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The Role of Nature in the Borderers : A Study of the Interpretations of Wordsworth's Early Drama

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THE ROLE OF NATURE IN THE BORDERERS

A STUDY OF THE INTERPRETATIONS OF WORDSWORTH'S EARLY DRAMA

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays Kansas State College in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts

by

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I wish to thank Dr. Samuel Hamilton, Dr. Gordon Price, Dr. Samuel Sackett, and Dr. Roberta Stout for their valuable suggestions and patient guidance. I am especially indebted to Dr. Verna Parish, both for her scholarly criticism of my work and for her willingness to undertake the additional administrative burden that resulted from my being unable to complete this thesis while still in residence at Fort Hays Kansas State College.

To my wife, Donna, I am indebted for generous and sympathetic assistance of every possible kind.
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF THE BORDERERS

Despite the play's lack of artistic merit, scholars have long considered The Borderers an important document in the history of Wordsworth's philosophical development. The exact nature and extent of its importance has, however, remained a matter of controversy. Prior to 1926, the most widely accepted interpretation of the play supplemented what the poet had expressed so powerfully in Book XI of The Prelude: at one time during his early manhood, he had been obsessed with the moral and philosophical questions arising out of the French Revolution and out of a rationalistic philosophy to which for a time he had whole-heartedly subscribed. This interpretation of the play, still well received by many scholars, holds that The Borderers reflects Wordsworth's obsession with Godwinism--the designation usually given the philosophy that preoccupied him--and shows the poet at a time when he was beginning to slough off what was for him a sterile and demoralizing creed.

After the discovery of the long suppressed Annette
Vallon episode, however, some critics saw the possibility of a new interpretation. The poet's concern with the French Revolution and with Godwinism may only have been a reflection of a deeper psychological turmoil. These critics began to interpret the play, as well as many of Wordsworth's other poems, as the poet's attempt to rid himself of the feelings of guilt which had resulted from his love affair. The Borderers became one element in the controversy that arose over the question of what weight should properly be attached to the Annette Vallon matter.

I. RECENT INTERPRETATION

In the Fenwick note dictated by the poet in 1843--some forty-six years after the play was written--Wordsworth stated that the play had been finished early in 1796. The research of Professor MacGillivray has revealed, however, that the poet's memory, often faulty in his later years, had very probably deceived him. In his article published in 1934, MacGillivray produced strong evidence to show that the play had been written one year later than the Fenwick note indicated. It had been begun in the fall of 1796 and finished sometime in early 1797.

It was an important discovery and may in part
account for the fresh scrutiny the play received. For instead of being a product of the period of philosophical and emotional confusion, The Borderers had actually been finished in the year that marked the beginning of the poet's great decade of poetic achievement. Professor George W. Meyer, while still concerned with the old problem of Godwinism and Annette Vallon, saw in the play the first unmistakable statement of the poet's mature nature philosophy, thus supplying a close connection between The Borderers and the poems written soon afterwards which stated that philosophy emphatically. Another implication of Meyer's interpretation was plain: since the play had been completed some months before Wordsworth became intimate with Coleridge, his nature philosophy--long considered, in one degree or another, as part of his debt to Coleridge--had actually been arrived at by Wordsworth independently. Although several noteworthy scholars have accepted Meyer's interpretation as a valuable contribution to Wordsworthian scholarship, no critical scrutiny of that interpretation has thus far appeared.

II. THE THESIS OF THE STUDY

This study, in addition to being a thorough
examination of the play and of its various interpretations, is an attempt to supply that scrutiny. It shall be the thesis here that although the play sheds light upon Wordsworth's philosophical development, it contains no statement of his mature nature philosophy. The genesis of that philosophy must be sought elsewhere: it is not to be found in The Borderers.

III. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Since this study is concerned with Wordsworth's philosophical development, it will be necessary to consider those matters which influenced his thought in the years immediately preceding the composition of The Borderers. To this end, a chapter has been written in which Wordsworth's relationship to the French Revolution, to Annette Vallon, and to William Godwin is briefly considered. A statement of Wordsworth's mature nature philosophy has also been necessary, since it bears directly upon the thesis of this study.

Chapter III consists of a detailed summary of the play itself. The purpose here is to provide the reader with a means of experiencing The Borderers without having to puzzle through what is, after all, a nearly unreadable
play. The lines which are relevant to the interests of this study are quoted directly from the text.

In Chapter IV, the statements which Wordsworth himself made about the play are considered. Chapter V is a study of the various critical interpretations of the play, considered in their chronological order. This chapter has been limited largely to those critics who have made a thorough study of *The Borderers*.

The concluding chapter summarizes the study, presents conclusions concerning the older interpretations of the play, and defends the thesis stated above.
CHAPTER II

THE BACKGROUND

The purpose of this chapter is apparent: to provide a coherent picture of certain major influences on Wordsworth that are referred to again and again in later chapters. Neither the review of Wordsworth's life nor of his thought is offered as a comprehensive study: much that is of importance to a full understanding of the early poet has been omitted. The aim has been to provide only that information essential to the purposes of this study. As far as possible, no interpretation has been included; however, where the opinions of authorities have varied widely and have affected subsequent criticism of The Borderers, those opinions have been briefly described.

I. WORDSWORTH 1792-1795

Wordsworth returned from France where he had spent a year studying the language in December, 1792,¹ having imbibed, if the authority of The Prelude is to be accepted,

¹ Or perhaps January, 1793. The lack of a firm date is a good indication of the obscurity surrounding these years. See, e.g., James Logan, "Wordsworth in France," TLS, November 20, 1937, p. 891.
the revolutionary ideology then current on the Continent. But he was only twenty-two, and his interests in France had not been altogether linguistic nor political. While at Blois, he had become involved with a French girl, Annette Vallon; and their affair resulted in a child, Caroline, who was born shortly before Wordsworth's departure for England. Whatever Wordsworth's feelings were regarding Annette and their child is, of course, largely a matter of conjecture. The incident was suppressed until long after Wordsworth's death, not becoming widely known till the research of Harper and Legouis revealed it. It is certain that both he and his sister maintained a friendly correspondence with Annette for years. His chances to return to France and marry her—if that really was his intention—were lessened both by his impecuniousness and by the war between England and France, declared shortly after his return in February, 1793. It is possible that he attempted a visit to Annette in the autumn of 1793, getting as far as Paris before

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being forced to turn back. There is no certain evidence that he saw her again, however, till his visit to Calais in 1802. They did not marry at this time. Instead, Wordsworth returned to England and within the same year married his childhood friend Mary Hutchinson. Something more of the Vallon episode is known, of course; but these are the essential facts. As shall be seen in a later chapter, there has been a great difference among critics as to the importance ascribed to the matter: some have largely discounted its influence on Wordsworth; some have given it a central position in explaining the period of deep depression which Wordsworth describes in The Prelude. Professors Campbell and Mueschke feel that out of Wordsworth's guilt over his abandonment of Annette and their child came the primary aesthetic impulse that resulted in the composition of The Borderers.  

Whatever may have been the effect of the Annette

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6 Legouis, op. cit., p. 174.

Vallon incident on Wordsworth, there is little question among critics of the importance of the revolutionary fervor he acquired in France. His republicanism had a direct and powerful effect upon his life and his work. Emile Legouis, for instance, speaks of *The Borderers* almost as if it were an allegory of the French Revolution. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth attributes his conversion to the revolutionary cause to the influence of Micheal Beaupuy, a French army captain whom he met while at Blois:

> Oft in solitude
> With him did I discourse about the end
> Of civil government, and its wisest forms;
> Of ancient loyalty, and chartered rights,
> Custom and habit, novelty and change;
> Of self respect, and virtue in the few
> For patrimonial honor set apart,
> And ignorance in the laboring multitude.

Although the influence of Beaupuy has not been denied, recent research into Wordsworth's Cambridge years has shown that he very probably had been introduced to revolutionary thought long before he left England. The *Prelude* seems

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9 *Wordsworth*, *op. cit.*, pp. 325-326.

10 Ben R. Schneider, Jr., *Wordsworth's Cambridge Education* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 112-203.
to prove, however, that Wordsworth's emotional involvement in the revolutionary cause did not occur until he was in France. Beaupuy was more than an intellectual rebel: his indoctrination was aimed not only at the head but at the heart as well. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth recalls an incident wherein he and Beaupuy came upon a "hunger-bitten girl" leading a heifer. Moved by the girl's wretched condition, Beaupuy remarked: "'Tis against that/That we are fighting." Wordsworth's response was all that his companion could have hoped:

> I with him believed  
> That a benignant spirit was abroad  
> Which might not be withstood, that poverty  
> Abject as this would in a little time  
> Be found no more . . .

Upon his return from France, Wordsworth lived in London. His life for a long time was unstable. Professor George M. Harper, one of the most distinguished of Wordsworth's biographers, has described his condition concisely:

> He had no home, and was obliged to live with friends and relatives. He had no profession, and was less inclined than ever to become a clergyman, thus disappointing his family. His principles were abhorrent to them. He was a republican. He was not orthodox. He led an unsettled life. His uncles

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parents had long been dead were irritated by his conduct. 12

Two of his poems, "Descriptive Sketches" and "An Evening Walk," were published; but the reviews, when they at last appeared, were unenthusiastic. 13 Sometime during the spring of 1793, he wrote his Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, which, because of the republican sentiments it expressed, was not published. Some critics have seen in the work the direct influence of Godwin's Political Justice, which had been published in February. 14 However, Wordsworth's ideas may have been derived from any number of sources. According to Ben R. Schneider, "The truth is that not a great deal of Political Justice was new to a Cambridge graduate." 15

From June until December, Wordsworth was occupied in a tour in the west of England, entirely financed by his


15 Schneider, op. cit., p. 213.
companion, William Calvert. During this time he composed "Salisbury Plain," based upon his experiences during a solitary portion of the journey. He did not arrive at Halifax, where he was to meet Dorothy, till Christmas; for the most part his actions during the weeks immediately preceding his arrival at Halifax are unknown (his return to France, if indeed he did return, may have occurred at this time). Wordsworth's reintroduction to the English countryside after his long stay in France and London seems to have affected him curiously. In The Prelude he describes his feeling for nature at this time as a kind of lust:

My delights,

Such as they were, were sought insatiably,
Though 'twas a transport of the outward sense,
Not of the mind, vivid but not profound.
Yet I was often greedy in the chase;
I roamed from hill to hill, from rock to rock,
Still craving combinations of new forms,
New Pleasure, wider empire for the sight.16

In "Tintern Abbey," he describes himself as being at this time

. . . more like a man

Flying from something that he dreads than one
Who sought the thing he loved.17


In the spring of 1794, Wordsworth and his sister borrowed a house from Calvert at Windy Brow in Keswick and lived there several weeks. During this time Wordsworth revised "An Evening Walk"; some of these new lines, as shall be seen, have been believed important in tracing Wordsworth's philosophical development:

A heart that vibrates evermore, awake
To feeling for all forms that Life can take,
That wider still its sympathy extends
And sees not any line where being ends;
Sees sense, through Nature's rudest forms betrayed,
Tremble obscure in fountain rock and shade,
And while a secret power those forms endears
Their social accents never vainly hears. 18

After leaving Windy Brow, Wordsworth and his sister paid visits to various relatives; then Wordsworth returned alone to Windy Brow to care for Raisley Calvert, the younger brother of the poet's friend, who suffered from consumption. Wordsworth cared for the young man until he died in January, 1795, leaving Wordsworth a legacy of 900 pounds. 19

Shortly after Calvert's death, Wordsworth returned


to London, arriving there in February. By this time his ardor for the cause of the French Revolution had cooled somewhat, although he remained a republican for many years. A few months earlier he had written to his friend Mathews: "The destruction of those Institutions which I condemn appears to me to be hastening on too rapidly. I recoil from the bare idea of a Revolution . . ." Some interpreters believe that his loss of fervor was due to the excesses of the revolutionists in France and find support for their belief in The Prelude in passages such as the following:

But now, become oppressors in their turn,  
Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence  
For one of conquest, losing sight of all  
Which they had struggled for . . .

It is also believed by some that Wordsworth's dismay over the direction the French Revolution was taking caused him to subscribe wholeheartedly to the doctrines of William Godwin and that these doctrines, in turn, since they were repugnant to Wordsworth's deepest instincts, brought about

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21 Wordsworth, The Prelude, pp. 405-406.
the "moral crisis" described in *The Prelude*. Opposed to this group are those critics who believe it was Wordsworth's feeling of guilt over his desertion of Annette which made Godwinism attractive—for Godwin, among other things, advocated the eradication of such personal emotions as remorse. The moral crisis, they believe, was the result of Wordsworth's repression, or attempted repression, of his guilt. Still another group discounts the influence of Godwin altogether—whatever caused the "strong disease" must have been something more intimate than the philosophy of a man whose name Wordsworth could not even spell.22

Similarly, there is little agreement as to the exact time of this crisis in Wordsworth's life. All that is reasonably certain is that it began sometime after Wordsworth returned from France and that his recovery began at about the time he wrote *The Borderers*. Garrod, however, believes that *The Borderers* is the work of a whole-hearted Godwinian and holds, therefore, that the recovery did not commence

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II. THE INFLUENCE OF WILLIAM GODWIN

Recently it has been discovered that during the spring and summer of 1795, Wordsworth and Godwin became personally acquainted. Unfortunately, Godwin's diaries, the source of this information, disclose nothing more than the frequency of their meetings: they met eight times between February 27 and August 15. Although the number of their meetings could be an indication of Wordsworth's interest in Godwin, it by no means proves that Wordsworth ascribed to his doctrines. Regarding Godwin's writing, it cannot be proved incontestably by direct evidence that Wordsworth ever read more of Godwin than the preface to the second edition of Political Justice. Because of this lack of evidence, Godwin's influence on Wordsworth can only be shown, if it can be shown at all, by comparing relevant passages from their works. This has, of course, been done many times; it shall be done here by (1) outlining


24 Moorman, pp. 264-265.

25 This much is proved by Wordsworth's letter to William Mathews, March, 1796, in The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, op. cit., p. 156.
briefly the main tenets of Godwinism as they are expressed in *Political Justice* and (2) referring to some of those passages from Wordsworth's writings that have been thought to show Godwin's influence. The reader may then decide what weight should be assigned to this evidence.

Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* appeared in February, 1793, the same month in which England declared war on the revolutionary government of France. Godwin's pacifism, among other things, thus made his work subversive; but Pitt believed the book's price would prevent its becoming popular and did not suppress it. But Pitt erred. The book's effect has been aptly described by Hazlitt:

> No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*. Tom Paine was considered for the time a Tom Fool to him, Paley an old woman, Edmund Burke a flashy sophist. Truth, moral truth, it was supposed, here had taken up its abode; and these were the oracles of thought.  

The philosophy expressed in the book is largely eclectic: Godwin synthesized elements from the philosophy of Rousseau, Locke, Hume, Hartley, Helvetius, d'Holbach,

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26 F. E. L. Priestley, p. 539.

and Condillac. From Holbach he derived his atheism; from Locke, Hume, and Hartley came his rejection of the principle of innate ideas: the mind of man, he believed, began as a *tabula rasa* and was gradually formed through the association of ideas.

Who is there in the present state of scientific improvement, that will believe that this vast chain of perceptions and notions is something that we bring into the world with us, a mystical magazine, shut up in the human embryo, whose treasures are to be gradually unfolded as circumstances shall require? Who does not perceive that they are regularly generated in the mind by a series of impressions, and digested and arranged by association and reflection?  

Upon this psychology rested both his faith in necessitarianism and in the perfectibility of man through education. Man was a creature entirely passive, formed entirely from without; he was not, consequently, doomed to imperfection. "Man . . . is merely a being capable of impression, a recipient of perceptions. What is there in this abstract character that precludes him from advancement?"  

Education was, therefore, the key to the betterment of man; a

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29 Ibid., p. 78.
teacher sufficiently astute and sufficiently subtle could transform the blank slate into whatever he chose. The possibilities of human development became immense: "Perfectibility is one of the most unequivocal characteristics of the human species."\textsuperscript{30}

But the most characteristic aspect of Godwin's philosophy is the exalted position given to reason. Like perfectibility, Godwin's faith in human reason grows out of associationist psychology, that

simple, clear and unanswerable theory of the human mind. We first stand in need of certain animal subsistence and shelter, and after that . . . our true felicity consists in the expansion of our intellectual powers [and] the knowledge of truth.\textsuperscript{31}

Man's essence lies in his power of reason: remove that power and he is no longer man.

If there be any man who is incapable of making inferences for himself, or understanding, when stated in the most explicit terms, the inferences of another, him we consider an abortive production, and not in strictness belonging to the human species.\textsuperscript{32}

Those who are not "abortive productions" have the authority

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, I, p. 93.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 311.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 147.
because of their powers of reason to place themselves above traditional, institutionalized morality. Instead of following an imposed code of conduct, we should "have our faculties in act upon every occasion that occurs, and to conduct ourselves accordingly." 33

The genuine and wholesome state of mind is to be unloosed from shackles, and to expand every fibre of its frame according to the independent and individual impressions of truth upon the mind. 34

The power of reason makes revolution unnecessary. The institutions, which are by their nature inevitably corrupt, rest upon the mistaken opinion (prejudice) that they are somehow essential. Erase that opinion and institutions, to borrow a phrase from a later philosophy, will wither away: "The chains (will) fall off of themselves, when the magic of opinion is dissolved." 35 Thus Godwin's solution to man's betterment was evolutionary, resting upon the slow but certain effects of education. Revolution--or any war, unless it was fought for self-preservation--was unnecessary and abhorrent.

An aspect of Godwinism that is sometimes overlooked

33 Ibid., p. 162.
34 Ibid., III, p. 269.
but which, nevertheless, finds abundant expression in Political Justice is his emphasis on "benevolence." This quality, combined with a courageous faith in his own reason, results in the ideal man—the kind of man which proper education could produce in abundance.

