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WORDSWORTH IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

It has been said, perhaps with more passion than justification, that the world knows nothing of its greatest men. Yet, with all due allowance for exaggeration, the statement is true enough, in that the great man, the man of genius, with something tremendous to contribute in thought or art, is by his very nature and sometimes by a matter of centuries, ahead of his time. Of Shakespeare, for example, it can indeed be said that the critical appreciation afforded him for two centuries after his death was enthusiastic rather than profound, and that recognition of the extent of his genius scarcely began in England until the period of the Romantic Revival, in particular through Coleridge. The impetus supplied by Coleridge continued to work on through the nineteenth and into our own century, achieving a kind of climax in the famous *Shakespearean Tregedy* of A. C. Bradley, published in 1904. On the other hand it can hardly be claimed that our insight into Shakespeare has progressed at all significantly beyond this point, although it should be clear to us that critically speaking the first rather than the last word on Shakespeare has been spoken, and that insights undreamed of as yet await us in the future. Shakespeare is a unique figure in our literature, but the phenomenon of gradual appreciation apparent in his case is to be found according to the extent of the genius of others. And it is my contention, which I hope to substantiate in this paper, that we find it or, more accurately, are likely to find it in the future, in Wordsworth.

Shakespeare had to wait two centuries before the appreciation due to him could even begin; it is now more than a hundred and seventy years since the first publication, in 1798, of the *Lyrical Ballads*. During the nineteenth century the same kind of instinctive enthusiasm afforded to Shakespeare, especially in the eighteenth century, was directed towards the Romantics in general and towards Wordsworth in particular. In the twentieth century, however, and here the Shakespearean parallel ceases, a reaction, justififed to some extent

by the sentimental excesses of the nineteenth-century Romantic enthusiasts, was to begin. The critical revolt against Romanticism, associated with such names as T. E. Hulme, T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, William Empson, has been one of the most pronounced and persistent literary phenomena of our time, and is still strongly with us. Shakespeare, a supreme figure, has never been reacted against; although one Thomas Rymer in the eighteenth century did mount a full-scale attack, thus ensuring for himself subsequently the label of "the worst critic who ever wrote". Those less than Shakespeare, however, are liable to a somewhat checkered posterity, marked by revivals and eclipses, and so it has been with Wordsworth. Wordsworth at the moment, after the euphoria of the nineteenth century, is to a certain extent in eclipse; an eclipse, however, that is anything but final, no more perhaps than a necessary prelude, a marking time until, at a higher level of insight, a new assessment can begin. Nevertheless the eclipse, the belittlement, is currently there, and with it and the reasons for it we must begin.

Wordsworth is so manifestly a great poet that no responsible twentieth-century critic has as yet quite summoned up the nerve to pronounce him a bad one. Instead, the attack on the Romantics—and we have now had sixty years of it—has been more negative than direct: not so much a repudiation as a withholding of enthusiasm, a directing of interest elsewhere. Of course there have been direct attacks also: F. R. Leavis, for example, has exposed some of the logical inconsistencies in the lyrics of Shelley, and William Empson in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity* has attempted to extend the same kind of iconoclasm to Wordworth's *Tintern Abbey*. In general however, there has been no direct confrontation, only a persistent lack of genuine interest, a rather patronizing assumption that the Romantics, Wordsworth in particular, have nothing much to offer of philosophical relevance to ourselves. Philosophically, however, the Romantics maintain their challenge, and if we are to account for the patronizing indifference and latent hostility of the twentieth century towards them, it is to the nature of the Romantic philosophy itself that we must turn. Clearly there is something about the Romantics and their way of looking at things that is uncongenial to the critical mentality of our time, something from which, consciously or subconsciously, it is shying away. And I would suggest at the outset that the two aspects of Romantic poetry which most get on our critical nerves today are, first of all, its assumption of an underlying spiritual reality informing the everyday world about us, and, second—and deriving from this assumption—an essentially optimistic attitude to life.

