ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine the methods of communication and the themes of the River Duddon Sonnets. It treats the following outstanding features of the sonnets: the morphology, style, and techniques as revealed in pattern, fusion of syntactical structure and idea, and the use of lively diction, apostrophe, personification, dramatic elements, recurring opposites, and multiple functioning images. It tries to show the effect of these features in the sonnet sequence and to explain the relationship between the multiple functioning images, especially the major image of the river, and the themes.

Selwyn Fitz-S SAGE

Master of Arts

ENGLISH

A Study of Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets

by

Selwyn F. Sage

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of English,
McGill University,
Montreal.

August, 1969

PREFACE

Citations from Wordsworth's poetry in my text are to The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, ed Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest De Selincourt (London, 1936). I wish to express thanks to Dr. Alec Lucas for the direction and encouragement which he so generously accorded me throughout this paper.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

WORDSWORTH as a SONNETEER

Wordsworth, one of the most prolific of English sonneteers, began to write sonnets about 1787. Composing more than five hundred, he employed several variations of the form and used the genre to write on a wide variety of subjects. He revived the sonnet sequence, which had been dormant since the seventeenth century.

Borrowed from the Italians, the sonnet was introduced into England during the sixteenth century by Sir Thomas Wyatt. Consisting of fourteen iambic pentameter lines, it is long enough to develop and conclude a theme, but so short as to test the poet's skill in compression, and to allow the reader to grasp a limited number of ideas easily. In a comment on the restrictions imposed by the form, Wordsworth notes its "narrowing unavoidably the range of thought, and precluding though not without its advantages many graces to which a freer movement of verse would naturally have led."[1]

He realized, however, its value as a means of combining both discipline and liberty. In his sonnet which begins "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room," he comments on this

[1]William Wordsworth, The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth, comp. and ed. Markham L. Peacock Jr. (Baltimore, 1950), pp. 417-418.

feature of the genre:

> In truth the prison, unto which we doom
> Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,
> In sundry moods, 't was pastime to be bound
> Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
> Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
> Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
> Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

Wordsworth rarely used the Shakespearean form of the sonnet, which consists of three quatrains and a couplet, generally rhyming abab cdcd efef gg. He preferred the Petrarchan or Italian model. Petrarch's sonnets consist of two parts: an octave and a sestet. The octave sets out an idea, while the thought of the sestet arises out of this idea and develops and completes it. Sometimes Petrarch ran the thought of the octave beyond the eighth line into the ninth. In his sonnets, full pauses seldom occur in places other than at the end of the fourth, eighth, eleventh and fourteenth lines. The octave generally rhymes abba abba, but sometimes abab occurs in the second quatrain. The interlocking rhymes, the repetition, and the couplets create intensity and harmony. Zilman thinks that "it would be difficult to conceive a more artistically compact and phonologically more effective pattern."[2] The sestet has two

[2]Lawrence John Zilman, John Keats and the Sonnet Tradition (New York, 1966), p. 19.

or three rhymes and allows considerable variety in their arrangement. Petrarch used no fewer than six different rhyming patterns in his sestets. The difference in rhyme schemes of octave and sestet emphasize the division of the thought and provide variety of sound.

English poets found the Italian sonnet difficult to compose. The Italian language has more rhyming words than English,[3] and thus Italian poets can conform more easily to the Petrarchan rhyme scheme. In addition many Italian words end in vowels, which are elided before words beginning with another vowel. Therefore, an Italian poet can pack more meaning into his lines than an English poet can, because it is possible for him to have in a verse a greater number of syllables, which contribute to meaning, but do not count metrically. The following line from one of Petrarch's sonnets illustrates the effect of elision on reading Italian poetry: "Pommi ove'l Sol occide i fiori e l'erba."[4] In addition to the two elisions marked by apostrophes, in this line at least three others have to be made by the reader, thus considerably reducing the number of syllables pronounced.

Because of the compression in Italian poetry, Wordsworth experienced a problem in translating Michelangelo's sonnets

[3]The Same, p. 27.
[4]Francesco Petrarcha, "Sonetto CXII," Le Rime di Francesco Petrarcha, ed. Romuldo Zotti, I (London, 1811), 316.

into English. "So much meaning," he declares, "has been put by Michael Angelo into so little room, and that meaning sometimes so excellent in itself, that I have found the difficulty in translating him insurmountable."[5]

In spite of such disadvantages, Wordsworth wrote several sonnets conforming strictly to the rules of the Petrarchan model. His sonnet which begins "As leaves are to the tree whereon they grow" illustrates how accurately he could copy the pattern of the Italian sonnet. It has the typical Petrarchan rhyme scheme, and a full pause at the end of the eighth line. In the octave, the poet argues that if men recognize that human beings are transient creatures in a more enduring world, they should abandon revolution and seek change by peaceful means. Arising out of this idea and developing and concluding it, the thought of the sestet expresses the poet's regret that men, dominated by passion, struggle too impetuously for freedom, and thus produce anarchy.

T.W.H. Crossland objects to placing a rhyming couplet at the end of the sestet,[6] a device frequently used by Wordsworth. But in so doing, Wordsworth follows a precedent--- though an infrequent one --- of Petrarch's. Zilman thinks that this concluding couplet may "be a desirable repetition of a device /used in the octave/ and serve to unify by recurrence."[7]

[5]Critical Opinions, p. 307.
[6]The English Sonnet (London, 1926), p. 72.
[7]John Keats and the Sonnet Tradition, p. 22.

Wordsworth seems to have been concerned with it chiefly as a means of emphasizing the thought. His effective use of it may be studied in "The Wild Duck's Nest." Here he discusses the beauty of the nest and its environs and, with the terminating couplet, emphasizes the climatic conclusion on the vanity of human pride:

> I gazed -and self-accused while gazing, sighed.
> For human kind, weak slaves of cumbrous pride!

Although Wordsworth wrote several strictly Petrarchan sonnets, he by no means always stuck to the exact requirements of Petrarch's form. He often followed Milton's practice of merging octave and sestet.[8] He was impressed by the "dignified simplicity and majestic harmony"[9] of Milton's sonnets, and realized the unity derived from joining the two parts. He comments on Milton's practice: "In the better half of his /Milton's/ sonnets, the sense does not close with the rhyme at the eighth line, but overflows into the second portion of the metre. Now it has struck me, that this is not done merely to gratify the ear by variety and freedom of sound, but also to aid in giving that pervading sense of intense Unity in which the excellence of the Sonnet has always seemed to me mainly to consist."[10]

[8]John Bard McNulty, "Milton's Influence on Wordsworth's Early Sonnets," PMLA, LXII (Sept., 1947), 745-751.
[9]Critical Opinions, p. 310.
[10]The Same, p. 149.

Such unity appears in Wordsworth's sonnet which commences "The Bard--whose soul is meek as dawning day." Comprising one sentence, it rolls on from beginning to end without a single full pause or turn of thought. I quote the entire sonnet below:

> The Bard--whose soul is meek as dawning day,
> Yet trained to judgements righteously severe,
> Fervid, yet conversant with holy fear,
> As recognizing one Almighty sway:
> He--whose experienced eye can pierce the array
> Of past events; to whom, in vision clear,
> The aspiring heads of future things appear,
> Like mountain-tops whose mists have rolled away --
> Assoiled from all encumbrance of our time,
> He only, if such breathe, in strains devout
> Shall comprehend this victory sublime;
> Shall worthily rehearse the hideous rout,
> The triumph hail, which from their peaceful clime
> Angels might welcome with a choral shout:

Indeed, Petrarch sometimes ran the thought of the octave into the ninth line, but he kept the two-fold division, and did not merge the thought of the two parts, as Wordsworth does in the sonnet quoted above.

Wordsworth, as he explained in 1833, recognized the relevance of the Italian bipartite division to the metrical framework and the excellence derived from the unity of the Miltonic sonnet. Yet he could not make up his mind on the most suitable form for the genre. "Though I have written so many, I have scarcely made up my own mind upon the subject. It should seem that the Sonnet like every other le-

gitimate composition, ought to have a beginning, a middle, and an end...."[11]

He seems to have had in his mind this tripartite division when he wrote the seventh sonnet of the series, Sonnets Upon the Punishment of Death. This sonnet consists of three parts, each forming a single sentence. The poet argues for the retention of capital punishment. In the first sentence, or beginning of the sonnet, which ends within the fifth line, he refers to the primitive concept of retributive punishment. In the middle section, which terminates at the end of the eighth line, he mentions Christ's doctrine of leniency, and in the last part, he warns against the danger of removing the deterrent of capital punishment. He thus divides the sonnet into three sections: two premises and a conclusion.

In seeking to adapt form to thought, and to escape from the rigidities of the Petrarchan pattern, Wordsworth not only departed from Petrarch's bipartite division, but also made changes in the rhyme scheme. He placed a third rhyme in the octave, making the pattern abba acca, a practice formerly adopted by Drummond and Bowles. Zilman calculates that out of five hundred and twenty sonnets by Wordsworth,

[11] Critical Opinions, p. 148.

the octaves of two hundred and thirty-four have the regular Petrarchan pattern, and those of two hundred and five have the pattern mentioned above.[12] Wordsworth's sonnet, "Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland," rhymes abba acca dd effe. It falls clearly into four parts, three quatrains and a couplet. The thought progresses from the past, to the more immediate past, through the present, into the future. Each section, with its change of rhyme, marks a stage in the transition. In the first quatrain, the poet looks back at the time when Liberty heard the voices of both the mountain and the sea, that is, when both Britain and Switzerland were free. In the second quatrain, he recalls Liberty's being driven from the mountain--Switzerland's being conquered. The third section, a rhyming couplet, emphasizes the main point of the poem. Liberty, having lost one voice, must retain the other --Switzerland having been conquered, Britain must remain free. The final quatrain anticipates the tragedy that would occur if Liberty were to lose both voices --if both Britain and Switzerland were to be conquered. The poet thus uses effectively the third rhyme in the octave, creating four differently rhyming couplets in the poem, making each one a stage in the

[12] John Keats and the Sonnet Tradition, p. 20.

time sequence.

In a few of his sonnets, Wordsworth also used highly irregular patterns, placing in the second quatrains of the octave such varied rhyme schemes as: caca, acac, baab, bccb and cbcb. He learned from Milton how to combine the technique of blank verse with rhyme in the sonnet. His sonnet "Fair Star of evening, Splendour of the West," illustrates this procedure. Its run-on lines and internal pauses help to achieve flexibility and to facilitate expression.

Commenting on Wordsworth as a sonneteer, William Sharp declares that "no poet of our own or any language could show ten sonnets equal in breadth of thought, verity of poetry, and beauty of expression to the ten greatest of Wordsworth's."[13] Indeed, though many of Wordsworth's sonnets are mediocre, some of them have the characteristics of great poetry: suitability of form to thought, compression of ideas, and universality of theme. Such qualities appear in the sonnet, "Upon the Sight of a Beautiful Picture." With its Petrarchan rhyme scheme, it falls neatly into two parts. The octave describes the scene in the picture; the sestet turns on its universal implications. The images have both literal and symbolic significance. The smoke, the shady wood, the travellers, and the boat are literal aspects of

[13]"The Sonnet: Its Characteristics and History," An Introduction to Sonnets of this Century, ed. William Sharp (London, 1886), p. lxxi.

the scene, but they also suggest movements of time, and the transient nature of matter. The static quality of the picture symbolizes the permanence of art, through which mortal man can achieve immortality.

