Lucy, that he is avoiding half unconsciously the more naked word 'die' for the sake of self-consolation. However, that would be a far too easy solution for a poet who is capable of such self-inspection of an objective kind as is presented in the *Tintern Abbey* lines whose timing of composition foreran the *Lucy* lyrics by not quite a year. Considered in terms of the whole context of both the stanza where the expression in question arises and the foregoing two, it is to be found that 'a violet by a mossy stone' evokes not only the purity and innocence of the maid but her vulnerability to natural influences. Vulnerability, we find, is enhanced by the juxtaposition of 'a mossy stone'

and, later on in the 2nd stanza, of 'only one star in the sky', which are symbolic of great durability. Now we know that in Wordsworth's vocabulary the word 'be' occupies a position of special significance. Wordsworth was extremely conscious of the existence and non-existence of things. I think that 'die' would not give full justice to the level of the consciousness the poet was in with regard to Lucy; it would make banal the idealized sense he had of this child of nature whose life must be in perfect harmony with the secret workings of nature. The expression 'ceased to be' causes no resistance to that harmony whilst 'die' would disturb the naturalness of Lucy's mortality.

However, the major point for consideration I would stress is that the direct confrontation of the poet's consciousness with Lucy's death heightens his appreciation of the maid. This sense of value is here achieved with unrivaled success and intensity throughout the whole poem. In the 2nd and 3rd stanzas the poet's admiration is set against the blindness of the rest of the human world and the inanimate vastness of the physical universe, but this isolation of the poet does nothing but emphasize the absolute value of Lucy in *his* eye. 'The difference to me' in the concluding line is apparently a modest effusion, but it is again one of the cases where the poet's quietness of utterance is in truth an indication of strong emotion working behind.

The 'difference', then, means *a world* of difference which the loss of the maid makes to the poet.

I still do not think that we have seen all that this poem has to say. The last one line in particular represents a recognition of not only of the poet's love for the maid now dead and of the inner shock, but of the intensity with which his mind reacts to that recognition, a consciousness of his own mind made so active by the shock as to turn Lucy into a being of value --- Lucy who has been such an insignificance in the stunning vastness of the universe. In fine, it is an assertion of humanity in terms of its independence of judgment, a momentary victory over the compelling laws of nature by exercising the powers proper to that part of nature which is human. 'The difference', then, also points to a new-born self, possibly a stage in the growth of the poet's mind, won at the cost of Lucy's life and the consequent suffering on the part of the poet. We may say that the experience of the poet described here borders on the kind of experience a tragedy produces vicariously in our mind. The spiritual elevation which the poet is apparently undergoing through reflection is such that it is almost as if he were celebrating his very vulnerability, as well as Lucy's, to the hard, dumb durability of the physical world.

This steady gaze of the poet upon his inner world leads us to another consideration. It is easily possible to trace hints of solipsism throughout the whole poem --- not merely in the way the poet professes to be the only lover of Lucy but in the way he turns his attention from Lucy herself to the reaction of his own mind which becomes manifest in the concluding line. It is often pointed out that Wordsworth describes a situation or an event for the purpose of presenting his own inner reaction to it. Also we are told that some people write what they really want to say in the last part of their letters or even in P.S. I am not certain if the practice is applicable to Wordsworth, but I do not think it quite unnatural that solipsism such as Wordsworth's should take such a pattern of expression: it so happens indeed that in all the *Lucy* poems including *Lucy Gray*, *a Solitude*, the poet falls more or less explicitly into the pattern in order to refer to his inner state. However, despite Keats' objection to 'egotistical' sublime' we know that even an egotist, instead of being a bore, can have much to say, especially when he feeds so much upon his direct experience as Wordsworth does and knows how to turn it into universal value through intellectual vocabulary.

Strange fits of passion have I known has the following two lines introducing the story into the 2nd stanza:

When she I loved looked every day

Fresh as a rose in June...