Concerning the spirituality of Wordsworth even the most reluctant of

modern critics can be in no manner of doubt; although it is one thing simply to take note of that spirituality, quite another to perceive its fundamental significance. Wordsworth, as he himself has told us in the famous note dictated to Miss Fenwick, was endowed in childhood with a clairvoyant capacity, a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within him. As a result of this he says,

> I used to brood over the stories of Enoch and Elijah, and almost to persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated, in something of the same way, to heaven. With a feeling congenial to this I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality.

Through such experiences, taken for granted rather than comprehended at the time, Wordsworth was to be made aware of spiritual beings or presences, "huge and mighty forms that do not live like living men", manifesting in and through Nature. As he grew up, however, the moments of mystical awareness, of actual spiritual communion, became less frequent, until at some undetermined point, perhaps in his early thirties, they ceased altogether. Again and again in his poetry, and especially in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth has described for us his ecstatic moments of "extra-sensory perception"—to use the modern phrase. Certainly the most famous and explicit description is found in the passage in *Tintern Abbey*:

> that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,—
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.

Concerning Wordsworth's mysticism then, there can be no manner of doubt, and even the most spiritually obtuse cannot but recognize that it is there. However, it is not enough simply to classify it as just one more component of Wordsworth's experience and poetry and leave it at that. Because, of course, it is fundamental, the fountain-head of his creativity, the source of his every insight, the basis and origin of his entire philosophy of life. Wordsworth,

in the matter of spiritual experience, was exceptional; but we are all of us endowed in some measure, if not with visionary powers, at least with intimations and intuitions of a spiritual nature, and it is these—however little we realize the fact—that determine our behaviour, our abilities, and the rationalisations that issue in our attitudes to life. Wordsworth's total philosophy is complex and profound, but it would be worth while to consider just a few of the extraordinary insights that could only have come to him through the medium of his spiritual experiences. Not the least of these, in that it can be said to have preceded and precipitated the rest, was his insight into the nature of childhood. The fundamental nature of this particular insight can be inferred from the fact that the intimations of immortality which he presents in his great Ode, and on the basis of which he seeks to erect an ultimate philosophy of life, came to him, as the title of the ode states specifically, through his recollections of early childhood. In such poems as "We Are Seven", the sonnet "It is a beauteous evening", the "Intimations" ode itself, and in the First Book of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth records his awareness, through observation and personal recollection, of what we might call the condition of unconscious spirituality in a child.

Taking its own state of being entirely for granted, the child can yet reveal to the observing adult the fact of its continuing involvement with the Divine. As Wordsworth says of the child, in this instance his nine-year-old daughter Caroline:

> If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
> Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
> Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
> And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
> God being with thee when we know it not.

In retrospect, observing and interpreting his own childhood experiences, Wordsworth thus became aware of his own involvement with the spiritual, and at the same time of the effect of this subconscious awareness upon his natural environment. It had had, as he could perceive in retrospect, a transfiguring power, investing all objects of sight with what he called "a dream-like vividness and splendour". This process of transfiguration, however, though continuous in early childhood, was to become more and more intermittent with the passage of time; until in his Intimations Ode, begun in 1802 at the age of 32, he has to admit, with an unbearable sense of loss and deprivation, that it has vanished entirely, and that nothing henceforth can bring back to him "the splendour in the grass, the glory in the flower". But it is this very deprivation that enables him to look back with extraordinary insight over his past life

and to perceive that spiritual deprivation has taken place in stages, each one marked by a distinct metamorphosis of his relationship to Nature.

