Keats's celebrated phrase "Egotistical Sublime" may seem to be an adequate commentary on Wordsworth's poetical character, especially when we consider poems like The Excursion, The Prelude and Tintern Abbey. The appellation, however, seems to ignore the other aspects of Wordsworth's poetry, and it hardly defines the complexity of his approach to reality. The "Advertisement" to the Lyrical Ballads published in 1798, and the Prefaces of 1800 and 1802, taken together, constitute an interesting document of Wordsworth's own uncertainties before several ideals; and while these uncertainties result in critical incoherence, they also throw a revealing light on the poet's approach to reality. The question whether the artist or the poet reflects or transcribes reality faithfully or whether he creates a poetic world, autonomous and distinct from the actual, has persisted through the centuries, and it acquires a special urgency in the early nineteenth century because of the conflict between empiricism and idealism. Wordsworth's emphasis on sensation and association links him with Locke and Hartley, and when he says that a poet's function is "slavish and mechanical," his debt to eighteenth-century mechanistic philosophy seems unmistakable. However, in the same Preface of 1802 he observes in discussing the function of metre that metre divests language of its reality and throws
a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition. The implication here is that the poetical world is distinct from the world of actual experience, and this negates Wordsworth's major premise that the criterion of poetic worth is fidelity to experience, particularly rustic experience. The same duality is discernible in Wordsworth's observation on the nature of the experience that poetry conveys. When he says that all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, he seems to look inward and suggests that a poet transmits his individual sensuous reactions to reality, but his choice of rustic subjects and his insistence on the employment of rustic speech extend the range of experience; and this exteriorization shifts the focus to the larger reality outside of the poet's own self. Thus Wordsworth's poetry oscillates between the two poles—his inner world and the world outside of his self. Geoffrey Durrant in his recent book *Wordsworth and the Great System* reminds us that "Wordsworth's poetry often reveals a strong interest in the structure of the physical universe as it had been re-defined by Newton and Boyle, and that poems that have been thought to be essentially personal and emotional sometimes involve rigorous considering of the conditions of human existence in such a universe". 

Wordsworth, Patricia M. Ball observes, demonstrates an important Romantic characteristic, the tension of the dual response. Wordsworth's description of the poetical character points to the same duality:
... What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him? — He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present, an ability to conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves:— whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement.  

Wordsworth believes that even without immediate external stimuli it is possible for the poet to express the feelings and
thoughts arising "from the structure of his own mind". The poet is concerned, however, not merely with his own "passions and volitions" but also with the "passions and volitions" as manifested "in the goings on of the universe". Wordsworth also adds that a poet has "a more comprehensive soul" and "a greater knowledge of human nature" than are supposed to be common among mankind.

Here two tendencies become clear — interiorization and exteriorization. John Jones observes that the "Poet", for Coleridge, meant "Maker". To him the poet is not to be taken as an imitator of the world of appearance but as a creator of a better, because a truer, world. On Wordsworth's assumption, the Poet is an observer. For Wordsworth (here we refer to his Preface to Poems published in 1815), "Imagination is a subjective term: it deals with objects not as they are, but as they appear to the mind of the poet". But it is also true that Wordsworth professes to look steadily at his subject and aims at a faithful transcription of reality. It may be relevant here to consider Coleridge's comment on the two types of poems included in Lyrical Ballads, with the work clearly divided between the two authors:

... a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such affections, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing
them real, And real in this sense they have been to
every human being who, from whatever source of
delusion, has any time believed himself under
supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects
were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters
and incidents were to be such as will be found in
every village and its vicinity, where there is a
meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or
to notice them, when they present themselves. 10

It was Wordsworth's declared purpose to present "incidents
and situations from common life", and "at the same time, to throw
over them a certain colouring of imagination". 11 As a matter
of fact, the whole method of fiction or drama is suggested by
this imaginative operation. The imagination creates the
characters, places them all on the same footing whether they
are real or not and sets them in motion in their appropriate
background. We should remember that Wordsworth's conception of
the imagination centres on the belief that the imaginative
visions are the result of an interaction between the external
object and inward reflection, between the mind of the poet and
his experience of nature and man. Some lines from The Recluse
will illustrate the point:

How exquisitely the individual Mind,
And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species to the external World
Is fitted, and how exquisitely too,
Theme this but little heard among men,
The external World is fitted to the mind
And the creation, (by no lower name
Can it be call'd) which they with blended might
Accomplish; this is our high argument