Wordsworth arranged some of his sonnets in sequence. A sonnet can form a neat paragraph in a series dealing with a single theme. Wordsworth ties together sonnets in a series, by consistency of subject and by the controlling image. In his Ecclesiastical Sonnets, he traces the growth of the English Church from the earliest times to his own age. The image of the river pervades the series. The poet sees the church as a "Holy River,"[14] flowing towards the Ecclesiastical City.

He uses Sonnets Upon the Punishment of Death to argue in favour of capital punishment. Here the image of the road predominates. In the beginning of the series, the poet stands on the road leading to Lancaster Castle, where condemned prisoners were executed. The road becomes a route in the mind, along which the poet travels. In the last sonnet of the series, he reflects:

> Enough; --before us lay a painful road,
> And guidance have I sought in duteous love
> From Wisdom's heavenly Father.

The series, Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty and Order, advocates social change with moderation. It has a predominant image

[14]"Sonnet I"

of a chain, symbolizing the forces that curtail freedom. This major symbol is enhanced by related images of bridle, binding, and locking.

The River Duddon Sonnets is a topographical series. Topographical poems contain, notably, description; but also--- up to the time of Wordsworth--history, exposition, early memories, dedactism, panegyric, and moralizing. The genre was not established firmly in England until the sixteenth century. Elizabethans tended to concentrate on panoramic views. Drayton's Poly-Olbion is a notable example of a topographical poem written during the period. Denham's Cooper's Hill (1642) led to a large number of hill poems and to poems on local scenes. Not only were hills treated, but buildings, landscapes and estates also. River poetry did not become widespread until the eighteenth century, during the latter part of which topographical poetry was very popular.

In the River Duddon Sonnets, Wordsworth traces the course of the River Duddon from its source to its mouth. The stream, and related objects and places provide images and foci for the poet to suggest and comment on a variety of subjects. Robert A. Aubin calls the series "The greatest river-poem of all." He declares, "With its use of apostrophe, local pride, historical reflection, catalogue, moralizing, genre

scenes, episode, early memories, prospect, ruin-piece, and Muse-driving..., it is not wonderful that a reviewer perceived that the work belonged in the main stream of topographical poetry."[15]

Wordsworth made an important contribution to the development of the sonnet in England. He helped not only to arrest the decline of the Miltonic sonnet,[16] but also to modify the general vogue of irregularity. During the eighteenth century the majority of sonnets were irregular.

Raymond Dexter Havens estimates that between the years of 1740-1800 eleven hundred and sixty irregular sonnets were composed, but only eight hundred and seventy regular Petrarchan.[17] Poets found the Petrarchan form difficult to handle. Most of them did not appreciate the significance of the bipartite division or of the rhyme scheme. Coleridge expresses the prevailing attitude towards the genre: "Respecting the metre of a sonnet, the writer should consult his own convenience.-- Rhymes, many or few, or no rhymes

[15]Topographical Poetry in XVIII-century England, (New York, 1936), p. 241.

[16]George Sanderlin, "The Influence of Milton and Wordsworth on the Early Victorian Sonnet," a portion of "The Sonnet in English Literature 1800-1850." John Hopkins University Theses, Vol.II, 1938. Reprinted from E.L.H. A Journal of English Literary History, Vol.V, (Sept., 1938).

[17]The Influence of Milton on English Poetry (London, 1928), p. 523.

at all--whatever the chastity of his ear may prefer, whatever the rapid expression of his feelings will permit;--all these are left at his own disposal."[18] Anna Seward, who wrote many sonnets during the period, thought that the rhymes might be arranged in any order.[19]

During the nineteenth century this attitude towards the genre changed. "The trend toward irregular structure which had set in from 1790 to 1800 was reversed at the very beginning of the century; the legitimate form predominated throughout the fifty year period (1800-1859)."[20] According to Zilman, Wordsworth was "in some degree to stabilize eighteenth-century inconsistencies."[21] In the vast majority of his sonnets Wordsworth maintained consistency, using the regular Petrarchan rhyme scheme in the octave, or making the second quatrain rhyme acca. Through his great influence as a poet, he helped to stem the tide of highly irregular sonnets.

But his greatest significance as a sonneteer lies in helping to restore the genre to a position of respect. According to Havens: "In his own day, his most important

[18]"Introduction to Sonnets," The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Hartley Taylor Coleridge, II (Oxford, 1912) 1139-1140.
[19]The Influence of Milton on English Poetry, p. 500.
[20]"Summary of the Influence of Milton and Wordsworth on the Early Victorian Sonnet."
[21]John Keats and the Sonnet Tradition, p. 42.

contribution lay in freeing the genre from the sentimentality, melancholy, and triviality which were becoming fastened upon it. He rededicated it to the loftiest purpose and the most serious occasions, and in so doing rescued for it some of the respect it had failed to win from many eighteenth-century readers."[22]

[22] The Influence of Milton on English Poetry, p. 535.

CHAPTER II

MORPHOLOGY, STYLE AND TECHNIQUES OF THE RIVER DUDDON SONNETS

Examining the River Duddon Sonnets, one notices the variations in the patterns of the sonnet, and in their metre, the use of blank verse techniques, the fusion of syntax and idea, the lively diction, the apostrophe, the personification, the recurring clash of opposing ideas and images, the dramatic elements, and the multiple functions of the imagery. The morphology of the sonnets of the River Duddon Series illustrates Wordsworth's general attitude towards the form of the genre. Unlike his other sonnet sequences, this one was composed over a long period of time. Wordsworth wrote the Ecclesiastical Sonnets in 1821, Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty and Order in 1831, Sonnets Upon the Punishment of Death in the years 1839-40; but he composed the River Duddon Sonnets over a period of fourteen years, 1806-20. The writing of this series thus stretches over an extensive period of the poet's career. In this sonnet sequence Wordsworth includes regular Petrarchan sonnets, but he also departs from Petrarch's pattern in both the division of the thought and the rhyme scheme.

Making typical use of the bi-partite division of the regular Petrarchan sonnet, Wordsworth sets out an idea or description in the octave and expands or comments on it in the sestet. In Sonnet VIII, he confines the subject of man's primitive

past to the octave, while in the sestet he treats of the beneficient influence of the river on man. The octave of the fifteenth sonnet serves to describe the "gloomy niche," the sestet to wonder about its origin, and in the first part of Sonnet XVIII, the poet eulogises "Sacred Religion," thus reserving the sestet to illustrate its influence, by means of a portrait of the pious parson.

Wordsworth finds the two-fold division of the Petrarchan sonnet a convenient medium for presenting contrasts. In the octave of Sonnet XXIX, he notes the lack of records of fighting that occurred at a place on the bank of the river, but in the sestet, he declares that the elements acclaim the "loyal and the brave," presumably those who fought there. In Sonnet XXX, he contrasts the thought of the octave with that of the sestet. The former treats of the misery of those who abandon the paths of innocence and integrity; the latter deals with the happiness of the honest and faithful. The bi-partite division also separates abstract and concrete ideas. In the twenty-eighth sonnet, where the poet lists a number of things for which he thanks the river, his "Leader," he places concrete phenomena in the octave, and abstract qualities in the sestet.

It is particularly interesting that the poet may treat different aspects of the course of the river in different

parts of a sonnet. In the octaves of Sonnets IV and V, he describes the meandering path of the river, and its passage through unpeopled forested areas, respectively; while in the sestet of the fourth sonnet, he comments on the rapid movement of the stream down a waterfall, and in the last six lines of the fifth sonnet, he deals with its progress through an inhabited region.

In the afore-mentioned sonnets the pattern of ideas fits the Petrarchan bi-partite structure. But Wordsworth by no means sticks to the Petrarchan method of dividing the sonnet. Even where the thought of a sonnet falls distinctly into two sections, he may refrain from making the division of ideas at the end of the eighth line or within the ninth. He does not do so haphazardly, but deliberately to adapt the structure of the sonnet to the idea expressed. The following sonnet illustrates this:

> The old inventive Poets, had they seen,
> Or rather felt, the entrancement that detains
> Thy waters, Duddon! 'mid these flowery plains;
> The still repose, the liquid lapse serene,
> Transferred to bowers imperishably green,
> Had beautified Elysium! But these chains
> Will soon be broken; --a rough course remains,
> Rough as the past; where Thou of placid mien,
> Innocuous as a firstling of the flock,
> And countenanced like a soft cerulean sky,
> Shalt change thy temper; and, with many a shock
> Given and received in mutual jeopardy,
> Dance, like a Bacchanal, from rock to rock,
> Tossing her frantic thrysus wide and high!
>
> (Sonnet XX)

The ideas of this sonnet fall neatly into two sections. The first section which describes the placid part of the stream ends within the sixth line, while the remainder of the sonnet deals with the rough part. It is important to note here that in spite of the change in the aspect of the river from tranquility to roughness, there is no break in its flow. By dividing the thought within the sixth line, rather than at the end of the eighth or within the ninth, the poet continues the rhyming pattern of the regular Petrarchan octave beyond the point where the thought turns. This method of division makes for greater unity of the sonnet than if the poem had been divided in the regular Petrarchan fashion, to make the contrast of ideas match the phonological antithesis of the rhyming patterns of the octave and sestet. The poet reinforces the unity of the poem by dividing the thought within, rather than at the end of the line. This unity of the sonnet aptly parallels the continuity in the flow of the stream.

A similar principle of adapting the structure of the sonnet to fit the pattern of ideas occurs in Sonnet VII. The division of this sonnet falls at the end of the tenth line. The first section of the poem treats of the inordin-

ately fanciful lover, the second treats of the simple. The disparity in the number of lines devoted to the lovers reflects the difference between the extravagant passion of the one, and the simple love of the other.

It would not be going too far to say that in this sonnet sequence, Wordsworth also uses the third rhyme in the octave to match changes in the thought pattern. A study of Sonnet XXIII illustrates this:

> Sad thoughts, avaunt!-- partake we their blithe cheer
> Who gathered in betimes the unshorn flock
> To wash the fleece, where haply bands of rock,
> Checking the stream, make a pool smooth and clear
> As this we look on. Distant Mountains hear,
> Hear and repeat, the turmoil that unites
> Clamour of boys with innocent despites
> Of barking dogs, and bleatings from strange fear.
> And what if Duddon's spotless flood receive
> Unwelcome mixtures as the uncouth noise
> Thickens, the pastoral River will forgive
> Such wrong; nor need we blame the licensed joys,
> Though false to Nature's quiet equipoise:
> Frank are the sports, the stains are fugitive.

The first quatrain, rhyming abba, in joyful mood, describes the happy shepherds at work, and the purity of the stream. The second quatrain which rhymes acca has an unpleasant note. It comments on a different aspect of the scene, the "turmoil" described in the sestet as "uncouth noise." The poet thus varies the rhymes of the internal couplets of the quatrains to parallel the difference in the two aspects of the scene.

A similar varying of the rhyme scheme to fit the ideas occurs in the twenty-first sonnet. I quote its octave:

> Whence that low voice?-- A whisper from the heart,
> That told of days long past, when here I roved
> With friends and kindred tenderly beloved;
> Some who had early mandates to depart,
> Yet are allowed to steal my path athwart
> By Duddon's side: once more do we unite,
> Once more beneath the kind Earth's tranquil light;
> And smothered joys into new being start.