The man, who vigilantly conforms his affections to the standard of impartial justice, who loses the view of personal regards in the greater objects that engross his attention, who from motives of benevolence sets loose his life and all its pleasures, and is ready without a sigh to sacrifice them to the public good, has an uncommonly exquisite source of happiness... He is filled with harmony within; and the state of his thoughts is uncommonly favorable to what we may venture to style the sublime emotions of tranquillity.36

Benevolence is, furthermore, the product of reason. If we are guided by reason,

We are able in imagination to go out of ourselves, and become impartial spectators of the system of which we are a part. We can then make an appraise-ment of our intrinsic and absolute value; and detect the imposition of that self-regard which would represent our own interest as of as much value as that of all the world beside. The delu-sion being thus sapped, we can, from time to time at least, fall back in idea into our proper post, and cultivate those views and affections which must be most familiar to the most perfect intelligence.37

36 Ibid., II, p. 430.
37 Ibid., p. 427-428.
It is this aspect of Godwin's thought which perhaps led Professor Legouis to believe that Godwin's principal teacher was Rousseau.\textsuperscript{38} For embedded in Godwin's connection of reason and benevolence is the assumption that man is intrinsically good: his power of reason makes him so. Several interpreters of \textit{The Borderers}, Legouis among them, believe that Wordsworth wrote the play to show that benevolence was not necessarily wedded to reason. Oswald, the central character, uses reason to justify crime: he is, as Wordsworth states in his preface, a "young man of great intellectual powers yet without any solid principles of genuine benevolence."\textsuperscript{39}

But \textit{The Prelude} is the work most often used to show Godwin's influence. In Book XI, Wordsworth describes a philosophy to which he had subscribed sometime between 1793-1796. It should be compared with Godwin's doctrines described above.

This was the time, when, all things tending fast


To depravation, speculative schemes—
That promised to abstract the hopes of Man
Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth
Forever in a purer element—
Found ready welcome. Tempting region that
For Zeal to enter and refresh herself,
Where passions had the privilege to work,
And never hear the sound of their own names,
But, speaking more in charity, the dream
Flattered the young, pleased with extremes, nor least
With that which makes our Reason's naked self
The object of its fervour. What delight!
How glorious! in self-knowledge and self-rule,
To look through all the frailties of the world,
And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
Infirmitles of nature, time, and place,
Build social upon personal Liberty,
Which, to the blind restraints of general laws,
Superior, magisterially adopts
One guide the light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent intellect. 40

These last lines have seemed to many a poetic paraphrase of
Godwin's statements about a "wholesome state of mind" being
one in which all decisions are made "according to the inde-
pendent and individual impressions of truth upon the mind." 41

A few lines later, Wordsworth again refers to his
old philosophy, part of which he still believes:

| I pursued what seemed |
| A more exalted nature; wished that Man |


41. See p. 20, above. These lines first appear in The Borderers, as part of Oswald's dialogue (Act III, 11, 1494-1496). See p. 58, below.
Should start out of his earthy, worm-like state,
And spread abroad the wings of Liberty,
Lord of himself, in undisturbed delight—
A noble aspiration! yet I feel
(Sustained by worthier as by wiser thoughts)
The aspiration, nor shall ever cease
To feel it.42

And a bit later the poet describes one thing that at the
time seemed to justify such a philosophy:

Enough, 'tis true—could such a plea excuse
Those aberrations—had the clamorous friends
Of ancient Institutions said and done
To bring disgrace upon their very names;
Disgrace, of which, custom and written law,
And sundry moral sentiments as props
Or emanations of those institutes,
Too justly bore a part. A veil had been
Uplifted; why deceive ourselves? in sooth,
'Twas even so; and sorrow for the man
Who either had not eyes wherewith to see,
Or, seeing, had forgotten! A strong shock
Was given to old opinions; all men's minds
Had felt its power, and mine was both let loose,
Let loose and goaded.43

There are, of course, other passages from Wordsworth's letters and verse which have been used to show the supposed influence of Godwin. These from *The Prelude*, however, have been the ones most frequently used to support the opinion that Wordsworth was a wholehearted Godwinian at the time of his arrival at Racedown and for an undetermined


43 Ibid., pp. 408-409.
length of time thereafter.

III. RACEDOWN

In the summer of 1795, Wordsworth was given the use, rent free, of the Pinney lodge, Racedown, in Somerset. Together with his legacy from Calvert, this windfall made possible what the poet had long desired: a home for Dorothy and himself. On his way to Racedown, Wordsworth spent a few weeks in Bristol as a guest of the Pinneys. Here he wrote the fifty-four lines of magnificent blank verse which, years later, became the opening lines of The Prelude. George W. Meyer considers the lines relevant to a proper understanding of The Borderers. The lines he believes most significant are quoted here, rather than with the consideration of Meyer's thesis in Chapter V, so that their chronological relationship to The Borderers can be better appreciated.

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze
That blows from the green fields and from the clouds
And from the sky: it beats against my cheek,
And seems half-conscious of the joy it gives.
O welcome Messenger! O welcome Friend!
A captive greets thee, coming from a house
Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free,

44 George W. Meyer, Wordsworth's Formative Years (Ann Arbor, 1943), p. 163.
A prison where he hath been long immured.

Long months of peace (if such bold word accord
With any promises of human life),
Long months of ease and undisturbed delight
Are mine in prospect.

... if I may trust myself, this hour
Hath brought a gift that consecrates my joy;
For I, methought, while the sweet breath of Heaven
Was blowing on my body, felt within
A corresponding mild creative breeze,

Which, breaking up a long-continued frost
Brings with it vernal promises, the hope
Of active days, of dignity and thought,
Of prowess in an honorable field,
Pure passions, virtue, knowledge and delight,
The holy life of music and of verse. 45

Since the feeling expressed in these lines is hopeful
and optimistic, Meyer believes they prove the poet was not
in a state of depression at Racedown. The traditional view,
supported by passages in Book XI of The Prelude, is, on the
other hand, that the poet suffered through the depths of
his moral depression during the first months (or more) at
Racedown. It should be noted, in any case, that the above
lines (1) were written nearly one year before The Borderers,

45 Wordsworth, op. cit., pp. 2-4.
and (2) contain indications that the poet may have felt his hopes for Racedown were optimistic. The hope for "Long months of peace," he says, may not be in "accord/With any promises of human life."

Whatever may have been his mood, Wordsworth arrived at Racedown with his sister in late September, 1795. The first two months were spent in revising "Salisbury Plain."\(^{46}\) It has also been proved that "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree" and "The Convict" were conceived during the early months at Racedown.\(^{47}\) Although the letters of this period do not—as Professor Harper has pointed out\(^{48}\)—make any direct reference to the poet's alleged moral crisis, there are indications in them that life at Racedown was not as idyllic as the poet had envisioned it. His letter to Francis Wrangham, for instance, shows that the "delights" of Racedown were indeed "undisturbed."

I have said nothing of Racedown; it is an

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excellent house and the country far from unpleasant but as to society we must manufacture it ourselves.\textsuperscript{49}

In another letter to his friend Wrangham, the poet again mentions his loneliness—and evidences, perhaps, a certain restlessness of spirit:

I am afraid you have neglected to make application for the newspapers; they would be a great amusement to us in the depth of our present solitude. I have been engaged an hour and a half this morning in hewing wood and rooting up hedges, and I think it no bad employment to feel 'the penalty of Adam' in this way; some of our friends (in London) have not been so lucky, witness poor Montague.\textsuperscript{50}

To his friend Mathews he writes ironically of his horticultural activities and wonders if his London friends are not laughing a bit at his pastoral seclusion:

Our present life is utterly barren of such events as merit even the short-lived chronicle of an accidental letter. We plant cabbages; and if retirement, in its full perfection, be as powerful in working transformations as one of Ovid's gods, you may perhaps suspect that into cabbages we shall be transformed. Indeed I learn that such has been the prophecy of one of our London friends.\textsuperscript{51}


\textsuperscript{50} Letter from William Wordsworth to Francis Wrangham, March, 1796, in \textit{Ibid.}, p. 152.

Wordsworth and his sister supplemented their meager income by caring for the infant son of Basil Montague (the "poor Montague" mentioned in the letter above). To Wrangham's suggestion that he take in more pupils, Wordsworth makes a self-disparaging--and unGodwinian--reply:

As to your promoting my interest in the way of pupils, upon a review of my own attainments I think there is so little that I am able to teach that this scheme may be suffered to fly quietly away to the paradise of fools. 52

In mid-summer, 1796, Wordsworth made a trip to London and stayed a month, leaving Dorothy to tend the cabbages. While in London, he again met with Godwin on at least three different occasions. 53 Mary Moorman believes it possible that at this time Wordsworth expressed the doubts he was beginning to have concerning Godwin's philosophy--doubts which may have led directly to the crisis in the poet's mental life. 54 It might be well to note how the poet describes his philosophical difficulties in The Prelude:

So I fared,

Dragging all precepts, judgments, maxims, creeds,

52 Letter from William Wordsworth to Francis Wrangham, April-May, 1796, in Ibid., p. 161.

53 Moorman, p. 297.

54 Loc. cit.
Like culprits to the bar; calling the mind,
Suspiciously, to establish in plain day
Her titles and her honours; now believing,
Now disbelieving; endlessly perplexed
With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
Of obligation, what the rule and whence
The sanction; till, demanding formal proof,
And seeking it in every thing, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
Yielded up moral questions in despair.
This was the crisis of that strong disease,
This the soul's last and lowest ebb; I drooped,
Deeming our blessed reason of least use
Where wanted most... 55

Wordsworth returned to Racedown in late July, and by
fall he was at work on The Borderers. 56 The play was not
originally intended for the stage. Although Wordsworth
attempted to revise it so as to make it suitable for a stage
production, it has never been produced. A year after he had
finished it, the poet said: "If ever I attempt another
drama, it shall be written either purposely for the closet,
or purposely for the stage. There is no middle way." 57

But Wordsworth never made another effort at


56 J. R. MacGillivray, "The Date of the Composition
of 'The Borderers,'" MLN, XLIX (1934), 104-111.

57 Letter from Wordsworth to James Tobin, March, 1798,
in The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth
(Oxford, 1935), p. 188.
playwriting. The defects of the play might well be overlooked if it were merely Wordsworth's first attempt at drama; as his only drama it lends support to the oft repeated remark that Wordsworth lacked the dramatic gift.

Certainly the play has grievous faults. Like much of the poet's early work it was awkwardly imitative. The most apparent debt is to Shakespeare: The Borderers has close similarities in language, character, and action not only to Othello but to Macbeth, Lear, and Julius Caesar as well. 58 Professor de Selincourt has also detected borrowings from Milton's Paradise Lost and Il Penseroso. 59 J. H. Smith has discovered that it is likely Wordsworth drew some of the picturesque and Gothic elements of the play from William Gilpin's Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty (1786). Professor Smith believes that these borrowed elements are the play's least sincere aspects, since, unlike Coleridge, Wordsworth was unable to assimilate material from this kind of source. 60 Some aesthetic defects


60 J. H. Smith, "Genesis of 'The Borderers,'" PMLA, XLIX (1934), 922-930.
of a more serious nature will be described in Chapter V, in connection with critical interpretation of the play.

The play was finished early in 1797, just before the poet became intimate with Coleridge and in the year which marks the beginning of his great period of poetic achievement. The play has, since its publication in 1842, been interpreted in many different ways; but it has been obvious to every critic since Legouis that The Borderers is freighted with philosophic meaning. Whether or not it includes the first clear statement of Wordsworth's nature philosophy is a question that will be taken up later. First the basic tenets of Wordsworth's nature philosophy need to be made as explicit as possible.

IV. WORDSWORTH'S NATURE PHILOSOPHY

No coherent or original philosophy of nature is expressed in Wordsworth's early verse. The bulk of his work during this period is, like The Borderers, highly imitative. As Professor de Selincourt has remarked, "how better could a young poet learn his trade than by sitting at the feet of his great predecessors?" 64 Nature often appears in these

poems as little more than decoration—the kind of poetic invention produced by what Coleridge styled the "fancy," ingenious, perhaps, but mechanical and stilted. One example should suffice to demonstrate what use he made of nature in this kind of poem.

Calm is all nature as a resting wheel.
The kine are couched upon the dewy grass;
The horse alone, seen dimly as I pass,
Is cropping audibly his later meal:
Dark is the ground; a slumber seems to steal
O'er vale, and mountain, and the starless sky.65

The purpose is to paint a picture and to create a mood. Although stanza is not without merit, its effectiveness is not relevant here. The point is that there is here no attempt to express a philosophical concept in terms of natural objects. In the next example, taken from Wordsworth's earliest extant poem, nature is used in a more elevated manner.

Fair to the view is sacred Truth display'd,
In all the majesty of light array'd,
To teach, on rapid wings, the curious soul
To roam from heaven to heaven, from pole to pole,
From thence to search the mystic cause of things,
And follow Nature to her secret springs.66


The imitative quality is here obvious. Nature is "abstract," demonstrating, as Basil Willey says, "the 'spectral' quality of eighteenth century deism; the deity celebrated is the First Cause, the Supreme Being of the natural philosophers."  

Somewhat later, undoubtedly influenced by the popularity of Gothic literature, the young poet began to use nature in another way: to produce terror. The Gothic trappings which appear in his work include such natural manifestations as raging torrents, whistling winds, and dark, desolate moors. Such a use of nature, since it appears often in The Borderers, is of particular interest to this study. A passage drawn from "Descriptive Sketches" will provide a good (and relatively subdued) example of Wordsworth's use of nature as a Gothic device.

The cloister startles at the gleam of arms,  
And Blasphemy the shuddering fane alarms;  
Nod the cloud-piercing pines their troubl'd heads,  
Spires, rocks, and lawns, a browner night o'erspreads.  
Strong terror checks the female peasant's sighs,  
And start th' astonished shades at female eyes.  
The thundering tube the aged angler hears,  
And swells the groaning torrent with his tears.  
From Bruno's forest screams the frightened jay,  
And slow th' insulted eagle wheels away.

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The cross with hideous laughter Demons mock,
By angels planted on the aerial rock. 68

These lines were written in 1793; 69 but the Gothic influence, somewhat softened by time, is to be seen in many of Wordsworth's mature poems, "Peter Bell" being a good example. 70

Professors Campbell and Mueschke have pointed out in a series of essays how the Gothic elements in Wordsworth's verse are sometimes combined with sentimental morality, which was a widely used literary convention in the poet's day. 71 Their thesis, stated briefly (it shall be treated more fully in connection with their analysis of The Borderers in Chapter V), is that terror, produced by Gothic devices and by undeserved suffering, produces in the reader a feeling of pity—which, in turn, "produces immediately reformatory impulses." 72 Thus Wordsworth, in

68Wordsworth, "Descriptive Sketches," p. 46.

69Loc. cit.

70An example of the poet's more overt Gothicism is contained in Appendix B.

71Oscar J. Campbell and Paul Mueschke, "Wordsworth's Aesthetic Development, 1795-1802," University of Michigan Publications in Language and Literature, X (Ann Arbor, 1933), 1-57. This is the last article in a series. For the complete series, see the Bibliography.

72Ibid., p. 8.
such poems as "Guilt and Sorrow" and "The Convict," "sought to combine the popular appeals of sentimental morality and the Gothic tale of terror." 73

But the important thing to note here is that Wordsworth habitually included natural objects among, and as a part of, the Gothic elements in his early poetry.

After 1796, however, nature began to play a more significant role. In Wordsworth's greatest verse appears a nature philosophy which, while not original in any single element, is expressed with such compelling force that it is, perhaps, the characteristic aspect of his work.

Scholars have, of course, shown a great deal of interest in Wordsworth's philosophy of nature. As might be expected, they have not always agreed concerning it. But mainly their disagreement occurs regarding such questions as how or from whom Wordsworth derived his philosophy. Beatty, for instance, believes that the vital parts of it were derived from the British philosophers--Locke through Hartley--and that Wordsworth learned of them not directly through his reading but mainly through Coleridge. 74

73 Ibid., p. 1.

on the other hand, believes that Wordsworth had developed
the essential elements of his philosophy long before he knew
Coleridge, holding that the eight lines written at Windy
Brow, "contain as much of Wordsworth's mature philosophy
of nature as could be intelligibly compressed within the
narrow limits of eight lines." Herbert Read, in an illuminat-
ing study of the poet, states that

Wordsworth's thought, in so far as it may be
described as in any way original, was intuitive
by nature. Coleridge took those intuitions,
translated them into discursive terms, sought
out their metaphysical analogues, combined
imagination and logic, and talked, talked,
talked.

But these disputes are of relatively little concern
here; for the purposes of this study, it is necessary only
to have a clear idea of what Wordsworth's philosophy is--
not of how he developed it. Fortunately, there exists a
general consensus among scholars regarding the main tenets
of that philosophy.

Joseph W. Beach has extracted from Wordsworth's
verse nine central tenets of the poet's philosophy; they

75 See p. 10, above.

76 George W. Meyer, op. cit., p. 167.

77 Herbert Read, Wordsworth (New York, 1931), p. 133.
include: (1) a faith in nature's benevolence, which included an "active" healing power; (2) a belief in "optimistic" necessitarianism; (3) a faith in man's natural virtue and benevolence; (4) the belief that nature is made up of "a graduated scale of beings descending from the highest of celestial creatures down through man and the lower animal worlds"; (5) the belief that design is apparent in the natural world; (6) the concept of universal harmony and universal love, which included the idea that the mind of man is perfectly adapted to nature and that nature is, in turn, perfectly adapted to it; (7) the belief that nature forms man's character through pleasure or joy; (8) the idea that nature presents man with a norm of conduct; and (9) the idea that "the mind may easily go wrong unless guided by what is called the heart or the imagination and amounts practically to spiritual insight or intuition." 78

Since all of these doctrines are quite familiar and generally understood, a full elucidation of each, which would require many pages, will not be attempted. Of more

value here, perhaps, would be an example of how Wordsworth managed to express this philosophy poetically. For this purpose, a passage from "Tintern Abbey" (1800) should serve well, since the poet's philosophy here achieves what is often regarded as its greatest utterance. (The figures in parentheses indicate the principles enumerated in the paragraph above and represent my opinion of what principles are being expressed in the corresponding lines.) The poet says that in addition to "tranquil restoration" nature has given him another gift

Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
(1) In which the heavy and the weary weight
of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
(7) 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
(6-7) Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
(3) Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
(9) To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
(5) Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit that impels
(2) All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
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 create,
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.  

CHAPTER III

THE PLAY

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, a summary of the play such as is included here will furnish the reader a means by which he can familiarize himself quickly with a work that would otherwise require a painstaking and aesthetically unrewarding study. Second, treating the play in detail here has made it possible to avoid the long quotations from the text in later chapters that would otherwise have been necessary.

Those passages which seemed of striking importance, or which have been used by the critics discussed in Chapter V to support their interpretations, have been quoted directly from the text of the play. At times, relatively unimportant dialogue has been included so that certain key passages may be considered by the reader in their full context.