(The Recluse, part I, Book I)*

For Wordsworth the external world is real, but he also
throws a veil of shadowy idealism over this reality; and the
result is an imaginative transformation of reality. The suffering
and lonely fortitude as recorded in Michael and The Leech-Gatherer,
the thought of childhood touched with the glory of pre-existence,
the thought of the history and powers of human mind "That feeds
upon humanity, that broods/Over the dark abyss, intent to
hear/Its voices", the sight of "The immeasurable height/Of woods
decaying, never to be decayed", of the sounding cataract that
"haunted" him "like a passion" — all this exhibits a level of
perception in which the subject and the object cohere. This
synthesis of the subjective and the objective constitutes the
essence of Wordsworth's poetic art. His lyrics — whether
conveying his inner spiritual experiences or the experiences of
rustic people — show this coalescence, but this coalescence is
also conducive to a special kind of dramatic treatment. We use
the word "special", for an understanding of Wordsworth's dramatic
method demands a different perspective: it is a Romantic poet's
attempt at dramatization of experience.

Both the early and the later versions of *The Prelude* show Wordsworth expressing a qualified delight in the theatre. (It is "dear delight" in *The Prelude*, Book vii, 407, 1850 text.) He praises in negative terms: he does not "blush to add" (vii 270, 1850 text) that he enjoyed mere spectacles whose appeal was solely to the eyes; he found no "mean delight" watching "crude Nature work in untaught minds" (vii. 274–75). In the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, "dear delight" is associated with "A Yearning". The "Yearning" in turn is linked with "obstacles / Which slender funds imposed" (vii. 438–39) — a thought entirely omitted from the 1850 version. The 1850 version also offers a new suggestion in that whatever delights the theatre offered, the young man even then saw that its "measured passions" (vii. 405) paled in comparison with the spectacles of real life, the world of "casual incidents" (vii. 402). Wordsworth admits that he did see plays of "more lofty themes" (vii. 465), but even of these he is critical. He is quick to add that his "Imagination" slept at such performances, that his response to "tragic sufferings" on the stage was emotional only (vii. 465–470). Though the mind was "passionately moved", nothing in the plays got beyond "the suburbs of the mind" (vii. 473–76). Yet, Wordsworth does not deny the pleasures of even the lowest type of entertainment. He confesses that he attended "more than once" shows such as those at Sadler's Wells (*The Prelude*, vii. 267). Thus the poet
learned enough about the "gross realities" of the stage to use them to advantage in *The Borderers*. In the Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* the poet makes a significant comment:

The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse. When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble endeavour made in these volumes to counteract it.  

Wordsworth's direct attempt to counteract "this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" is his play *The Borderers*. It is true that Wordsworth's genius is more lyrical than dramatic: his chief concern is the progress of the human soul rather than emotional or physical conflict.  

He is pre-eminently a contemplative poet, and human volition and action was for him of secondary importance. (That is perhaps why Byron called him a "dull disciple" of Robert Southey.) He avoided consciously and deliberately all those elements from his sense-perceptions which seemed merely melodramatic. "The moving accident is not my trade / To freeze the blood I have no ready arts;", he says. He thought the dramatist's job was to "crowd his scenes with gross visible action". He points out that a narrative poet should see:
... if there are no victories in the world of spirit, no changes, no commotions, no revolutions there, no fluxes and refluxes of the thoughts which may be made interesting by modest combination with the stiller actions of the bodily frame, or with the gentler movements and milder appearances of society and social intercourse, or the still more mild and gentle solicitations of irrational and inanimate nature.

Wordsworth responded actively to the world around him, but the area he sought to explore was "the world of spirit", and this both delimits and distinguishes the nature of his work. It is, however, difficult to agree with John Jones that Wordsworth's talent "was not only undramatic in its kind, but in a positive sense the denial of drama". His own dramatic experiment belongs to a special category, and while it has its limitations it also possesses distinct excellences.