The octave of this sonnet, like that of Sonnet XXIII, has a rhyme scheme abba acca. The first quatrain treats of the poet's roaming physically with his companions in the past. The second quatrain deals with the poet's present spiritual re-union with his friends, now dead. The phonological difference of the rhymes of the internal couplets reinforces the difference between the senses in which, and the times when, the poet joins his companions.

The poet may depart from both the Petrarchan method of dividing the sonnet and the Petrarchan rhyme scheme, in the same sonnet. Sonnet XIX combines unity of thought with irregularity of rhyming pattern. I quote this sonnet:

> My frame hath often trembled with delight
> When hope presented some far-distant good,
> That seemed from heaven descending, like the flood
> Of yon pure waters, from their aery height
> Hurrying, with lordly Duddon to unite;
> Who, 'mid a world of images imprest
> On the calm depth of his transparent breast,
> Appears to cherish most that Torrent white,

> The fairest, softest, liveliest of them all!
> And seldom hath ear listened to a tune
> More lulling than the busy hum of Noon
> Swoln by that voice---whose murmur musical
> Announces to the thirsty fields a boon
> Dewy and fresh, till showers again shall fall.

No turn of thought occurs in this highly unified sonnet. The tributary descends to unite with the Duddon. This union is followed by the anticipation of the regeneration of the fields, that recalls the "delight" and "hope" mentioned at the beginning of the poem. The recurrence of the couplets in the rhyming pattern abba acca deed ed enhances the unity of the sonnet, while the phonological variations of the rhymes produce both tension and melodious sound through variety in unity.

To maintain unceasingly the iambic pentameter would be monotonous in a sonnet sequence and would restrict the poet's choice of words. Wordsworth varies the metre chiefly by substituting a trochee from an iamb, as in this line: "Sacred Religion! 'mother of form and fear'" (Sonnet XVIII). The use of the trochee enables him to place at the beginning of a line a verbal commencing with a stressed first syllable, so as to gain its full force. In the fourth sonnet, for instance, a heavy stress falls on the first syllables of four lines that begin with either participles or verbs. The poet may also use an internal anapaest, thereby creating a quickened sing-song movement, as in this line, joyful in mood:

"Laugh with the generous household heartily" (Sonnet XIII), or in this: "And Thou blue Streamlet, murmuring yield'st no more (Sonnet VII). The Alexandrine which ends Sonnet XVII combines with the monosyllables to emphasize the idea of descending slowly:

> Tardily sinking by its proper weight
> Deep into patient Earth, from whoose smooth breast it came!

In restricting the positions of the pauses in the octave to the ends of the quatrains, the writer of the sonnet achieves the maximum effect of the falling cadence of the repeated first rhyme, as well as a smooth flow of the verse. But this limits considerably his freedom of expression. In this sonnet sequence, Wordsworth exercises freedom in the positions of the pauses, and in the use of run-on lines. He thus avoids the problem of ending his sentences in similar positions in various sonnets. His use of blank verse techniques is evident in Sonnet VIII:

> What aspect bore the Man who roved or fled,
> First of his tribe, to this dark dell--who first
> In this pellucid Current slaked his thirst?
> What hopes came with him? what designs were spread
> Along his path? His unprotected bed
> What dreams encompassed? Was the intruder nursed
> In hideous usages, and rites accursed,
> That thinned the living and disturbed the dead?

The internal pauses and the run-on lines give the poet considerable freedom in the arrangement of the syntax.

The writer of the sonnet faces a dilemma. Should he adhere strictly to the discipline of the form, or should he sacrifice this for expediency in expressing his ideas? In this sonnet sequence, Wordsworth makes a compromise. He maintains some uniformity, restricting the rhyming patterns of the octaves to the regular Petrarchan rhyme scheme, or to the irregular rhyme scheme with acca in the second quatrain of the octave; but he exercises freedom in the division of the thought, in the positions of the pauses, and with the metre. He thus combines discipline and liberty. With this combination, he avoids the monotony of form typical of Italian sonnet sequences, and the irregularity of form which predominated in the writing of sonnets during the eighteenth century.[23]

The freedom which the poet exercises in the division of the thought, and in the positions of the pauses, gives him some ground for manoeuvring with the syntax. It facilitates his arranging words, phrases, and sentences, so as to emphasize ideas. This use of the syntax to emphasize ideas is manifest in the long sentences, in the frequently occurring parentheses, and in the irregular syntactical constructions.

Long sentences, with subordinate clauses, originate from the necessity to link ideas in such a way as to portray

[23]p. 10 above.

their relationships as exactly as possible. Wordsworth may use the structure of such sentences to emphasize the ideas expressed. The following sentence contains no less than three subordinate clauses:

> She /~Desolation/ guards thee, ruthless Power!
> who would not spare
> Those mighty forests, once the bison's screeen,
> Where stalked the huge deer to his shaggy lair
> Through paths and alleys roofed with darkest green;
> Thousands of years before the silent air
> Was pierced by whizzing shaft of hunter keen!
> (Sonnet II)

The length of the sentence and the building up of its subordinate clauses into a rising crescendo emphasize the power of Desolation. The contrast between the brevity of the main clause, and the length of the subordinate clauses combined reinforce the contrast between the "mighty forests" and the simple river --called a child, in a preceding line of the sonnet --and between the beneficient and malevolent attitudes of Desolation towards the river and the forests respectively.

Parentheses generally indicate the interposition of secondary ideas incidental to and expanding on the main ones. Wordsworth sometimes uses such parentheses in a subtle fusion of thought and syntactical structure, making parenthetical phrases an integral part of a sentence. In the following lines, the parentheses help to convey the conflicting emotions of the maiden:

> To stop ashamed--(too timid to advance;
> She ventures once again--(another pause!
>
> (Sonnet X)

The poet places in parentheses the phrases "too timid to advance" and "another pause" to emphasize the idea that the maiden's hesitation is only temporary, as indicated by the "frolic Loves" clapping "their wings for victory" (Sonnet X). Witness how in the following lines of Sonnet IX the parentheses --used in preference to a comma --help to convey the continuing movement of the stream: "How swiftly have they /the waters of the river/ flown,/Succeeding--still succeeding!"

In the irregular constructions, verbs precede their subjects, adverbs precede verbs, adjectives follow nouns, and limiting phrases take unusual positions. Admittedly, the poet may use some irregular constructions to satisfy the demands of the rhyming pattern as the following lines illustrate:

> On, loitering Muse--(the swift stream chides us--)on!
> Albeit his deep-worn channel doth immure
> Objects immense portrayed in miniature
> Wild shapes for many a strange comparison!
> Niagaras, Alpine passes, and anon
> Abodes of Naiads, calm abysses pure,
> Bright liquid mansions, fashioned to endure....
>
> (Sonnet XII)

In the sixth line, the adjective "pure" follows the noun "abysses" in order to rhyme with other words ending with "ure" in the regular Petrarchan rhyme scheme.

On the other hand, irregular constructions emphasize ideas. In the sentence, "Starts from a dizzy steep the undaunted Rill" (Sonnet IV), the anticipation of the subject speeds up the movement of the thought, in keeping with the quick pace of the downward flowing stream. The verb "Starts," coming at the beginning of the sentence and of the verse, where it receives the heavy stress of the counterpointing first foot, literally performs the action it connotes.

Note the effect of the position of the adverb "here" in the last of the following lines:

> Methinks 'twere no unprecedented feat
> Should some benignant Minister of air
> Lift, and encircle with a cloudy chair
> The One for whom my heart shall ever beat
> With tenderest love;-- or, if a safer seat,
> Atween his downy wings be furnished, there
> Would lodge her, and the cherished burden bear
> O'er hill and valley to this dim retreat!
> Rough ways my steps have trod; too rough and long
> For her companionship; here dwells soft ease.
>
> (Sonnet XXV)

By its position--preceding the verb--the adverb "here" emphasizes the contrast between the "rough ways" and the quiet place, and keeps "dim retreat" foremost in the mind of the reader.

Adjectives following nouns may occur in lines with regular adjective-noun constructions. The contrasting positions add variety and force to the modifiers, as in this

line of Sonnet III: "Of brilliant moss instinct with freshness rare;" or in this one of Sonnet XV: "A gloomy niche, capacious, blank and cold."

In the following sentence the qualifying phrases "Fallen , and diffused into a shapeless heap" and "quietly self-buried in earth's mould" take unusual positions:

> Fallen, and diffused into a shapeless heap,
> Or quietly self-buried in earth's mould,
> Is that embattled House, whose massy Keep
> Flung from yon cliff a shadow large and cold.
>
> (Sonnet XXVII)

The qualifying phrases anticipate the noun "House" which they limit, thus emphasizing the important ideas of decay and ruin.

The discipline of the sonnet form forces the poet to arrange his material in a formal rhyming pattern. If this rhyming pattern has too great an influence on the syntax, the result can be dull and stilted poetry. Such is not the case with the River Duddon Sonnets. In spite of the rhyming pattern, the emphasizing of ideas plays an important part in the arrangement of the syntax.

The diction with its present and past participles, active verbs, and nouns denoting action helps to enliven the sonnet sequence. The following sonnet neatly illustrates the effect of present participles:

> Take, cradled Nursling of the mountain, take
> This parting glance, no negligent adieu!
> A Protean change seems wrought while I pursue
> The curves, a loosely-scattered chain doth make;
> Or rather thou appear'st a glistering snake,
> Silent, and to the gazer's eye untrue;
> Thridding with sinuous lapse the rushes, through
> Dwarf willows gliding, and by the fern-brake.
> Starts from a dizzy steep the undaunted Rill
> Robed instantly in garb of snow-white foam;
> And laughing dares the Adventurer, who hath clomb
> So high, a rival purpose to fulfil;
> Else let the dastard backward wend, and roam,
> Seeking less bold achievement, where he will!
>
> (Sonnet IV)

Five present participles denoting action occur in the sonnet quoted above. Here they emphasize the pervading notion of a flowing river.

Past participles sometimes add a sense of activity even to a static scene, as in Sonnet XI:

> No fiction was it of the antique age:
> A sky-blue stone, within this sunless cleft,
> Is of the very footmarks unbereft
> Which tiny Elves impressed; --on that smooth stage
> Dancing with all their brilliant equipage
> In secret revels --haply after theft
> Of some sweet Babe --Flower stolen, and coarse Weed left
> For the distracted Mother to assuage
> Her grief with, as she might! ....

Here the past participles "stolen" "left" and "distracted" infuse the description of the chasm with impressions of completed actions.

Active verbs add to the liveliness of the sonnet sequence. Verbs of seeing, feeling, detaining, and beautifying enliven the following description of a calm part of the course of

the river:

> The old inventive Poets, had they seen,
> Or rather felt, the entrancement that detains
> Thy waters, Duddon! 'mid these flowery plains;
> The still repose, the liquid lapse serene,
> Transferred to bowers imperishably green,
> Had beautified Elysium! ....
>
> (Sonnet XX)

Nouns too contribute to this liveliness. Some of them not only denote actions, but also have the form of verbs. I list some of such nouns: "charm," "taint," "murmur," "bloom," "echo," "chime," "blast," "record," "sweep," "dance," and "lapse." Appearing regularly throughout the sonnet sequence, they enhance the effect of the participles and active verbs.

