Human Suffering in Wordsworth's Early Poetry

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On the whole, in the poetry Wordsworth wrote before 1805, human suffering is for the poet an inexplicable problem. He holds diverse attitudes toward it and explores it vigorously from shifting moods and points of view. His treatment of it can be roughly divided into three stages. Before 1798, the poet is impressed with the images of calamity, especially those caused by natural, social or political evils. He sympathizes with people in their afflictions and attempts with all efforts to incite one's sympathy by presenting the distress and helplessness of the sufferers. In the subsequent important period of the *Lyrical Ballads,* his interest in suffering characters is twofold. On the one hand, the calamities of human life and his sense of pathos aroused by them continue to take hold of him. On the other hand, he begins to be fascinated by the primary passions he finds in the rustic suffering people; he is delighted with the strength and beauty of the elementary affections of their hearts. As a result, his mood in treating the subject of suffering varies from exultant joy to melancholy sadness. In the following stage, which spans the years approximately from 1801 to 1804, Wordsworth's sense of death and ineluctable suffering grows continuously, but he also endeavors to reconcile himself to the feeling of pathos by looking into the mind to find the very power that would sustain one in suffering. There are in this stage some remarkable poems particularly dealing with the unflagging and indomitable power of man's mind in encountering adversities.

In his earliest poetry, Wordsworth's presentation of human suffering centers on what had impressed him so deeply in his youth, the "images of danger and distress /And suffering . . . /Man suffering among awful powers and forms."[1] His description of the suffering characters emphasizes their helplessness and desperation in encountering the overwhelming powers and forms.

Some of the characters are tortured by a hostile Nature, such as the freezing beggar family in "An Evening Walk" (1788-1789), and the chamois-hunter in "Descriptive Sketches" (1791-1792). Nature in the two episodes in these two poems is presented as a cruel destroying power, responsible for the suffering and death of the characters. Though the suffering of the female beggar and her babies in the former poem is partly due to the war, which has taken the husband and father away, the war is not further explored as a cause of human suffering. Instead, it is the result—the exposure of the family to the torture of Nature—that is pictured. Nature is apparently the inflictor in this episode. The family is tormented first of all in summer under the scorching sun. The mother is dragging her babies along the "weary way" while "arrowy fire extorting feverish groans, /[Shoots] stinging through her stark o'er-labour'd bones."[2] Later, as the poet imagines, they are assailed by "the bitter showers" and "the torrent gale" of winter. At length, the children die in their dead mother's arms in the fierce and freezing tempest.

The episode of a chamois-hunter's death in "Descriptive Sketches" represents in another way a puny man victimized by nature. The destroying power of nature here is mixed with supernatural elements. The lost hunter seems to have intruded

himself into a sacred place of the spirits among the high Alps, and is finally annihilated by the evil spirits. He pursues his way through "worlds where Life and Sound, and Motion sleep, / Where Silence still her death-like reign extends" (*PW*, I, 64, ll. 375-76). He slashes his feet in order to climb "the peak's impracticable sides." He is hungry and exhausted, but still can not find his way out. At once, "bewildering mists around him close . . . [and] /The Demon of the snow with angry roar /Descending, shuts for aye his prison door." Finally, the "raven of the skies" and the "eagle of the Alps" appear to await the end.

In the four or five years following 1792, Wordsworth's mind was deeply and intensely absorbed in social and political problems. Already depressed with the failure of the French Revolution, he was dejected by the calamitous social conditions of England and dismayed at the declaration of war between France and his own country. Such being the case, in the poetry of this period the image of man suffering in hostile nature is replaced by that of man being victimized by war and social wrongs. The most prominent examples of this are the two drafts of "Guilt and Sorrow," namely "Salisbury Plain" and "Adventures on Salisbury Plain,"[3] written from 1793 to 1795, the most obscure years in the poet's life. In these two drafts, Wordsworth presents the poor innocent people's calamities and attacks war and social injustice which cause the calamities. The Female Vagrant, for instance, was first of all oppressed so that she had to leave the land on which she had happily passed her childhood and maidenhood. Later the American war caused the death of her husband and children and turned her life into endless vagrancy. She is now aimless and hopeless, having no earthly friend and "no house in prospect but the tomb" (Gill, p. 34, "Salisbury Plain," l. 393). The traveller in "Adventures on Salisbury Plain" is also a victim of social and political evils. The tragedies are drawn in dark colors. The horrific and ghostly atmosphere reflects the poet's turbulent and depressed state of mind. The characters are also suffering from natural disasters. But it is not the poet's intention to present Nature as an overwhelming destructive power. In "Salisbury Plain," for example, what the traveller suffers on Salisbury Plain before he meets the Female Vagrant seems inconsiderable compared with the woman's ineffable wretchedness. The starving and exhausted traveller is plodding over the plain and looking in vain for shelter at nightfall when a storm is threatening. He approaches Stonehenge, but is bid to avoid the place by a dreadful voice, which tells him about the barbarous human sacrifice at the pile in the past. The storm comes. He trudges on until he reaches the Dead House, where he meets the vagrant woman. Undoubtedly, he has experienced physical and mental torments; yet, after listening to the woman's even more wretched experience, he seems to have been cleansed of his own pain and fear:

> . . . human sufferings and that tale of woe
> [Have] dimmed the traveller's eye with Pity's tear,
> And in the youthful mourner's doom severe
> He half [forgets] the terrors of the night
> . . . . (p. 34, ll. 399-402)

Wordsworth seems to say that the social wrongs and the barbarities of war man

suffers from are such that before them natural evils and supernatural horrors both pale into insignificance. Nevertheless, in this draft the poet still has faith in the ultimate triumph of reason, which, he thinks, will contribute to a reformed society and make impossible the calamities such as the Female Vagrant suffers from.[4]

In "Adventures on Salisbury Plain," Wordsworth's view of human suffering is more pessimistic than that in the previous draft. His faith in reason has vanished. The picture of the injustice of social conditions is drawn in still darker colors. To the Female Vagrant's sufferings he now adds the details of how she and her father were oppressed by the wealthy and how she was treated "with careless cruelty" at the hospital. More important, the traveller's role is elaborated. He was seized by the "ruffian press gang" to fight in the American war and driven to robbery and murder in the desire to provide food for his family by the "slaves of Office," who denied the pay due to him on his discharge. Since committing the crime, he has been leading a fugitive life and suffering from his sense of guilt and fear of punishment. Though a criminal himself, he is also a victim. Though he committed a crime, the crime, instead of hardening his heart, enlarges his sympathies, for it teaches him to make all other people's misfortunes his own. Yet, when he finally gives himself to be hanged, there is no act of mercy to mitigate his penalty. And his death is not considered as a matter of justice. The "violated name of Justice" is ironically said to have performed an act of mercy for once in that it frees him from the misery of life. The end of this draft depicts, with savage satire, how "dissolute men, unthinking and untaught, /[Plant] their festive booths beneath [the hanged traveller's face]," and fathers with their wives and children make holiday at the foot of the gallows.

When he composed "Adventures on Salisbury Plain," Wordsworth was at the "lowest ebb" of his moral crisis. Talking about his state of mind at this period, the poet says in *The Prelude*:

> I lost
> All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
> Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
> Yielded up moral questions in despair
> .... (p. 406, X, 898-901)

However, after settling with Dorothy at Racedown in September 1795 the poet gradually recovered from his despondency; his turbulent emotions were before long tranquillized. When he wrote "The Ruined Cottage," he had emerged from the stage of depression and could depict a woman's silent suffering with calmness and great restraint.

Composed during 1797 and 1798, "The Ruined Cottage"[5] both manifests the poet's old preoccupation with the wretchedness and helplessness of the sufferers and anticipates a new reconciled view of suffering which he will develop in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Margaret in this poem is very like the Female Vagrant of the "Salisbury Plain" drafts except that she stays in her cottage instead of wandering about the world. War and unemployment are again the background of her personal tragedy. However, the poet does not raise any social or political indictment here; nor does he present a hostile Nature attacking the sufferer. Instead, he focuses on the silent

endurance and gradual decline of Margaret; and the figure of the meek sufferer is beautifully harmonious with her surroundings, the cottage she dwells in and its garden.

Margaret's story is related effectively through the calm tone of an old man, a pedlar by profession. He uses restraint and is careful not to make any overt bid for sympathy. His description of Margaret's decay is paralleled with that of the collapsing of the cottage and the lack of attention to its garden. When he saw the woman's drooping and declining after the disappearance of her husband, it seemed to him that the plants and flowers in the garden were also suffering in their decaying and withering. In the setting as he saw it,

> The unprofitable bindweed spread his bells
> From side to side and with unwieldy wreaths
> Had dragg'd the rose from its sustaining wall
> And bent it down to earth. . . .
> (Butler, p. 63, "The Ruined Cottage," 11. 314-17)

When grief and poverty came nearer to her, the Pedlar found that the earth in her garden was hard, "With weeds defaced and knots of withered grass"; that the better part of her herbs and flowers seemed to be "gnawed away /Or trampled on the earth" (p. 69, 11. 418-19); and that a chain of straw lay at the root of a dying young apple-tree. Though it is a realistic description of a garden lacking attention, the scene seems to manifest a sympathetic natural surrounding, which reflects faithfully its dweller's breaking down.

On the other hand, while physically declining, Margaret was tenaciously clinging to the torturing hope that her husband might return. She would sit half a day long and look in the distance, expecting to see him coming back. If a stranger came by, she would make an inquiry, hoping to learn her husband's fate. Even after her baby died, she lived on for five years more with her hope unvanquished. This tenacity, though there is certainly a measure of unbalance and discord, is none the less an expression of human grandeur. This dimension of Margaret's suffering is an important part of the elements that make this tragic story stand further from those in the earlier poetry and closer to those in the *Lyrical Ballads*.