I. MANUSCRIPT VERSIONS OF THE PLAY

Four manuscript versions of the play are known to
Two of these, prepared at the time of the play's publication in 1842, are of little concern to this study. Manuscript A, however, includes a short "Argument of Act II," the importance of which will be made clear in Chapter VI, where the Argument has been quoted in its entirety.

All quotations in this chapter are taken from the play as it was published in 1842. Although the poet rewrote passages at that time, he stated that he made "not the slightest alteration . . . in the conduct of the story or the composition of the characters." However, since he did at that time change the dungeon scene from prose into verse, the prose version, as it appears in Manuscript B, has been included in the Appendix. Thus the reader may, if he chooses, verify the poet's assertion that no alteration in content was made.

II. ACT I

The leader of a small band, Marmaduke patrols a remote border to which the authority of Henry III (1216-

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2And as they appear in Ibid., pp. 128-225.

3William Wordsworth, "1842 Note to 'The Borderers,'" Ibid., p. 344.
Marmaduke is young and generous, guarding the innocent and keeping the peace out of the goodness of his heart. The borderers gain their sustenance by stripping the plundering Scottish bands of their spoil. Marmaduke is in love with the daughter of Baron Herbert.

Baron Herbert is old, blind, and impoverished. His domains in Devon were wrongfully usurped long ago while he was away on a crusade. He loves his daughter Idonea deeply and refuses to give her up to Marmaduke, who, he has heard, is a scoundrel.

Although she loves Marmaduke, Idonea is attached to her father by more than ordinary bonds. Not only is he blind and helpless, but his blinding occurred while he rescued her from the fire that killed her mother. This happened long ago in Palestine, but Idonea remains grateful and accedes to her father's wish that she refuse Marmaduke's proposal of marriage.

Oswald, Marmaduke's lieutenant, pretends to help his leader win Idonea's hand. He is acting as the agent between Marmaduke and Herbert, who have never met; and he is being false to both. It is he, for example, who has persuaded Herbert that Marmaduke is a scoundrel. The motives behind Oswald's treachery are not made clear.
Although the rest of the borderers suspect Oswald is a villain, Marmaduke is less discerning. He respects Oswald’s ability and appreciates his help with Idonea and Herbert. In an early scene, Oswald, entering with a bunch of plants in his hand, hints at the complexity of his motives:

Osw. This wood is rich in plants and curious simples.

Mar. (looking at them). The wild rose, and the poppy, and the nightshade: Which is your favorite, Oswald? 46

Osw. That which, while it is strong to destroy, is also strong to heal--

Oswald tells Marmaduke that Herbert despises him and considers him an outlaw. But Marmaduke’s natural sympathy for the blind old man is not destroyed:

Ne'er may I own the heart That cannot feel for one, helpless as he is. 68

Oswald tells Marmaduke that Herbert’s story about saving Idonea from the fire is a lie that the old man invented to make his daughter feel obligated to him. Marmaduke still hesitates to condemn Herbert:

Treat him gently, Oswald; Though I have never seen his face, methinks There cannot come a day when I shall cease To love him. I remember, when a Boy Of scarcely seven year's growth, beneath the Elm
That casts its shade over our village school,
'Twas my delight to sit and hear Idonea
Repeat her Father's terrible adventures,
Till all the band of playmates wept together;
And that was the beginning of my love. 95
And, through all converse of our later years,
An image of this old man still was present,
When I had been most happy.

Seeing Herbert and Idonea approaching, Oswald and
Marmaduke hide in a thicket and learn that the two are
journeying to Idonea's patroness to receive a bequest. Her-
bert is weary, and they stop to rest:

    Her. (after some time). Idonea, you are silent,
    And I divine the cause.

    Idon. Do not reproach me:
    I pondered patiently your wish and will
    When I gave way to your request; and now, 135
    When I behold the ruins of that face,
    Those eyeballs dark—dark beyond hope of light,
    And think that they were blasted for my sake,
    The name of Marmaduke is blown away:
    Father, I would not change that sacred feeling
    For all this world can give.

    Her. Nay, be composed: 140
    Few minutes gone a faintness overspread
    My frame, and I betheught me of two things
    I ne'er had heart to separate—my grave,
    And thee, my Child!

    Idon. Believe me, honoured Sire!
    'Tis weariness that breeds these gloomy fancies,
    And you mistake the cause: you hear the woods 145
    Resound with music, could you see the sun,
    And look upon the pleasant face of Nature—

    Her. I comprehend thee—I should be as cheerful
    As if we two were twins; two songsters bred 150
In the same nest, my spring-time one with thine.
My fancies, fancies if they be, are such
As come, dear Child! from a far deeper source
Than bodily weariness. While here we sit
I feel my strength returning.--The bequest
Of thy kind Patroness, which to receive
We have thus far adventured, will suffice
To save thee from the extreme of penury;
But when thy Father must lie down and die,
How wilt thou stand alone?

Idonea replies that Marmaduke will then protect her.

Herbert has expected this and is disturbed by her reply.
But the two soon forget their differences and retire to a
hostel for the night.

After they leave, Oswald tells Marmaduke that Herbert
plans to give Idonea to Baron Clifford, an infamous volup-
tuary. Although this is, of course, untrue, Marmaduke
believes it and is deeply troubled. They go to the hostel
where they find Herbert alone. Idonea has left him in order
that he may rest while she makes the last leg of the journey
to her patroness unimpeded by the slow old man. Oswald,
feigning kindness, offers to take Herbert to a convent where
he can sleep the night undisturbed by the noisy revelers
who have suddenly arrived at the hostel. Herbert is grate-
ful and agrees to go after a brief respite.

While Herbert is resting, Oswald takes Marmaduke to
see a beggar woman whom he has bribed to discredit Herbert.
The Baron, she tells Marmaduke, is not Idonea's true father. She is the girl's mother; the Baron took the child long ago from her true parents; and, using her to gain sympathy from others, he allowed her to grow up believing that he was her rightful father. The clever beggar woman also confirms Oswald's lie about Idonea's being given to the notorious Baron Clifford.

Marmaduke is now totally convinced of Herbert's villainy:

Father!—to God himself we cannot give A holier name; and, under such a mask, To lead a Spirit, spotless as the blessed, To that abhorred den of brutish vice!—Oswald, the firm foundation of my life Is going from under me; these strange discoveries—Looked at from every point of fear or hope, Duty, or love—involve, I feel, my ruin.

III. ACT II

Alone in his chamber in the hostel, Oswald delivers his first soliloquy. In it he disavows that jealousy is his motive for misleading Marmaduke—even though he does have cause to be jealous:

They chose him for their Chief!—what covert part He, in the preference, modest Youth, might take, I neither know nor care. The insult bred More of contempt than hatred; both are flown; That either e'er existed is my shame: 'T was a dull spark—a most unnatural fire That died the moment the air breathed upon it. --These fools of feeling are mere birds of winter
That haunt some barren island of the north,
Where if famished man stretch forth his hand,
They think it is to feed them.  

Marmaduke returns, having just seen an example of the result of Clifford's lechery: a pathetic peasant woman who paces endlessly around the grave of her child. He fears that Idonea will be similarly destroyed if she comes within Clifford's clutches. Marmaduke intends to prevent this by bringing Herbert and Idonea together here in the hostel and forcing Herbert to confess. However, since even such a summary investigation would reveal his plot, Oswald urges his pupil to be more ruthless—"as befits a man whose "single virtue has transformed a Band/Of fierce barbarians into Ministers/Of peace and order." Furthermore, Oswald explains,

it is
In darkness and in tempest that we seek
The majesty of Him who rules the world.
Benevolence, that has not heart to use
The wholesome ministry of pain and evil,
Becomes at last weak and contemptible.
Your generous qualities have won due praise,
But vigorous Spirits look for something more
Than youth's spontaneous products; and to-day
You will not disappoint them.

But Marmaduke's benevolence, though shaken by recent experience, is still strong enough to make him hesitate to murder Herbert outright:

Oswald, I have loved
To be the friend and father of the oppressed,
A comforter of sorrow;—there is something
Which looks like a transition in my soul,
And yet it is not.

Oswald argues that if they try to question Herbert here, the revelers might interfere. Marmaduke is finally convinced. They lead Herbert, who believes he is being taken to the convent, to a half-ruined castle where Clifford "oft has held infernal orgies."

When they have arrived, Herbert, believing that they are only seeking shelter from the storm, enters a dungeon and retires. Oswald and Marmaduke pace "backwards and forwards" outside the dungeon and remark upon the foulness of the night.

Mar. 'Tis a wild night. 725
Osw. I'd give my cloak and bonnet
For sight of a warm fire.
Mar. The wind blows keen;
My hands are numb.
Osw. Ha! ha! 'tis nipping cold.

They recall how harrowing had been their journey to the castle. In the dark a horseman, galloping by them, had come "within an ace" of sending Herbert prematurely to his grave. Marmaduke tells of the strange thing that happened while he was leading Herbert across the river:

When, upon the plank,
I had led him 'cross the torrent, his voice blessed me: You could not hear, for the foam beat the rocks With deafening noise,—the benediction fell Back on himself; but changed into a curse.

Osw. As well indeed it might.

Mar. And this you deem The fittest place?

Osw. (aside). He is growing pitiful.

Mar. (listening). What an odd moaning that is!—

Osw. Mighty odd The wind should pipe a little, while we stand Cooling our heels in this way!

Herbert's dog Leader was swept away by the river. Marmaduke, still listening to the moaning of the wind, says:

That dog of his, you are sure, Could not come after us—he must have perished; The torrent would have dashed an oak to splinters. You said you did not like his looks—that he Would trouble us; if he were here again, I swear the sight of him would quail me more Than twenty armies.

Oswald, who wants to enter the dungeon and get on with it, says sarcastically that he will handle the dog if it should appear. Marmaduke feels strangely ill:

These drowsy shiverings, This mortal stupor which is creeping over me, What do they mean? were this my single body Opposed to armies, not a nerve would tremble: Why do I tremble now?—Is not the depth
Of this man's crimes beyond the reach of thought?
And yet, in plumbing the abyss for judgement,
Something I strike upon which turns my mind
Back on herself, I think, again--my breast
Concentres all the terrors of the Universe:
I look at him and tremble like a child.

Osw. Is it possible?

Mar. One thing you noticed not:
Just as we left the glen a clap of thunder
Burst upon the mountains with hell-rousing force.
This is a time, said he, when guilt may shudder;
But there's a Providence for them who walk
In helplessness, when innocence is with them.
At this audacious blasphemy, I thought
The spirit of vengeance seemed to ride the air.

Osw. Why are you not the man you were that moment?
He draws MARMADUKE to the dungeon.

Mar. You say he was asleep,--look at this arm,
And tell me if 'tis fit for such a work.
Oswald, Oswald!

Osw. This is some sudden seizure!

Mar. A most strange faintness,--will you hunt me out
A draught of water?

While Oswald is gone, Herbert comes out of the dungeon and speaks to Marmaduke, mentioning his love for his daughter. Marmaduke, believing his words are hypocritical, twice is about to throttle the blind man and twice loses his resolution. Then Herbert speaks about his dog, which causes Marmaduke to start--as if a cold wind had struck him.

Oswald returns, and Herbert again retires to the dungeon. Oswald tries to goad Marmaduke into murdering the
old man, but Marmaduke's scruples prevent him from doing so:

Weak! I am weak--there does my torment lie,
Feeding itself.

Osw. Verily, when he said 885
How his old heart would leap to hear her steps,
You thought his voice the echo of Idonea's.

Mar. And never heard a sound so terrible.

Osw. Perchance you think so now?

Mar. I cannot do it.
Twice did I spring to grasp his withered throat,
When such a sudden weakness fell upon me, 890
I could have dropped asleep upon his breast.

Oswald continues to urge him to commit the act.

Marmaduke thinks it would be unmanly:

Fallen should I be indeed: 900
Murder--perhaps asleep, blind, old, alone,
Betrayed, in darkness! Here to strike the blow--
Away! away!---- Flings away his sword

Finally, however, Oswald succeeds. Marmaduke
descends into the dungeon, sword in hand. While he waits,
Oswald soliloquizes. He says that it was Herbert's wretch-
edness that first suggested the crime to him:

Murder!--what, of whom?
We kill a worn-out horse, and who but women
Sigh at the deed? Hew down a withered tree,
And none look grave but dotards. 930

Oswald believes that killing Herbert will waken Marmaduke
from his dogmatic slumbers:

Then shatter the delusion, break it up
And set him free. What follows? I have learned
That things will work to ends the slaves o' the world
Do never dream of. I have been what he--
This Boy--when he comes forth with bloody hands--
Might envy, and am now,--but he shall know
What I am now--

Marmaduke emerges from the dungeon. Oswald, assuming
that the murder has been done, congratulates him. (Oswald,
it should be noted, has not at any time entered the dungeon.)

It is all over then;--your foolish fears
Are hushed to sleep, by your own act and deed
Made quiet as he is.

Mar. Why came you down?
And when I felt your hand upon my arm
And spake to you, why did you give no answer?
Feared you to waken him? he must have been
In a deep sleep. I whispered to him thrice.
There are the strangest echoes in that place!

Osw. Tut! Let them gabble till the day of doom.

Mar. Scarcely, by groping, had I reached the Spot,
When round my wrist I felt a cord drawn tight,
As if the blind man's dog were pulling at it.

Osw. But after that?

Mar. The features of Idonea
Lurked in his face--

Osw. Pshaw! Never to these eyes
Will retribution show itself again
With aspect so inviting. Why forbid me
To share your triumph?

Mar. Yes, her very look,
Smiling in sleep--

Osw. A pretty feat of Fancy!

Mar. Though but a glimpse, it sent me to my prayers.
Marmaduke admits, somewhat hesitantly, that he has failed to kill Herbert. Oswald, disgusted, says, "Henceforth, then, will I never in camp or field/Obe y you more."

Marmaduke explains his failure:

'Twas dark--dark as the grave; yet did I see,
Saw him--his face turned toward me; and I tell thee
Idonea's filial countenance was there
To baffle me--it put me to my prayers.
Upwards I cast my eyes, and, through a crevice,
Beheld a star twinkling above my head,
And by the living God, I could not do it.

Osw. (to himself).
Now may I perish if this turn do more
Than make me change...

(To MARMADUKE). Dear Marmaduke,
My words were rashly spoken; I recall them:
I feel my error; shedding human blood
Is a most serious thing.

Mar. Not I alone,
Thou too art deep in guilt.

Osw. We have indeed
Been most presumptuous. There is guilt in this,
Else could so strong a mind have ever known
These trepidations? Plain it is that Heaven
Has marked out this foul Wretch as one whose crimes
Must never come before a mortal judgment-seat,
Or be chastised by mortal instruments.

Mar. A thought that's worth a thousand worlds!

Suddenly, Oswald and Marmaduke are interrupted by members of the band returning from a patrol. From the men they learn that the king plans to restore to Herbert his rightful domains. Marmaduke tells his men of Herbert's
guilt. They are outraged, but Herbert's age and blindness make them hesitate and speak of mercy. Oswald, however, delivers a speech about justice in which mercy plays no part. Lacy, a fiery member of the band, senses his leader's indecisiveness and orders Herbert to be brought to the camp where justice shall be done. Struggling to retain his leadership, Marmaduke thanks Lacy for the "hint" and repeats the order. The men leave to make preparation for the trial.

IV. ACT III

Oswald knows that if Herbert is brought to the camp his plan will fail. Since reasoning with Marmaduke has failed, Oswald decides to play upon his passions:

---Methinks
It were a pleasant pastime to construct
A scale and table of belief—as thus—
Two columns, one for passion, one for proof;
Each rises as the other falls: and first,
Passion a unit and against us—proof—
Nay, we must travel in another path,
Or we're stuck fast for ever;—passion, then,
Shall be a unit for us;--

He believes that Marmaduke is already tottering; make him miserable by playing upon his passionate nature, and he will hesitate no longer:

A whipping to the Moralists who preach
That misery is a sacred thing: for me,
I know no cheaper engine to degrade a man,
Nor any half so sure.
The "progress" that Marmaduke has already undergone is transitory. An overt act—something substantial for his memory to chew on—is needed to insure a permanent change.

Marmaduke enters and waves Oswald away: he has heard enough of his "proofs":

Ay, prove that when two peas
Lie snugly in a pod, the pod must then
Be larger than the peas—prove this—'t were matter
Worthy the hearing. Fool I was to dream
It ever could be otherwise!

Oswald is certain now that his old methods are inadequate. He invents a tale calculated to wipe away Marmaduke's indifference. Last night, while they were at the castle, Oswald claims to have overheard some of Clifford's henchmen talking about Idonea. He quotes one of the henchmen as saying:

"She is right willing—strange if she were not!—
They say, Lord Clifford is a savage man;
But, faith, to see him in his silken tunic,
Fitting his low voice to the minstrel's harp,
There's witchery in 't. I never knew a maid
That could withstand it."

The new method is an instant success. Marmaduke is enraged and miserable; he laughs bitterly at the things which last night made him hesitate:

Last night, when moved to lift the avenging steel,
I did believe all things were shadows—yes,
Living or dead all things were bodiless,
Or but the mutual mockeries of body,
Till that same star summoned me back again. Now I could laugh till my ribs ached. Oh fool!
To let a creed, built in the heart of things,
Dissolve before a twinkling atom!

In this mood Marmaduke hastens to find Herbert, who is discovered sitting on a stone in a part of the moor so isolated that "If a man should die/And leave his body here, it were all one/As he were twenty fathoms underground." But Herbert's voice reminds him of Idonea, and again the mere thought of Idonea weakens Marmaduke's resolve. Herbert tells him how once he was saved when, deserted by all others, he heard a voice "Such as by Cherith on Elijah called." Marmaduke decides to abandon Herbert on the moor: if Herbert is truly innocent God will save him once again.

The borderers, meanwhile, have learned the truth from the beggar woman and discovered Oswald's plot. Wallace, the member most hostile to Oswald, explains Oswald's motives:

Natures such as his
Spin motives out of their own bowels, Lacy!
I learned this when I was a Confessor.
I know him well; there needs no other motive
Than that most strange incontinence in crime 1430
Which haunts this Oswald. Power is life to him
And breath and being; where he cannot govern,
He will destroy.

They pledge to kill Oswald and leave to search for him.