Apostrophe occurs several times in this sonnet sequence. With it the poet elevates the style in order to lift the reader to the heights of his--the poet's--personal exuberance, as in this address: "All hail, ye mountains! hail thou morning light!" (Sonnet I): or in this eulogy of religion:

> Sacred Religion! 'mother of form and fear,'
> Dread arbitress of mutable respect,
> New rites ordaining when the old are wrecked,
> Or cease to please the fickle worshipper;
> Mother of Love! (that name best suits thee here)
> Mother of Love! for this deep vale, protect
> Truth's holy lamp, pure source of bright effect,
> Gifted to purge the vapoury atmosphere
> That seeks to stifle it; ....
>
> (Sonnet XVIII)

Wordsworth also uses apostrophe to jolt the reader suddenly into awareness of a change of scene. After relating the tragic story of the maiden, which centres on the "hidden pool" (Sonnet XXII), he turns to the sheep-washing scene with "Sad thoughts Avaunt!" (Sonnet XXIII), and having commented on the deceptive work of Fancy, which produces likenesses of shapes in the bed of the river (Sonnet XII), he announces his arrival at the "OPEN PROSPECT:" "Hail to the fields" (Sonnet XIII).

The frequent occurrence of personification is another outstanding feature of the River Duddon Sonnets. Modifiers add human qualities to inanimate objects and abstract ideas. Here are some of these epithets together with the nouns they qualify: "grateful coolness" (Sonnet I), "speaking monument: (Sonnet III), "envied flower" (Sonnet VII), "timid Yesterday" (Sonnet XV), "unworthy seat" (Sonnet XXI), "Desperate alternative" (Sonnet XXII), "trysting thorn" (Sonnet XXVIII), and "unambitious functions" (Sonnet XXXIII).

Some inanimate objects and abstract ideas assume human roles. The mountain is a nurse (Sonnet IV), the river a child (Sonnet II), and a leader (Sonnet XXVIII), a "dark plume" fetches the poet (Sonnet XVII), mountains "hear and repeat" sounds (Sonnet XXIII), winds pay tribute to the dead, and "Torrents chant their praise" (Sonnet XXIX). The stream chides the poet (Sonnet XII). Religion is a mother protecting the

"lamp of truth" (Sonnet XXVIII), Memory a woman, with golden locks, and Time a relentless retributive judge (Sonnet XXI). "Loose Idleness" wears a "wily mask" (Sonnet XXIV). Thus out of inanimate objects and abstract ideas, the poet creates a world of active thinking human beings.

Contrasting ideas and images run through the sonnet sequence creating tension. These contrasts are of two kinds: combinations of negative and affirmative, and of antithetical positive ideas. Rather than make a plain affirmative statement, the poet may stress an idea by using litotes. He admonishes the river,

> Take, cradled Nursling of the mountain, take
> This parting glance, no negligent adieu!

Addressing the stream in Sonnet II, he declares: "Not seldom when with heat the valleys faint." The description of the chasm, in Sonnet XI, begins: "No fiction was it of the antique age." In the following lines of Sonnet XXV, double negatives come together: "Methinks 'twere no unprecedent feat."

Wordsworth may stress an idea by means of elimination. He presents two contrasts and with the negative eliminates one of them, thereby emphasizing the other. Summing up the variations in the course of the river, he stresses its present state, by eliminating features of the past:

> Not hurlded precipitious from steep to steep;
> Lingering no more 'mid flower-enamelled lands
> And blooming thickets; nor by rocky bands

> Held; but in radiant progress toward the Deep
> Where mightiest rivers into powerless sleep
> Sink, and forget their nature--now expands
> Majestic Duddon, over smooth flat sands,
> Gliding in silence with unfettered sweep!
>
> (Sonnet XXXII)

In the following lines, by eliminating the contrasting pictures of grandeur, the poet emphasizes the humble aspect of the river:

> But here no cannon thunders to the gale;
> Upon the wave no haughty pendants cast
> A crimson splendour: lowly is the mast
> That rises here, and humbly spread, the sail.
>
> (Sonnet XXXIII)

The poet may suggest an idea purely by means of elimination. He tells what does not exist, leaving the reader to imagine the opposite:

> Mid-noon is past;--upon the sultry mead
> No zephyr breathes, no cloud its shadow throws.
>
> (Sonnet XXIV)

Here the absence of wind and cloud suggests a tranquil atmosphere and clear skies.

Charles A. Smith declares: "In Wordsworth, a pattern of basic habits of thinking and feeling unfolds itself in a kind of dualism: Wordsworth had a very strong habit of thinking in terms of paired opposites or contrarities. Everywhere, in nature, in individual man and in society, he saw a constant interplay of opposing forces. These contrarieties were a characteristic manifiestation of his mind. They found expression

> Held; but in radiant progress toward the Deep
> Where mightiest rivers into powerless sleep
> Sink, and forget their nature--now expands
> Majestic Duddon, over smooth flat sands,
> Gliding in silence with unfettered sweep!
>
> (Sonnet XXXII)

In the following lines, by eliminating the contrasting pictures of grandeur, the poet emphasizes the humble aspect of the river:

> But here no cannon thunders to the gale;
> Upon the wave no haughty pendants cast
> A crimson splendour: lowly is the mast
> That rises here, and humbly spread, the sail.
>
> (Sonnet XXXIII)

The poet may suggest an idea purely by means of elimination. He tells what does not exist, leaving the reader to imagine the opposite:

> Mid-noon is past;--upon the sultry mead
> No zephyr breathes, no cloud its shadow throws.
>
> (Sonnet XXIV)

Here the absence of wind and cloud suggests a tranquil atmosphere and clear skies.

Charles A. Smith declares: "In Wordsworth, a pattern of basic habits of thinking and feeling unfolds itself in a kind of dualism: Wordsworth had a very strong habit of thinking in terms of paired opposites or contrarities. Everywhere, in nature, in individual man and in society, he saw a constant interplay of opposing forces. These contrarieties were a characteristic manifiestation of his mind. They found expression

spontaneously in hundreds of images which are too short, too obviously unpremeditated to have been the result of conscious thought. Such images are, rather, an unconscious expression of a habitual turn of mind."[24] Positively contrasting ideas occur frequently in the River Duddon Sonnets. The river itself has qualities of permanence and change. It will continue to flow forever; "Still glides the stream, and shall forever glide" (Sonnet XXXIV). But it begins as a child (Sonnet II), and later changes into a man (Sonnet IX). Its course is sometimes rough and sometimes smooth (Sonnet XX).

Contrasts may receive emphasis by occurring in single sonnets: heat and frost (Sonnet II), hill and valley (Sonnet XXV), "dark dell" and "pellucid current" (Sonnet VIII), "fruitful palm-tree" and "parched waste" (Sonnet XXXI). "Bright liquid mansions, fashioned to endure" are pitted against "the solidities of mortal pride, / Palace and tower. . . crumbled into dust" (Sonnet XII); the beneficient attitude of Desolation towards the river, against its destructive attitude towards the forests (Sonnet II); the ruin and decay of the ancient castle against its former glory (Sonnet XXVII); and the holy lamp of truth against "the vapoury atmosphere / That seeks to stifle it" (Sonnet XVIII). Delicately balanced antitheses may appear in a single line: "To stop ashamed --too timid to advance" (Sonnet X); or "Deep underground? or in the upper air"

[24]""The Contrarieties: Wordsworth's Dualistic Imagery," P.M.L.A., 1954, Vol. 69, p. 1181.

(Sonnet XII).

The sense of action suggested by the diction, the human world created by personification, and the conflict implied by the contrasts form a relevant background for the dramatic elements of the sonnet sequence. One may consider the series the River Duddon Sonnets a miniature drama. It has unity of time. The poet's journey occurs within a single day. It begins in the morning and ends in the evening. In the first sonnet of the series, the poet greets the early part of the day: "hail thou morning light!" In Sonnet XXIV, he informs us that "Mid-noon is past." The moonlit mountains (Sonnet XXXI) and the mention of sleep (Sonnet XXXII) suggest evening.

The poet is the sole speaker in this drama. In monologues, he addresses other characters: the river that accompanies him (Sonnets II, III, IV, V, XIV, and XXXIV), the Muse (Sonnet XII), or some abstract idea such as religion (Sonnet XVIII), or "Content" (Sonnet XXVI). He also plays the role of a chorus, philosophising (Sonnets XXVII and XXX), recalling the past (Sonnet XXI), and anticipating the future (Sonnet XX). As he shifts from one role to another, his ever present personality helps to unify the sonnet sequence. He views things objectively and at the same time keeps his distance from the reader.

He gives us not only a pictorial view of objects, but also an impressionistic one coloured by his own emotions. He compares the Kirk of Ulpha to

> a star, that doth present
> Its shining forehead through the peaceful rent
> Of a black cloud diffused o'er half the sky:
> Or as a fruitful palm-tree towering high
> O'er the parched waste beside an Arab's tent;
> Or the Indian tree whose branches, downward bent,
> Take root again, a boundless canopy.
>
> (Sonnet XXXI)

This is not a pictorial description, but an impressionistic one, coloured by the poet's recollection of joy and relief.

The imagery of this sonnet sequence operates on several different levels. Wordsworth had used such multiple functioning imagery in other works of his. Commenting on the image of the journey in the Prelude -- completed 1805---**R.A. Foakes** declares: "The image of the journey operates on several different planes, the simplest being the many descriptions of journeys which actually formed part of the poet's life, as for instance the journey to Cambridge (Book III), the return on vacation (Book IV), the travels over the Alps and into Italy (Book VI), into France (Book IX) and the final excursion into Wales (Book XIII). These are not simply literal accounts of travels, but mark a progress in time, in the development of the poet's imagination...."[25] The imagery of the River Duddon Sonnets is likewise multiple functioning. The image

[25]The Romantic Assertion (New Haven, 1958), pp. 61-62.

of the river operates on a literal level, but also suggests poetry, the Imagination, the poet's own life, the principle of life, the life of the individual man, and religion. Other images suggest more than one idea.

Perhaps it may seem far-fetched to consider the image of the river as operating on so many different levels; but there are valid reasons for doing so. The image of the stream is flexible enough to suggest various ideas. Traditionally poets connect it with life. In the Prelude Wordsworth connects it with the Imagination, and in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets with the Church.

Wordsworth composed the sonnets of the Duddon Series at intervals over a long period of time. In the appendix, he explains that these sonnets, unlike the poems, the "Ruins of Rome" and Crowe's "Lewesdon Hill" were not composed in a single day, but the series "was the growth of many years;--the one which stands the 14th was the first produced; and others were added upon occasional visits to the Stream, or as recollections of scenes upon its banks awakened a wish to describe them."[26] The poet did not intend originally to write a sonnet sequence. From the editor's note, one learns that these sonnets "were written at various intervals between 1806 and 1820. Sonnet No. XIV (O Mountain Stream!) was written before April 1807,

[26]Prose Works, III, 97.

when it first appeared amongst the Miscellaneous Sonnets of Poems in Two Volumes; and Sonnet No. XXVII (Fallen, and diffused) was published in 1819, along with The Waggoner; included in the collective (4 vol.) ed. of 1820, amongst the Miscellaneous Sonnets; and in ed. 1827, transferred to its present place in this Series."[27] Since the poet composed the sonnets at intervals over a long period, and since he did not intend at first to combine them into a sequence, one can safely assume that the stream suggested different ideas to the poet at different times.