Margaret's is originally a tragic story without relief; it ends with the final decline of the cottage and Margaret's death.[6] When he reworked the poem in early 1798, Wordsworth added the dramatic framework: the opening lines (1-54), two interruptions in the narrative (185-237, 362-76), and the conclusion. In such a revision the story of Margaret's suffering is entrusted with a purpose; it is employed by the Pedlar to initiate his young friend into not only the presence of human suffering but also the proper attitude toward it. It is his intention to arouse the young man's sympathy and moral sense by relating a distressing story of human sorrow, as he says in the midst of his narration:

> . . . we have known that there is often found
> In mournful thoughts, and always might be found,
> A power to virtue friendly. . . .
> (p. 59, 11. 227-29)

He also intends to initiate the young man to the experience in which one's sympathy with human suffering in supplementing his sympathy with natural objects is able to effect, as it were, a "transcending joy." In this case, the "Addendum" which Wordsworth originally affixed to MS. B of "The Ruined Cottage"[7] will assist in expounding the Pedlar's intention.

In the "Addendum" the old Pedlar explains to his friend how one can become spiritually accomplished through having "sympathies" with nature and with man. By having sympathies with "things that hold /An inarticulate language," according to the old man, we will feel the "joy of that pure principle of love." Our feelings of aversion will be "softened down"; and we will sense a "holy tenderness" pervading our being. The influence of natural objects on man will be even more powerful when we relate the objects to human passions:

> And further, by contemplating these forms
> In the relations which they bear to man
> We shall discover what a power is theirs
> To stimulate our minds, and multiply
> The spiritual presences of absent things.
> Then weariness shall cease. (11. 24-29)

"Weariness," "oblivious sleep" (1. 77), and "fretful dreams /Of feverish nothingness" (11. 77-78) describe the unstimulated, weary existence such as the narrator knows at the poem's beginning. In that state one "dimly pores on things minute, /On solitary objects, still beheld /In disconnection dead and spiritless" (11. 60-62)– the "insect host. . . joined their murmurs to the tedious noise /Of seeds of bursting gorse" ("The Ruined Cottage," 11. 24-26). But if one's mind is stimulated through his sympathies with the objects with human associations, one will read in the objects some "sweet and tender lesson to [his mind] /Of human suffering or of human joy" (11. 34-35). Thus, before he knows the story of Margaret, the ruined house and the deserted garden are insignificant to the young man; he can not see things which the Pedlar sees around the place. But after listening to the Pedlar's story, he is moved. The deserted place is no longer insignificant to him. He turns toward the ruined cottage to "trace with nearer interest /That secret spirit of humanity" (11. 112-13). However, the young man's response still does not satisfy the old Pedlar, for he has given himself to excessive sorrow. Seeing his friend being overcome with intense pathos, the Pedlar says:

> "My Friend, enough to sorrow have you given,
> The purposes of wisdom ask no more;
> Be wise and cheerful, and no longer read
> The forms of things with an unworthy eye.
> She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.
> I well remember that those very plumes,
> Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,
> By mist and silent rain-drops silver'd o'er,
> As once I passed did to my heart convey

So still an image of tranquillity,
So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
That what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
The passing shews of being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream that could not live
Where meditation was. I turned away
And walked along my road in happiness."

(*PW*, V, 403, "Addendum," 11. 118-35; Butler, pp. 73 & 75, "The Ruined Cottage," 11. 508-25)

This is in fact a "spot of time" in which the Pedlar sees into "the life of things" (*PW*, II, 260, "Tintern Abbey," 1. 49); actually, the old man's experience anticipates the poet's exalting joy gained through his sympathies with nature and with "the still, sad music of humanity" in the "Tintern Abbey" poem. The old Pedlar seems to say that since he had seen the whole course of Margaret's suffering, the plants in the ruined place, which seemed to have suffered with Margaret, after her death appeared to him to have come to a repose. And in the image of tranquillity seen in the "plumes," the "weeds" and the "high spear-grass," the dead Margaret, for all her miseries and torments while she was alive, also seemed to have been in harmony with her surroundings (presumably because he had this feeling before, the Pedlar says to his friend: "She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.") With this feeling of stillness and harmony, the old man was purged from his "uneasy thoughts," from what he felt of sorrow and despair caused by his contemplation of Margaret's suffering. So at last, he could turn away and walk along his road in happiness.

Edward E. Bostetter holds that the Pedlar's attitude is a kind of complacency, in which the old man tries to explain social and natural evils away and relieves himself of "any responsibility to act within the present frame of things."[8] In fact, as is mentioned previously, Wordsworth does not intend to raise any social indictment in relating Margaret's story. Instead of concerning himself with the causes of human suffering, the poet rather dwells upon the poor woman's patient endurance and gradual decay. Nor is human suffering justified in any way. Though Margaret is seen, or is imagined, to be in harmony with her surroundings in death, her suffering is not retrospectively explained or condoned. The Pedlar, as Wordsworth explains more clearly in the fragment "The Pedlar,"[9] is a man who has achieved the perfect spiritual equilibrium that Wordsworth felt he himself was approaching.[10] He has deep sympathy with man, he can "afford to suffer /With those whom he [sees] suffer" (Butler, p. 410, "The Pedlar," 11. 28-29), but is free from excessive passion and despondency. His is not complacency, but peace of mind "unvexed, unwarped /By partial bondage" (p. 408, 11. 315-16).