We may refer here to Wordsworth's comments on dramatic works, theatrical productions and the taste of the contemporary audience. He was an ardent admirer of Shakespeare, and of the ancient Greek tragedians — Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. He liked the dramatic works of Webster and Jacob Fletcher. He did not like the "stupid German Tragedies" — particularly of Kotzebue. His comments on Monk Lewis's Castle Spectre are significant: "The Castle Spectre is a Spectre indeed. Clothed with the flesh and blood ...".
His discussion in some detail of Barry Cornwall’s *Miranda* shows that he could be sympathetic where sympathy was due. He commented on "a little degradation of character, for a more dramatic turn of plot in Lamb’s *The Wife’s Trial*." His enthusiasm for Shelley’s *The Cenci* was rather graciously generous as he called it "the greatest tragedy of the age." Wordsworth’s interest in theatrical performances remained undiminished throughout his life, and even in 1830 we find the poet welcoming Leigh Hunt’s play *The Legend of Florence*.

Wordsworth’s criticism of the contemporary audience was, however, severe; he felt that the audience were ill-equipped and deluded by cheap tragedies and sensational melodrama, and that public applause or censure could hardly be taken as a standard of reference. Consider, in this connection, his comments on the receptivity of the audience and their determining influence — the effect is often crippling — on dramatic writings and productions:

... if he write for the stage, he must adapt himself to the taste of the audience, or they will not endure him; accordingly the mighty genius of Shakespeare was listened to. The people were delighted; but I am not sufficiently versed in stage antiquities to determine whether they did not flock as eagerly to the representation of many pieces of contemporary Authors, wholly undeserving to appear upon the same boards. Had there been a formal contest for superiority among
dramatic writers, that Shakespeare, like his predecessors Sophocles and Euripides, would have often been subject to the mortification of seeing the prize adjudged to sorry competitors, becomes too probable, when we reflect that the admirers of Settle and Shadwell were, in a later age as numerous, and reckoned as respectable in point of talent, as those of Dryden. At all events, that Shakespeare stooped to accommodate himself to the most striking proofs of his almost omnipotent genius is that he could turn to such glorious purpose those materials which the prepossessions of the age compelled him to make use of. Yet even this marvellous skill appears not to have been enough to prevent his rivals from having some advantage over him in public estimation ...

This criticism of the taste of the audience — more specifically of the "groundlings" — may seem unkind, but we must recognize the context that provoked such animadversions. Wordsworth, it is true, misses the positive role of the audience — Shakespeare's greatness as a playwright lies in this that while he pleased his hearers and was considerably influenced by them, he also remoulded their sensibility and taste, — but he shows a clear understanding of the requisites of dramatic art. A dramatist must have an insight into the workings of human minds and must be able to relate the world
of events to this inner reality. The question whether and how far the "objective correlative" is adequate in Wordsworth's play is to be discussed later, but the poet's prose writings, especially his prefaces and his notes and comments on his poems, amply bear testimony to his interest in the workings of human minds. The Preface to The Borderers, the discussions on human nature in his Essay Upon Epitaphs, his observations in Isabella-Fenwick Notes on the heroine of The White Dove point out that despite his inwardliness, he had a sense of drama and an understanding of the complex human motivations.

Dramatic speech, as T.S. Eliot reminds us, is different from poetic speech, and there is some truth in the statement that the plays of the Romantic poets show a lyrical effusion that spoils the dramatic effect. Wordsworth's drama, too, suffers from this deficiency, but we also note his clear recognition of the vitality of spoken speech. As a poet his avowed purpose was "to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them throughout as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men". The "dramatic parts of composition", Wordsworth observes, "are defective, in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature, and are coloured by a diction of the Poet's own, either peculiar to him as an individual Poet or belonging simply to Poets in general ...". The relevance of Wordsworth's observation becomes apparent when we remember the contemporary dramatic practice and the currency of rhetorical bombast. While a dramatist must avoid lyrical
effusions, he must also have a capacity for detachment, for objectivity or depersonalisation, and we may refer, in this connection, to a pertinent statement of Wordsworth:

The Dramatic, — consisting of Tragedy, Historic Drama, Comedy, and Masque, in which the Poet does not appear at all in his own person, and where the whole action is carried on by speech and dialogue of the agents; music being admitted only incidentally and rarely.