The subject matter of various sonnets indicates that the river did not suggest the same ideas to the poet on all occasions. While it is true that in some sonnets the river suggests several ideas, in some it suggests only one. In Sonnet II it is a child, but in Sonnet XII, it is the Imagination. The next chapter shows how the poet combines multiple functioning images with echoes from his own and from other works and with literal statements to form this sonnet sequence.

[27]Note I, Poetical Works, p. 296.

CHAPTER III
THEMES

Since the image of the river operates on several different levels, it is convenient to analyze the sonnet sequence according to topics, and to group together ideas relating to a common topic. Those ideas are expressed literally; or metaphorically and symbolically, as suggested by the image of the river, by other images, or by echoes from Wordsworth's own or other works. Analysing the sonnet sequence in this way, one finds that the following topics are central: the literal description of the river, poetry, the Imagination and Fancy, the poet's own life, the principle of life, the life of the individual man, the pastoral contrast of the life of natural man with that of civilized man, love and religion.

Wordsworth's acquaintance with the Duddon qualified him well to describe the stream. While at College and at University he spent time near the river.[28] After beginning the Duddon Series, he visited the stream on several occasions.[29]

In the River Duddon Sonnets, the poet describes the three main sections of the river: its initial stages, the varied middle section, and the final part where it flows calmly, joining the River Thames to enter the sea. He hails the mountain where the stream originates (Sonnet I). Addressing the river, "Child of the Clouds!" (Sonnet II), he refers to

[28] Prose Works, III, 99.
[29] The Same, 97.

the cloudy nature of the region. He omits the exact spot where the stream originates, since he is ignorant of this. In the notes to the series, the poet expresses this ignorance: "It is with the little River Duddon as it is with most other rivers, Ganges and Nile not accepted, --many springs might claim the honour of being its head. In my own fancy, I have fixed its rise near the noted Shire Stones placed at the meeting point of the counties Westmoreland, Cumberland, and Lancashire .... At what point of its course the stream takes the name Duddon, I do not know."[30]

The poet describes the initial winding movement of the river with its curves, making a "loosely scattered chain," (Sonnet IV). It moves downhill, its appearance becoming whitened by the rapid flow:

> Starts from a dizzy steep the undaunted Rill
> Robed instantly in garb of snow-white foam.
>
> (Sonnet IV)

Later the river expands, making a loud noise, at a place where a bridge crosses it:

> The struggling Rill insensibly is grown
> Into a Brook of loud and stately march,
> Crossed ever and anon by plank or arch.
>
> (Sonnet IX)

[30] Prose Works, III, 98.

This account seems to be based on actual observation of an outstanding area, referred to in the appendix, where, "On the foreground, a little below the most favourable station, a rude foot-bridge is thrown over the bed of the noisy brook foaming by the way-side."[31]

In Sonnet XIII, the poet describes a populated cultivated area:

> Hail to the fields --with Dwellings sprinkled o'er
> And one small hamlet, under a green hill
> Clustering, with barn and byre, and spouting mill!

In the notes, he describes a place that strongly resembles the region described in the lines quoted above. He tells of a "level valley, which is besprinkled with grey rocks plumed with birch trees. A few homesteads are interspersed [there], in some places peeping out from among the rocks like hermitages, whose site has been chosen for benefit of sunshine as well as shelter; in other instances, the dwelling-house, barn, and byre compose together a cruciform structure."[32] In the same sonnet (XIII), the river sweeps along roughly, at a point where it leaves the valley mentioned above and descends to pass near Sethwaite Chapel.[33]

The stream passes through a "wild and beautiful scenery which gave occasion to The Sonnets from the 14th to the 20th inclusive."[34] Wordsworth describes a section of the region:

[31] Prose Works, III, 103.
[32] The Same, 103.
[33] The Same, 104.
[34] The Same, 104.

> A field or two of brighter green, or plot
> Of tillage --ground, that seemeth like a spot
> Of stationary sunshine....
>
> (Sonnet XIV)

Leaving the place last mentioned, the river flows through an uninhabited wilderness (Sonnet XIV), then joins the Sethwaite Tributary (Sonnet XIX). Passing along a rocky course, it reaches the Donnerdale plain, where it moves slowly in "still repose" (Sonnet XX). Then it became rough again -- "a rough course remains / Rough as the past" (Sonnet XX). It next goes through pastoral lands (Sonnet XXIII), and finally, no longer "hurled precipitous from steep to steep" (Sonnet XXXII), it joins the River Thames to enter the sea.

The changes in the course of the river reflect the description in Green's Guide to the Lakes, cited by Wordsworth: "The river is an amusing companion, one while brawling and tumbling over rocky precipices, until the agitated water becomes again calm by arriving at a smoother and less precipitious bed, but its course is soon again ruffled, and the current thrown into every variety of form which the rocky channel of a river can give to water."[35]

Places of historical and topical significance add interest to the description of the Duddon. Wordsworth includes

[35] Prose Works, III,103.

"the lone Camp on Hardknot's height" (Sonnet XVII), Hardknot Castle, an old Roman fort.[36] He describes accurately the Druidic circle, "that mystic Round of Druid fame" (Sonnet XVII) called "Sunken Church," as[37]

> Tardily sinking by its proper weight
> Deep into patient Earth, from whose smooth breast it came.
> (Sonnet XVII)

The records of Sethwaite Chapel, concerning a former priest, the Reverend Walker, occasion a part of the eighteenth sonnet. In the poem, Wordsworth describes him as "a Gospel Teacher... / Whose good works form an endless retinue." He compares him to the parson of Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales and to that of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," both men of ideal Christian virtue. How far he relied on the records may be gleaned from this section, he reproduced in the appendix: "Buried, June 28th, the Rev. Robert Walker. He was curate of Sethwaite sixty-six years. He was a man singular for his temperance, industry, and integrity."[38]

The poet's comments on the eagle reveal the extent to which the sonnets are based on actual observation. Referring to the great bird he declares:

> Aloft, the imperial Bird of Rome invokes
> Departed ages, shedding where he flew
> Loose fragments of wild wailing, that bestrew

[36]The Same, 102.
[37]The Same, 102.
[38]The Same, 105.

> The clouds and the thrill the chambers of the rocks;
> And into silence hush the timorous flocks....
> (Sonnet XVII)

He relates in the appendix how an eagle visited Rydal Lake and occasioned consternation among the smaller birds, causing them to utter loud screams. He adds that the horse also fears the eagle.[39] The outline of the course of the river, the descriptions of the changes in its movement, of the various aspects of the landscape and of the beauty of the scenery, and the historical and topical associations make the River Duddon Sonnets an excellent topographical poem.

This sonnet sequence, however, has much more than topographical interest. Some aspects of the river suggest Wordsworth's ideal of poetry. Its healing, cleansing and restorative role (Sonnet VIII) is analagous to his concept of the work of the poet, whom he describes as "the rock of defense for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love."[40]

Its function of mitigating the fruits of ignorance (Sonnet VIII) suggests the qualities he attributes to poetry, which he deems "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge."[41] As Florence Marsh says, the stream's " 'Bright liquid mansions' which endure when 'the solidities of mortal pride' have crum-

[39]The Same, 101-102.
[40]"Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Prose Works, II, 91.
[41]The Same, 91.

bled remind one of the mansion of verse that is also a transparent veil."[42] The perpetual form and function of the river (Sonnet XXXIV), recalling Keats "Grecian Urn," suggest the permanence of art, art through which mortal man can acheive immortality, by creating something with "power / to live, and act, and serve the future hour" (Sonnet XXXIV).

Literal statement also echoes Wordsworth's ideas on poetry. The poet's desire for purity, vigour, freedom and brightness in the verse (Sonnet I) echoes his rejection of the neo-classical techniques of style, with its "guadiness and inane phraseology"[43] in favour of "a selection of the language really spoken by men."[44] It recalls his idea that the language of poetry should be "dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures."[45]

The river is emblematic of the Imagination. The Duddon with its mysterious beginning in cloudy regions (Sonnet II), its passage through natural areas (Sonnet VI), its retreat into isolation (Sonnet XIV), its reappearance into the open (Sonnet XX), in the lessons it teaches concerning human life, and in the faith the poet draws from it (Sonnet XXXIV) strongly resembles the stream of the Imagination described in the Prelude:

> we have traced the stream
> From the blind cavern whence it faintly heard

[42] Wordsworth's Imagery (New Haven, 1952), p. 94.
[43] "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Prose Works, II, 80.
[44] The Same, 86.
[45] The Same, 87.

> Its natal murmur: followed it to light
> And open day; accompanied its course
> Among the ways of Nature, for a time
> Lost sight of it bewildered and engulphed;
> Then given it greeting as it rose once more
> In strength, reflecting from its placid breast
> The works of man and face of human life;
> And lastly, from its progress have we drawn
> Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought
> Of human Being, Eternity and God.[46]

The journey along the banks of the river is a journey in poetic experience under the influence of the stream of the Imagination. The poet begins the journey breathing on the "clear height," rather than toiling "in needless sleep from dream to dream" (Sonnet I). Breathing is often used figuratively in Romantic poetry. As Henry Taylor sees, "to breathe" is one of the stock terms that recur in Romantic poetry. In the poetry of Byron's followers "to breathe" is "a verb poetical which [implies] anything but respiration."[47] While "to breathe" in the first of the River Duddon Sonnets may mean "to respire," it certainly has more than this literal significance. Immediately after commenting on the breathing on the "clear height" (Sonnet I), the poet states the kind of verse he wishes to write. He then adds his theme. I quote the appropriate lines below:

> Better to breathe at large on this clear height
> Than toil in needless sleep from dream to dream:
> Pure flow the verse, pure, vigorous, free, and bright,
> For Duddon, long-loved Duddon, is my theme!
>
> (Sonnet I)

[46]Book XIV, lines 194-205.
[47]"The Poetical Works of Mr. Wordsworth," Notes From Book in Four Essays (London, 1849), p. 5.

The juxta-position of the ideas, and the absence of a full pause after "dream" indicate a strong connection between the breathing and the composition. There is a suggestion that the composition arises out of, or results from, the breathing.

Furthermore the breathing on the "clear height" rather than dreaming and sleeping is analagous to the poet's escape from the city in the Prelude --to the rural open spaces, where he can "breathe again." The "breath of heaven" inspires an internal "correspondent breeze" and joins with it, to break up the "long-continued frost" of poetic dearth, so that the poet can "Pour forth that day my soul in measured strains."[48] Thus the breathing on the "clear height" suggests the poet's awakening from the sleep and dream of poetic lethargy, to commence a period of creative activity, a journey in poetic experience.

As the poet makes his journey under the influence -- guidance (Sonnet XII) and leadership (Sonnet XXVIII) -- of the river of the Imagination, Fancy tries to divert him. A summary of Wordsworth's concepts of these two faculties, the Imagination and Fancy, helps to clarify their respective roles on the journey, that is, in the process of composition. In the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth declares that poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in

[48]Prelude, Book I, lines 1-49.

tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind."[49]

The Imagination acts on the emotion during the period of recollection. In the "Preface to the Poems of 1815," Wordsworth explains that the Imagination confers additional qualities on an object, subtracts from it qualities which it already possesses and modifies it. Referring to "Resolution and Independence," he asserts that the Imagination confers animate qualities on the stone and inanimate qualities on the sea-beast, thus bringing them close together to coalesce in resemblance to the leech-gatherer.[50] The Imagination

> Is but another name for absolute power
> And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
> And Reason in her most exalted mood.[51]

The Imagination is the source of true creative power.