We are given to understand so early in the whole progress of the poem that she, that is, Lucy, is no longer alive, and we are prepared to see that in this poem again the poet is concerned squarely with human mortality. The poet, in the capacity of the lover in this poetic scene, is seen on his way to his love's cottage on horseback beneath an evening-moon. The step of his horse is excellently dramatized as an accompaniment to the lover's psychology, while the moon is set in motion to represent the lover on horseback drawing nearer the maid's abode. The sudden dropping of the moon behind the cottage, also equally dramatic, presents a shock, a moment of darkness shot through the lover's happy illusion in which he has been drunk. The illusion, I think, is a mental condition which corresponds to that described in *A slumber did my spirit seal*. But here the illusion is that of a lover whose sense of time is almost lost or blurred in the ecstasy of love. All the journey to his love's cottage which ultimately results in a sudden disillusionment can be taken to be a whole process of the state of a 'spirit sealed' leading to an awakening of consciousness. Superficially, to think of death by a suggestion of the moon suddenly dropping when the maid is still 'fresh as a rose in

June', must be 'fond and wayward'. But in the state of consciousness in which the poet is now narrating by recollecting his past psychological experience, he does know that in real truth the thought of death is not necessarily 'fond and wayward'. We see that just like in *A slumber did my spirit seal* the sealed state of consciousness occasioned, in this case, by the lover's amorous absorption, is not complete: the lover observes the moon only with idle attention and hears his horse moving on almost as if feeling his own heart beating in his accelerating impatience. But the horse's step and the moon 'coming nearer and nearer' suggest in reality the steady flow of *objective* time. Here we see how Wordsworth, in spite of his apparently simple artifice of poetry, can be highly subtle in creating effect. Thus, the final blackout by the disappearance of the moon symbolizes not only the 'slumber' dispelled but the journey's end overlapping momentarily the end of Lucy's life, leaving to us a sense of irony in that the lover's wish is frustrated at the last moment of fulfilment. However, the poet's own comment that the thought which the sudden blackout produced in the lover's mind is 'fond and wayward' shows that this narration is being made from the viewpoint of common sense which must regard the psychological experience here disclosed as near-madness attendant upon a man in love. Nevertheless we also know that a man in love can be

unusually alive to the most subtle intimations, as well as morbid. The experience described in the poem, then, implies not only that the lover can be absent-minded and morbid in the eye of common sense, but that his intuition can be so alive as to give him moments of insight of which common sense is not capable. This reading of the poem is, I think, to be further supported by that part of the poem which originally stood as its last stanza but was later struck out:

I told her this: her laughter light
Is ringing in my ears:
And when I think upon that night
My eyes are dim with tears.

We are given to understand that the lover's thought of death was indeed 'fond and wayward' *for the time being*, for we are told that the lover did have conversation with his beloved maid. But the 'wayward thought' ceases to be *wayward* with the final death of the maid, and with it also the lover's disillusionment represented by the abrupt blackout turns into a moment of insight. Here again Wordsworth seems almost to be celebrating the virtue of humanity presented as a heightened perception of a man in the special condition of being in love --- Wordsworth says, 'I will dare to tell but in the lover's ear alone --- although we must say that the nature of the insight here

disclosed is essentially tragic because it stares straight at the ultimate decay of man and its love. The significance of the deletion mentioned in the above is that the stanza in question would detract a great deal from the power of the poem as it stands now which rests upon the irony I have already pointed out. The added stanza would produce something of an anticlimax by reducing the vigorous shock of the ironical climax to a sentimental reflection. We may also note that here, almost exceptionally, Wordsworth succeeds in checking himself from falling into his customary self-effusion the effect of which is that which makes this poem the most successful of all the *Lucy* lyrics *as a ballad*, although with the stanza in question it would have pleased more the Victorian sensibility. What is remarkably Wordsworthian about the poem as a whole is that although there is a detached eye which supports the irony, it is an eye which keeps watch with sympathy over the destiny of man as he is being borne away steadily on time to his finality, without ever falling into mockery or synicism.

Compared with these poems we have examined so far, *I travelled among unknown men* is apparently of a fairly different character in that it expresses Wordsworth's patriotism in a rather daring manner. No doubt it was motivated by the particular circumstances of his stay with Dorothy in Germany, but at the same time no

one can fail to see that it is Lucy that lies at the core of his patriotism, that it is this maid who makes things English so dear and precious to the poet. Wordsworth was a man deeply rooted to the Lake District community. There it was that he had learned what it was to have 'primal sympathy' and 'filial bond'. For Wordsworth whose life-long concern was a quest for his self-identity, those scenes of his early years which his 'eye and ear half created and perceived' were part and parcel of his self, and we may suppose that Lucy, whoever she really was, reigned at the centre of his inner world. Indeed, so far as this particular poem is concerned, Wordsworth's patriotism would be fictitious and unsubstantial, if not hypocritical, if the English scenery lacked Lucy. For Wordsworth was a great solipsist, and for such a man to be patriotic it takes something more immediately dear and familiar than just what one's country as a whole means to him: the poet's love for England is his love for Lucy and he misses England because he misses Lucy, and, I think, that settles the account for the most part. I personally believe more in his egotism than in his professed patriotism. Despite his democratic enthusiasm, he was rarely interested in man as masses. Crowds of men refused his empathetic assimilation; in his eye they lacked human dignity