We may pose here a relevant question: How far has Wordsworth been able to dramatise his spiritual experiences and the experiences of rustic people in his poems? In the Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth attempts a "natural delineation of human characters" and a study of "the essential passions" of the heart. The delineation is achieved by non-narrative means, for his technique is to allow the "language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society" to create his personae for him. Actually, Wordsworth was attracted to the ballad because of its closeness to life. It is true that Wordsworth's rustic characters are idealised portraits, and he often attributes his own sentiments to his characters; but these poems are an attempt on the part of a lyric poet — temperamentally a poet of calm contemplation — to enter sympathetically into other selves and render their passions and feelings. Several of Wordsworth's poems have dramatic potential — consider, for
instance, Vaunbracour and Julia and Laodamia. The suspense and surprises in the narrative of Laodamia are gripping, and the situations might form episodes in a short play. In the Preface to The Excursion the poet states that "something of a dramatic form" has been adopted in the poem. In many of his narrative poems dialogues are put into effective use. When Coleridge referred to some poems of Wordsworth "in which the author is more or less dramatic", he meant those poems in which a character has a volition of its own and we do not feel the intrusion of the poet's personality. In this sense Resolution and Independence (originally named The Leech-Gatherer) may be called a dramatic poem. There is a kind of confrontation scene—a situation in which the character, an old man, appears ("I saw a Man before me unawares: / The oldest Man he seem'd that ever wore grey hairs"). The Leech-Gatherer speaks only a few words and his conversation is mostly reported; but despite this absence of direct speech, we perceive the distinctiveness of his identity:

The old Man still stood talking by my side;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
Or like a man from some far region sent,
To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.

(xvi)
In his reflective and autobiographical poems, Wordsworth objectifies his feelings by creating an imaginary or partly imaginary figure. The Wanderer in The Excursion (Book I) is certainly a distinct personality, retaining the moral authority, despite the presence of the first person. From time to time, tiny details delicately worked into the narrative confirm the distance already established between the Wanderer and the narrator: consider, for instance, lines 469-70 ("I see around me here/Things which you cannot see"), and lines 535-36 ("Not twenty years age, but you I think / Can scarcely bear it now in mind"). We note that these details have a different function from those which serve in the opening section of the poem to differentiate the Wanderer from Wordsworth himself. The Wanderer has a real dramatic presence, created out of Wordsworth's own self-awareness, hence different from the more thoroughly objective Leech-Gatherer. Carlos Baker has drawn our attention to the technique of double exposure, an odd co-presence in the mind of the then and now, which gives a dramatic life to some of Wordsworth's reflective lyrics:

"Because he is interested in the stages of growth, he often juxtaposes widely separated periods of time in such a time that we are made dramatically conscious of the degree of growth that has taken place between Stage One and Stage Two". Similarly, in Wordsworth's The Reverie of Poor Susan, Susan's reverie in a poverty-stricken area of London, the film of memory still holding the impression of her happy childhood spent in the "green pastures" of her village, juxtaposes the suffocating present and the free...
past. In Tintern Abbey the poet sees in the light of Dorothy's eyes "what I was once". The mental landscape becomes so vivid that the gap of five years brings consolation amidst a sense of loss. Thus the two images — one inward and the other external — combine to dramatise the maturity and wisdom he gains in the intervening period. However, the word "dramatic" has a very limited relevance in respect of Wordsworth's poems. He is a contemplative poet and his ideas have the vitality of sensation; but there is no clash of ideas, nor any tense situations and tragic conflicts with the same intensity as we find in drama. There is no real dramatic progression in his "recollections". There are moments of stillness and serene contemplation, but there is a want of inward debate. There are vivid visual images, but visualisation is only one constituent in the dramatic mode. And in reviewing Wordsworth's dramatic work, The Borderers, we must bear in mind the distinctiveness of Wordsworth's poetic genius. His poetry shows a keen observation of external reality, but as Hazlitt noted in his review of The Excursion, the poet lived "in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought". 35

III

The Borderers, Wordsworth's single dramatic work, ("A Somersetshire Tragedy", is a poem 36) was first published in 1842,
nearly fifty years after its composition. Wordsworth was only twenty-six when he wrote the play. Wordsworth says, "It was composed at Racedown in Dorsetshire during the latter part of the year '95, and in the course of the following year". 37 J.R. Mac Gillivray, however, thinks that Wordsworth could not possibly begin it before March 7, 1796, that the letter in which the poet tells Wrangham that the first draft of the play is nearly finished must have been written "some time between the beginning of December 1796 and the end of February 1797". 38 Hence the composition would have begun not before October 24, when Dorothy reported that her brother was "now ardent in the composition of a tragedy". 39