Having left Herbert to his "trial by ordeal" on the moor, Marmaduke rejoins Oswald. Oswald assumes that the
murder has finally been accomplished and congratulates Mar-
maduke:

Today you have thrown off a tyranny
That lives but in the torpid acquiescence
Of our emasculated souls, the tyranny
Of the world's masters, with the musty rules
By which they uphold their craft from age to age:
You have obeyed the only law that sense
Submits to recognize; the immediate law,
From the clear light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent Intellect.

Marmaduke knows that he has actually failed and

desires to be left alone. Oswald misunderstands; he
believes Marmaduke is feeling remorse and believes his
chief's remorse to be unreasonable.

What! feel remorse, where, if a cat has sneezed,
A leaf had fallen, the thing had never been
Whose very shadow gnaws us to the vitals.

The act that caused the remorse is transitory and unimpor-
tant; but the suffering which follows "is permanent, obscure
and dark,/And shares the nature of infinity." Such suffer-
ing is used by "puny souls" merely to "purchase puling sym-
pathy"; but suffering educates the noble man: it teaches
him the idiocy of conventional morality, devised to protect
"every pest and plague/That bears the shape of man." Oswald
praises Marmaduke for overleaping this "flimsy barrier."

What he has gained is worth the price of suffering.

Idonea enters. Marmaduke's coldness she takes to be
the result of her refusal to marry him. She explains that she did so out of love and gratitude toward her father. But now her father's domains are to be restored. Once that is done, surely he will no longer object to their marriage. Marmaduke senses she is still innocent—somehow she has escaped the machinations of her father and Baron Clifford. Marmaduke embraces her. Oswald, certain now that his pupil is beyond Idonea's influence, muses sadistically at what would happen if he chose this moment to reveal Herbert's death to the girl:

_Were I a Moralist,
I should make wondrous revolution here: _1622
It were a quaint experiment to show
The beauty of truth--_

But he decides that now he can afford to let events take their natural course; he leaves them in each other's arms.

Marmaduke is understandably troubled: he does not as yet know the outcome of Herbert's "trial," and he cannot deal properly with Idonea until that matter is resolved. Moreover, he suddenly notices that he still has Herbert's scrip; he has left the old man without food. Marmaduke leaves Idonea for the night at a peasant's cottage and joins Oswald at the hostel.
V. ACT IV

At the hostel Oswald tells Marmaduke the story of his own "education." In his youth he, like Marmaduke, had been naive and open-hearted. While the first-mate on a ship bound for Syria, he had, however, been betrayed by the crew into believing that his captain was leading "a foul Conspiracy/Against his honour." Enraged, Oswald abandoned the captain on a "bare rock"; there was "no drink, no grass, no shade,/No tree, nor jutting eminence, nor form/Inanimate large as the body of a man." Oswald discovered later that the man whom he had left to die was innocent. When they landed, the story spread and Oswald was ruined. He retired to a convent and brooded over his misfortune:

Three sleepless nights I passed in sounding on, Through words and things, a dim and perilous way; And, wheresoe'er I turned me, I beheld A slavery compared to which the dungeon And clanking chains are perfect liberty. You understand me--I was comforted; I saw that every possible shape of action Might lead to good. . .

He thrust from himself his feelings of remorse, "that worst principle of ill which dooms/A thing so great to perish self-consumed." His experience had freed his mind:

When from these forms I turned to contemplate The World's opinions and her usages, I seemed a Being who had passed alone Into a region of futurity, Whose natural element was freedom--
Marmaduke begins to suspect that Oswald has intentionally betrayed him into killing Herbert and that the story of Idonea's seduction by Clifford is a lie. But Oswald's moving story has prepared him for the revelation. Marmaduke says:

'Tis a strange aching that, when we would curse 1845
And cannot.--You have betrayed me--I have done--
I am content--I know that he is guiltless--
That both are guiltless, without spot or stain,
Mutually consecrated.

Oswald does not realize that Herbert has been left alive on the moor to be judged by a higher power; he assumes that Marmaduke has murdered the old man outright. Under this false impression, Oswald exultantly congratulates Marmaduke. Now, like himself, Marmaduke has been betrayed into committing a great crime. Oswald can now reveal himself completely:

The mask, 1860

Which for a season I have stooped to wear,
Must be cast off.--Know then that I was urged,
(For other impulse let it pass) was driven,
To seek for sympathy, because I saw
In you a mirror of my youthful self;
I would have made us equal once again,
But that was a vain hope. You have struck home,
With a few drops of blood cut short the business;
Therein for ever you must yield to me.
But what is done will save you from the blank
Of living without knowledge that you live:
Now you are suffering--for the future day,
'Tis his who will command it.--Think of my story--
Herbert is innocent.
His suspicions of what Oswald has done confirmed by this admission, Marmaduke rushes from the room determined to find Herbert, whether the old man be alive or dead. Oswald, horrified by the knowledge that Herbert may still be alive, follows him.

Meanwhile, Herbert has collapsed on the moor, exhausted and bleeding. He is found by Eldred, a peasant, who owns the cottage wherein Idonea is spending the night. Eldred is an ex-convict, an innocent victim of man's laws. Before he can get Herbert to his cottage, the old man faints and appears to be dying. Fearing that he will again be accused of something criminal, Eldred abandons the old man. He returns to his cottage alone and tells his wife what has happened. Idonea overhears and, realizing that the old man which Eldred described is her father, pursuades Eldred and his wife to help her rescue him.

VI. ACT V

At dawn Marmaduke, nearly mad with anxiety, meets Eldred on the moor. The peasant confesses that he had found Herbert but had abandoned him again; an ex-convict's deeds, he says, "will not stand by their own light." Marmaduke sees the similarity of Eldred's guilt to Oswald's
and his own. "Oh Monster! Monster!" he cries, "there are
three of us,/And we shall howl together." Eldred tells him
that Herbert is dead. The body, he says, lies in his cot-
tage, and Idonea is there mourning her father. When Mar-
maduke arrives at the cottage, Idonea throws herself into
his arms. Her father is dead, she says; he has at last
found peace. Marmaduke is thankful that at least Idonea has
been spared the torture of watching her father die:

Give me a reason why the wisest thin g
That the earth owns shall never choose t o die,  2120
But some one must b e near to count h is gr oans.
The wounded deer retires to solitude,
And dies in solitude: all things but man,
All die in solitude.

He walks to the cottage door and muses: "Mysterious God,/If she had never lived I had not done it!"—" Idonea
believes that Marmaduke speaks so strangely because the
tragedy of her father's death has overwhelmed him; but
Eldred, whose hard life has made him ignoble, suspects
Marmaduke of being the murderer. He is now eager to see
Herbert's death avenged.

Marmaduke tells Idonea that he knows who killed her
father. Idonea, before learning the killer's identify,
issues a curse:

O miserable Father!
Thou didst command me to bless all mankind;
Nor to this moment, have I ever wished
Evil to any living thing; but hear me,
Hear me, ye Heavens!—(kneeling)—may vengeance
haunt the fiend
For this most cruel murder: let him live
And move in terror of the elements;
The thunder send him on his knees to prayer
In the open streets, and let him think he sees,
If e'er he entereth the house of God,
The roof, self-moved, unsettling o'er his head;
And let him, when he would lie down at night,
Point to his wife the blood-drops on his pillow!

Although the curse is on his own head, Marmaduke
pitiably recognizes it as just. He wishes that Idonea
had perished in the flames from which her father saved her
so that she might have been spared her present anguish.
But he braces himself and confesses his crime:

... the truth must be laid bare.
It must be told, and borne. I am the man,
(Abused, betrayed, but how it matters not)
Presumptuous above all that ever breathed,
Who, casting as I thought a guilty Person
Upon Heaven's righteous judgment, did become
An instrument of Fiends. Through me, through me
Thy Father perished.

At first Idonea cannot believe him; then the beggar
woman enters and tells her how Marmaduke was deceived.
Marmaduke adds the description of how he abandoned her
father to the ordeal. Idonea faints and is carried into
the cottage by Eldred and his wife.

Oswald enters, still certain that his actions,
"Strong to o'erturn, strong also to build up," have been
in the best interests of Marmaduke. You have, he says,
... cast off the chains
That fettered your nobility of mind--
Delivered heart and head!
Let us to Palestine;
This is a paltry field for enterprise.

Marmaduke's response to this is at first ironic:

Ay, what shall we encounter next? This issue--
'T was nothing more than darkness deepening darkness,
And weakness crowned with the impotence of death!—
Your pupil is, you see, an apt proficient.

Oswald is startled by Marmaduke's tone. His pupil leads
him to the cottage wherein lie Herbert and his daughter,
one dead, the other unconscious. Marmaduke says,

Men are there, millions, Oswald,
Who with bare hands would have plucked out thy heart
And flung it to the dogs; but I am raised
Above, or sunk below, all further sense
Of provocation. Leave me, with the weight
Of that old Man's forgiveness on thy heart,
Pressing as heavily as it doth on mine.
Coward I have been; know there lies not now
Within the compass of a mortal thought,
A deed that I would shrink from;—but to endure
That is my destiny. May it be thine:
Thy office, thy ambition, be henceforth
To feed remorse, to welcome every sting
Of penitential anguish, yea with tears.
When seas and continents shall lie between us—
The wider space the better—we may find
In such a course fit links of sympathy,
An incommunicable rivalry
Maintained, for peaceful ends beyond our view.

Members of the band, led by Wallace, enter and seize
Oswald. Though he realizes that he is close to death, he
is neither dismayed nor repentent. His last words concern
the beggar woman; it is she, he realizes, who has brought
the band down upon his head. He regrets that he did not kill her;—still, he says,

If I pass beneath a rock
And shout, and, with the echo of my voice,
Bring down a heap of rubbish, and it crush me,
I die without dishonor. 2285

He smiles "scornfully and exultingly" at Marmaduke as Wal-lace stabs him.

Sadly, Marmaduke reproves his men for the rashness of the deed. He resigns his leadership of the borderers, asking Wallace to erect a monument on which his story shall be inscribed. Idonea (still unconscious) is to be advised of the whole story and be cared for until her estates are restored to her. Marmaduke then describes what his own fate will be:

A hermitage has furnished fit relief
To some offenders: other penitents,
Less patient in their wretchedness, have fallen, 2310
Like the old Roman, on their own sword's point.
They had their choice: a wanderer must I go,
The Spectre of that innocent Man, my guide.
No human ear shall ever hear me speak;
No human dwelling ever give me food, 2315
Or sleep, or rest: but, over waste and wild,
In search of nothing, that this earth can give,
But expiation, will I wander on—
A Man by pain and thought compelled to live,
Yet loathing life—till anger is appeased 2320
In Heaven, and Mercy gives me leave to die.
Wordsworth wrote three separate commentaries regarding *The Borderers*. Since he gave none of them titles, it will be necessary to designate them here arbitrarily. They are "The Preface to *The Borderers," long regarded as lost until Professor de Selincourt unearthed it in 1926; the "Note of 1842"; and the "Fenwick Note to *The Borderers,"" dictated by the poet to Isabella Fenwick in 1843. The three commentaries shall be considered here in chronological order.

I. THE PREFACE TO THE BORDERERS

Critics have differed over the importance they felt should be ascribed to the Preface. De Selincourt, for instance, feels that it "is of deep interest, not only in its elucidation of the play but also for the acuteness and profundity of its psychology."¹ George W. Meyer, on the other hand, speaks of it as "a rather tedious exposition of the

psychology of pride."2 It is, in any case, the only commentary by the poet which was written during his composition of the play.3 For that reason, if for no other, it would seem to warrant close attention.

Wordsworth referred to the Preface in the Fenwick note. He recalled that the Preface was intended to be

... illustrative of that constitution and those tendencies of human nature which make the apparently motiveless actions of bad men intelligible to careful observers. This was partly done with reference to the character of Oswald, and his persevering endeavor to lead the man he disliked into so heinous a crime; but still more to preserve in my distinct remembrance what I had observed of transition in character, and the reflections I had been led to make during the time I was a witness of the changes through which the French Revolution passed.4

With the exception of four words, the Preface is devoted entirely to an analysis of the character of Oswald

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3De Selincourt believes the Preface was written sometime in 1797. See de Selincourt, op. cit., p. 164. The poet's reference to the Preface in the Note of 1842 indicates only that it was written "while I was composing the play."

Marmaduke is summarily dismissed as "an amiable young man"). That the poet took such pains to elucidate Oswald's character has led one critic to remark that "no doubt he realized that he had not fully succeeded in exhibiting it dramatically." But whatever may have been his purpose in writing the Preface, it is certain that the poet's comments shed considerable light on the character of Oswald.

Wordsworth begins by showing what combination of circumstances and temperament created Oswald:

Let us suppose a young man of great intellectual powers yet without any solid principles of genuine benevolence. His master passions are pride and the love of distinction. He has deeply imbibed a spirit of enterprise in a tumultuous age. He goes into the world and is betrayed into a great crime.--That influence on which all his happiness is built immediately deserts him. His talents are robbed of their weight, his exertions are unavailing, and he quits the world in disgust, with strong misanthropic feelings.

In such a state, the young man soon learns to use his intellectual powers to rationalize away his guilt. It


7 All quotations from "the Preface" are taken from de Selincourt, pp. 168-169.
occurs to him that if moral acts are measured not by their intent but by their effects, there is no sure way to separate vice from virtue—since, the world being what it is, an act of virtuous intent often results, as did Oswald's, in evil effects. The more he thinks, the less responsibility he feels for his crime.

His feelings are interested in making him a moral sceptic, and as his scepticism increases he is raised in his own esteem. After this process has been continued some time his natural energy and restlessness impel him again into the world.

Once into the world, the loss of power and prestige that followed upon his crime, as well as his suppressed feelings of guilt, lead him to actions most likely to restore his self-esteem. Such actions are very likely to be antisocial:

Perhaps there is no cause which has greater weight in preventing the return of bad men to virtue than that good actions being for the most part in their nature silent and regularly progressive, they do not present those sudden results which can afford sufficient stimulus to a troubled mind. In processes of vice the effects are more frequently immediate, palpable and extensive. Power is much more easily manifested in destroying than in creating.

The young man, consequently, becomes enmeshed in crime. "His reason is almost exclusively employed in justifying his past enormities and in enabling him to
commit new ones." The effects are cumulative: his philosophy and his actions tend to become more and more radical. He becomes blind to the "mild effusions of thought"; he exults when his studies reveal that conventional morality is not absolute but completely relative to time and place. "Such a mind," the poet says, "cannot but discover some truths, but he is unable to profit by them, in his hands they become instruments of evil." But truth is not his only ally:

He presses truth and falsehood into the same service. He looks at society through an optical glass of a peculiar tint; something of the forms of objects he takes from objects, but their colour is exclusively what he gives them; it is one, and it is his own. Having indulged a habit, dangerous in a man who has fallen, of dallying with moral calculations, he becomes an empiric, and a daring and unfeeling empiric. He disguises from himself his own malignity by assuming the character of a speculator in morals, and one who has the hardihood to realize his speculations.

His thirst for crime becomes progressively more extravagant. "He is like a worn out voluptuary—he finds his temptation in strangeness." But in spite of his perversity, his intellectual accomplishments are not without merit.

... he frequently breaks out into what has the appearance of greatness; and in sudden emergencies, when he is called upon by surprise and thrown out of the path of his regular habits, or when dormant
associations are awakened tracing the revolutions through which his character has passed, in painting his former self he really is great.

It is obvious, Wordsworth feels, that such a man as this will react violently and perversely to whatever tends to lower his self-esteem. "Benefits conferred on a man like this . . . will give birth to positive hatred." Deprive him of power and he will never forgive it; what would seem trivial slights to others will provoke him to the "greatest enormities."

The young man also has a tendency to be superstitious. He is led to superstition, because, "in a dark and tempestuous age," it is likely that he shall need something to replace the religion he has shaken off.

Toward the end of the Preface, Wordsworth summarizes Oswald's motivations and explains his purpose in delineating such a character. It is perhaps the most important paragraph in the essay. Oswald's motives, the poet explains, . . . are founded chiefly on the very constitution of his character; in his pride which borders even upon madness; in his restless disposition; in his disturbed mind; in his superstition; in irresistible propensities to embody in practical experiments his worst and most extravagant speculations; in his thoughts and in his feelings; in his perverted reason justifying his perverted instincts. The general moral intended to be impressed by the delineation of such a character is obvious— it is to shew the dangerous use which may be made of reason when a
man has committed a great crime.

The play, he says, also contains a criticism of society:

It has been a further object with me to shew that from abuses interwoven with the texture of society a bad man may be furnished with sophisms in support of his crimes which it would be difficult to answer.

II. THE NOTE OF 1842

In the Note of 1842, the poet first mentions the date of the play's composition and the fact that his later revisions involved no change in the "conduct of the story, or the composition of the characters." Since these matters have already been discussed in previous chapters, they will not be repeated here.  

Although the Note is very brief, it contains two more statements of importance. In the first the poet explains why it was that he left essentially unchanged a play he had written nearly a half-century before:

... above all, in respect to the two leading Persons of the Drama, I felt no inducement to make any change. The study of human nature suggests this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart, and the perversion of the understanding to which they may

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8 See page 2 and page 42, above.

Secondly, the poet states where and when he learned this "awful truth" about human nature:

During my long residence in France, while the revolution was rapidly advancing to its extreme of wickedness, I had frequent opportunities of being an eyewitness of this process, and it was while that knowledge was fresh upon my memory, that the Tragedy of 'The Borderers' was composed.\footnote{Loc. cit.}

\section*{III. THE FENWICK NOTE TO THE BORDERERS}

In addition to the information concerning the Preface, which has already been considered,\footnote{See page 68, above.} the Fenwick Note contains the poet's comments on several matters of interest.

In it, first of all, the poet admits that \textit{The Borderers} has several artistic flaws. (Although this study is not concerned with the play's aesthetic merits, it shall be seen in a later chapter that the poet's criticism of his own work has an indirect but important bearing upon deciding what philosophy, if any, the play contains.)
Had it been the work of a later period of life, it would have been different in some respects from what it is now. The plot would have been something more complex, and a greater variety of characters introduced to relieve the mind from the pressure of incidents so mournful. The manners also would have been more attended to.\textsuperscript{12}

But in spite of its flaws, Wordsworth believed the play was essentially successful, since he had achieved his primary aim.