and identity; Wordsworth in a crowd failed to 'see into the life of things'; for him man 'worthy of himself' had to be solitary, alone. Examples to illustrate this particular pattern of mental reaction are enough and to spare in all his poetry but most remarkably in *The Prelude*. I would say that it was by making this poem one in the series that Wordsworth could save himself from dishonesty or even hypocrisy. So here we find ourselves again concerned with Lucy through whose image and significance the poet expressed himself about his native land.

The turning of the spinning-wheel is a symbol of Wordsworth's life with Lucy in England, or better to say, somewhere in the Lake District. Indeed such must have been Wordsworth's ideal of domestic life. However, by allowing myself such a point of view I may be running the risk of too easily overlapping Dorothy on this fictitious maid, for William and his sister lived a long time together before and after the days, also spent together, at Goslar. Nevertheless, so far as this poem is concerned, the poet's life, apparently so ideally described, can be taken to be not all joy and optimism, and I think that this is what makes it quite different from Roger's *A Wish* by which Wordsworth was unmistakably inspired. I read the motion of the spinning-wheel as suggesting that one day it will come to a standstill and with it Lucy's life, too. But the vital significance of the poem lies

in something like a consolation which the poet, and the reader as well, may be given by remembering Lucy and all she evokes --- by letting her, as it were, live in his mind --- by living the same kind of imaginative life that we have seen enacted by Wordsworth in *Three years she grew in sun and shower* and *She dwelt among the untrodden ways*, but more positively in the latter. Perhaps it is more precise to describe the human mind working as it does in this case as recollective than as imaginative, but then we know also what 'emotion recollected in tranquility' meant to Wordsworth: with him recollection did not remain mere recollection; it could launch off imaginative activity and lead to vision. Thus, 'the bowers' are turned into value since he saw 'mornings and nights show and conceal them when Lucy played there'; 'the green field' is precious since Lucy looked over it before she died. It must be reminded once again that the value of 'the last green field' is won at the cost of Lucy's life. Especially the qualification by 'last' is very aptly emphatic in enhancing the uniqueness of the field. I do not consider this poem so elusive as some critics find reason to do. M. Drabble, for instance, finds much difficulty in getting a clear idea of what some of these lines mean:

....It was among the mountains of England, he says, that he first felt 'the joy of his desire', and this phrase is entirely typical of the poem; it seems perfectly

straight forward, but the closer one looks at it, the less sure one becomes of its exact meaning. Is he speaking desire for Lucy? Or desire for the mountains? And if he first felt the joy of his desire amongst English mountains, did he feel some other kind of desire somewhere else? The poem ends with another apparently simple statement; the poet says that England was the last country Lucy looked upon:

And thine too is the last green field
That Lucy's eyes surveyed.

This remark, too, is deceptive in its simplicity; it could possibly mean that Lucy is dead, and that she does not now survey any green fields at all --- or it could merely mean that the last time Lucy looked at a field, it was, since she lives in England, an English one. The first of these meanings seems to be too big for the words, the second too little --- the real meaning seems to lie, impossibly enough from a logical viewpoint, somewhere between the two...⁵⁾

I think that the dual character of Wordsworth's patriotism I have mentioned ought to clear these points the critic disputes: Wordsworth does not specifically say he first felt the joy of his desire among English mountains. If he loved Lucy and Lucy was an English girl, the English mountains --- probably those in the Lake District --- should be his ideal environment in which to spend their life together. His desire whose joy he says he felt in such environment should involve everything that he could demand of such a life, and the stanza in question means as a whole that he was given what he demanded. And the last two lines I find to be an excellent expression in which that duality of patriotism wedded to personal love is poetically realized. Here Wordsworth is not telling a story, much less

writing an autobiography.