The play, it is true, has not been ignored by Wordsworth scholars. Yet the fact remains that this drama, notable also as Wordsworth's first long attempt at blank verse, has not received the attention it deserves, although it received sincere praise from the greatest living critic of the time. Coleridge wrote to Cottle:

I speak with heart-felt sincerity and I think unblinded judgment, when I tell you that I feel a little man by his side ... His drama is absolutely wonderful ... There are in the piece those profound touches of the human heart which I find three or four times in The Robbers of Schiller, and often in Shakespeare, but in Wordsworth there are no inequalities. 40
Most other critics, however, stigmatize the play as unhealthy. Swinburne, for instance, sees in the play "morbid and monstrous extravagance of horrible impossibility" and Garrod condemns "the morbid tortuosity, the unnatural perversion" of its plot. Helen Darbishire echoes as late as 1953 the same view when she writes that The Borderers is an "unstageable drama of morbid psychology". Of course, Ernest de Selincourt, O. J. Campbell and P. Mueschke and a few others have recognized the psychological skill and the originality in the conception of the character of Oswald. The poetic merits of many passages have been admired by Mary Moorman in her biography of the poet. G. Wilson Knight admiringly points out the Christian symbolism and the metaphysical formulation in the play. But the prevailing view is that the drama is important merely as a document which records Wordsworth's moral crisis at a particular period. As a play it is regarded as a dismal failure: it is "melodramatic", "a turgid closet drama", "the worst of Shakespearean imitations", the characters merely acting as the poet's spokesmen delivering some long, tiring, philosophical speeches. The play, several critics think, is "irksome", "unreadable", and "unintelligible". Allardyce Nicoll finds only didacticism and the German influence in The Borderers and Remorse. H. W. Garrod approvingly quotes Swinburne's scathing criticism, and E. de Selincourt refers to the "ingenious improbable story". In the main, twentieth-century critics confirm Swinburne's opinion.
censure of "morbidity" involves a moral problem; but his comment on the "monstrous extravagance of horrible impossibility" involves the question of verisimilitude. The array of hostile critical opinions is indeed forbidding, and a revaluation of the play demands a healthy distrust of received opinions and "second intentions" and an unprejudiced understanding of the author's intention.

That Wordsworth's intention is to focus attention on a moral problem is evident from the setting. He places his characters in a situation in which the absence of established order affords freedom of choice and demands a rational exercise of this freedom. Marmaduke, young and full of idealism, is the leader of a philanthropic band of former crusaders. He inspires his band to a life of active benevolence so that "aged men have blessed their steps" and "the fatherless" retired "for shelter to their banners". Oswald, who inevitably reminds us of Iago, joins the band, raising apprehension, for he has been able to win the confidence of their "open-hearted leader". Oswald has had a dark past. As a young man he won the confidence of a captain in Syria whose daughter made him promise never to desert her father. The crew, however, hated their captain and in order to get rid of him deceived Oswald into believing that the captain had designs on his honour. Oswald left the captain on an island to starve and die. Later on, of course, Oswald realizes his mistake and is full of remorse. But, strangely enough, this incident makes him accept a philosophy that
recognizes only private reason as the sole authority for all action and regards all human feelings as weakness. Proud and energetic, Oswald seeks to give a practical shape to his newly acquired philosophy, and chooses Marmaduke for his experiment. Marmaduke is in love with the beautiful and innocent Idonea, the only daughter of Herbert, old, blind and bereft of his barony. Oswald bribes a beggar woman to tell a lie that Idonea is bought by Herbert who is "a scoundrel" in spite of all his saintly pretension. She also informs Marmaduke that Herbert wants to sell Idonea to Lord Clifford, a "cold voluptuary", for gaining his support for the barony of which he is not the rightful claimer. Shrewd and scheming, Oswald arranges an interview between Marmaduke and the beggar woman and Marmaduke believes the whole cooked up story. Again, when Marmaduke is informed that Idonea is a willing agent in this sinful transaction, he feels lost and heart-broken. Herbert, separated from his daughter, is led to a lonely moor by Oswald, and Marmaduke feels it his moral duty to get rid of such a cruel, unscrupulous man. He leaves the old man on a desolate moor, and his part in the crime amounts to murder.