My care was almost exclusively given to the passions and the characters, and the position in which the persons in the Drama stood relatively to each other, that the reader (for I had then no thought of the Stage) might be moved, and to a degree instructed, by lights penetrating somewhat into the depths of our nature. In this endeavour, I cannot think, upon a very late review, that I have failed.\textsuperscript{13}

It shall be seen presently that several different interpreters have placed emphasis on Wordsworth's choice of setting as being a means of understanding the philosophical intent of the play. The poet's own explanation is laconic:

As to the scene and period of action, little more was required for my purpose than the absence of established Law and Government; so that the agents might be at liberty to act on their own impulses.\textsuperscript{14}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12}William Wordsworth, "The Fenwick Note to The Borderers," \textit{op. cit.}, p. 342.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13}Loc. cit.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14}Loc. cit.}
CHAPTER V

CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BORDERERS

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the critical interpretations that have been made of The Borderers. Since there are a great many studies of Wordsworth, mentioning The Borderers in some connection, it has been necessary to limit this survey largely to those critics who have made a thorough study of the play. When two or more critics have been in essential agreement, the most highly developed interpretation has been considered and the agreeing critics noted. For the sake of intelligibility, an attempt has been made to present each interpreter's over-all estimation of the drama, even though that at times necessitated touching upon facets of the play not directly relevant to this study. Those parts of the interpretations which have a direct bearing on the interests at hand have, of course, been most thoroughly treated.

I. EARLY CRITICISM

Naturally enough, the earliest critical notice of The Borderers was concerned almost entirely with the artistic merit of the play: little interest was evidenced
regarding its importance as a document in the history of Wordsworth's philosophical development. This body of criticism is, therefore, largely irrelevant to the purposes of this study and shall be limited to those critics whose comments suggest the nature of the criticism which prevailed prior to 1896. Coleridge and Swinburne have been chosen because of their prominence in the literary world and because their estimations of the play differ so radically that they may be taken as the possible poles of critical opinion regarding the artistic merit of the play. Henry N. Hudson is included to represent those critics who saw little value of any kind in The Borderers.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

In June, 1797, Coleridge paid his famous visit to Wordsworth and Dorothy at Racedown. Dorothy's letter to Mary Hutchinson describes the circumstances under which Coleridge first heard The Borderers:

The first thing that was read after he came was William's new poem The Ruined Cottage, with which he was delighted; and after tea he repeated to us two acts and a half of his tragedy Osorio. The next morning William read his tragedy The Borderers...

Coleridge's reaction to the reading must have been ecstatic; in his letter to Joseph Cottle, at any rate, his admiration for Wordsworth and the play is boundless:

Wordsworth has written a Tragedy himself. I speak with heart-felt sincerity and (I think) unblinded judgement, when I tell you, that I feel a little man by his side; and yet do not think myself the less man, than I formerly thought myself.--His Drama is absolutely wonderful. You know, I do not commonly speak in such abrupt and unmingled phrases--and therefore will the more readily believe me.--There are in the piece those profound touches of the human heart, which I find three or four times in 'The Robbers' of Schiller, and often in Shakespeare--but in Wordsworth there are no inequalities. T. Poole's opinion of Wordsworth is--that he is the greatest Man, he ever knew--I coincide.²

Coleridge's estimation of the play's aesthetic merit contrasts markedly, to say the least, with subsequent critical judgement. Ernest de Selincourt believes that this can be partly explained by Coleridge's close psychological resemblance to Wordsworth at this time: Coleridge had, in his own way, gone through a similar period of mental depression. It is possible, de Selincourt believes, that

Wordsworth may have introduced his reading of the play with a few words that gave a key to its interpretation. Indeed, he may even have read the Preface.  

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The essay "Wordsworth and Byron" in which Swinburne treats of The Borderers was written in the 1880's. This would seem to separate his criticism considerably in time from Coleridge's letter of 1797. It should be recalled, however, that Coleridge was privileged to hear the drama read nearly fifty years before it was published: no formal criticism could have appeared earlier than 1842; and since by that time Wordsworth's reputation was assured, "the reviewers as a whole treated The Borderers with respect, if not with enthusiasm." But the play appears to have been little read; as Swinburne remarks, the tragedy was "usually and discreetly passed over in expressive silence by the disciples who preach us Wordsworth's gospel."  

Swinburne recognized that the play was not wholly

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4 Ibid., p. 158.

lacking in "literary power," but condemned the play's thematic development:

... in the moral conception and development of its leading idea, it is, I suppose, unparalleled by any serious production of the human intellect for morbid and monstrous extravagance of horrible impossibility.  

Then, with a touch of contempt, Swinburne concludes by quoting a French critic with whom he was acquainted: "Il n'y a que les poètes vertueux pour avoir de ces idées-la." 

**Henry N. Hudson**

Professor Hudson was for the most part an enthusiastic admirer of Wordsworth's poetry. Indeed, he felt the poet's faults were hardly worth mentioning, except that "passing them by in silence might seem to argue a spirit of blind or indiscriminate praise." Of those faults, Hudson considered the most serious to be Wordsworth's unevenness of achievement: "A considerable portion of Wordsworth's matter, a fourth at least, perhaps a third, may well be set down as little better than worthless; mere slag . . ." 

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9 *Loc. cit.*
For instance, his tragedy of The Borderers is, to my sense, hardly worth the paper it is written on; except . . . as a sample of a great poet's apprentice work. For it was written in his youth . . . and of right dramatic power Wordsworth had little or none . . .

Later critics have largely agreed with Hudson's estimation of the play's aesthetic value: it was more or less a waste of paper. But, beginning with Legouis, critics have come to recognize the importance of the play in the understanding of Wordsworth's philosophic and aesthetic development.

II. INTERPRETATION OF THE BORDERERS SINCE 1896

Before considering the many more recent studies of the play, it may be well first to schematize roughly the various directions that critical opinion has taken. With reference to the thesis of this study, the interpretations made after 1896 fall into three categories. The first of these holds that the play endorses no positive moral philosophy whatever, but is, rather, concerned with demonstrating the weakness of Godwinian morality. To this school belong Professors Legouis (1896), de Selincourt (1926), Beatty (1922), Willey (1940), and Stallknecht (1945). The

10 Loc. cit.

11 Dates in parentheses indicate the date of the most relevant criticisms.
second category is made up of those critics who agree that there is no evidence of a positive philosophy but hold that the play is something more than a refutation of Godwinism. In this group fall Professors Garrod (1923), Campbell and Mueschke (1926), Fausset (1933), and Hayden (1951). The last group of critics believes the play contains the first statement of Wordsworth's mature nature philosophy. The group includes Professors Meyer (1943), Smith (1953), Jones (1954), Moorman (1957), and Schneider (1957). Professor Chew (1948) should also, perhaps, be included among the members of this group.

This rough schematization involves several inaccuracies; it is offered only as what may be a helpful overview of this part of the study.

Emile H. Legouis

The first critic to realize the significance of The Borderers as marking a stage in Wordsworth's philosophical development was Emile H. Legouis, professor of literature at the University of Lyon. Since the appearance of his La Jeunesse de William Wordsworth in 1896,

interpreters of Wordsworth have been almost unanimously agreed that the drama possesses an importance for students of Wordsworth despite its lack of literary merit. This does not mean, of course, that critics have unanimously accepted Professor Legouis's interpretation of the drama.

Legouis was the first to use *The Borderers* to demonstrate the extent to which Wordsworth's disillusionment with the French Revolution and with Godwinism had attributed to the poet's Racedown crisis.¹³ He believes that although "today it is never spoken of by critics except as one of the sins of Wordsworth's youth, and most of them do not even seem to think it worth reading," *The Borderers* does, nevertheless, show the "matters with which the author's mind was preoccupied."¹⁴

Through an analysis of Book XI of *The Prelude*, Legouis shows how Wordsworth had been driven by the depravity of the Terror into a full acceptance of Godwinism. *The Borderers* reveals the poet's subsequent rejection of


¹⁴Ibid., p. 269.
Godwin's reason: "It is the work of a Godwinian, who, having at first seen only the grandeur of his master's system, is horror-struck when he suddenly perceives its consequences." Wordsworth had seen how reason had been used to justify the worst excesses of the French Revolution; his play was intended to show that reason could be put to use by vice as well as by virtue. The absence of civil authority in the border region which the poet chose as the setting for his play corresponds perfectly to the anarchy which prevailed during the Terror, when the Montagnard, like Oswald, used reason to justify murder. Read as an allegory of the French Revolution, The Borderers, Legouis points out, "acquires a meaning; it ceases to be a fantastic vision, and reflects a reality which it is only too impossible to deny." This is, of course, in harmony with what the poet says about the play in the Fenwick Note: the play had been inspired by his reflections at a time when "the revolution was rapidly advancing to its extreme of wickedness."
Legouis makes a further parallel: the devitalization of Christianity by eighteenth century rationalistic thought is personified in the person of Marmaduke, whose benevolence is unsupported—as was true in the case of the poet himself at this time—by a "vital faith" in Christianity.\(^{18}\)

Although Marmaduke is a kindly disposed man who has no other object than good, he has only his reason to guide him towards his object; and, consequently, he can be led astray by Oswald, an older and more facile reasoner. "Marmaduke can do no more than fall a prey to his wiles, curse the man who has given him such fatal counsel, and suffer the pangs of remorse."\(^{19}\) His instinctive benevolence is an inadequate protection from evil; he can do little more than bewail his moral impotence. "His only exclamations are those of a man groping in the darkness, unable either to see or to understand. He is crushed by his unbearable load of ignorance."\(^{20}\) It should be noted in passing that this interpretation of Marmaduke is supported by the poet's own description of that character as merely "an

\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 254.

\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 276.

\(^{20}\)Loc. cit.
amiable young man." It should also be recalled that
Legouis had not, of course, seen the Preface wherein the
poet makes his brief description of Marmaduke.

Legouis's identification of Marmaduke and Wordsworth
warrants a closer consideration:

Wordsworth, no less than Marmaduke, was at that time
unable to find any answer to Oswald's cynical phi-
losophy. He might abominate it; he could not refute
it. Before the depths of depravity, now for the
first time revealed, his spirit shuddered, powerless.
he no longer attributed evil to Society alone. . .
Evil was inherent in man's limited and imperfect
nature. Not only was it intrenched, beyond the
reach of every attempt at reform, within the most
secret recesses of the human heart; it could also
enlist the services of the intellect. And it was
this unscrupulous antagonist to which the weak and
wavering forces which make for goodness were
opposed. 22

Thus Legouis makes it explicitly clear that he
feels Wordsworth expressed no positive philosophy in The
Borderers. He believes that at the time the poet wrote
The Borderers he had indeed "yielded up moral questions
in despair."

But Legouis ends his consideration of the play on
a more optimistic note. By writing the play, he believes,
Wordsworth purged himself of his pessimism. Shortly after

21 See page 69, above.

22 Ibid., pp. 276-277.
he finished it, with the aid of Dorothy, Coleridge, and nature, his recovery began. "With such protection and support, slowly but surely he recovered what he had lost, a moral equilibrium as perfect as any man, or, to say the least, any poet, has achieved." 23

Although Professor Legouis was one of the researchers who brought to light the Annette Vallon episode, he did not find it necessary to alter his interpretation of The Borderers because of this later discovery. 24

H. W. Garrod

In contrast to Legouis, Professor Garrod believes The Borderers, rather than marking the beginnings of a revolt against Godwinism, represents a complete confirmation of its principles. 25 Basing his opinions upon a study of The Prelude, Garrod maintains that Wordsworth was a thorough-going Godwinian at the time he wrote the

23 Ibid., p. 278.


play. The Borderers is Godwinian to the core:

Whoever it be who talks the Godwinism in the play, or even if there is no Godwinism talked in it at all, what is really significant, and perhaps alone relevant, is that the poem is built out of an essentially Godwinian idea; the morbid tortuosity, the unnatural perversion of its plot, turns upon a ground-conception patently Godwinian . . . 26

Also "the idea of laying the scene in a region where there is no law or established government" was inspired directly by Godwin's novel Caleb Williams. 27

Garrod believes, moreover, that it is hardly accurate to describe Oswald as a villain: "In so far . . . as the villain talks Godwinism, he is not a villain but a good man. 28 Oswald meets disaster not because he is a Godwinian but because he violated one of Godwin's cardinal principles: he neglected to demand proof of his captain's guilt before abandoning him to die. Thus neither the original crime of the story nor its consequences can be blamed on Godwinian morality:

So far, then, as the disaster which befalls the hero arises from his failure to follow reason, to insist on proof; and so far as that is brought home to us (Wordsworth, I fancy, intended to make it clearer

26 Ibid., p. 91.

27 Ibid., p. 93.

28 Ibid., p. 92.
than he has), the tragedy is Godwinian, but not immoral. Its immorality springs from its initial conception (as set forth by Wordsworth himself in the[Note of 1842] ): the conception that 'sin and crime are apt to spring from their very opposite qualities', and that, a crime once committed, 'there are no limits to the hardening of the heart'. The first part of the thesis is Godwinism, and what is odd is that Wordsworth should still enunciate it in 1842; the second part is an addition of Wordsworth, and either part is wholly false.29

Garrod, it is evident, believes that The Borderers does reflect a positive philosophy; but that philosophy is, he thinks, Godwinism—unmodified and unmitigated. This view, it should be added, has found very little support among later critics.

Ernest de Selincourt

Professor de Selincourt was without doubt one of the most eminent Wordsworthian scholars who ever lived. His research, including, but by no means limited to, his excellent compilation of Wordsworth's correspondence and his publication of previously unknown manuscript versions of Wordsworth's early poems has formed the basis for much of the more recent study of Wordsworth. To be sure, his interpretations of the poet's work do not pass unchallenged;

29 LoC. cit.
but no student of Wordsworth questions his enormous contributions to the field. His work is especially important to a study of The Borderers: his Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth includes, in addition to the 1842 text of the drama, numerous early fragments, arguments, and notes that add significantly to one's understanding of the play. His discovery of the Preface to The Borderers in 1926, already mentioned in an earlier chapter, has done much to clarify the drama's meaning.

In the essay he wrote to accompany the publication of Wordsworth's lost Preface, de Selincourt expresses his interpretation of the play. Like Legouis (with whose interpretation he is in essential agreement), de Selincourt approaches his analysis of the play via The Prelude, which indicates, he believes, that during the poet's first months at Racedown, and perhaps shortly before, he was a whole-hearted Godwinian:

... he embraced the creed in all its implications, in its exaltation of reason at the expense of the passions, and of the individual against the

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collective will, in its insistence on the right of each man to reject all general rules of conduct and act in each situation as his independent reason prompted him. Under this tutelage opinions took the place of faith, feelings, instincts... 31

Professor de Selincourt further maintains that The Borderers represents Wordsworth's partial rejection of Godwin's doctrine—but it is only a partial rejection, since Wordsworth always, both before and after Racedown, accepted certain aspects of Godwin's doctrine, namely, "his humanitarianism, his condemnation of war and of the criminal law, and his necessitarianism." 32

Like virtually every critic subsequent to Coleridge, de Selincourt believes the play an artistic failure; but the failure, according to de Selincourt, is not due to the poet's choice of theme or to his language: "The prime weakness of The Borderers lies... in the plot's unsuitability for making clear the central idea on which the poet is working." 33 This failure, de Selincourt believes, accounts for the wide divergence of interpretations among critics of the play. With nothing but the text itself

31 Ibid., p. 160.

32 Ibid., pp. 159-160.

33 Ibid., p. 163.
to guide him, the reader could easily conceive of Oswald in two widely differing ways:

... either as a villain who, conscious of his own misery and the degradation that had followed on his crime, is led by hatred and envy of one more fortunate than he to drag down his rival to his own level, or, on the other hand, he could be presented as a genuine but deluded enthusiast for the intellectualism that he professes, who ruins a man he loves by the desire to share with him his own vaunted freedom.

His understanding of the Preface, however, leads de Selincourt to believe that neither of these interpretations of Oswald was intended. Oswald, as Legouis had perceived, was meant to demonstrate the antiGodwinian position that reason could be put to evil purposes as well as virtuous ones. De Selincourt believes that the poet based his criticism of Godwinism on two premises: (1) that the passions of men are often more fundamental than their intellects in determining their behavior, and (2) that those passions are not necessarily good, even among men who had not been corrupted by the institutions of society. A proper reading of the play, then, demonstrates, according to de Selincourt, the exact extent to which Wordsworth had broken with Godwin. This position, de Selincourt

points out, is supported by Wordsworth's statement in the preface: "The general moral intended . . . is to shew the dangerous use which can be made of reason when a man had committed a great crime." And de Selincourt adds that reason,

at the mercy of the passions, cannot fail to be put to dangerous uses, among the most dangerous of which will be that by its agency men of simple, unsuspicious character will become tools of the able but less scrupulous. In a state of society such as is depicted in the play, such as Wordsworth had himself witnessed in France, reason is the willing hand-maiden of crime.35

Like Legouis, de Selincourt believes the prevailing tone of the play is pessimistic. Although, as the character of Marmaduke shows, a man's intellect is not necessarily perverted by his guilt, it is likely to be unless his benevolent instincts are as strong as Marmaduke's. What is more, the evil passions tend naturally to dominate, since it is easier to destroy than to create. Godwin's faith in benevolence is not justified by a study of human nature; "the world is," as Marmaduke laments, "poisoned at the heart."

De Selincourt finds nothing to indicate that Wordsworth saw a solution to this dilemma at the time he wrote The Borderers.

35 Ibid., p. 171.
Wordsworth now realized the moral casuistry that lay at the root of all this; but he could not as yet see his way clear of it. He re-read Godwin in a more critical spirit, 'hoping though not expecting to find the work much improved in the second edition'; but, though his attitude to it was widely different now from his former acceptance, there was much of its argument that he could not controvert. It is true, he saw, that reason may be abused by evil and misguided men, but that does not impugn its right to ascendancy. It is true that emotion cannot be eliminated from human nature, and is, indeed, the main source of our strength and happiness, but that does not give it rights against the reason . . . Between these two forces, antagonistic, often mutually destructive, in society as he had seen it about him, some reconciliation must be affected. But how? To this tormenting problem he could find, as yet, no satisfying solution. 36

This reading of The Borderers has been endorsed by several eminent Wordsworthian interpreters, among them Arthur Beatty, 37 Basil Willey (whose understanding of Wordsworth rests upon a profound study of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), 38 and Newton P. Stallknecht. 39

Francis Todd, in a more recent study of the play, also

36 Ibid., pp. 178-179.


39 Newton P. Stallknecht, Strange Seas of Thought (Durham, 1945), pp. 186-188.
accepts de Selincourt's interpretation: "the significant discovery embodied in the play is the poet's realization that the real source of evil was in the individual, not in society"; but no positive philosophy is endorsed.  