To conclude, although of this poem we cannot say so definitely, as of *Strange fits of passion have I known*, that there is a mature mind working behind, I find it still possible to look at it from the same point of view: suffering may provide occasion for imaginative activity leading to a better appreciation or a new discovery of things. It will not be quite idle to remind ourselves in this connection that the winter over 1798-1799 in the ancient German town of Goslar is reported to have been the hardest in two hundred years, and living in a small tenent William and Dorothy were miserably isolated in the unfamiliar cold-hearted human relationship of the local community. It is easy to imagine how, under such circumstances, they were forced to fall back on each other and their own minds, to console themselves by feeding upon familiar memories they shared, and we have records to show that out of this dreary confinement came *She dwelt among untrodden ways, Strange fits of passion have I known*, as well as, possibly, part of the Book I of *The Prelude*.

Poems to be numbered in the *Lucy* series are not always easy to define, but because of an obvious affinity of theme and title it is proper to examine one more poem entitled *Lucy Gray*, a *Solitude*, although it is not exactly a Lucy lyric since Lucy

in the ones we have examined is supposed more or less clearly to reach maturity whilst Lucy Gray apparently dies young.

We know that Wordsworth took his materials for this poem from an actual incident of drowning. It is also illuminating to know that in writing the poem Wordsworth's attempt was to 'throw imaginative influences over common life', for here the poet can be taken to be fully conscious of his position as a poet, such as is professed in *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. We may therefore expect here to see what Wordsworth really means by 'throwing a certain colouring of imagination over incidents and situations chosen from common life.'

Lucy Gray had no mate, 'dwelt on a wide moor', was 'the sweetest thing that ever grew beside a human door'. What we have here is the image of a human child fostered in sheer nature, --- she shares the 'wide moor' with fawns, hares and roes ---, Wordsworth's ideal of formative environment for man of which we have an abundance of suggestions in *Preface*. As a result the maid is as full of life and charm as the mountain roe, even 'blither' than this creature. However, the kindly behaviour of the maid in obeying her father's order eventually led her to her destruction in the solitary wilderness of snow storm. The child of nature with such grace and vivacity is brought into striking contrast with the horror of death as

if by nature's ruthless design. All this readily reminds us of the way Lucy dies in *Three years she grew in sun and shower* as well as of 'the kindly nature's blessings' by which Lucy attains ideal maturity. The significant difference is, I think, that the death of the maid is here, at least partly, the result of her own will in taking an order from her parent. We may think that in this human act she is temporarily free from the exigent laws of nature. I do not think that Wordsworth, by letting her die in that manner, means that the very choice of her course of action is all predestinated. Such a reading of this poem would not in fact agree with the basic idea by which Wordsworth 'throws a colouring of imagination' over this seemingly matter-of-fact incident. I would rather take this again to be one of those instances where Wordsworth, a self-styled proponent of the language of the 'common man', can show himself highly subtle in practice. Indeed we see in this poem that in grace and spontaneity of movement the maid is almost a wild creature, such as a fawn or a hare with which she shares the wide moor. But all the same we should not be led to assume that the maid is completely in the state of such a wild animal. It is in this connection that the act of the maid takes on a significant aspect: in letting her choose her own line of action Wordsworth gives just so much freedom to humanity. But then the freedom

of man from the laws of nature involves that much irregularity, uncertainty, fallibility for him, and that is how the young, fairy-like maid of the moor, tripping lightly on an errand, perishes on the stormy bridge. We thus see in the end that freedom costs death. The light-footedness of the maid is symbolic of both this human freedom and fallibility.

It is needless to say that this poem with its subtitle 'Solitude' is concerned with the solitude of human existence in nature. True, Wordsworth makes out of a maid a spirit-like being --- the more or less characteristic quality of Lucy in all the lyrics in the series --- as if to say that only such solitude of nature as she enjoys in her wide moor can foster anything like her, and it is quite possible to suggest, as H.J. F. Jones does, that the emphasis is on her perfect relationship to environment.⁷⁾ But, as I have myself referred, the maid is after all a human being who, with all her partial freedom from the laws of nature, ultimately succumbs to the inevitable human destiny. We may say that the very 'perfect relationship' involves in itself the destructive as well as the formative. My own stand on this poem is therefore that it is with this duality of natural forces, at once formative and destructive, that Wordsworth here is really concerned. This is what is revealed, though more drastically, also in *Three years she grew*

in sun and shower. But here the element of humanity, presented in the maid going on an errand, renders it more pathetic, while it assumes more quality of a ballad by the poet's being less egotistical than there, although the lonesome scene of this poem frequented by the maid, both alive and dead, remains Wordsworthian enough. In such a poem one aspect of Wordsworth throwing a colouring of imagination upon an actual happening is well illustrated in his treatment of the posthumous existence of the maid as something of a ghost. Obviously, in so doing Wordsworth drew upon popular belief in the supernatural, but it must be pointed out at the same time that the maid-ghost is saved from ghastliness by a pitiful and sympathetic eye of the poet --- perhaps a result of the warm response of a contemplative mind, such as Wordsworth's, to the unselfconscious and spontaneous.