The recognition of the three stages of development—as they are usually called—through which an individual passes in the first twenty years or so of his life, was in itself a remarkable discovery—and one moreover that has still to be appreciated at anything like its true worth. It is probably true to say, for example, that modern educationists still tend to conceive of the passage from childhood to maturity as a continuous uniform progress from childish ignorance and stupidity towards an ultimate goal of fact-based adult intelligence. In consequence, the accumulation of facts and of skills to manipulate those facts in the shortest possible time, if possible with the aid of machines, is the educational fate that has confronted and will continue even more inexorably to confront the child of today and of the foreseeable future. But the notion underlying such a concept of education, the notion that the child is a stupid miniature adult who must be coaxed and tricked and pressured into developing with all possible speed an adult level of intelligence, is certainly one that would have horrified Wordsworth. At least Wordsworth, on a basis of personal observation and insight, had come to recognize that there was something special about a child, a state of being and consciousness deserving of the highest reverence and an instinctive wisdom often capable of putting the arrogantly intelligent adult to shame. Childhood, for Wordsworth, was not a condition to be treated with impatience and contempt, to be cut short by intellectual coercion; but rather a state to be treasured and prolonged, a Garden of Eden in which the child should be encouraged to linger, until it came to know through its own instinctive wisdom that the time had come to eat of the fruit of the intellectual tree and leave a paradise behind.

But again Wordsworth knew—and we have still to catch up with him—that the ending of the childhood phase marked the beginning of another, no less distinct, and that in this, the adolescent phase, while the thinking principle has certainly awakened, it will remain for a long while subordinate to the surging claims of the emotional life. Wordsworth, in retrospect, identified this phase in himself through the change that took place in his relationship to Nature. As a child—as he indicates in the First Book of *The Prelude*—he was not so much aware of Nature as a part of it, holding no more than subconscious intercourse with its beauty. With the onset of adolescence, however, awareness of Nature began and was to be sustained as the dominant passion of his life until beyond his twentieth year. The new relationship was an emotional one, independent of thought. In his Tintern Abbey poem, written from

the vantage point of yet a further stage of development, Wordsworth looks back upon the self of this earlier phase, with all its aching joys and dizzy raptures:

> I cannot paint
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.

For a prolonged period, indeed until his mid-twenties, Nature was to be for Wordsworth a predominant interest, and only occasionally, and by slow gradations, were his thoughts drawn away from her in the direction of humanity. External events of shattering impact, his personal involvement with the French Revolution, his love affair with Annette Vallon, were to precipitate in him a violent awareness of human life and were in fact to lead him through a phase of disillusion to the brink of despair. But a turning point eventually came, in his twenty-fifth year, when he achieved a degree of financial independence and was able to set the storm and stress of city life behind him and return to Nature, only to find that, while Nature herself had obviously remained constant, his relationship to her had once again changed. The aching joys and dizzy raptures, the adolescent emotionalism were over, and he now stood before the mountains, rivers, woods and fields a fully self-conscious man. A third phase of consciousness was in fact upon him, and with it the realisation that the basis of his life had again been altered, that the former love of Nature had led him on by imperceptible degrees to a love of man. Nature, no longer an all in all, loved for her own sake, now spoke to him of human nature, and in her presence henceforth he would hear "the still sad music of humanity". Also, in his new state of heightened consciousness, he could now sense consciously as never before the underlying spiritual reality in Nature, that

> sense sublime
> Of something for 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,
> And rolls through all things.

The three stages of development through which Wordsworth passed are of course well known to all students of his poetry. But again it is one thing to know about them, quite another to recognize their relevance not only to Wordsworth but to ourselves. For the stages through which Wordsworth passed in his development to maturity are common to us all, and until this vital fact is realised we shall continue to be baffled—as we most certainly are—by the problems of childhood and adolescence, and to provide methods and systems of education suitable for miniature adults but more or less catastrophic when applied to a developing child. Wordsworth's extraordinary insights into the first twenty years of human life are at our disposal and for a hundred and fifty years have been essentially disregarded. Perhaps in all that time only one individual of note, the poet Keats, has taken them with the seriousness they deserve. In his famous letter to his friend Hamilton Reynolds, where he compares human life to a "large Mansion of Many Apartments", and confirms, in the light of his own experience, the findings on human development set forth in Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey poem—in this letter we do indeed encounter a mind moving along Wordsworthian lines and perceptive of the unprecedented range of his genius.