By the time "The Ruined Cottage" is finished, Wordsworth's attitude toward human suffering has advanced into a new stage. According to James H. Averill, the poet at this period in his life becomes interested in contemporary science. This interest results in his experimental and clinical approach toward pathos in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*. The "contemplation of suffering," Averill says, "is important for

[the] Wordsworth of [the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*] . . . as a source of energy upon which he can draw to explore, clarify, and illustrate other questions about poetry and human psychology."[11] This view indeed explains well Wordsworth's treatment of suffering in such poems as "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," "Simon Lee," and "The Thorn."[12] In "The Thorn," for instance, Wordsworth intends to "exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind";[13] and what is connected with the superstition in the poem is an image of human suffering, the wretchedness of a deserted woman. However, Wordsworth's other approach to human suffering in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* is at least of equal importance. This approach has to do with the poet's view of human nature formed at this time.

Having recovered from his depression caused by the social and political upheavals, the poet finds "Once more in man an object of delight,/Of pure imagination, and of love" (*The Prelude*, p. 440, XII, 54-55). He finds in those "who lead the simpliest lives most according to nature," those "who [ha]ve never known false refinements, wayward and artificial desires, false criti[ci]sms, effeminate habits of thinking and feeling, or who, having known these [t]hings, have outgrown them,"[14] such as are found in peasants, shepherds, beggars, and outcast women, the elementary feelings or the essential passions of the heart are at their purest and simplest. He finds those humble rustic people are the best measure of human nature.[15] Because of this, though he is still sympathetic with human miseries, his concern with suffering no longer centers on its pathetic aspect. The strength and beauty he has found in the humble sufferers' feelings and passions enable him to look at those sufferers even with delight and happiness.

1798 is for Wordsworth a year of great happiness.[16] In the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, though there are undertones of tragic suffering, the prevailing notes are joyful and exultant. Several of the humble sufferers are presented with a delightful mood hardly found in the poet's later poems on human suffering. "The Idiot Boy" is the best example.

An idiot is usually regarded as an unfortunate and disagreeable, if not disgusting, being who often causes pain and suffering to his family. But in this poem, idiocy is seen in its pure and lovely aspect. The idiot boy has undergone a perilous but happy moonlight ride and is finally found sitting upright on the feeding pony near the waterfall, as if stunned by the wonder of the natural phenomenon. The boy's mother, instead of seeing her idiot son as a burden, loves him and is proud of him. The mother's love and tenderness are seen, for instance, in the scene in which she is sending the boy to fetch a doctor for her sick neighbor:

> And now that Johnny is just going,
> Though Betty's in a mighty flurry,
> She gently pats the Pony's side,
> On which her Idiot Boy must ride,
> And seems no longer in a hurry.
> (*PW*, II, 69, 11. 67-71)

With nobody else to help, she is anxious to send her son away because the neighbor is seriously ill. She gently pats the pony's side because it is going to carry her son; and she seems no longer in a hurry because she does not really want him to

go, knowing that the boy is only "half-wise." Thus, this poem, which might have been another suffering story, becomes a comic and beautiful tale depicting a happy journey of an idiot boy, the love of the mother, and finally, the miraculous recovery of the neighbor from her sickness because of her concern for the missing idiot boy and his mother. Wordsworth himself said that he "wrote the poem with exceeding delight and pleasure, and whenever [he] read it [he] read it with pleasure."[17]

Some other poems dealing with suffering characters in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* — though they were obviously not written with so much pleasure nor do they provide so much delight as "The Idiot Boy"—are also far from dwelling upon the distress and helplessness of the characters. The strength and beauty of the sufferers' primary passions have tempered in one way or another the pathetic aspect of the stories.

Among the primary passions, love is the poet's favorite subject in these Lyrical Ballads. Besides "The Idiot Boy," maternal love is also treated in "Her Eyes Are Wild" and "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman." In the first poem, Wordswroth presents the complicated state of mind of a deserted woman who is inclined to fall into complete insanity and yet is pulled back to normality by her love for her infant child. The distress and the deranged state of the woman contribute to the pathos of this poem. But the strength of her love creates a force to reconcile one's pathetic feeling incited by her miseries. Similarly, in the second poem, the situation of the sick Indian woman left behind by her people arouses one's pity; but her love for her child, which enables her to cleave in solitude to life and society at the approach of death, invites one's admiration and gives one a sense of relief.