George W. Knight's interpretation of The Borderers reflects, as one might be led to expect from his analysis of other poets, the profound influence of modern psychoanalytic theories. But even though his critical orientation is, therefore, considerably different from de Selincourt's, their interpretations agree concerning the matter of most interest to this study. The Borderers, Knight believes, projects no positive philosophy; Marmaduke, like Wordsworth, "concludes by giving up all 'moral questions,' tangled hopelessly in all problems of just action." Not until after the play was written does Wordsworth's life become "one long attempt to modify his sight of the nakedly spectral powers into a more positive doctrine of nature and human existence."  

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41 George W. Knight, The Starlit Dome (London, 1941), p. 35.  
42 Ibid., p. 36.
Oscar J. Campbell and Paul Mueschke

Basing their interpretation of *The Borderers* not upon Book XI of *The Prelude* but rather upon a previous study of "The Female Vagrant" and "Guilt and Sorrow" (two narrative poems whose composition in part preceded that of *The Borderers*), Campbell and Mueschke make a sharp break with traditional interpretations of the play.\(^{43}\) Their thesis has two distinct parts and shall be considered here in the order in which they appear in Campbell and Mueschke's article.\(^{44}\)

The first part concerns Wordsworth's motives for imbibing the philosophy of Godwin. The traditional explanation that the poet's conversion came as a result of his disillusionment with the French Revolution is rejected. Although this explanation is based upon the poet's own explicit testimony in *The Prelude*, Campbell and Mueschke believe that the real explanation is to be found in the

\(^{43}\) Oscar J. Campbell and Paul Mueschke, "'Guilt and Sorrow': A Study in the Genesis of Wordsworth's Aesthetic," *MP*, XXIII (February 1926), 293-306.

\(^{44}\) Oscar J. Campbell and Paul Mueschke, "'The Borderers' as a Document in the History of Wordsworth's Aesthetic Development," *MP*, XXIII (May 1926), 465-482.
deeper recesses of the poet's mind: the factors which moti-
vated Wordsworth's conversion to Godwinism were not polit-
cical or philosophical, as Book XI of The Prelude would
lead one to believe, but emotional--resulting not from his
disillusionment with the revolution but from the guilt
occasioned by his abandonment of Annette Vallon and their
child. Wordsworth's efforts to suppress his deep feelings
of remorse for his transgression confused his personality
and "found furtive expression in his work." 45

The appeal of Godwinism for the poet lay not in its
rejection of revolution as a means of bettering the human
lot but in its rejection of all human feelings except that
of an intellectualized, selfless concern for humanity: it
thus represented for Wordsworth an avenue by means of which
he could escape his remorse. Godwin's determinism was also
consoling, since it freed Wordsworth from any moral respon-
sibility for his actions in France. 46

The character of Oswald is a symbolic representation
of Wordsworth's own experience. Like Wordsworth's, Os-
wald's crime results from what were initially "virtuous"


46 Ibid., p. 478.
feelings—in Oswald's case, regard for his fellow man; in Wordsworth's, love for Annette Vallon. Like Wordsworth, Oswald adopts a cold-blooded intellectualism in an effort to escape his feelings of remorse. Like the poet's, his escape is only partially successful, since neither he nor Wordsworth is able to accept this rationalization completely enough for it to be wholly effective. The confused ambivalence which Oswald's personality evidences is the result of Wordsworth's own emotional turmoil.

Campbell and Mueschke devote considerable space in demonstrating the great part that the feeling of remorse plays in the drama. The theme of abandonment, they point out, also appears time and again. Although they recognize that both remorse and abandonment were popular themes in much of the writing of the day, they do not believe that Wordsworth's obsessive interest in these matters can be entirely explained in terms of literary convention.

Needless to say, this part of Campbell and Mueschke's thesis has been strongly challenged: de Selincourt, for instance, was quick to point out what he considered to be

its greatest weaknesses. He considers their emphasis upon the remorse supposedly occasioned by the Annette Vallon episode as "somewhat fanciful":

... for in the first place we have no direct evidence as to the state of Wordsworth's feelings towards Annette at the time he wrote The Borderers. He had been separated from her three years before by the force of circumstances, and not by his own will. Letters written by Annette to him and to Dorothy some months after his return to England take for granted that their separation is only temporary; and it is at least probable that in September 1794 he went as far as Paris in an attempt to reach Orleans, and was only turned back by realizing that his presence there would be a danger not only to himself but also to her and to her whole family; in September 1795 he was still in correspondence with her; and there is no reason for believing that he had given up the idea of rejoining her as soon as the end of the war made it feasible...

In the statement that the Borderers is 'the result of a clash between Godwin's philosophy and his own bitter and searching personal experience' Professors Campbell and Mueschke are undoubtedly correct: in their limitation of that experience to one element in it they throw over all the evidence in favour of pure hypothesis.

The lack of evidence in the Annette Vallon matter

48 Ernest de Selincourt, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, pp. 173-176. It should be noted that Campbell and Mueschke did not have available to them at the time of their study the lost Preface to The Borderers; it was not published until some months after the appearance of their article.

49 Ibid., pp. 175-176.
makes a final solution to the problem of what part it plays in *The Borderers* unlikely to be settled satisfactorily. Professor Donald E. Hayden, in a study of Wordsworth's "ambivalence" during his early manhood, points out the areas of agreement in the opposing views: both believe the play is the result of a mental crisis; both believe that writing the play helped the poet to solve that problem, although the actual solution did not come till later. The main difference lies in the fact that one side explains the crisis (and therefore the play) in philosophical terms, while the other prefers to use psychological terms. Although he does not elaborate upon his understanding of *The Borderers* sufficiently enough to warrant a more detailed treatment here, Professor Hayden suggests an interesting synthesis:

> Because Annette, Godwin, and the French Revolution represent a cluster for Wordsworth, the play in symbolically portraying any one of the group may also include the others. Starting from either the political or the sexual interpretation, we see that Wordsworth may have become an Oswald. ... *The Borderers* does not accept or reject: it is not entirely a welcome or a refutation of Godwin; it is not conservative or liberal politically. It is on the border. It is a clear expression of Wordsworth's period of ambivalence, and any comment will be partial which starts from the assumption that the play is an expression of either one viewpoint or the other, regardless of what
Before going on to the second part of Campbell and Mueschke's thesis, it is well to note that they are not without allies in their estimation of the importance of the Annette Vallon matter. Hugh I'A. Fausset in a later study of the play, for instance, repeats their interpretation with only a slightly different emphasis.51

The second part of Campbell and Mueschke's thesis, since it does not depend upon their view of the Annette Vallon episode, has gone comparatively unchallenged. De Selincourt, in fact, has not only largely accepted this part of the thesis but strengthened it with arguments of his own.52 This second part of the thesis maintains that Wordsworth's acceptance of Godwinism made him particularly vulnerable to the traditional literary conventions of terror and sentimental pity then in vogue:

50 Donald E. Hayden, After Conflict, Quiet (New York 1951), p. 92. Professor Hayden has restated his interpretation of the drama in "Toward an Understanding of Wordsworth's 'The Borderers,'" MLN, LXVIX (1951), 1-6.


52 De Selincourt, op. cit., p. 173.
A poet who adopted in whole-hearted fashion Godwin's particular form of determinism almost inevitably cast his tragic view of life into one of two aesthetic modes. The suffering of the man who subjects his will and feelings, as Godwin advised, to the rational necessity will be a mere pitiable spectacle. On the other hand, the man who foolishly tries to assert himself by acting in a world of forces which securely enmesh him is doomed to painful futility. His struggles, like those of Laocoön, seem mere muscular grimaces, capable of inspiring only horror. Godwin's metaphysic thus gave additional authority to the two popular contemporary aesthetics of tragedy—that of sentimental morality and that of horror. Accordingly the artistic methods of both Gothic Romance and the sentimental narrative appear in exaggerated form in his work.

Campbell and Mueschke go on to point out the evidences of terror and sentimental pity to be found in the drama: the extensive use of the Gothic devices—the howling winds, the foaming river, the stormswept moor, the ruined castle, and the eerie dungeon—are meant to fill the reader with horror. The emphasis on Idonea's devotion and innocence, Herbert's aged helplessness, and Marmaduke's undeserved destruction are obviously intended to evoke sentimental pity.

De Selincourt uses this portion of Campbell and


54 Ibid., pp. 480-481.
Mueschke's work to help explain Coleridge's estimate of the play:

The conformity of The Borderers with the prevalent literary taste explains, doubtless, how much that to us appears forced and melodramatic seemed to Wordsworth and to Coleridge no unfit background for a work of profound spiritual import.\(^{55}\)

The importance of Campbell and Mueschke's insights concerning the Gothic elements of the play will be considered in the next chapter of this study.

Campbell and Mueschke conclude their interpretation of The Borderers with an estimation of what stage in the poet's development the play represents. They believe that writing such a drama helped Wordsworth to understand the emotional conflicts that were the underlying causes of his "strong disease." In The Borderers he was able to oppose the obnoxious elements of Godwinism only with the tawdry and sentimental morality of the day; soon afterwards, however, he evidenced his dissatisfaction with both doctrines and combined the strongest elements of both into a moral and aesthetic doctrine of his own.\(^{56}\) Thus Campbell and Mueschke, in spite of their definite break with traditional interpretations, agree that the play is pessimistic.

\(^{55}\) De Selincourt, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

\(^{56}\) Campbell and Mueschke, *op. cit.*, p. 482.
and does not present a genuine positive philosophy.

**George W. Meyer**

Professor Meyer's work represents an even more radical departure from traditional interpretations of *The Borderers* than does the work of Campbell and Mueschke. His first break with tradition is based, however, on the work of George M. Harper, long recognized as an eminent Wordsworthian scholar. Along with Harper, Meyer believes, in spite of what Wordsworth says in *The Prelude*, that he suffered no moral crisis at Racedown. As Harper had pointed out, the letters of neither the poet nor his sister make any direct reference to Wordsworth's supposed depression during this period. 57 Meyer, using evidence which was not available to Harper, endeavors to strengthen this position. First, he believes that those lines of *The Prelude*, so often used by traditional critics to show the poet's mental distress at this time, have been tampered with so extensively that any evidence drawn from them "is of highly dubious value." 58

Furthermore, the fifty-four lines of blank verse written

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in September, 1795, together with the eight pentameter lines written the year before at Windy Brow, indicate that Wordsworth was "exultant," "joyous and unafraid," and looking forward enthusiastically to the future. "These lines, in short, make it difficult for us to believe that Wordsworth was sick with despair when he arrived at Racedown."

These factors, together with his reading of the play, lead Meyer to conclude that The Borderers is essentially an optimistic play. "So far ... from being a pessimistic play, The Borderers ... ceases almost to be a tragedy." Meyer agrees with Garrod that The Borderers does not indicate that Wordsworth was breaking away from Godwinism during the Racedown period; his reasons for believing the play to be an affirmation of Godwinism are considerably different, however, from those of Garrod. Meyer believes that Oswald is, to be sure, a villain; but his villainy stems from his total disregard for the benevolent aspects

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59 See page 26, above.

60 See page 13, above.

61 Meyer, p. 163.

62 Ibid., p. 200.
of Godwin's doctrine. Meyer believes the rationalistic side of Godwinism has been over-emphasized: "Godwin was as much a sentimentalist as a rationalist."*63* "The truth seems to be that the tradition which connects the villainous Oswald with the philosophic Godwin rests upon a serious misunderstanding of *Political Justice*."*64* It is plain that Godwin would have condemned Oswald's actions as utterly vicious ... his compelling motive was selfish and corrupt; the tendency of his plot was mischievous. In the light of Godwin's philosophy, Oswald was not a devotee, but a perverted criminal.*65*

Meyer's next break with tradition concerns his thematic interpretation of the play. His reading of the Preface to *The Borderers* and of "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree," leads him to believe that the basic conflict of the play is between pride and benevolence, rather than between reason and emotion as others have believed.

When we approach the tragedy from the point of view afforded by "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree," we immediately recognize Oswald and Marmaduke as personifications of pride and benevolence; the action of the play we perceive to be a conflict between two

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*63* Ibid., pp. 187-188.

*64* Ibid., p. 184.

*65* Ibid., p. 183.
"passions," or modes of life, and the conclusion little more than a revelation of the evil consequences of pride, and the blessings of disinterestedness and benevolence.\textsuperscript{66}

Meyer believes that the Preface, "a rather tedious exposition," clearly shows that Wordsworth intended Oswald to be a personification of pride. He also cites numerous passages from the play itself which, he believes, show pride to be the salient feature of Oswald's personality.\textsuperscript{67}

But Meyer's view of Marmaduke is far more original. Unlike previous critics, he believes that Marmaduke is the most significant character in the play: "The dramatic interest of The Borderers is focused . . . on the character of Marmaduke."\textsuperscript{68} It is upon this conviction of Marmaduke's significance that Meyer's conclusion that the play is optimistic largely rests. According to Meyer, Marmaduke embodies the optimistic philosophy of Christian benevolence; Meyer thinks that a proper reading of the play shows this philosophy triumphant. Wordsworth was offering it as a genuine moral philosophy to oppose the cynical selfishness of Oswald's doctrine. This is not made clear until the end

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., pp. 190-191.

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid., pp. 191-192.

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., p. 195.
of the play. "Conscious of the advisability of loving all and hating none," Marmaduke, who "is made of sterner stuff than Oswald," eagerly accepts his own guilt and even tries to save Oswald "from the dreadful consequences of a life dedicated to pride, tainted by scorn, and divorced from human sympathy."^69

Oswald of course scorns repentance and cherishes his sinful pride to the end, when he dies at the hand of Wallace, while Marmaduke devotes the remainder of his life to the penitential pursuit of salutary remorse; Marmaduke's is a heroic effort to atone for the sin of having presumed to judge a fellow man and for having dared to suspect that the world and man--God's best creation--were evil.^70

By abandoning Herbert on the moor, to be judged by God, Marmaduke is guilty of hubris.

Anyone so unfortunate as to be guilty of this sin must, like Marmaduke, pay a heavy penalty: either he must devote his life to the cultivation of remorse, as Marmaduke does, or he must be content to pass his days in wretched divorce from human sympathy . . . Wordsworth strongly recommends remorse . . . which leads to possible salvation and happiness in heaven.^71

Marmaduke triumphs since he heroically accepts his fate; his lines are "pregnant with benign sentiment and

^69Ibid., p. 199.

^70Ibid., p. 200.

^71Ibid., p. 208.
Christian wisdom." And the play, since good prevails, is optimistic.

Meyer's belief that the play is optimistic is strengthened by his belief that the play contains Wordsworth's first clear statement of his mature nature philosophy:

It is only in The Borderers . . . that Wordsworth first suggests to us in the vivid manner of his later work the benign efficacy of natural objects as guides to right conduct.  

Meyer develops four supporting arguments for this theory, three of which are based upon the text of the play and one of which is inferred from his belief that the play is optimistic. (Since a considerable portion of the next chapter of this study shall be concerned with a criticism of these arguments, they shall be described here, as far as practicable, in Meyer's words.) The first to be considered shall be the deduction from Meyer's thematic interpretation of the play.

Wordsworth's interest in the responsibility of the individual toward his fellows in a border society where there is no formal administration of law to govern conduct clearly reveals for the first time his belief in a transcendent ethical principle

72 Ibid., p. 207.

73 Ibid., p. 209.
whose existence and value are independent of prevailing institutions and modes of government. Whether one lives under the British Constitution of the 1790's or in the anarchy of the border regions in the reign of Henry III, he must live in accord with the principle of self-effacing love. No man need look far to discover this principle; its lodging is the human heart, and it is everywhere in nature. Its presence in The Borderers proves, incidentally, that nature, to Wordsworth, was "the nurse, the guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul Of all my moral being," long before he wrote "Tintern Abbey."  

Meyer's remaining arguments provide, he believes, more than incidental proofs, since they are based on direct evidence drawn from the play. A short conversation between Idonea and Herbert near the beginning of Act I reflects, Meyer believes, the poet's belief in the benign healing power of nature.

Herbert has become weary from the labors of the road, is depressed and full of dark thoughts. Idonea attempts successfully to restore his better spirits:

Believe me, honoured Sire!
'Tis weariness that breeds these gloomy fancies,
And you mistake the cause: you hear the woods
Resound with music, could you see the sun,
And look upon the pleasant face of Nature--

Herbert: I comprehend thee--I should be as cheerful
As if we two were twins; two songsters bred
In the same nest, my spring-time one with thine.

Through Idonea and Herbert, Wordsworth here expresses

74 Ibid., p. 208.
the conception--basic in his best known and most successful poems--of nature as an agent and minister of pleasure ever ready to remind disheartened and misguided men that joy is their proper emotion.\textsuperscript{75}

The last two pieces of textual evidence Meyer uses to support his belief that Wordsworth's mature nature philosophy appears in \textit{The Borderers} are taken from the dungeon scene in Act II. Meyer believes that Marmaduke's decision not to murder the old man is effected by a natural object--by a single star. The recognition of "Idonea's filial countenance" in Herbert's features, he explains,

\begin{quote}
put me to my prayers. 
Upwards I cast my eyes, and, through a crevice, 
Beheld a star twinkling above my head, 
And, by the living God, I could not do it.
\end{quote}

The momentous significance of these curious signs and prodigies is not entirely wasted on Marmaduke. These mute warnings suffice to prevent him from murdering Herbert in the dungeon. For the moment even Oswald seems to be impressed by the singular occurrences which Marmaduke describes, for he observes:

\begin{quote}
Plain it is that Heaven 
Has marked out this foul Wretch as one whose crimes 
Must never come before a mortal judgment seat, 
Or be chastised by mortal instruments.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

Thus Marmaduke is saved from committing the crime by nature's benign efficacy as a moral guide and guardian. What is more, the experience is of such power that even

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., p. 210. \textsuperscript{76}Ibid., pp. 205-206.
\end{flushright}
Oswald, the cynic, is momentarily impressed. Meyer concludes that the older interpretations of the play, such as Legouis's, were mistaken. The play is essentially optimistic; the presence of benevolence in man and of the benign influence of nature in the play proves it. "Some evil Wordsworth may have found; but he found also, as we have just observed, an antidote for evil, a potent force for good existing in the heart of man and in the world of nature."  