In his poetry up to the year 1802, Wordsworth presents us with a retrospect of his three former selves from a viewpoint beyond them. But the very fact that he can see himself as he used to be suggests the attainment of yet another phase of development that he will be able to perceive and characterize only when it too is completed and viewed retrospectively. Indeed it is possible to infer that while the first three stages of human life are highly distinctive, involving as they do marked physical as well as spiritual changes, they are but the prelude to later stages of a more subtle kind. Thus in 1802, when Wordsworth wrote the first four stanzas of his Immortality Ode, it was to record the fact of yet another change in his relationship to Nature, and so in himself. For now, finally, the moments of mystical communion had ceased, and with them had gone the last remnant of that transfiguring radiance in which, since childhood, the objects of sight in Nature had been invested. The desolating effect of this ultimate spiritual deprivation sounds out again and again in the opening stanzas:

> Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
> Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Two years were to pass before the answer to these rhetorical questions came, before Wordsworth could continue and complete his Ode. And the answer provided, the explanation of his new state of being, was the product of an imaginative insight as profound as any in the whole range of English literature. Briefly, the theory in terms of which Wordsworth sought to explain the sequence of changes in his relationship to Nature can be and has been summed up in the phrase "the Platonic theory of pre-existence". Plato in his *Republic* refers, of course, not only to the pre-existence of the soul in spiritual regions before birth, but also to its re-incarnation in a whole series of earthly lives. Wordsworth, specifically at all events, does not seem prepared to go as far as this; as a poet, however—that is to say through the medium of the poetic imagination—he is able to seize upon the notion of an already existing soul incarnating at birth as providing, at last, an explanation of that state of instinctive spirituality that he had come to recognize and venerate so deeply in the child. Without any equivocation he records the revelation in the fifth stanza of the Ode:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
> The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting,
> And cometh from afar:
> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home.

Also explicable now in terms of the Platonic theory are those changes of consciousness so apparent to Wordsworth in retrospect, each one reflecting a new and different relationship between himself and his natural environment, and each one characterized by a further gradual dying out of his capacity for mystical communion. Again we have only to refer to the Ode:

> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing Boy
> But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
> He sees it in his joy;
> The Youth, who daily farther from the east
> Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
> And by the vision splendid
> Is on his way attended;

At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

The stage of final and irrevocable spiritual eclipse is upon Wordsworth, but, as he goes on to argue in the Ode, he is not on that account either bereft or forsaken. For the recollection of what has been, of the past moments and phases of spiritual communion with their intimations of man's immortality, are still with him, and on that basis of recollected experience he can erect consciously and deliberately a sustaining philosophy of life.

Thus all too briefly and inadequately we have touched on some of the more remarkable spiritual insights conveyed to us in the poetry of Wordsworth —insights to be found nowhere else in English literature and whose profundity and significance have yet to be realized. The challenge of Wordsworth's spiritual philosophy has yet to be taken up. Because of its explicitness within the body of his poetry it cannot be ignored, but on the other hand pretexts can always be found to belittle its importance. Thus in the case of the Intimations Ode, it has been claimed that Wordsworth is lamenting, not the dying out of his spiritual insight into Nature, but of his own poetic powers; and this, notwithstanding the fact that in the five years following the commencement of the Ode he was to produce some of his greatest poetry! Also, with reference to the introduction of the theory of pre-existence into the Ode, while it cannot be denied that it is indeed there, the point is made that we need not take it too seriously because Wordsworth himself never really believed in it, and said as much in the note on the Ode dictated to Miss Fenwick. In fact in the Fenwick note, Wordsworth leaves the question of belief open, while indicating where support for the idea of pre-existence can be found; but his insistence (also in the note) that he had no wish to *inculcate* belief has been fastened on without further ado as a kind of back-tracking on his part and used as a pretext to dismiss the theory of pre-existence from further consideration. This, of course, is a familiar critical device in confrontation with that which is unwelcome intellectually or too difficult to explain: thus, for example, the baffling problem of Hamlet's delay is often disposed of by naively insisting that he did not delay.