What the shepherd in "The Last of the Flock" has shown is another kind of love, the love of property. Yet this love appears to be a vigorous instinct closely interwoven with the noblest feelings. The shepherd loves his sheep as deeply as he loves his children. When he is obliged to sell his sheep one by one in order to support his family, he is driven nearly crazy and finds that he also loses the power to love his children. Again, the weeping shepherd is an object of sympathy; but one's sympathy for him is paralleled by an appreciation of the tenacity of his heart.

Nature in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* is never described as a cause of human suffering. On the contrary, in those poems collected in the edition as well as in some verses composed at this same period, nature is benevolent, effecting beneficial influence on and giving nothing but pleasure to man.[18] As has already been presented in the "Addendum" to "The Ruined Cottage," the poet thinks one's sympathy with nature together with his sympathy with human suffering can enable one to feel a transcending joy. Wordsworth describes his experience of transcending joy thus gained even more explicitly and clearly in "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey":

> I have learned
> To look on nature, not as 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. 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
.... (*PW*, II, 261-62, 11. 88-99)

In the joy, the poet, like the Pedlar, feels the harmonious existence of the universe, for what is involved in the "sense sublime" is

A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.
(11. 100-02)

In many poems collected in the second volume of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads,* human suffering is treated in a similar manner to that in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads,* which becomes, with the omission of "The Convict," the first volume of the 1800 edition. "Ruth," for example, depicts a girl's unhappy childhood, her being deserted by her lover after growing up, and her miserable situation in being imprisoned after becoming lunatic. It also presents Ruth's innocence formed by nature and her sensibility, and her eventual return in idiocy to that innocence. For another example, the old Cumberland beggar in the poem of that name is in the eye of the poet both an emblem of human suffering and an embodiment of some natural force. He is helpless in appearance and always incites the country people's sympathy. He is so still in look and motion, that "even the slow-paced waggon leaves [him] behind" (*PW*, IV, 236, 1 66). But, as Cleanth Brooks suggests, the old beggar is also like a "noble animal,"[19] who has been brought by the "tide of things" (1. 64) to the "vast solitude" (1. 163) and appears to "breathe and live but for himself alone, /Unblamed, uninjured" (11. 165-66). He struggles with natural hardships, but also enjoys natural freedom. His life, which seems a useless one, bears fruit in the lives of others. When moving around, he carries, though he himself is unconscious of it, the "good which the benignant law of Heaven /Has hung around him" (11. 167-68): he incites the villagers' moral impulse and makes them think by reminding them of their "peculiar boons," their "charters and exemptions" (11. 126 & 127). Thus, the poet wishes that the old beggar may continue to live and may die eventually "in the eye of Nature."

Nevertheless, on the whole, Wordsworth's tragic sense of human predicaments, especially the sense of death, prevails in the second volume of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads.* Human love, the major source of his delight gained through his observation of the humble sufferers in the 1798 volume, becomes the greater part of the cause of suffering in the poetry of 1800—one suffers from the death of an individual primarily because he loves the one who is dead. The poet at this time seems to be much preoccupied with the subject of the death of young people. In such poems as "There Was a Boy," "The Childless Father," "The Brothers," the "Matthew poems" and the "Lucy poems," except Matthew himself, the lamented dead all die young and make those who love them suffer intensely from bereavement. Moreover, nature, which is all benevolent in the 1798 edition, seems now to be accused again of causing human suffering.

However, Wordsworth does not recoil to his former view of human misery, which looks at men as helpless victims of awful "powers" and "forms," as shown in the poetry before 1798; and his accusation of nature here is never placed in an explicit way. The best examples of his view at this time are the "Matthew poems" and the "Lucy poems."

These two groups of poems focus on the subject of death and the response of the bereaved and show a well-balanced treatment of the subject. In the "Matthew poems," though death causes sorrow to the bereaved, the bereaved, instead of falling into immitigable suffering, reconcile themselves to suffering in their love and memory of the dead. In "The Two April Mornings," for instance, Matthew, a school-master of about 70, was bereaved of his daughter, but he seemed to have found comfort in his memory of her. And her death seemed to have increased his love for her:

> "Six feet in earth my Emma lay;
> And yet I loved her more,
> For so it seemed, than till that day
> I e'er had loved before.
> (*PW*, IV, 70, ll. 37-40)

Matthew's love for his daughter was so strong that he rejected any substitute for her. Hence, when he saw the blooming Girl and felt delighted to see such a fair child, he did not wish her his daughter. Similarly, in "The Fountain" Matthew, though bereaved of all his kin, rejected the narrator's proposal to be his son.