On the other hand, Wordsworth considers Fancy merely an associative power. It conjures up likenesses; but it does not modify. It does not lead to profound truths as the Imagination does. "Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in

[49] Prose Works, II, 96.
[50] Prose Works, II, 138.
[51] Prelude, Book XIV, lines 190-192.

their constitution, from her touch; and, where they admit of modification, it is enough for her purpose if it be slight, limited, and evanescent. . . . Fancy is given to quicken and beguile the temporal part of our nature."[52]

The above summary explains how Fancy tries to detract from the creative work of the Imagination by producing mere likenesses:

> Objects immense portrayed in miniature,
> Wild shapes for many a strange comparison!
> Niagaras, Alpine passes, and anon
> Abodes of Naiads, calm abysses pure,
> Bright liquid mansions, fashioned to endure
> When the broad oak drops, a leafless skeleton,
> And the solidities of mortal pride,
> Palace and tower, are crumbled into dust!
>
> (Sonnet XII)

The stream, the Imagination, urges on the Muse against delaying as a result of the diversions of Fancy: "On --loitering Muse, the swift stream chides un --on" (Sonnet XII). The poet also exhorts the Muse not to be led astray by the wiles of Fancy:

> The Bard who walks with Duddon for his guide,
> Shall find such toys of fancy thickly set:
> Turn from the sight, enamoured Muse --we must:
> And, if thou canst, leave them without regret!
>
> (Sonnet XII)

In Sonnet XXIV, Wordsworth arrives at a resting place. Here the three different scenes, the mead, the nook, the prospect, each have symbolic significance. The description of mead suggests a respite from the influence of the Imagination:

> Midnoon is past; --upon the sultry mead
> No zephyr breathes, no cloud its shadow throws:
> If we advance unstrengthened by repose,
> Farewell the solace of the vagrant reed!

As M.H. Abrams observes, in Wordsworth's poetry "the rising wind...is correlated with...an outburst of creative power following a period of imaginative sterility."[53] Florence March sees that for Wordsworth, "The sound of the wind, always invisible in source, leads...to the 'visionary power,' The wind is "The ghostly language of the ancient earth,' a 'strange utterance' that makes the sky seem 'not a sky / Of earth' and the motion of the clouds mysterious."[54] In Sonnet XXIV, the contrasting absence of wind suggests the lessening of creative activity.

The poet retreats into a narrow nook:

> This Nook --with woodbine hung and straggling weed,
> Tempting recess as ever pilgrim chose,
> Half grot, half arbour --proffers to enclose
> Body and mind, from molestation freed,
> In narrow compass --narrow as itself.
>
> (Sonnet XXIV)

The nook mentioned above is a grotto, not only in a literal sense, but a narrow mental enclave. It suggests a limitation of the creative process.

But the process of composition is unlikely to cease completely. Within the narrow enclave of the mind, in spite of the limitations imposed on creative activity, there is room

[53]"The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor," English Romantic Poets, ed., M.H. Abrams (New York, 1960), pp. 37-38.
[54]Wordsworth's Imagery, p. 89.
55p. 40 above.

for the process of creation to continue, as suggested by the "stealthy prospect" (Sonnet XXIV), which contrasts with the "narrow compass." By this means Fancy can continue to work:

> Or if the Fancy, too industrious Elf,
> Be loth that we should breathe awhile exempt
> From new incitements friendly to our task,
> Here wants not stealthy prospect, that may tempt
> Loose Idless [Idleness] to forego her wily mask.
> (Sonnet XXIV)

Fancy now abandons her distracting role, and aids in the creative process ("loth that we should breathe awhile exempt / From new incitements friendly to our task,") Fancy is quite capable of so doing: for inspite of her limitations,[55] "she ...is also under her own laws, and in her own spirit, a creative faculty. Fancy ambitiously aims at rivalship with Imagination, and Imagination stoops to work with...[her] materials."[56]

The course of the river reflects the poet's life. In its early stages the river resembles him as a child. It is the darling of Nature whose elements protect it. The "honours of the lofty waste" belong to it. Frost protects it from the heat and the "whistling Blast" chants its birth (Sonnet II). The alders, ashes and birch-trees give it shade. It flows among the willows, ferns, and rushes, joining children at play (Sonnet V). In its innocence, it enjoys the idyllic scenes of "birds warbling to their paramours"

[56]Preface to the poem of 1815, Prose Works, II, 141.

and of "bees plying their harmless robberies" (Sonnet VI). These attributes of the river call to mind Wordsworth's childhood. He recollects in the Prelude how Nature protected him from evil, awakening his moral consciousness with "low breathings"[57] among the hills, and with the uprearing of the mountain peaks. He played in the fields, on the hills and in the woods, trapping the birds and roaming with noisy friends. He gathered "pleasure like a bee among the flowers,"[58] and dwelt in a humble cottage, like the "cottage rude and grey" (Sonnet V). It is no mere coincidence that he addresses the stream and speaks of his own childhood in similar terms. The doubtful "How shall I paint thee?" (Sonnet III) recalls his reference to himself as a child in "Tintern Abbey;" "I cannot paint / What then I was."[59]

The course of the river also bears a striking resemblance to the poet's life summed up in the Prelude:

> Long time have human ignorance and guilt
> Detained us, on what spectacles of woe
> Compelled to look, and inwardly oppressed
> With sorrow, disappointment, vexing thoughts,
> Confusion of the judgment, zeal decayed,
> And, lastly, utter loss of hope itself
> And things to hope for! Not with these began
> Our song, and not with these our song must end.[60]

[57] Prelude, Book I, line 323.
[58] Prelude, Book I, line 580.
[59] Lines 75-76.
[60] Book XII, 1-8.

Later he tells of the return of happiness: "Spring returns, -- / I saw the Spring return, and could rejoice."[61] The pleasant prospect of the initial stage of the course of the river reflects the poet's youthful joy, the rougher part of the course echoes his disappointments and frustrations at a maturer age. Here one may recall the unhappiness occasioned by the French Revolution, the unfortunate affair with Annette Vallon, and the loss of imaginative power. The final calm flow of the stream echoes his return to happiness and faith. The Kirk of Ulpha (Sonnet XXXI) suggests a reinvigoration of spirit and a restoration of confidence. The study of themes continues in the next chapter.

[61] The Same, 31-33.

CHAPTER IV
THEMES (continued)

This chapter treats of the topics which relate to human life. The poet sees the river as reflecting the principle of life, and the life of the individual man.[62] The stream's bucolic nature gives him an opportunity to contrast the life of natural man with that of civilized man. Ideas of love and religion enrich the study of human life in the sonnet sequence.

If the stream reflects the poet's own life, it reflects more directly the principle of life, and the life of the individual man. It is a symbol of the everlasting life principle. In it the poet sees "what was, and is, and will abide" (Sonnet XXXIV). Like the stream of life, the river will continue to flow forever:

> Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;
> The Form remains the Function never dies.
>
> (Sonnet XXXIV)

The poet reminds us of the incalculable time that life has existed:

> Thousands of years before the silent air
> Was pierced by whizzing shaft of hunter keen!
>
> (Sonnet II)

The river also symbolises the life of the individual man. In its early stages it is a child --"Child of the clouds!" (Sonnet II) --a "cradled Nursling of the Mountain" (Sonnet IV), with a foster-mother, Earth (Sonnet III), and a

[62] Stuart Wilcox, "Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets," P.M.L.A., LXIX (March, 1954), 136.

handmaid, Frost, that attends its cradle (Sonnet II). Like a child it needs protection, and this is provided by Desolation (Sonnet II). It grows rapidly, joining other children its "pleased associates" at play (Sonnet V). It is energetic, and must be clothed:

> Thridding with sinuous lapse the rushes, through
> Dwarf willows gliding, and by ferny brake.
> Starts from a dizzy steep the undaunted Rill
> Robed instantly in garb of snow-white foam....
>
> (Sonnet IV)

Various aspects of the river in its early stages suggest different features of childhood as conceived by Wordsworth. The stream's mysterious rise among the clouds (Sonnet II) suggests the soul of the child coming into the world from a state of pre-existance as expressed in the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality:"

> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home.[63]

The absence of signs "To dignify the spot that gives... birth" to the stream, and Nature's having lent to its "beginning nought that doth present / Peculiar ground for hope to build upon" (Sonnet III) recall Earth's attempts to make the child forget its past:

[63]Lines 62-65.

And caught the fragrance which the sundry flavers

> The homely Nurse doth all she can
> To make her Foster-child her Inmate Man,
> Forget the glories he hath known,
> And that imperial palace whence he came.[64]

Wordsworth considered the child as simple and innocent. As A. Charles Babenroth declares: "In their endeavour to win man back to a simple life the [Romantic] poets instinctively held up the child as an example of simple, if not divine, contentment."[65] The scene depicted in Sonnet VI suggests the innocence and simplicity of childhood. I quote this sonnet:

> Ere yet our course was graced with social trees
> It lacked not old remains of hawthorn bowers,
> Where small birds warbled to their paramours;
> And, earlier still, was heard the hum of bees;
> I saw them ply their harmless robberies,
> Fed by the stream with soft perpetual showers,
> Plenteously yielded to the vagrant breeze.
> There bloomed the strawberry of the wilderness;
> The trembling eyebright showed her sapphire blue,
> The thyme her purple, like the blush of Even;
> And if the breath of some to no caress
> Invited, forth they peeped so fair to view,
> All kinds alike seemed favourites of Heaven.

This idyllic scene marks a stage in the growth of the stream, before it becomes "a Brook of loud and stately march" (Sonnet IX), that is, before the child becomes a man. The flowers, birds, and bees suggest innocence and simplicity. As Hoxie Neale Fairchild sees, for Wordsworth, "Flowers and birds were felt to possess untrammelled beauty, simplicity and unreflective goodness."[66] Florence Marsh notes that in

[64]"Ode on the Intimations of Immortality," lines 81-84.
[65]English Childhood (New York, 1922), p. 313.
[66]The Noble Savage, p. 376.

Wordsworth's poetry "Flowers, birds, butterflies, all growing and living things sound the note of joy."[67] The scene described in Sonnet VI suggests the child in a state of total unself-consciousness.

> The river-child grows into an adult man:
> The struggling Rill insensibly is grown
> Into a Brook of loud and stately march.
>
> (Sonnet IX)

It reaches middle age and begins to decline:

> How swiftly have they [the waters] flown,
> Succeeding --still succeeding! Here the Child
> Puts, when the high-swoln Flood runs fierce and wild,
> His budding courage to the proof; and here
> Declining Manhood learns to note the sly
> And sure encroachments of infirmity,
> Thinking how fast time runs, life's end how near.

The changes in the course of the river reflect the vicissitudes of life, but they also echo man's shifting moods. The stream's movement, now smooth, now downhill, now along the plains, suggests man's varied temperament. The poet sees the stream sweeping by in anger (Sonnet XIII). He notes its changing emotions:

> a rough course remains,
> Rough as the past; where Thou, of placid mien,
> Innocuous as a firstling of the flock,
> And countenanced like a soft cerulean sky,
> Shalt change thy temper; and, with many a shock
> Given and received in mutual jeopardy,
> Dance, like a Bacchanal, from rock to rock,
> Tossing her frantic thrysus wide and high!
>
> (Sonnet XX)

[67] Wordsworth's Imagery, p. 45.