The particular criticisms brought against the Immortality Ode, the particular pretexts used to justify rejection of its spiritual claims and implications, are of course symptomatic of the general intellectual reluctance, in evidence now for more than sixty years, to come to terms with Wordsworth. All kinds of excuses are made for this reluctance because, in view of his manifest greatness as a poet, Wordsworth must be explained away rather than ignored.

However, the real reason, as opposed to the many professed reasons, for belittling and side-tracking Wordsworth is manifestly the spiritual basis of his life and work. To the contemporary mind, conditioned by generations of materialism, there is something profoundly embarrassing about a poet, such as Wordsworth, who will not keep his mysticism in a compartment of its own, insulated from any kind of involvement with external reality. Mystical experiences, in other words, are quite all right in themselves provided it is firmly understood that they have nothing to do with the conduct and processes of everyday life. But Wordsworth's mysticism is not of this order. Here is a mystic, in fact, who claims a continuing involvement of the material with the immaterial, so that they must be recognized as dual aspects of a single reality. Here is a poet who seriously maintains on the basis of his own insight and experience that the forces and appearances of external nature are not self-sufficient, since they are also the manifestations of supernatural beings. Here finally is a concept of man himself as the outward and visible sign of an inner soul and spirit: an entity, not created out of nothing by heredity and environment, but already pre-existing in spiritual regions before being summoned into earthly life through the procreative process, and passing back at death into the spirituality from which it came. Such concepts, with all their inevitable moral implications, are deeply disturbing to the modern mind, obsessed as it is with the desire to cut loose from morality by conceiving of the span of human life as a meaningless interlude between birth and death beginning and ending with itself. Wordsworth with his basis of spiritual experience, his "authentic tidings of invisible things" issuing in a profoundly moral view of human life, obviously will have little to say to those who have dropped the word sin from their vocabulary, and who expect to get away with their actions, however outrageous, on the convenient assumption that God is dead and death itself is total extinction.

Equally uncongenial to a generation intent on convincing itself of the hopelessness and meaninglessness of an existence confined within the boundaries of birth and death will be Wordsworth's fundamental optimism, his awareness through personal experience of the glory and enduring purposefulness of the human soul: his certain knowledge that—

> whether we be young or old,
> Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
> Is with infinitude, and only there;
> With hope it is, hope that can never die,
> Effort, and expectation, and desire,

> And something evermore about to be.
> Under such banners militant, the soul
> Seeks for no trophies, struggles for no spoils
> That may attest her prowess, blest in thoughts
> That are their own perfection and reward,
> Strong in herself and in beatitude
> That hides her, like the mighty flood of Nile
> Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clouds
> To fertilise the whole Egyptian plain.

The denigration of the Romantics, of Wordsworth in particular, through n infinite variety of subtle devices, has now been going on, as we have stated, or the whole of this century. This in itself raises the question as to whether ne repudiation is permanent, or no more than a prolonged, destructive phase. n this connection it is relevant to recall that the phase of Neo-classicism, in ome ways no less poetically destructive, lasted for more than a hundred and fty years. Anti-Romanticism is still strongly with us, not so much as an ctive critical force but as a tacit attitude of patronising indifference. On the ther hand, it could be argued that at this present moment and through the ising generation a spiritual climate less unfavourable to Romanticism may be n the making. It is indeed a commonplace to state that the youth of today on ne threshold of adult life are expressing, with anarchic violence, their total isenchantment with the values and objectives of the materialistic heritage repared for them by their elders. Asking for bread, they are being offered a einforced concrete stone. And it is especially significant that in repudiating ne world made in the image of their elders, the youth of today are attempting o supply, after their own fashion, the particular element in that world which s so devastatingly lacking, the element of spirituality. The means adopted to ecure, at whatever cost, some kind of personal experience of the spiritual, have een so far uniformly disastrous. As we all know, those who have felt impelled o force their way into the spiritual world through the material medium of rugs have experienced only chaos and distortion, and have had to pay for neir presumption through varying degrees of alienation from life, amounting n extreme cases to insanity. Premature spiritual experiences induced by rtificial means are obviously and tragically undesirable; but the very fact that o many young people have resorted to such means is a reflection of an in-tinctive and desperate hunger within them, a hunger for a spirituality which ne world made in the image of their elders does not contain.