Marmaduke is now assailed by moral and emotional conflicts. Herbert's appeals sound like the height of hypocrisy, and sympathy for Herbert's utter helplessness seems mere weakness. And yet Marmaduke's own moral dubieties haunt his consciousness. Oswald at this stage relates his own experience. Marmaduke feels sympathy for Oswald and condemns the crew who had deceived him. But when Oswald asks him "to join in thanks for their blind
services" (iv. 1843) and urges him to be free from the "soft chain" of love, pity and remorse and join the "fellow-labourers" to "enlarge man's intellectual empire" (iv. 1855-56), Marmaduke instinctively shrinks. Still further shock is waiting for him. "The mask which for a season I have stooped to wear must be cast off", Oswald says (iv. 1860-64) and reveals that Herbert is innocent. "You have struck home, / With a few drops of blood cut short the business ; / Therein for ever you must yield to me" (iv. 1867-69). Marmaduke's heart almost breaks; he goes out to find out Herbert, dead or alive, and learns that the innocent old man is dead. The tragic news is broken to Idonea by Marmaduke himself. The horrified beggar woman confesses her foul role to the band. Oswald, haughty and unrepentant up to the end, is killed by Marmaduke's troops. Leaving Idonea to the care of friendly people, Marmaduke leaves his band and goes out

To wander on —

A man by pain and thought compelled to live,
Yet loathing life — till anger is appeased
In Heaven, and Mercy gives me leave to die.

(v. 2350-53)

If tragedy is a moral action, the crisis or the moment of critical choice will be the preeminently tragic moment. In Wordsworth's play, we note two peaks or centres of tension. Marmaduke's moral conflict before he takes his final decision in regard to Herbert is pronounced:
Murder — perhaps asleep, blind, old, alone,
Betrayed, in darkness! Here to strike the blow —
Away! away! (II. 901-2)

These drowsy shiverings,
This mortal stupor which is creeping over me
What do they mean? were this my single body
Opposed to armies, not a nerve would tremble:
Why do I tremble now? — (II. 777-80)

I do believe he weeps — I could weep too —
There is a vein of her voice that runs through his:
(III. 1319-20)

The name of daughter in his mouth, he prays!
With nerves so steady, that the very flies
Sit unmolested on his staff.
(III. 1377-79)

The hero's range of choice becomes increasingly restricted.
Marmaduke commits the crime after a fight with his inner self.
He is no longer free to do what he once could have. When Othello, for instance, reaches his last scene, he has passed beyond the crisis in his purposive life and has been forever deflected from the pilgrimage which once enchanted Desdemona. The mystery, in both the cases of Othello and Marmaduke, is that so great a man should have committed so grievous a crime. W. B. Yeats says that
the denouement of tragedy should carry us "beyond time and persons to where passion, living through its thousand purgatorial years, as in the wink of an eye, becomes wisdom ...".\textsuperscript{53} A reference to Freud may also be relevant here. He believes that every poet confirms the idea that "all life must die from internal causes ... If man must himself die, after first losing his most beloved ones by death, he would prefer that his life be forfeit to an irrevocable law of nature, the sublime \textit{Ananke}, than to a mere accident which perhaps could have been in some way avoided."\textsuperscript{54} Marmaduke's final journey is purgatorial, but in a sense he too has reached the "still centre", the moment of supreme quietude and surrender. But he also leaves the impression of a tortured idealist voyaging "through words and things a dim perilous way". The last speech of Marmude shows a resolution of tension, a serenity in which all disagreeables evaporate, and yet anguish and despair persist.