The Followers of Meyer  

That part of Meyer's interpretation of The Borderers which holds that the play contains the first clear statement of Wordsworth's mature nature philosophy has been adopted by several noteworthy scholars. A brief review of their work will show that they make little or no additions to Meyer's arguments. It should be noted also that of the four pieces of evidence Meyer uses to support his theory, the "twinkling star" is the one most favored by his followers.

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77 Ibid., p. 212.

78 The critics considered in this section are "followers of Meyer" only in the narrow sense of holding a similar view as to the place of nature in the play.
Charles J. Smith. Smith, however, makes no direct reference to the star but is content merely to declare his acceptance of Meyer's thesis. Indeed, Smith is not directly concerned with the role that nature has in the play but rather with a study of the enormous influence of Shakespeare on The Borderers. His conclusion in this regard, since it is of some interest to this study, shall be considered briefly in its own right, even though it is his endorsement of Meyer which is most relevant here.

Smith believes that the artistic failure of the drama is not, as many have thought, due to the poet's preoccupation with Godwinism but is the result of "his unfortunate attempt to model a tragedy of thought... on a tragedy of passion. The amalgam is simply impossible." Not only was the thematic structure of The Borderers influenced by Shakespeare's dramas, but Smith also notes many parallels of characterization between Shakespeare and Wordsworth. These parallels extend to the 'tempting' or 'prompting' of the hero and the subsequent inner conflict between opposing sides of his nature. The witches of Macbeth, the ghost of Hamlet, Iago in Othello and Oswald in The Borderers, all urge the central character toward

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his main action. There are awakened in each hero at the same time certain contrary promptings which warn him away from the action. Macbeth's imagination almost saves him from the murder of Duncan. Part of Othello's mind keeps whispering to the end that no one could be so lovely and impure. Similarly Marmaduke has continual promptings from his natural feelings of pity and from nature which almost save him from the murder of Herbert.  

In a footnote, Smith gives Meyer credit for first pointing out the significant effect of nature upon Marmaduke. The significance of Smith's major interest—the effect of Shakespeare on The Borderers—will be considered again in the next chapter.

**John Jones.** In his study of The Borderers, John Jones finds that the play contains "intimations of Wordsworth's mature power." After quoting the passage from the dungeon scene in which Marmaduke tells of seeing the star above him, Jones says:

> A star prevents a murder: this is the point towards which Wordsworth's prosings about the life of the intellect and the life of sensation are vainly directed. Hitherto, sympathy has been simply a matter of external correspondence with environment. Wordsworth now tries to say something more difficult. Oswald, we have seen, stands for the isolation of the intellect; and this isolation is false because it is achieved only through the denial of relationship. Wordsworth argues in his Preface

\[80\text{Ibid., p. 632.}\]

that Oswald's world is determined by his intellectualism: he looks at things "through an optical glass of a peculiar tint". Since he can only see things in this intellectual monochrome, Oswald cannot see anything but himself. But Marmaduke saw a star, and in so doing he realized that Oswald's "creed" and the "twinkling atom" were at war. Wordsworth spends the next ten years showing what it means to see things: in *The Borderers* he makes a tentative beginning.

Unlike Meyer, Jones offers no other support for this thesis than the single, twinkling star. He feels that it is an example of the poet's "association of the effectiveness of the world with its solidity"; but, since Wordsworth's mature philosophy attributed nature with a more active power than this, Jones concludes that the star is only an "intimation" of the poet's mature philosophy.

Mary Moorman. Mary Moorman is less hesitant to proclaim the star's significance. Although her brief interpretation of *The Borderers* is in most respects traditional, she states:

*The Borderers*, though a tragedy unrelieved by any lighter tones or scenes, is shot through with gleams of poetic feeling and beauty that show how Wordsworth was advancing, as he wrote, towards his true vocation as the poet of nature and man. Nature in *The Borderers* is always a 'benevolent' influence.

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82 Ibid., pp. 77-78.
83 Ibid., p. 78.
The sight of a star twinkling through a crevice above his head prevents Marmaduke from murdering Herbert in the dungeon of the castle. 84

Ben R. Schneider. In his scholarly and fascinating account of Wordsworth's college years, Ben R. Schneider indicates that he too believes Meyer's thesis to be valid. Schneider states:

The manner in which Marmaduke is prevented from executing his false judgement is extremely significant in the development of Wordsworth's thought. Two natural manifestations—thunder and a star—shake his determination to kill Herbert. The thunder causes him to feel that his intentions are evil; the star produces in him such a feeling of the old man's innocence that he cannot deal the death blow. Thus beauty and fear, produced by natural phenomena, prove to be better moral guides than reason. 85

It is too early, perhaps, to be certain whether or not the theory that nature plays a significant role in The Borderers as first expressed by Meyer and as subsequently endorsed by Smith, Jones, Moorman, and Schneider represents a prevailing trend in critical interpretation of the play. No critic has thought it necessary to point out the weaknesses, if any, in their arguments. Such a careful literary historian as Professor Samuel C. Chew, moreover, seems


ready to follow their lead: "The play is not merely a negation of Godwinism but an affirmation of the reconciliation of man and nature." A portion of the concluding chapter of this study will be devoted to questioning whether such a general acceptance of this theory as Professor Chew's statement suggests is warranted by the available evidence.

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CHAPTER VI

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE BORDERERS

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first is a summary of the study which attempts to categorize and designate the various interpretations of The Borderers. The next section draws conclusions concerning those interpretations which have stood the test of time and critical scrutiny. The last section is concerned with presenting a criticism of Meyer's interpretation.

I. A SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

This study has revealed that there are three prevailing interpretations of The Borderers. The first, here designated as the "traditional" interpretation, was first stated by Professor Emile H. Legouis in 1896 and was further developed by Ernest de Selincourt in 1926. According to the traditional interpretation The Borderers is a confirmation of Wordsworth's autobiographical account in Book XI of The Prelude. Those who ascribe to this interpretation believe that the poet's choice of setting for the play reflected his preoccupation at this time with the moral and philosophical problems arising out of the French Revolution.
They believe that the character of Oswald reveals the flaw Wordsworth had found in Godwinism, a philosophy to which he had fully subscribed a short time before writing the play. They believe that the character of Marmaduke proves that the poet had no positive moral philosophy at this time. As Legouis puts it, "Marmaduke can do no more than fall prey to [Oswald's] wiles, curse the man who has given him such fatal counsel, and suffer the pangs of remorse." Although this lack of a positive philosophy makes the play pessimistic, the critics who espouse this interpretation believe that writing the play helped the poet to purge himself of his pessimism and, with the aid of Dorothy, nature, and Coleridge, helped him to regain his moral equilibrium. In addition to Legouis and de Selincourt, this interpretation is accepted, at least in broad outline, by Arthur Beatty, Basil Willey, Newton P. Stallknecht, Francis Todd, and George W. Knight.

The second prevailing view of the play, here called the "psychological" interpretation, was first stated by Professors Campbell and Mueschke and later endorsed in its essentials by Hugh I'A. Fausset. The critics who share this interpretation hold that the initial aesthetic impulse to write *The Borderers* resulted from the poet's feelings
of guilt over his desertion of Annette Vallon and their child. The poet's concern with the French Revolution and especially with Godwinism was, according to this interpretation, an effort to alleviate, either consciously or unconsciously, his deep and debilitating remorse. The psychological interpretation stresses the importance which the themes of remorse and abandonment are given in the play and maintains that the play's artistic failure can be explained in terms of Wordsworth's emotional confusion.

Campbell and Mueschke further believe that the poet's acceptance of Godwinian necessitarianism made it impossible for him to develop any genuine moral force to oppose Oswald's cynicism. As a result the poet was obliged to rely for this purpose on sentimental morality, a popular literary convention of the day. The characters of Idonea, Herbert, and Marmaduke reflect this sentimental morality.

As in the traditional school, the critics who ascribe to the psychological interpretation believe that writing The Borderers helped Wordsworth resolve his problems—although this interpretation explains his convalescence in psychological rather than in philosophical terms.

The salient feature of the third prevailing
interpretation is the belief that The Borderers contains a clear statement of the poet's mature nature philosophy. Since that philosophy was optimistic and positive, this view of the play is here termed the "positive" school. Its adherents include Professors George W. Meyer, Charles J. Smith, John Jones, Mary Moorman, and Ben R. Schneider. These critics cannot, however, be categorized except in a narrow sense; they are uniform only in their belief that the play contains a positive philosophy. With the exception of this belief, the members of this group either adhere generally to the traditional or psychological schools, or have not expressed their opinions of the play in sufficient detail for them to be categorized.

Meyer, however, has developed an over-all interpretation that is novel in several respects. His interpretation will be summarized in the last section of this chapter.

II. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This section is devoted exclusively to the conclusions reached concerning the traditional and psychological interpretations. The conclusions concerning the positive interpretation will be described in the next section.

It has become evident to me during the course of
this study that the traditional view of *The Borderers* is—in terms of concrete, external evidence—the soundest of the three prevailing interpretations. This interpretation is supported by the poet's statements in his Preface and in the notes written in 1842 and 1843. It also finds much support in Book XI of *The Prelude*, which contains the poet's description of his life at a time roughly corresponding to the Racedown period. This evidence is difficult to ignore. The poet explicitly states, for instance, that the play was the result of what he had learned of human nature by his observations of men during the French Revolution. In the Fenwick Note he strongly implies that the setting was chosen to correspond with the anarchy that prevailed in France at that time. The poet's statements in the Preface support the traditional belief that *The Borderers* represents a breaking away from Godwinism. Here he makes it explicitly clear that he believes reason to be inadequate as a moral guide. The play's purpose, he says, is to "shew the dangerous use which may be made of reason when a man has committed a great crime."

Similarly, the traditional belief that Marmaduke's destruction is pathetic but not genuinely meaningful is supported by the poet's description of him in the Preface.
as merely "an amiable young man."

Thus the traditional interpretation can point to a substantial amount of circumstantial evidence to support its views. It is, however, open to several possible criticisms.

First, it might be objected that the traditional interpreters approach the play not on its own merits but with a view of the poet and his Racedown philosophy already in mind. This criticism is, in a sense, valid. But it is difficult to see how such a defect could be avoided. As de Selincourt has pointed out, the play is so poorly constructed that, when considered alone, it justifies at least three different interpretations. In order to arrive at the intended interpretation, one is obliged, therefore, to rely, as the traditional interpreters do, on evidence external to the play. Furthermore, it is not likely that any reader has ever studied The Borderers without having at first read enough of the poet's other work to have formed a conception of his philosophy. The play's position as a minor work as well as its defects preclude the possibility of its being read objectively. In any case, both the psychological and the positive interpretations are equally guilty of having approached the play with definite
preconceptions in mind.

In my opinion the single deficiency of the traditional interpretation is its failure to account for the stress given in the play to the themes of desertion and remorse. Both of the main characters and some of the minor ones are motivated primarily by their feelings of remorse; and if Idonea's leaving of her father at the hostel is counted, the act of desertion is committed at least five times, each time resulting in a catastrophe. Although such themes were popular (and appear, for instance, in Coleridge's Osorio), they were rarely given this kind of emphasis, as Professors Campbell and Mueschke have pointed out.  

Professor Pfeiffer has shown that the abandonment theme appeared frequently, and often with a disproportionate intensity, in much of Wordsworth's work composed at about the time he was suffering from what he describes in The Prelude as his "strong disease."  

De Selincourt believes it "somewhat fanciful" to account for Wordsworth's

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1 Oscar J. Campbell and Paul Mueschke, "'The Borderers' as a Document in the History of Wordsworth's Aesthetic Development," *MP*, XXIII (1926), 465-482.

period of moral depression in terms of the Annette Vallon episode; but, granting this, is it so fanciful to use the episode to help account for the poet's extensive and intensive use of the abandonment-remorse theme?

Some of the importance that has been ascribed to Wordsworth's relationship with Annette Vallon can, of course, be explained away by the human failing for sensational exposes. Some of it can be attributed to the wide and sometimes imprudent application by critics of modern psychoanalytic theories. But after these elements are filtered out, a residue remains. Although by its very nature extremely difficult to prove, the thesis that the themes of remorse and abandonment in The Borderers can be explained in some degree by his feelings of guilt over his desertion of Annette Vallon seems at least possible, if not likely.

I conclude, therefore, that the most adequate interpretation of The Borderers results from a synthesis of the traditional and the psychological interpretations of the play. Such a synthesis, as was seen in Chapter V, has been proposed by Donald E. Hayden. In Professor Hayden's estimation, the psychological and traditional interpretations do not conflict so much as they supplement each other. Both
groups of critics see evidence of the poet's mental crisis in *The Borderers*. Both believe that by the time he finished the play, Wordsworth had defined his problems but had not as yet found a solution to them. Both believe, therefore, that the play is pessimistic but that it played a significant role in the poet's development. Thus the critics of the traditional and psychological schools, although they approach the play from considerably different orientations, are in essential agreement on important aspects of the play.

Professor Hayden has not as yet developed his suggested synthesis into a complete and detailed interpretation of the play. Although such a development is beyond the scope of this study, I believe that the most adequate interpretation of the play could be found by pursuing the synthesis that Professor Hayden suggests.

III. CONCLUSIONS PERTAINING TO THE ROLE OF NATURE IN THE BORDERERS

Meyer's case for holding that *The Borderers* contains the first clear statement of Wordsworth's nature philosophy rests upon four supports. Three of these depend upon evidence drawn directly from the text of Acts I and II, but
the first is a deduction based upon his broad interpretation of the play. A complete examination of this first point would seem to require a thorough tracing of his thematic analysis, stopping at each stage to evaluate his judgement. Fortunately, this is unnecessary. Sufficient evidence from sources external to the play is available that will, I believe, serve to demonstrate satisfactorily the weakness of Meyer's first support.

First, Meyer's broad interpretation of the play needs to be reduced to its essentials: from his reading of the text, Meyer has become convinced that The Borderers represents a struggle between pride and benevolence. Marmaduke (benevolence) is led by Oswald (pride) into committing the sin of hubris. But instead of perverting his intellect to escape his guilt as Oswald has done, Marmaduke heroically accepts his punishment, which, though painful here on earth, "leads to possible salvation and happiness in heaven." Thus The Borderers becomes, in Meyer's estimation, an optimistic play.

He concludes that the presence of such enduring benevolence, even in a setting which had been deliberately chosen by the poet because of its lack of established law and order, proves that Wordsworth was trying to express a
"transcendent ethical principle." Since benevolence prevails even when institutional control and guidance are absent, it must consequently be lodged in "the human heart" and "everywhere in nature." Meyer believes this proves "incidentally" that Wordsworth had developed his nature philosophy by the time *The Borderers* was written.

This interpretation has several difficulties. First, it depends largely upon Meyer's belief that Marmaduke, the personification of benevolence, represents the fundamental force in the play. He is in every sense the hero of the story; he is, Meyer says, "made of sterner stuff than Oswald." This contrasts markedly with the way Wordsworth describes him in the Preface, in which only four words are devoted to Marmaduke. He is, the poet says, "an amiable young man." It is unlikely that the poet would have described so slightingly a character whom he intended to be representative of a "transcendent ethical principle," which was, in turn, meant to be the central "message" of the tragedy.

The second difficulty arises from this optimistic "message" which Meyer believes is embodied in the play. The optimistic quality, he believes, stems from Marmaduke's self-imposed wretchedness leading to "possible salvation
and happiness in heaven." This seems an unlikely message from a poet whom Coleridge described, only a few months before the play was begun, as "a Republican and at least a Semi-Atheist." The message also contradicts what Wordsworth says in The Prelude regarding his beliefs during the Racedown period. Our paradise, he here exclaims, is to be found

in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all!4

The third difficulty lies in the fact that Marmaduke may well be only a personification of sentimental morality, a popular convention which, as Campbell and Mueschke have shown, appears in much of the poet's work during this period. Marmaduke's pathetic and undeserved destruction at the hands of the villain may merely have been intended to make the reader weep— not demonstrate the principle of innate benevolence. This interpretation is, it should be noted, supported by the poet's brief and somewhat condescending description of Marmaduke in the Preface.


Meyer, then, places too much stock in Marmaduke. Such characters appeared in so much literature of the day that it seems likely Wordsworth was availing himself of a convenient stereotype—not creating a character who would represent the poet's new-found optimistic philosophy. Although this study has not been concerned with producing sources and analogies of the character of Marmaduke, parallels abound in the fiction of the day. Schiller's The Robbers, the novels of Monk Lewis and Mrs. Radcliffe, and Godwin's Caleb Williams, for example, all contain such characters. The work of Auguste von Kotzebue, though it is doubtful Wordsworth was acquainted with it at the time in question, is often populated by benevolent types similar to Marmaduke, Idonea, and Herbert. For example, in Die Sonnenjungfrau (translated into English as The Virgin of the Sun in 1799) the character of Rolla bears a striking resemblance to Marmaduke both in temperament and occupation. Moreover, Rolla's simple Peruvian warriors resemble Marmaduke's borderers in everything but complexion

5 All these works are frequently cited as possible sources of The Borderers. See, for example, Moorman, pp. 305-307.

6 I am indebted to Professor Samuel Sackett for this observation.
and costume.

All of which would indicate that fictional types like Marmaduke were "in the air" at the time Wordsworth wrote *The Borderers*. If Meyer would have Wordsworth's interpreters take Marmaduke more seriously, he is obliged to show, somehow, that the benevolent leader of the borderers is something other than a stock hero, drawn from a widespread literary tradition. This Meyer has not attempted to do.

The fourth difficulty lies in Meyer's implication that Wordsworth chose the setting of the play with the intention of demonstrating thereby the universality of his supposed "transcendent ethical principle." Two more plausible explanations of the purpose behind the poet's choice of setting have been offered by Legouis and J. H. Smith; Legouis's is supported by the poet's strong implication in the Fenwick Note that the setting was selected to correspond with the anarchy that prevailed during the Terror. It is not likely that the worst excesses of the Revolution had inspired in the poet a faith in the innate benevolence of man and of nature. It is more likely, as Legouis believes, that the Terror had destroyed, or seriously modified, such faith.

The last difficulty to be mentioned lies in Meyer's
implication that Wordsworth believed the lack of institutional control and guidance made benevolence more difficult. As a republican the poet believed that institutions corrupted man. If his aim in writing the play was, as Meyer believes, to show that benevolence would prevail even under adverse circumstances, London would have been a more appropriate setting. For in the remote border region, Marmaduke's benevolence had, with the exception of Oswald, everything in its favor: simple folk, the absence of institutions, and, above all, nature.