Finally, like an aged man, the stream no longer has the energy and youthful vigour of its former days, but it becomes calm and placid, creeping towards the grave:

> Not hurled, precipitious from steep to steep;
> Lingering no more 'mid flower-enamelled lands
> And blooming thickets; nor by rocky bands
> Held; but in radiant progress toward the Deep
> Where mightiest rivers, into powerless sleep
> Sink, and forget their nature--now expands
> Majestic Duddon, over smooth flat sands
> Gliding in silence with unfettered sweep!
>
> (Sonnet XXXII)

The stream's being "hurled precipitious from steep to steep" suggests the vigour of youth; the "lingering ... 'mid flower-enamelled lands / And blooming thickets," the period from youth to middle age, the most productive years of life; the river's expansion, man's expansion with the wisdom and cares of riper years; the silence, the inactivity of old age; and "unfettered sweep," the inevitability of death. In old age man abandons the activities of youth and creeps vigourless towards death.

The poet stresses the brevity of human life. The journey begins in the morning and ends in the evening. Contrasting man's short life with the infinite duration of the life principle, Wordsworth regards it as lasting no longer than a day.[68]

The stream symbolises not only the life of a man, but of Wordsworth's ideal man. With its qualities of permanence

[68]Stuart Wilcox, P.M.L.A. LXIX (March, 1954), 136.

and flux, it grows into an adult, but retains qualities of childhood. This does not suggest that a man can retain the physical characteristics of a child, nor can he keep its peculiar insights. Wordsworth informs us in the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" that after the child has reached manhood, "nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower" (lines 181-182). But a man can retain the attributes of innocence and simplicity that he possesses in childhood.

Wordsworth sees such qualities of innocence and simplicity existing in the rustic. In his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," he explains why he chose "Humble and rustic life" as the subject of these poems:

> Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart can find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and

> more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature. . . . [Also] from their rank in society, and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse ... [rustics are] less under the influence of social vanity.[69]

Wordsworth's shepherd Michael ("Michael") is frugal, industrious, and magnaminous. The rustic Margaret (The Excursion) and the leech-gatherer ("Resolution and Independence") display unparalleled serenity of mind in the face of great adversity. As Hoxie Neale Fairchild observes, "From the basic principles of Wordsworth's naturalism it follows that; other things being equal, the excellence of human beings is in proportion to the number and richness of their contacts with nature." Fairchild goes on to point out that "of adults those are most blest also who dwell uninterruptedly among the beautiful and awe-inspiring scenes, as do the shepherds of the Lake Country."[70]

The "long-loved Duddon" (Sonnet I) is a rustic. Wordsworth emphasizes its bucolic nature. In the first of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, he informs us that in the River Duddon Sonnets, he sang of "mountain-quiet" and "boon nature's grace." "Boon nature's grace" signifies Nature's beneficient influence on man. The Duddon dwells "remote from every taint / of sordid industry" (Sonnet II). Unlike the "sovereign Thames,"

[69]Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Prose Works, II, 81.
[70]The Noble Savage, p. 175.

it is not "With commerce freighted, or triumphant war," (Sonnet XXXII). This "pastoral River" (Sonnet XXIII) inhabits rural lands, flowing by the cultivated fields, "the small hamlet, under a green hill/ Clustering with barn and byre, and spouting mill," (Sonnet XIII), the shepherds washing their flocks (Sonnet XXIII), the forested areas (Sonnet V) and the wilderness (Sonnet XIV). The poet sums up its connection with rural life:

> I rose while yet the cattle, heat-opprest,
> Crowded together under rustling trees
> Brushed by the current of the water-breeze.

He continues thanking the river,

> And for their sakes, and love of all that rest,
> On Duddon's margin, in the sheltering nest;
> For all the startled scaly tribes that slink
> Into his coverts, and each fearless link
> Of dancing insects forged upon his breast.
>
> (Sonnet XXVIII)

The Duddon's life is simple. The poet will not sing of Persian fountain, nor of "Alpine torrents thundering / Through ice-built arches" (Sonnet I), both emblems of greatness. Nor will he sing of Bandusia, the ancient Roman fountain, celebrated in odes by the poet Horace, and which he --Wordsworth --associates with grandeur. In "An Evening Walk" (1793), he modestly assumes that he does not have the talent to eulogise so great a fountain:

> Did Sabine grace adorn my living line,
> Bandusia's praise, wild stream, should yield to thine!
>
> (lines 71-73)

Wordsworth casts aside such lofty themes, to celebrate a simple unpretentious river, ignored in ancient and modern times:

> Pleased could my verse, a speaking monument,
> Make to the eyes of men thy features known.
> But as of all those tripping lambs not one
> Outruns his fellows, so hath Nature lent
> To thy beginning nought that doth present,
> Peculiar ground for hope to build upon.
> To dignify the spot, that gives thee birth
> No sign of hoar Antiquity's esteem
> Appears, and none of modern Fortune's care.
>
> (Sonnet III)

The stream's functions are unambitious (Sonnet XXXIII). Its waters, though temporarily polluted, are spotless (Sonnet XXIII). It advances towards the sea of Eternity "in peace of heart, in calm of mind" (Sonnet XXXIII). It is a symbol of the simple, innocent man, living in communion with Nature.

In contrast to the life of peace and simplicity of natural man, Wordsworth portrays the pomp and strife of civilization. He reminds us of the horrors of warfare:

> No record tells of lance opposed to lance,
> Horse charging horse, 'mid these retired domains;
> Tells that their turf drank purple from the veins
> Of heroes, fallen, or struggling to advance,
> Till doubtful combat issued in a trance
> Of victory, that struck through heart and reins
> Even to the inmost seat of mortal pains,
> And lightened o'er the pallid countenance.
>
> (Sonnet XXIX)

In Sonnet XVII, the Danish Raven and the Roman Eagle, introduced by emblems of evil ("A <u>dark</u> plume fetch me from yon blasted yew") recall a period of warfare during the Roman

and Danish invasions of Britain. The "wild wailing" and the "timorous flocks" suggest the terror and suffering inflicted during times of strife.

The poet suggests the vanity of human ambition in "the solidities of mortal pride,/ Palace and tower, . . . crumbled into dust. (Sonnet XII). The "mightiest rivers" that sink "into powerless sleep" (Sonnet XXXII) recall the sentiments of Gray: "The paths of glory lead but to the grave." The formerly great castle now in ruins suggests the futility of human pride and the weakness of human power:

> Fallen, and diffused into a shapeless heap,
> Or quietly self-buried in earth's mould,
> Is that embattled House, whose massy keep
> Flung from yon cliff a shadow large and cold.
> There dwelt the gay, the bountiful, the bold;
> Till nightly lamentations, like the sweep
> Of winds -- though winds were silent -- struck a deep
> And lasting terror through that ancient Hold.
> Its line of warriors fled; --they shrunk when tried
> By ghostly power: --but Time's unsparing hand
> Hath plucked such foes, like weeds, from out the land.
> (Sonnet XXVII)

For all its greatness, and for all the glory of its inhabitants, the castle is now ruined and all its occupants fled. Glory and strife are useless. Man's greatest asset is a simple, peaceful life:

> And now, if men with men in peace abide,
> All other strength the weakest may withstand,
> All worse assaults may safely be defied.
> (Sonnet XXVII)

The individual man dies, but the race continues through reproduction. Appropriately, suggestions of eroticism and sex pervade this sonnet sequence which treats of the life of man. Personifying some objects and abstract qualities as male --the river --, and others as female --Earth (Sonnet III), Religion (Sonnet XVIII), and Memory (Sonnet XXI) -- the poet reminds us of the dual sex of mankind. The "small birds warbling to their paramours" (Sonnet VI) suggest philandering. One cannot help noticing the suggestion of sex and birth in the relationship between Earth and the Druidic circle,

> that mystic round of Druid frame
> Tardily sinking by its proper weight
> Deep into patient Earth, from whose smooth breast it came!
> (Sonnet XVII)

The activities of the lovers in Sonnet X may have been literally watched by the poet, but they have a universal significance. I quote the entire sonnet:

> Not so that Pair whose youthful spirits dance
> With prompt emotion, urging them to pass;
> A sweet confusion checks the Shepherd-lass;
> Blushing she eyes the dizzy flood askance;
> To stop ashamed --too timid to advance;
> She ventures once again --another pause!
> His outstretched hand He tauntingly withdraws --
> She sues for help with piteous utterance!
> Chidden she chides again; the thrilling touch
> Both feel, when he renews the wished-for aid:
> Ah! if their fluttering hearts should stir too much,
> Should beat too strongly, both may be betrayed.
> The frolic Loves, who, from yon high rock, see
> The struggle, clap their wings for victory!

It is significant that this sonnet comes immediately after the idea of man's reaching middle age, and turning towards death:

> Puts Here the Child
> Puts, when the high-swoln Flood runs fierce and wild,
> His budding courage to the proof; and here
> Declining Manhood learns to note the sly
> And sure encroachments of infirmity,
> Thinking how fast time runs, life's end how near!
> (Sonnet IX)

By calling Sonnet X "The Same Subject," --as that of Sonnet IX —the poet emphasizes the connection between the ideas expressed in the two sonnets. He contrasts the gravity of the middle-aged man, with the joyful love of youth. Wordsworth indicates the universal significance of the lovers, by capitalising the word "Pair." The lass is an emblem of women, and the lad of men, in general. Their joining each other suggests a man and woman joining each other in partnership of love. The oxymoronic "sweet confusion" expresses the typical conflicting emotions of a woman venturing into love. The lad's chiding the lass and his impatiently urging her to brave the current to join him suggest the lover anxiously wooing his loved one to cross the barriers of her doubts and fears and enter an amorous relationship with him. She, typical woman, must blush and hesitate before she makes up her mind. When she does, the "frolic Loves," emblems of Venus and Cupid, deities of love, naturally, "clap their wings

for victory!"

The union of the Duddon and its tributary the Sethwaite (Sonnet XIX) seems to carry sexual overtones. The purity of the Sethwaite's waters suggests maidenhood; the tributary's hurrying to unite with the Duddon, a maiden's eagerness for physical union; the accompanying musical tune, the resultant joy; the boon announced to the fields, the anticipated fulfilment.

Indulging in the pathetic fallacy, the poet projects his own feelings into Nature:

> here dwells soft ease:
> With sweets that she partakes not some distaste
> Mingles, and lurking consciousness of wrong;
> Languish the flowers; the waters seem to waste
> Their vocal charm; their sparklings cease to please.
> (Sonnet XXV)

These lines may well refer to an occasion when Wordsworth visited the idyllic place and longed for his wife to be there too; but they also express the universal nostalgia of a lover regretting the absence of one he loves.

In Sonnet VII, Wordsworth satirizes the conventions of courtly love, which had been adopted by the pastoral writers. In this tradition, the hero idealised his mistress, paying tribute to aspects of her person, such as her eye-brows, and grew sick with grief, when his passion was not reciprocated.

The tradition had become overworked and artificial during the sixteenth century, and Shakespeare satirized it in As You Like It. Laura is the heroine of Petrarch's love sonnets; written according to these conventions. The "love-sick stripling" is the courtly lover of the pastoral shepherd worshipping the maiden whose love he cannot gain. Here Wordsworth shows the artificial and highly extravagant expressions of love, characteristic of courtly lovers:

> 'Change me, some God, into that breathing rose!'
> The love-sick Stripling fancifully sighs,
> The envied flower beholding, as it lies
> On Laura's breast, in exquisite repose;
> Or he would pass into her bird, that throws
> The darts of song from out its wiry cage;
> Enraptured, --could he for himself engage
> The thousandth part of what the Nymph bestows.