The plot as such, if compared with Elizabethan revenge plays, full of blood and thunder, and German melodrama, would not look so "monstrous" as Swinburne thinks it to be. We leave aside here the question whether the fable adequately conveys the moral issue that is Wordsworth's chief concern in the play. The point is that this moral issue redeems the play from conventional melodrama, and what is important to note is that Wordsworth, while using the elements of melodrama, gives these materials a new spiritual dimension. A damsel in distress, a wily villain, the suffering of the innocent, the final exposure and punishment
of the villain — all these make their appearance in Wordsworth's play, but the final effect is different. Wordsworth also makes an effective use of the usual mechanical devices. Concealments, accidents, coincidences characterised the average melodrama of the period, and the world Marmaduke faces is full of such melodramatic absurdities where situation changes with strange suddenness and where a man is not what he seems. However, what happens in Wordsworth's play is that these melodramatic absurdities deepen Marmaduke's moral dilemma and he is perplexed by the contrast between appearance and reality. Marmaduke has to be sure of the truth of appearance before making his choice. The apparent reality is contradictory and bewildering. Herbert looks respectable and honest, but he has a dark past. Idonea seems innocent, but she seems to be a willing agent to a sordid bargain. Is there anything to disbelieve the beggar woman's version? Has he any reason to ignore or disbelieve Oswald's allegations against Herbert? Has not Marmaduke overheard the conspiracy between Herbert and Clifford to send the girl to the "abhored den of brutish vice"? In the course of the play Marmaduke discovers that Herbert is a noble sufferer instead of being an incarnation of evil; Oswald, previously taken to be a model of heroic spirit, turns out to be a wicked criminal. These bewildering appearances are important elements in the structure of the play. In the second scene of Act I we note that Herbert rejects Marmaduke as not deserving his daughter's
love and calls him a worthless bandit. "I wot not", Idonea says despairingly, "what 'ill tongue had wronged him with you."

Herbert seems even spiritually blind. Evil puts on the appearance of goodness, and good seems evil. This transposition of values heightens the spiritual problem, and we see how blind love falls into the trap of the far-sighted intellectualized evil symbolized in the person of Oswald. In the first scene of Act II we find Oswald deceiving Marmaduke by "a few swelling phrases, and flash of truth, enough to dazzle and to blind". Oswald, like a supreme artist, throws out innuendoes and ironical statements and watches the effect: "the thing stands clear of mystery", "he knows your eye will search his heart". Marmaduke can only say, "it could not be", but the next moment he accepts the whole bluff (I, iv). Oswald, it should also be noted, is not an ordinary wily villain that abounds in conventional melodrama. He is the spokesman of a philosophy, and his criminal design is part of his experiment with truth, however monstrous the experiment may be. He is committed to a way of life released from the chain of affections, and he seeks to convert Marmaduke to his philosophy. This complicates our evaluation of his true character. His motive is not mere hatred and jealousy, and he is not merely a disillusioned intellectual. The fact is that Wordsworth had, as De Selincourt observes, a subtler conception of Oswald's character, but he lacked the experience of a consummate artist to delineate the complexity. The ambiguity in Oswald's character has led Garrod to doubt whether "the term villain does not beg the question!" The character is not
fully realized, but however inadequate the objectification may be, Wordsworth's concern with certain fundamental ethical questions is unmistakable.

While Wordsworth uses the conventional devices of melodrama to heighten the moral perplexity of his hero, he also makes effective use of the Gothic setting. J.H. Smith persuasively suggests that *The Borderers* shows the effect of Wordsworth's study of *Observations* (1786) by William Gilpin, a specialist in scenery and ruins. (Wordsworth in a letter dated March 21, 1796 asks Mathews to return his copies of two of Gilpin's tours.) Torrent, dark night and elemental tumult, ruined castle, dark dungeons, dreadful deeds, romantic bandits and damsels in distress, the terror-motif — these are common features in Wordsworth's play and Gilpin's *Observations*. The scene of the ruined castle in Act II of *The Borderers* deserves mention in this connection. (Here we may in passing refer to the fragment, *Gothic Tale.*) The particular setting and the Brougham castle in the vicinity of Penrith are similar in many respects. Each is associated with the name of Clifford and each has an accessible dungeon. Of course, Wordsworth may have gone to other sources for these effects. The combination of wild mountainous scenery and brigands recurs in contemporary romances. Wordsworth may have read that appendage to Ossian known as *The Six Bards* and such popular romantic novels as Mrs. Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest* and Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. Wordsworth may also have drawn on local history and legends.
Lord Clifford "that cold voluptuary" (I, 289), holds "infernal orgies" (II, 660) in his "shattered castle" (Ibid.). Though unseen, he serves as a link to this Gothic convention. The atmospheric effect is also to be noted:

A desolate prospect — a ridge of rocks — a chapel on the summit of one — Moon behind the rocks — night stormy — irregular sound of a bell — Herbert enters exhausted (Act IV).