The means so far adopted by the young to provide themselves with a

spiritual counterpart to materialism have left them worse off—more alienated, more frustrated—than before. However, it is at least possible in the remaining years of the century that an apprehension and experience of the spiritual involving a heightened state of consciousness may begin to arise: an apprehension that will come about not through a dulling and drugging of the mind and the senses, but naturally and spontaneously through the intellect and the imagination working harmoniously in full and deliberate awareness. It is at least possible that the present anarchic state of the world is signifying not only the disintegration of an out-moded state of human consciousness but the inauguration of one that is essentially new.

Should this be the case, then indeed it is permissible to hope that the Wordsworthian view of life, with its basis in spiritual experience, with its recognition of the way in which the spiritual interpenetrates the material, may begin in the forseeable future to come into its own. In the past, and especially during the nineteenth century, a genuine appreciation of Wordsworth certainly prevailed, but it was an emotional appreciation, more concerned with the feeling content of his poetry than with its ideas. In the twentieth century so far there has been an extreme yet, in some respects justifiable reaction against the emotional approach to Wordsworth, and at the same time an intellectual realisation of his ideas. But the ideas have yet to be taken seriously enough and applied with a full sense of their implications directly to life. Such an application may well begin to be made in the years immediately ahead of us if the new spiritual consciousness of which there are already so many signs develops beyond its present destructive phase.

I do not myself believe that the rising generation is yet ready or willing to turn its attention to a poet who died more than a century ago and who is thus identified with the past and so with that arch-enemy of contemporary youth, the Establishment. Although it is interesting to note that some of those who have induced extra-sensory states in themselves through the use of hallucinatory drugs have fastened with surprised recognition onto Wordsworth's description of the mystical mood (already quoted) in his Tintern Abbey poem! Obviously, however, more than this kind of acknowledgement is needed. Wordsworth's poetry speaks powerfully to the feelings, and will continue to do so; on the other hand if we are to come to terms with him today, if the healing power magically present in his poetry is to be brought to bear, then we must approach him with all the emotional fervour of the nineteenth century but at the same time with a new and searching awareness of the urgent relevance of his ideas.

Wordsworth's healing power, supplemented by the whole Romantic influence, was virtually all that the nineteenth century had, apart from an eroded faith, to set against the galloping inroads of scientific materialism. A remarkable instance of what Wordsworth could do for a nineteenth-century intellectual is to be found in the recorded experience of the youthful John Stuart Mill. In his twenty-second year, in a state of depression and despair induced by overwork and an excess of analytical thought, he turned to the poetry of Wordsworth with no particular expectation of relief. On a previous depressed occasion he had tried out the poetry of Byron without any kind of success. Wordsworth, however, was to prove almost miraculously effective. As he explains:

> What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings . . . from them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence. . . . The delight which these poems gave me proved that with culture of this sort there was nothing to dread from the most confirmed habit of analysis.

The emphasis here, in the case of a young man of the early nineteenth century, is predictably upon the emotional content of Wordsworth's poetry; a young man of today in quest of the same healing power would need to place an equal emphasis upon the communicated ideas. Perhaps the experiment is worth recommending. When desperation is upon us, and suicide or psychiatry seem the only alternatives, perhaps we could do worse than recall the recorded experience of John Stuart Mill. Wordsworth or psychiatry! *The Prelude*, *Tintern Abbey* and the *Ode on Intimations* or L.S.D.! The choices may be less fantastic than we might suppose. And on the subject of psychiatry, it is perhaps worth noting that Wordsworth with his insight into the nature of childhood, his specific realisation that the "Child is Father of the man", anticipated one of the fundamental discoveries of psycho-analysis by a hundred years.