The narrator's response to Matthew's death is also treated in a similar manner. The narrator, who loves Matthew as his own father, feels deep sorrow after Matthew died. But his lamentation over the old man's death is somewhat relieved by his memory of him. In his memory, Matthew was a "happy Soul" (*PW*, IV, 69, "Matthew," 1. 30), a man having an unusual capacity for joy, for "fun and madness," yet lacking not the balance of profound feeling and thoughts. Thus, in "The Two April Mornings," for instance, after recalling his journey with Matthew the narrator seems to see his old friend, who "is in his grave," "stand, /As at that moment, with a bough /Of wilding in his hand" (*PW*, IV, 71). The image of Matthew with a bough of wilding, a symbol of life and joy, has counterbalanced the image of Matthew in his grave and has certainly mitigated the narrator's grief for the death of his old friend.

Nature in the "Matthew poems" serves as a reminder of human suffering. In "The Fountain," for example, the constant murmuring of the stream caused Matthew to contrast his momentary life with the eternity of nature. In "The Two April Mornings," for another example, the recurrence of the season and the similarity of the day—"that April morn, /Of this the very brother"—aroused Matthew's feeling about his dead daughter and reminded him of his suffering. Nevertheless, Wordsworth never presents nature as a tormenting force as he did before.

The balanced treatment of human suffering is carried to an even higher level in the "Lucy poems."[20] On the one hand, the lover in this group of poems grieves over the death of his beloved, a girl called Lucy; on the other, he appears to have some gains through his suffering. Nature in this group of poems is more explicitly

more," which express the sense of loss, the heath, the calm and quiet scene, also reflects the lover's feeling of tranquillity.

Certainly, the treatment of suffering in the "Lucy poems" is far different from that in the earliest poems written before 1798. It is also different from that in "The Ruined Cottage." Margaret in "The Ruined Cottage" is distressed and helpless; her suffering is a destructive power, checked in its overwhelming force only by her tenacious hope for her husband's return. But the narrator in the "Lucy poems" is not helplessly wretched after Lucy's death. His suffering, instead of destroying him, enables him to have a better sense of himself, of the world and of Lucy. Wordsworth's consciousness of the beneficial influence of suffering on the sufferer himself here, in fact, anticipates his reaction to the death of his brother John in 1805 and his treatment of human suffering thereafter. Besides, the pathos of Margaret's story in "The Ruined Cottage" is reconciled in the transcending vision which the Pedlar obtains partly through his sympathies with nature, a vision in which he sees beyond all earthly agonies. But in the "Lucy poems" nature does not offer the possibility for man to achieve such a transcending joy. Though one has, as the lover does, a feeling of calmness, one's sense of pathos aroused by human suffering is not dissolved or transformed into happiness after reading the "Lucy poems."

It is, perhaps, partly because of the waning of the vision of joy that he sensed so intensely in 1798, and partly because of his increasing sense of death and ineluctable suffering, that Wordsworth's attention is drawn to the power of man's mind in confronting adversity as presented in some prominent poems written in the years approximately from 1802 to 1804, such as "Resolution and Independence" and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality." This change is anticipated in "Michael," the last poem that enters the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Like most of the poems in the edition, "Michael" presents the misfortune of a humble rustic and his strength of affection in the face of the misfortune; but unlike them, this poem lays the stress on the fortitude with which Michael copes with his suffering. This stress gives this poem an importance in the sequence of Wordsworth's early poetry dealing with human suffering.

The suffering of Michael is far greater than what befalls the other earlier characters with the exception of, perhaps, Margaret in "The Ruined Cottage." What is involved in Michael's suffering is not only the loss of a loved person, his only son born in his old age, but also the loss of the hope that is attached to this person, the hope that his land would become free through his son and that his descendants would possess it, "free as is the wind /That passes over it" (*PW*, II, 88, ll. 246-47). Accordingly Michael suffers unutterably after the disappearance of his son, as is presented in his failure to finish the sheep-fold, the covenant between him and his son:

> . . . 'tis believed by all
> That many and many a day he thither went,
> And never lifted up a single stone.
> (ll. 464-66)

But, unlike Margaret, who fails to perform her duty to take care of the cottage, the garden, and her baby, Michael in his suffering goes about his daily work and lives after his son's disappearance for the length of seven years.

presented as a cause of human suffering than in the "Matthew poems," but it is also described as something which assists man in reaching reconciliation to his suffering.

Lucy is unique and precious for the lover. He compares her to a half-hidden violet, beautiful but easily overlooked by the public; and to a single star shining alone in the sky, strong in radiance but attractive to him only. Her life and death, though insignificant in the public world, are of supreme importance to him. His feeling aroused by Lucy's death is therefore a total sense of loss, which is ineffable so that he can only say: "But she is in her grave, and, oh, /The difference to me!" (*PW*, II, 30, "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways").

However, the lover has some gains through his suffering; he obtains a better sense of himself and the world. In "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known," for instance, his thought of Lucy's death startles him into the reality that his feeling of the immortality of his beloved, a feeling easily nourished in young lovers, is only a delusion, is only one of the "sweet dreams." For another example, in "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," the lover, after Lucy's death, seems not only to have awakened from his dream, his "slumber," in which Lucy "seemed a thing that could not feel /The touch of earthly years," but also to have recognized the reality that man's death is a part of nature. He feels that Lucy after death is "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course, /With rocks, and stones, and trees."