Against this extravagant lover, with his unrealistic aspirations ("too daring choice"), Wordsworth pits the simple-minded:

> There are whose calmer minds, it would content
> To be an unculled flowerlet of the glen,
> Fearless of plough and scythe; or darkling wren
> That tunes on Duddon's banks her slender voice.

This last quoted passage is an expression of Romantic naturalism. For Wordsworth "Flowers . . .were felt to possess the untrameled beauty, simplicity, spontaneity and unreflective goodness which find echo in the heart of man whenever he casts off the perverting influences of civilization."[71]

[71] The Noble Savage, p. 376.

Wordsworth's Lucy is associated with the beneficient influence of Nature and with flowers:

> Three years she grew in sun and shower,
> Then Nature said "A lovelier flower
> On earth was never sown."[72]

The ideal woman of the courtly love tradition, a woman of society delights in artificial roses and caged birds. The ideal woman for the Romantic is a child of Nature, associated with natural flowers --"the unculled flowerlet of the glen." Wordsworth thus contrasts the two attitudes towards womanhood and love.

Erotic love assures the continuation of the human race, but religion satisifies man's spiritual aspirations. Wordsworth was an Anglican with high church leanings, and conventional Christian ideas appear in his works. In the River Duddon Sonnets, he presents suggestions of the Temptation and Fall of Man, the Temptation of Christ, the Flood, the Hope of Redemption and the Judgment. In Sonnet IV, the river's "Protean change" recalls the ability of spirits to take any shape they wish. Its serpentine form reminds one of Satan's disguise. The "garb of snow-white foam" is reminiscent of God the Son, while the Adventurer is Satan who aspires to the position of God, which he fails to attain, and who seeks "less bold achievement" in the temptation of man:

72."Three years she grew in sun and shower."

^ "from their aery height" call to mind the spirit descending

> Else let the dastard backward wend, and roam,
> Seeking less bold acheivement where he will.

The dastard's "less bold achievement" suggests Satan's ability limited to tempting man.

The poet reminds us of the Temptation of Christ in the wilderness in Sonnet XIV:

> Thee hath some awful Spirit impelled to leave,
> Utterly to desert, the haunts of men,
> Though simple thy companions were and few;
> And through this wilderness a passage cleave
> Attended but by thy own voice, save when
> The clouds and fowls of the air thy way pursue!

The phrase "fowls of the air" adds a biblical tone to the passage. The simple and few companions are reminiscient of Christ's apostles, limited to twelve, and considered "unlearned and ignorant men."[73] The awful spirit suggests Satan, who led Christ into the wilderness to tempt him.

In Sonnet XIX the "far distant good" suggests Redemption. The "pure waters" descending upon Christ, as he washed in the Jordan, and the tributary, with its "torrents white" uniting with the Duddon, suggests not only physical union, but also the Holy Spirit uniting with the Church. The boon is the promised Redemption which will re-invigorate the "thirsty fields" of Fallen man's spirit. Against these reassuring ideas, the poet recalls the past punishment, the destruction of the flood, "the turbulence of waves" that occurred "when o'er highest hills the Deluge passed" (Sonnet XV). He reminds

[73]Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 4, verse 13.

us of the future destruction after the Judgment, in the "roaring blasts" of fire, "let loose form central caves" (Sonnet XV).

In some respects, the river suggests the true religion. Its spotlessness (Sonnet XXIII) suggests spiritual purity; and the "unwelcome mixtures" (Sonnet XXIII) the forces of corruption that at times defile it. But the true religion purifies itself; for "the stains are fugitive" (Sonnet XXIII). It may pass through vicissitudes (Sonnet XXXIII), but in the end it finally triumphs, and advances in "radiant progress" (Sonnet XXXII) towards Eternity. Its "bright mansions" are "fashioned to endure" (Sonnet XII). It "was and is and will abide" (Sonnet XXXIV). The function of the river, like that of the true religion, is to teach mankind, to purify man's soul, and lead him to truth. Man was lost in the dark pollution of paganism,

> In hideous usages, and rites accursed,
> That thinned the living and disturbed the dead?
> (Sonnet VIII)

He worshipped at the shrines of the pagan gods of Rome --Jove and Mars --or joined in the heathen rites of the Druids (Sonnet XVII), or in "tutelary service" (Sonnet XV) to idols. But he is spiritually cleansed and led to truth by drinking at the waters of the "pellucid current" of the stream whose work

"was to heal and to restore / To soothe and cleanse, not madden and pollute!" (Sonnet VIII). In this role, the Duddon resembles "Sacred Religion," the duty of which is "to protect / Truth's holy lamp" and "to purge the vapoury atmosphere / That seeks to stifle it" (Sonnet XVIII).

The river, as the true religion, is man's leader and guide, and those who stick to it will not suffer spiritually:

> Who swerves from innocence, who makes divorce
> Of that serene companion --a good name,
> Recovers not his loss; but walks with shame,
> With doubt, with fear, and haply with remorse;
> And oft-times he --who, yielding to the force
> Of chance --temptation, ere his journey end,
> From chosen comrade turns, or faithful friend --
> In vain shall rue the broken intercourse.
> Not so, with such as loosely wear the chain
> That binds them, pleasant River! to thy side.
>
> (Sonnet XXX)

Like the true religion, the stream assures man of Eternal Life:

> I choose to saunter o'er the grassy plain,
> Sure, when the separation has been tried,
> That we, who part in love, shall meet again.
>
> (Sonnet XXX)

Finally from the stream the poet learns the secrets of contentment. First we must make a lasting and vital contribution for the benefit of future generations:

> Enough, if something from our hands have power
> To live, and act, and serve the future hour.
>
> (Sonnet XXXIV)

Secondly we must possess the attributes of the Christian man as propounded by St. Paul,[74] being thus assured that man is more than mortal:

> And if as toward the silent tomb we go,
> Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
> We feel that we are greater than we know.
>
> (Sonnet XXXIV)

[74] Corinthians, Chapter 13, Verses 1-13.

CONCLUSION

The River Duddon Sonnets illustrates Wordsworth's contribution to the genre of the sonnet. After the vogue of highly irregular sonnets written during the eighteenth century, Wordsworth shows an encouraging respect for consistency in the sonnet form. Handling the sonnet with considerable skill, he produces a sequence lively and intellectually stimulating. In using the sonnet, which had lost respect, to express ideas of a serious nature, he shows his high regard for the genre.

In the Duddon Series Wordsworth combines discipline and liberty. Cognisant of the importance of the bipartite division and of the rhymes of the regular Petrarchan sonnet, he uses this pattern effectively, in setting out an idea in the octave, and commenting or expanding on it in the sestet, or in presenting contrasting ideas. In seeking to use the structure of the sonnet to emphasize the idea expressed, or in attempting to facilitate expression, he varies the form of the regular Petrarchan sonnet, in the method of division, in the rhyme scheme, in the metre, and in the position of the pauses. But conscious of the need for maintaining some consistency, the poet limits the variations in the rhymes scheme to the use of a third rhyme in the octave.

Considered on the whole the sonnet sequence never lapses into doldrums. With the limited variations in the patterns

of the sonnet, the poet avoids both monotony of form and profuse irregularity. The fusion of syntax and idea, and the lively diction enliven the sonnet sequence. Apostrophe elevates the style. The human world created by personification, and the confict implied by the contrasts, creating tension, provide a relevent background for the dramatic elements of the sonnet sequence. These dramatic elements give the sonnet sequence an immediacy. The multiple functioning of the imagery stimulates the intellect and makes for compression.

When Wordsworth began to write the River Duddon Sonnets, he had already commenced composing the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality," completed 1806, in which he declares, that he has lost the visionary power:

> There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth, and every common sight,
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream.
> It is not now as it hath been of yore; --
> Turn whereso'er I may,
> By night or day,
> The things which I have seen I now can see no more.[75]

Wordsworth, however, was conscious at the time when he composed the Duddon Sonnets, of the great influence of water on the minds of poets. In the notes to the series he declares: "The power of waters over the minds of Poets has been acknowledged from the earliest ages; --through the 'Flumina amen

[75]Lines 1-9.

silvasque inglorius' of Virgil, down to the sublime apostrophe to the great river of the earth by Armstrong, and the simple ejaculation of Burns," which begins "The Muse nae Poet ever fand her."[76] Truly the river had great influence over his own mind. He sees the stream as a multiple functioning symbol. It evokes in his mind thoughts, not of simple matters, but of the major ideas that interested him throughout his life: poetry, the Imagination, his own life, and human life. His choice of the sonnet to express these ideas indicates his high regard for the genre.

[76] Prose Works, III, 98.

List of Works Consulted

Primary Works.

Bowles, William L. Sonnets and Other Poems. London, 1798.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge. 2 vols. Oxford, 1912.

Lee, Sydney, ed. Elizabethan Sonnets. 2 vols. Westminister, 1904.

Main, David M., ed. A Treasury of English Sonnets. New York, 1881.

Petrarch, Francis. Le Rime Di Francesco Petrarca, ed. Romulda Zotti. 3 vols. London, 1811.

Wordsworth, William. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest De Selincourt. London, 1936.

---------- The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth, comp. and ed. Markham L. Peacock Jr. Baltimore, 1950.

---------- The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. Alexander B. Grossart. 3 vols. London, 1876.

Secondary Works.

Abrams, M. H. "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor," English Romantic Poets, ed. M. H. Abrams. New York, 1960.

Aubin, Robert Arnold. Topographical Poetry in XVIIIth Century England. New York, 1960.

Babenroth, A. Charles. English Childhood. New York, 1922.

Congleton, J. E. Themes of Pastoral Poetry in England 1684-1798. Gainsville, 1952.

Crossland, T. W. H. The English Sonnet. London, 1917.

Fairchild, Hoxie Neale. The Noble Savage. New York, 1928.

Foakes, R. A. The Romantic Assertion. New Haven, 1928.

Havens, Raymond Dexter. The Influence of Milton on English Poetry. London, 1922.

Legouis, Emile. The Early Life of William Wordsworth. New York, 1918.

Marsh, Florence. Wordsworth's Imagery. New Haven, 1952.

McNulty, Bard. "Milton's Influence on Wordsworth's Early Sonnets," P.M.L.A., LXII (Sept., 1947), 745-51.

McClean, Kenneth. "The Water Symbolism in the Prelude," University of Toronto Quarterly, 17 (July, 1948), 372-89.

Moorman, Mary. Wordsworth: A Biography. 2 vols. Oxford, 1965.

Sanderlin, George. "The Influence of Milton and Wordsworth on the Early Victorian Sonnet," a portion of "The Sonnet in English Literature," John Hopkins University Theses, II (1938). Reprinted from E.L.H., Vol. V, No. 3. (Sept., 1938).

Sharp, William, "The Sonnet: Its Characteristics and History," an Introduction to Sonnets of This Century, ed. William Sharp. London, 1887.

Tomlinson, Charles. The Sonnet: Its Origin, Structure and Place in Poetry. London, 1874.

Wilcox, Stuart. "Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets," P.M.L.A., LXIX (1954), 131-141.

Zilman, Lawrence John. John Keats and the Sonnet Tradition.

New York, 1966.