In proclaiming the greatness of Wordsworth and his relevance to the needs and problems of our time, we are up against not only the anti-Romantic critical trend to which reference has been made, but also—and involved with this—the modern tendency to repudiate the past, to break with it artistically. Whenever truly great artists arise in any medium, one of the unmistakable

signs of their greatness is the reverence and acknowledgement they bestow upon their predecessors. We have only to think of Chaucer passing through his French and Italian phases before emerging as a poet in his own right, of Milton freely acknowledging Spenser as his master, of the Spenserian, Shakespearean and Miltonic influences in the work of Keats. In the twentieth century, however, this artistic reverence for the great figures of the past, this realisation that the man of genius must pay his debt to the past before he can hope to find himself artistically, is almost universally lacking. The modern artist is one typically determined to pull himself up by his own boot straps, to insulate himself from the past in a vacuum of self-sufficiency. Undoubtedly, in the fullness of time, perhaps well into the twenty-first century, great literary figures will again appear, and the first sign of their greatness will be their recognition that they must return in reverence and understanding to all the great poets of the English language, and not least to the last of them, Wordsworth, before pursuing on their own account things unattempted hitherto in prose or rhyme.

Looking ahead as we must, if we are to escape despair, to an eventual renaissance of great art, we shall of course understand that the future poets of the English language while returning with new fervour and understanding to the Romantics, will take them and their great predecessors, Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, only as points for a new departure. Wordsworth, as being the nearest great poet in time, will undoubtedly be the one to speak to them most directly of themselves and of their aspirations. If, as we have suggested, the rising generation with its confused hunger for the spiritual is but a portent of what is to come, then we may conceive of later generations who will transcend confusion and see into the life of things with an insight still only potential in ourselves. Wordsworth in this respect will be their forerunner, but only to the extent that he can lead them to a threshold that he could not and they must cross. For while Wordsworth can carry us, and will carry them a long way into the spiritual, we have to recognize that for the purposes of our time and of the future he does not carry us quite far enough. He provides us with wonderful insights, into childhood, into Nature; he can come up, at all events tentatively, with the apocalyptic idea of the soul's pre-existence; but we need, and are going to need with increasing urgency, far more direct spiritual information than he was able, with all his genius, to supply. As he tells us in *The Prelude* in connection with his moments of direct mystical communion with the Divine, he could, on returning from them into his everyday consciousness, bring with

him no more than an obscure recollection of what he had experienced. The soul, as he puts it, in *The Prelude*

> Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
> Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
> Of possible sublimity, whereto
> With growing faculties she doth aspire,
> With faculties still growing, feeling still
> That whatsoever point they gain, they yet
> Have something to pursue.

The faculties to which Wordsworth refers have undoubtedly grown in man in the past century and a half and will continue to evolve. In fact his present state of spiritual confusion, of intensifying distrust for the material, suggests that we are all of us now in the process of crossing a threshold beyond which will lie not only direct experience of the spiritual, but also the power through an ever-developing consciousness to communicate that experience in concepts, in matter-moulded forms of speech, towards which Wordsworth, for all his greatness, could but point the way.

Meanwhile the healing power of Wordsworth's poetry, if we approach it rightly, will remain. The spiritual concepts with which he provides us are few compared with our needs, but by surrendering to them we can prepare ourselves and others for what lies ahead. Our experience of Wordsworth though more self-conscious and less emotional, will not greatly differ from that of John Stuart Mill, or of that other great Victorian, Matthew Arnold. In his *Memorial Verses* written in 1850 at the death of Wordsworth, Arnold speaks of his own age, that iron time of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears, and what Wordsworth could do for it; and in so doing Arnold speaks also and with prophetic appositeness for another world, our world, in which all the materialism he identified and dreaded is at one and the same time uneasily triumphant and faced with the imminence of its own defeat:

> He too upon a wintry clime
> Had fallen—on this iron time
> Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.
> He found us when the age had bound
> Our souls in its benumbing round;
> He spoke, and loosed our heart in tears.
> He laid us as we lay at birth
> On the cool flowery lap of earth,
> Smiles broke from us and we had ease;

The hills were round us, and the breeze
Went o'er the sunlit fields again;
Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.
Our youth returned; for there was shed
On spirits that had long been dead,
Spirits dried up and closely furled
The freshness of the early world.