In short, this support for Meyer's thesis is inadequate. Every word the poet wrote about the play and his testimony in The Prelude, as well, demonstrate clearly that he was preoccupied at this time not with benevolence but with evil and crime and with the relationship that reason had to these two factors. He mentions benevolence only to remark upon its absence or its inadequacy.

The remaining supports for Meyer's thesis are not inferred from his broad interpretation of the play and can, therefore, be subjected to a more direct examination.

As has been seen, Meyer attaches significance to the dialogue between Herbert and Idonia in Act I. The first objection to this piece of evidence is one which Meyer
himself would likely admit: the reference to nature made in
this scene is not unequivocal enough to prove, when taken
alone, that Wordsworth had at this time the basic concep-
tion—apparent in his later poems—that nature is "an agent
and minister of pleasure ever ready to remind disheartened
and misguided men that joy is their proper emotion." 7

The second objection is more severe. If the reader
will compare the excerpt from the play quoted by Meyer
(page 110, above) with the more complete quotation from
the scene in Chapter III (pages 45-46, above), he will note
that Herbert's reply to Idonea is not the ecstatic con-
firmation of nature's healing power that Meyer's incom-
plete version implies. Idonea tells Herbert that his
gloominess is the result of fatigue and that if he could
see the beauties of the landscape he would be more cheerful.
Herbert's first words (the only ones quoted by Meyer), in-
stead of being a confirmation of Idonea's reasoning, merely
indicate that he has understood her. He goes on to say
that his gloom comes "from a far deeper source than bodily
weariness." The return of his strength while they are sit-
ting there does not mitigate his gloom, which is the result

of his worrying about what Idonea will do after his death. Herbert's meaning is clear. Instead of agreeing with Idonea that the beauties of nature could alleviate his gloom, he infers—in all his age and wisdom—that his gloom is beyond the power of nature to heal.

The conclusion regarding this piece of evidence is thus two-fold: (1) the evidence contained in this dialogue is at best flimsy, even if only that portion of it that Meyer quotes is examined; and (2) if the dialogue is considered more extensively than Meyer's quotation of it allows, it is apparent that Herbert has belittled nature's healing power rather than confirmed it.

The next piece of Meyer's evidence that shall be considered is based upon Oswald's reaction to Marmaduke's experience in the dungeon. Meyer's statements which introduce Oswald's dialogue (see page 111, above) seem, at least on first reading, to imply that Oswald is momentarily impressed with the awesomeness of Marmaduke's experience in the dungeon and is sincere in his statement about heaven watching over Herbert. Again, examination of the dialogue which Meyer has excluded (see pages 53-54, above) shows that this reading of the scene is unmistakably false. Oswald's aside, "Now may I perish if this turn do more/Than
make me change my course," clearly indicates that the portion of his dialogue quoted by Meyer is meant to be utterly insincere. Oswald is laying the groundwork for some new villainy, not confirming the significance of Marmaduke's experience.

A close examination of Meyer's key sentence, however, might indicate that he has not misled his readers. The sentence (see page 111, above) is curiously ambiguous: "For the moment even Oswald seems to be impressed by the singular occurrences . . . " Substituting the word "pretends" for the indefinite "seems" would have made the sentence clear and made it carry the true meaning of the text. If this is what Meyer means by the word "seems," then there can be no quarrel with him. But the presence of another key word, "even," indicates that Meyer intends Oswald's dialogue to add weight to Marmaduke's experience. A reading of the complete scene shows that Oswald's statement obviously does not. It is concluded, therefore, that the evidence obtained from Oswald's dialogue in this scene in no way supports Meyer's thesis.

The remaining evidence offered by Meyer to support his thesis is the appearance of the star in the dungeon scene. The star is of great importance to Meyer's argument.
As has been seen, Jones, Schneider, and Moorman have all been greatly impressed with the significance of the star. Because of its obvious importance, this piece of evidence will be treated here somewhat more elaborately than has Meyer's previous evidence.

First of all, it should be pointed out that the star appears in a scene which demonstrates, perhaps more adequately than anything else in the play, Wordsworth's enormous debt to Shakespeare. The similarities of the dungeon scene to the murder scene in *Macbeth* (wherein Duncan is slain), and to the banquet scene, as well, are not limited merely to language. This fact has been pointed out by many critics, among them Ernest de Selincourt and Charles J. Smith. The structure, the properties, and the motivations of the characters in the dungeon scene have all been to a large extent borrowed directly from *Macbeth*. The murderer in each case is being urged to an act repugnant to his better nature by a less scrupulous confederate. Both murderers have hallucinations: Macbeth imagines the dagger, Marmaduke the ghostly dog, etc. Both attempt to pray, and when doing so experience a shock: Macbeth cannot say "amen"; Marmaduke, deep in the bowels of a castle, unexpectedly sees a star above his head. Both murderers use a similar
weapon: Macbeth a dagger, Marmaduke a sword. Both are intent on the unmanly murder of a victim who is old, trusting, and asleep. Both murders (or attempted murder, in Marmaduke's case) are done off stage, while the confederate soliloquizes. Lady Macbeth is unable to murder Duncan because the old man resembles her father as he sleeps; Marmaduke hesitates because he sees "the filial countenance" of Idonea in Herbert's face. The ominous experiences that occur during the murder sequence are spoken of disparagingly in later scenes: Marmaduke sneers at his former reluctance to kill Herbert, "O Fool!/To let a creed, built in the heart of things, /dissolve before a twinkling atom"; Lady Macbeth, disgusted with her husband's hallucinations, says, "O proper stuff!/This is the very painting of your fear./This is the air-drawn dagger which you said/Led you to Duncan."

Other parallels in content and language exist; but these suffice to make it clear that any conclusions regarding Wordsworth's thought drawn from this scene must necessarily be somewhat dubious. Wordsworth's imitative tendencies in his early work make it difficult to establish with any certainty whether the thoughts he is expressing are his own.
But Meyer is confident, not withstanding the imitative aspects of the scene, that the star, a symbol of nature's benign moral guidance, prevents Marmaduke from murdering Herbert and thus constitutes a statement of one of the basic principles of Wordsworth's mature nature philosophy.

The star is, without doubt, important. It is the last of numerous phenomena which combine to prevent Marmaduke from murdering Herbert. What is more, when Marmaduke recalls his experience in the dungeon in a later act, it is "that same star" that he refers to. But before accepting Meyer's thesis on this account, it might be wise to examine the phenomena that help to account for Marmaduke's inability to murder Herbert.

Marmaduke's natural sympathy for Herbert's blind and aged helplessness is firmly established in the first act. He mentions several times that it would be unmanly to murder such a man. But in addition to this factor, there are many things of a different order which make him hesitate--some of them natural, some of them man-made, and some of them presumably proceeding from Marmaduke's heat oppressed brain.

The dungeon scene opens with a reference to the wilderness of the night and the keenness of the wind; a bit later
there is mention of a torrent in which "the foam beat upon the rocks"; the wind ominously changes Herbert's blessing into a curse; Marmaduke hears "an odd moaning," which turns out to be the wind; he expresses superstitious dread at the thought of Herbert's dead dog returning; he is filled with "drowsy stirrings and mortal stupor; he remembers a "clap of thunder [which] burst upon the mountains with hell-rousing force"; he mentions that "the spirit of vengeance seemed to ride the air; he has heard the echo of Idonea's voice in Herbert's speech and remarks that he had "never heard a sound so terrible."

All of this occurs before Marmaduke sets foot in the dungeon. He is so unnerved that his first two attempts to strangle Herbert fail. It is significant that these failures occur before Marmaduke enters the dungeon. It has not taken a star to deter him.

In the dungeon the Gothic properties are even more fearsome. Marmaduke feels a restraining hand upon his arm; he believes it to be Oswald's, but Oswald is not in the dungeon. When Marmaduke speaks, whoever owns the hand does not answer. Then Marmaduke hears strange echoes. The ghost of Herbert's dog tugs at a cord tied to his wrist. Although the dungeon is as "dark as the grave" Herbert's
face is strangely illuminated. Seeing a resemblance to Idonea in Herbert's face, Marmaduke drops to his knees to pray and sees—at long last—the star which, if the thesis of Meyer's and his followers is correct, "produces in him such a feeling of the old man's innocence that he cannot deal the death blow."

It is apparent, whatever one makes of the star, that most of the things Wordsworth uses to account for Marmaduke's behavior are unquestionably Gothic devices. They are the kind of device which he often used in his early work and which often appeared in the form of natural manifestations of one kind or another. As Gothic devices they are intended to terrify Marmaduke (and, of course, the reader as well), not reinforce his benevolence. And Marmaduke is terrified; he says as much, and his trembling proves that he is telling the truth. In other words, it is difficult to see how any one of the phenomena that combine to prevent the crime can be thought of as anything more than merely another Gothic property.

Seen in its full context, the thunder—which Schneider feels supplements the effect of the star—cannot be regarded as anything more than a Gothic device. "Hell-rousing" thunder obviously belongs to the same category as the
raging torrent and moaning wind.

The star, however, is not such a familiar Gothic device. But if Wordsworth meant it as a symbol of nature's benevolence, his presentation of it as such is singularly inept. Presenting it in close conjunction with ghostly dogs and strange echoes not only confuses but cheapens its effect. Furthermore, the sudden appearance of the star in the blackness of the dungeon, if it was not meant to be the final element in all the things that were striking fear to Marmaduke's heart, would call for a wrenching change of mood in Marmaduke and in the whole act as well.

There is external evidence which proves that all of Marmaduke's experiences were meant to end in his being utterly terrified and nothing more. Manuscript A of the play includes the following "Argument of Act II."

Scene a room in the Inn. Rivers having stirred him up to murder him then resolves to lead him to Monteagle castle--Matilda and old Soldier--Monteagle Castle, a storm. Mortimer dialogue--he goes down to murder him. Rivers soliloquizing--smugglers seen on the top of the walls in another part of the castle--smugglers have overheard--resolve to prevent scheme--Mortimer goes up to Rivers--stirred up and goes down again--sees the light and hearing cries overcome with terror and cannot do it. Rivers laughs at him--a voice heard--they discover blood of banditti.
Mortimer tells Rivers of a plan. The Argument does not mention the star directly but only "the light." Possibly, at this early stage, Wordsworth had not yet thought of using the star at all. The "light" may have originally referred to the smugglers' lantern or, perhaps, to some ghostly light similar to the one which enabled Marmaduke to see Herbert's face. Wordsworth may, of course, have intended to use the star from the beginning; if so, it is difficult to understand why (if the star is as important as Meyer believes) the poet does not refer to it as a star here and not merely as "the light."

But the greatest significance of the Argument is that it shows conclusively that Wordsworth intended Marmaduke's response to the Gothic elements to culminate in his being "overcome with terror." The star was not intended as an appeal to his benevolence but to his superstitious fear.

Furthermore, the dungeon scene is not the first place that the poet had used a star as a Gothic device. The reader is referred to the "Gothic fragment" (See appendix B), written, de Selincourt estimates, in 1791.


9 Ibid., p. 370.
Professor de Selincourt believes that the importance of this juvenile fragment is that it undoubtably was used by the poet as a model for the dungeon scene in The Borderers. Indeed, it does have all the elements: the sleeping victim, the would-be murderer, the ghosts, the thunder, the dungeon, and the star. No one has been bold enough to maintain that this blatantly Gothic poem contains Wordsworth's first statement of his mature nature philosophy, and yet Meyer's argument, it would seem, could be applied with equal validity to it as well as to The Borderers. In the "Gothic Fragment," however, the poet was not forced to describe the effect of the star from the murderer's point of view; here he could with greater ease describe the exact response of the young man to the star. The young man, he says,

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

This star, then, along with the ghosts and the disembodied hands, was intended to do nothing more than strike terror to the young man's heart. There is nothing that would indicate the star which Marmaduke sees is meant to do something more. The Argument, in fact, indicates that

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\(^{10}\text{Loc. cit.}\)
after seeing the star Marmaduke was "overcome with terror."
There would appear little grounds for believing that the
star was intended to evoke a milder emotion.

It is concluded, therefore, that the interpretations
of Meyer, Smith, Jones, Schneider, and Moorman—to the ex-
tent that those interpretations include the belief that
The Borderers contains a statement of Wordsworth's mature
nature philosophy—are inadequately supported by the avail-
able evidence.
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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

TRUE VERSION OF IRENE'S STORY

Mry. Well, Jeannie, don't you laugh at your foolish fears? you have done it cleverly—sent him into the other world without a groan—never trouble your head about burying him—we'll shove him into a corner—in the current hard-by there is water enough to wash away all the blood in the universe (apologizing him! Think I don't see a stain about you. That was disastrously enough (looks at his own) Seaman! Did you espy him?

Mry. What made you come down and lay your hand upon my shoulder? when I spoke to you, why did you not answer? You were afraid of asking him, I suppose. He must have been in a deep sleep, for I whispered to his ears—There are named scenes in that place.

Mry. Tell me more yesth, to all eternity? This an excellent method—you would have the grasp of a dame—you are sure you finished him?

Mry. Scurwily, but I found the place where he was lying when I felt as if there was a string around my wrist, and the blind an't a dog pulling at it.

Mry. Well, but what? Let me have it.

Mry. There was something in his face the very counterpart of Fortnite.

Mry. Let that alone. Never tell my life I tried me such another opportunity—why did not you allow me a share in your triumph—oh, how I envy you.

Mry. Her very looks sitting in sleep—

Mry. Well, have you been playing the card?

Mry. Well, for a single moment—but it sent me to my prayers.

Mry. Please, is he alive?

Mry. Alive! who asked?
Riv. Well, tis all over then--don't you laugh at your foolish fears? you have done it cleverly--sent him into the other world without a groan--never trouble your head about burying him--we'll shove him into a corner--In the torrent hard by there is water enough to wash away all the blood in the universe (examining him) Death! I don't see a stain about you. That was dexterously managed (looks at his sword) Zounds! Did you strangle him?

Mor. What made you come down and lay your hand upon my shoulder? when I spoke to you, why did you not answer? You were afraid of waking him, I suppose. He must have been in a deep sleep, for I whispered to him twice--There are damned echoes in that place.

Riv. Tut! let them gabble to all eternity! 'Twas an excellent method--you would have the grasp of a demon--you are sure you finished him?

Mor. Scarcely had I found the place where he was lying when I felt as if there was a string around my wrist, and the blind man's dog pulling at it.

Riv. Well, but after? Let me have it.

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

Riv. Let that alone. Never will my life afford me such another opportunity--why did not you allow me a share in your triumph?--Oh, how I envy you.

Mor. Her very looks smiling in sleep--

Riv. Hell! have you been playing the coward?

Mor. 'Twas only for a single moment--but it sent me to my prayers.

Riv. Plague, is he alive?

Mor. Alive! who alive?
Riv. Herbert! The Baron Herbert! since you will have it, he who will be the Baron Herbert when Matilda is Clifford's Harlot--Is he living?

Mor. The blind man lying in that dungeon is alive.

Riv. Then curse me, if ever in camp or field I obey an order of yours again--I will proclaim you and before the whole body--they shall hear it all--you a protector of humanity! an avenger of innocence!

Mor. 'Twas dark, dark as hell! Yet I saw him--I tell thee I saw him, his face towards me--the very looks of Matilda sent there by some fiend to baffle me--It put me to my prayers. I cast my eye upwards, and through a crevice in the roof I beheld a star twinkling over my head, and by the living God, I could not do it (sinks against the scene exhausted).

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APPENDIX B
FRAGMENT OF A "GOTHIC" TALE

At length confirmed and to the work addressed
The youth broke silence; but the summons found
No answer; for betaken to his rest
The blind man sleeping lay upon the ground.
So nearer to his bed the stripling drew,
When in that ample dungeon's farthest bound
Dim sparks revealed a hand of fleshy hue,
And such the import which that phantom bore
That had it long endured his heart had beat no more.

But that grim shape, as if it ne'er had been,
Soon vanished, and anon
In place of those dull sparks a light was seen
That from the cavern's depth came gliding on;
And now the legs as of a human frame
 Appeared; and with that light which dimly shone
Forthwith a gloomy figure nearer came,
And, stopping short, replaced a kerchief bound
About his arm, that bled as from a recent wound.

Glad respite did that black Appearance give
When every inward vessel gan dispar
With ghostly terrors never sent to live
Amid the weakness of a mortal heart;
The pendent cutlass and the belt, descried
By what faint glare the lantern could impart,
Marked out the Shape which he before had spied.
His work arranged, the man at distance short
Passed through the dark recess and sought the upper court.

And gone, he left the stripling light of soul,
Not doubting but the hand that vault had shown
Was earthly, mid lamp-smothering vapours foul
So fashioned to his eye by sparkles thrown
On the thick air, from fire-detaining wood
Or flint whose sound the wind had made its own.

three lines missing
His ear, though often troubled, only felt
The low vault to the moaning gust reply;
His sight, though inly busy, only dealt
With darkness or the shapes of Phantasy;
At length he rose, by irksome thought impelled,
And looking up, in restless walk, on high
Above the dungeon's roof a star beheld
Whose sparkling lustre, through the crevice shed,
Sent to his fluttering heart a momentary dread.

At length, the open area to explore,
For in that vault no second foot appeared,
Up to the dungeon's mouth his course he bore.
The winds were passed away, the sky was cleared,
Nor did the court or silent walls present
Object or shape whose motion might be feared;
Only the crimson moon, her lustre spent,
With orb half-visible was seen to sink,
Leading the storm's remains along th' horizon's brink.

So back he slunk and to the corner came
Where lay his friend devoted to the grave;
But as he gan to lift his murderous aim
A rumbling noise along the hollow cave
Was heard remote, succeeded by a sound
Of uncouth horror, to which echo gave
Such rending peal as made the vault rebound;
Nor whelming crash it seemed, or shriek or moan,
But painful outcry strange, to living ear unknown.

"Whence comes that uproar?" starting from his sleep
The sailor cried, nor could the other make
Reply, o'ercome with shock of horror deep;
And, when returning thought began to wake,
In bare remembrance of that sound there dwelt
Such power as made his joints with terror quake;
And all which he, that night, had seen or felt
Showed like the shapes delusion loves to deem
Sights that obey the dead or phantoms of a dream.¹