Nature in this group of poems is assumed to have played a role in causing human suffering. In "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower" the lover seems to say that it is nature's will that makes possible Lucy's death and that has caused his deep grief, for he imagines that Nature noticed the loveliness of Lucy when she was a child, began to shape her into a perfect lady for Herself, and, when the work was done, took the girl away from man's world. In "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known" the lover imputes, though implicitly, his delusion of Lucy's immortality to Nature; he describes the delusion as "one of those sweet dreams," "Kind Nature's gentlest boon." He seems to say that Nature puts off his thought of Lucy's mortality, and his shock thus redoubles its intensity when he abruptly thinks of Lucy's death.

Yet nature also contributes to the lover's reconciliation to suffering. In "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," the lover seems to have achieved at least a partial reconciliation in his transcending awareness that Lucy is in death participating in the diurnal movement of nature. In "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower," though Nature's taking Lucy away has caused his suffering, Lucy's death can also be considered as a sign of Nature's blessing. Her beauty and perfection were prepared, not for dwelling in a human world, but for living in the "happy dell" with Nature. The lover seems to say that Lucy can be regarded as something like an angel, who does not belong in man's world, but will stay happily in Paradise. This imagination is perhaps the source of the lover's feeling of calm as expressed at the end of the poem:

> 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. (*PW*, II, 216, 11. 38-42)

Though there is an emptiness about the landscape and a resonance in the "never

Nevertheless, there is still human weakness in Michael's fortitude. Another poem "Resolution and Independence" written in 1802 depicts a character, a leech-gatherer, in such a way that he becomes absolutely an emblem of fortitude. When he sees the old leech-gatherer, the poet is wandering upon the moor with a depressed mind, thinking that he might some day in the future suffer from "Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty" (*PW*, II, 236, l. 35). He thus unconsciously describes the old man, on the basis of his own low spirits, as a suffering being:

> His body was bent double, feet and head
> Coming together in life's pilgrimage;
> As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
> Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
> A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.
> (11. 66-70)

But the old man's words remove the suffering image from the poet's mind right away. The old man tells him that he, being old and poor, is roaming from pond to pond and from moor to moor to gather leeches to gain his maintenance. It is a hazardous and wearisome employment; and "he [has] many hardships to endure" (l. 102). Leeches, he says, "have dwindled long by slow decay," yet "still [he perseveres], and [finds] them where [he] may" (11. 125-26). The old man does not feel sorry for himself; nor does he intend to invite one's pity. Instead, he seems to have overlooked his suffering, for soon with his description of his hardships "he other matter [blends], /Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind, /But stately in the main" (11. 134-36). The "Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor" thus becomes a symbol of resolution and independence, who gives the poet human strength by "apt admonishment."

By the time "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" is finished, namely in March 1804,[21] Wordsworth seems to have accomplished a reconciliation to his sense of death and ineluctable suffering by finding in his own mind the very strength that sustains him in his experience of loss. In one sense, the Intimations Ode also depicts the death of youth, in particular, the death of the poet's own youth. According to Wordsworth himself, the Ode rests upon two recollections of his childhood: "one that of a splendour in the objects of sense which is passed away, and the other an indisposition to bend to the law of death as applying to our particular case."[22] In other words, the poet suffers, in growing up, the loss of the vivid sensations and the sense of immortality of his childhood.

As a matter of fact, Wordsworth had already mentioned the loss of his sensational pleasure obtained in nature in the "Tintern Abbey" poem. In "Tintern Abbey" the poet's faith in a benevolent Nature, "which never did betray /The heart that loved her," and which would lead man "From joy to joy," was so strong that he could already associate his loss of sensational pleasure with the gaining of a sober pleasure, which he reached through "hearing oftentimes /The still, sad music of humanity." However, in the great Ode, it seems, the conviction so firmly made in the year of 1798 can no longer sustain him in the loss of his past grandeur. Nature, inspite of all its offering of joy and pleasure, continually reminds the poet of his loss:

I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
—But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?
(*PW*, IV, 280, 11. 50-57)

What gives him relief this time is his awareness of the power of the human heart obtained through his recollection of the experience of growing up. His thanks and praise are given, not to "Delight and liberty, the simple creed /Of childhood" (11. 137-38), but to the Child's strength in confronting his suffering from doubts and fears in growing up:

Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing
. . . . (11. 140-53)

In other words, it is the "primal sympathy," the energy of the heart manifested in the Child's fitting his new existence to existing things, in the Child's overcoming the fear and the doubt of the unknown, that "doth live" "in our embers." It is the work of the "primal sympathy" that transmits intimations of immortality to man when he no longer has that sense of immortality of his childhood, for that energy of the heart has power to "make /Our noisy years seem moments in the being /Of the eternal Silence" (11. 154-56), and to enable us to "have sight of that immortal sea" (1. 164) upon whose shore the Children are sporting. Thus, though the Child's "visionary gleam" is fading and at length "the Man perceives it die away," the Man will not grieve, he will "rather find /Strength in what remains behind":