Throughout all the *Lucy* poems and *Lucy Gray*, a *Solitude*, we are struck by a poignant sense of solitude which permeates the whole scenes. It should be again reminded, however, that a scene or a situation in Wordsworth's poetry is usually of symbolic quality. Therefore the solitude of these poems, we may take it, represents a projection of the solitude within the poet himself. No doubt the particular circumstances under which they were composed or inspired --- William's and Dorothy's isolation in the extremely

cold town of Goslar ---- had a great deal to do with it. But more essentially, his solitude seems to have other relevances. Among other things it should be mentioned that these poetic scenes point to that state of tranquility of mind which saved Wordsworth from his nightmarish world of *Sturm und Drang*, the world of *Guilt and Sorrow* and *The Borderers*, for example, by clearing the scene, as it were, for creative imagery. All the important poetry of Wordsworth was in fact written either in separation from the person or the place he was going to write about, that is, when the thing in question was properly distanced and 'reflected in tranquility'. I suspect that Wordsworth's insistence upon tranquility may paradoxically point to a highly emotional temperament which, in order to be creative, if it can be so at all, requires that state of mind. It will be reminded in this connection that he was an eighteenth-century man of passions who worried his mother most of all the family's children for his wilfulness and later dared make himself the father of an illegitimate daughter. Thus, 'emotion recollected in tranquility' was a mode of self-salvation which Wordsworth had consciously, and wisely, created in himself after the feverish years of youth, and therefore no affectation on his part.

Not only that. The state also involves a certain kind of spiritual growth or the winning of a capacity to look with

another eye, or a new recognition of value, or an awakening of consciousness, if you like, on the part of the poet. This, I think, is what Wordsworth meant when he said that 'a deep distress had humanized his soul'. The poems, in suggesting the natural forces in its dual nature, show that while the poet accepts yet feels to the full the pain and sorrow of human mortality as inevitable, he equally asserts humanity in its different aspects in a modest but appealing tone. In all the poems spiritual maturity is presented as a result of the painful shock that human mortality in terms of Lucy's death produces in the mind of the poet. This is the formula of spiritual growth for Wordsworth who we find says:

... for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompense. For I have learned
To look on nature, not in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.... 8)

If we consider the deepening experience of human mortality and suffering to be corresponding to the growth of our mind, we necessarily have to seek a redemption for ourselves --- for we would not easily accept the idea of losing and suffering for

nothing --- in something like a theodicy.⁹⁾ I think that Wordsworth's acceptance of nature in its duality of influence upon man can be accounted for in that light. Growth is change and change entails loss. In terms of the poems we have examined, the loss is Lucy and the gain is the spiritual growth which is more or less explicitly suggested in the experience of the poems --- or more specifically in the poet's own terms, 'the calm, the power, the insight that are ours when we are worthy of ourselves'. Great egotist as he is, Wordsworth in these ballads are still found capable of telling us about ourselves.

Notes

- 1) *The Prelude*, Book I, ll. 358-361.
- 2) *Tintern Abbey*, ll. 105-113.
- 3) See, for example, H.W. Garrod: *The Profession of Poetry* (Oxford), PP. 82-3.
- 4) See, for example, M.Drabble: *Wordsworth*, Literature in Perspective Series, (London), PP.69-70.
- 5) *Ibid.*, P.66 .
- 6) cf. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire, 5 vols (Oxford), 1, 360, n.

- 7) H.J.F.Jones: *The Egotistical Sublime* (London), P.73.
- 8) *Tintern Abbey*, ll. 89-95
- 9) cf. M.H.Abrams: *The Prelude as a Portrait of the Artist*, Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies (Cornell University).

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1. Helen Darbishire: *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford).
2. Mary Moorman: *William Wordsworth*, a Biography (Oxford).
3. F.E.Halliday: *Wordsworth and His world* (London).
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5. *Wordsworth's Art and Mind*, ed. A.W.Thomson (Edinburgh).
6. Lionel Trilling: *The Liberal Imagination* (Penguin Books).
7. Basil Willey: *The Eighteenth Century Background* (Penguin Books).
8. Albert O. Wlecke: *Wordsworth and the Sublime* (California).
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