In the primal sympathy
Wich having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;

In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.
(11. 182-87)

In the poetry before 1798, the sufferers are all helpless and wretched people; what they can incite in the reader is only pathetic feeling. In "The Ruined Cottage," the poet endeavors to lighten the pathetic and tragic elements of human suffering by looking at the tragedy from a transcending view which looks beyond earthly agonies. In the "Tintern Abbey" period, the pathetic feeling caused by human suffering is to a great extent relieved by the delight gained through the observation of the beauty of the sufferers' primary passions. Subsequently, the poet's tragic sense of human predicaments, especially his sense of death, grows strong. Many of the characters in the poetry of this period suffer intensely because of the death of their beloved persons. And now in the Intimations Ode, there are soothing thoughts coming out of human suffering.

The nature of the "soothing thoughts" that spring out of human suffering here can not possibly be the same as that of the "joy /Of elevated thoughts" the poet senses through his hearing of the still, sad music of humanity in the "Tintern Abbey" poem. Otherwise, "Tintern Abbey" would suffice, and the Intimations Ode would be unnecessary. The poet here probably means that he, like the lover in the "Lucy poems," has gains not through his contemplation of human suffering but through his own experience of suffering, his consciousness of the loss of his past grandeur. While the lover's suffering makes possible his recognition of the truth of nature, the poet's suffering brings forth his awareness of the power of regeneration of the heart. This awareness in turn gives him the faith that man will be strong enough to cope with his suffering, will gain soothing thoughts out of his suffering. Thus at length, the poet gives his thanks "to the human heart by which we live . . . to its tenderness, its joys, and fears" (11. 201-02).

In fact, since the composition of "The Ruined Cottage," the poet has been conscious of the power of man's heart in encountering suffering. Each of the figures of Margaret, Michael and the Leech-gatherer has in her or his turn shown some strength in endurance. But it is not until now that Wordsworth's attention is particularly drawn to the power itself. Nevertheless, his complete awareness and confirmation of the power of the human heart in coping with suffering would probably have never occurred, at least would have not occurred soon, had he not suffered the most staggering and insupportable catastrophe of his whole life, namely the death of his brother John in 1805. To deal with the effect of John's death on the poet's view of human suffering is, however, out of the scope of this article.

Notes

[1]*The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays,* ed. Johathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), p. 278, (1805), VIII, 11. 211-13. All references to *The Prelude* in this article, unless otherwise noted, are to the 1805 text of this edition, which will be hereafter cited as *The Prelude.*

[2]*The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-1952), I, 26, 11. 245-46. All references to Wordsworth's poetical works in this article, unless otherwise noted, are to this edition, which will be hereafter cited as *PW*.

[3]All references to these two drafts are to *The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975).

[4]See the end of "Salisbury Plain," Gill, p. 38, 11. 541-49.

[5]The text of "The Ruined Cottage" used in this article is MS. D published in *The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar*, ed. James Butler (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979).

[6]See Butler, Introduction, p. 14. See also Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity*, London: Thomas Nelson, 1969, p. 11.

[7]For the "Addendum" see *PW*, V, 400-04.

[8]Edward E. Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists*, Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1963, p. 64.

[9]See Butler, pp. 382-412.

[10]In the I. F. note to *The Excursion*, talking about the Pedlar, Wordsworth says: "At all events, I am here called upon freely to acknowledge that the character I have represented in his person is chiefly an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances" (*PW*, V, 373).

[11]James H. Averill, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering*, p. 161.

[12]Averill singles out "Simon Lee" and "The Thorn" as examples for Wordsworth's "experiments in pathos." See Averill, pp. 162-80.

[13]See Wordsworth's note to this poem, *PW*, II, 512.

[14]*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 355, June 7, 1802. This edition will be hereafter cited as *EL*.

[15]See *EL*, p. 355.

[16]Among the evidences of Wordsworth's exultant happiness in 1798 are the verses in *The Prelude*, p. 480, XIII, 390-410.

[17]*EL*, p. 355. See also I. F. note to "The Idiot Boy," *PW*, II, 478.

[18]Besides "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," see also such poems collected in the *Lyrical Ballads* as "Lines Written at a Small Distance from My House," "Expostulation and Reply," and "The Tables Turned," and such poems not included in the edition as "The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale" and "A Night-Piece."

[19]See Cleanth Brooks, "Wordsworth and Human Suffering: Notes on Two Early Poems," *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom, London, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965, p. 379.

[20]The "Lucy poems" discussed here refer to the following four poems: "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known" (*PW*, II, 29), "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways" (*PW*, II, 30), "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower" (*PW*, II, 214-16), and "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" (*PW*, II, 216).

[21]I adopt Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire's dating of this poem. See *PW*, IV, 464-65.

[22]*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years 1812-1820*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 189, January 1815.