The reign of Henry III, the Robinhood-like hero, Scottish marauders looted of their spoils, the romantic borders — all these factors combine to make an ideal medieval setting. As the minor romantic writers had to satisfy the contemporary tastes, the middle ages had naturally come back into fashion. The success of Home's Douglas (1756) with a border as a backdrop had set the vogue, though there is no evidence that Wordsworth was directly indebted to this play. "Imaginative literature", says G. Wilson Knight, "is now fascinated by what has come to be known as the 'Gothic'. Respect for ancient Greece and Rome gives way, following the Faust myth, to the claims of medievalism as a source of fear and insight, the pressure of Augustan discipline is relaxed and power pours in from the Grotesque." Gothic elements may perhaps be traced in some ancient eastern secret rituals and heretical doctrines which combining with Faustian magic and devilry produced an effect of both fascination and terror. Reference may also be made here to Schiller's Die-Raubers (1781), and M.G.Lewis' The Castle Spectre (1797) and Ambrosio or The Monk (1796).
There were other sources too, "mine of wild yet terrific mythology", as De Selincourt points out. The young Wordsworth was fascinated by the elements of melancholy, mystery and terror in the popular western and oriental legends as found in the tales of Arabian Nights, Percy's translations of Norse poetry, Bishop Hurd's Essays on Chivalry and Romance, Mrs Barbauld's essay On the Pleasures derived from objects of terror, and a fragmentary romantic tale of horror, Sir Bertrand (containing details similar to some found in The Vale of Esthwaite), Beattie's Minstrel (its hero Edwin resembled, as Wordsworth's sister wrote to a friend, what young William was like). Wordsworth's debt to all these works and to the Gothic tradition is unmistakable, but he was not interested in Gothic sensationalism — "to freeze the blood I have no ready arts"; (Heart-Leap Well, II, 98). The Gothic setting served for him an appropriate vehicle to convey the mystery and potency of evil, and, as G. Wilson Knight says, in Wordsworth's play "the fascination of evil is given a metaphysical formulation". The Borderers is not a Gothic play though it does traffic with some Gothic appurtenances.

Though the influence of German literature on Wordsworth was not very deep, he, too, like most of his great contemporaries, might have fallen to the spell of Schiller's *The Robbers* (Wordsworth probably knew Schiller's *Die Rauber* through his reading of A.F. Tytler's translation, second edition of 1795. Unfortunately, we have no record of Wordsworth's immediate impressions.) But the influence of this German play on *The Borderers* is of a general nature. The idealist bandit leader Marmaduke recalls Karl Moor; Oswald's character and situation reminds us of Frantz Moor and Spiegelberg. Again, there are some particulars in which we may discover a diluted savour of Schiller. Wordsworth's debt to Schiller may not have been large, but we note an identity of approach in relation to the moral problem that disturbs the protagonists of the two plays. Karl Moor in Schiller's play finally discovers that the end is determined by the means: "Oh! fool that I was, to fancy that I could amend the world by misdeeds and maintain law by lawlessness!"

Both Karl Moor and Marmaduke recognise the enormity of their crimes and choose their own modes of atonement: Marmaduke becomes a Wanderer seeking expiation and Karl Moor proposes to offer up his own life to help a poor day labourer with eleven children.

IV

The action of the drama takes place on the borders of England and Scotland in the reign of Henry III. Men act on their
own impulses, there being no established law and government, and the situation is reminiscent of the anarchy unleashed by the French Revolution. The reason why Wordsworth chose the thirteenth century for his setting is partly explained by restrictive regulations: the "Seditious Meetings Act" and the "Treasonable Practices Act" of October, 1795 would not have encouraged an interest in contemporary life. Wordsworth makes clear the limited use he makes of the historical past in his play:

As to the scene and period of action, little more was required for my purpose than the absence of established Law and Government; so that the agents might be at liberty to act on their own impulses --- nevertheless I do remember that, having a wish to colour the manners in some degree from local history, more, my knowledge enabled me to do, I read Redpath's History of the Borderers...

The anarchic state of the border is exploited by Wordsworth to render a perplexing moral dilemma, and the moral issues that disturbed Wordsworth and that he sought to embody in his play may be traced to three things: the poet's disillusionment with the French Revolution, the impact of Godwin's Political Justice, and his sense of guilt and remorse arising out of his desertion of Annette Vallon. "During my long residence in France while the revolution was rapidly advancing to its extreme of wickedness",
Wordsworth writes, "I had frequent opportunities of being an eye-witness of this process — "the hardening of the heart" — and it was while that knowledge was fresh upon my memory, that the Tragedy of 'The Borderers' was composed." Wordsworth witnessed the end of monarchy in France and the establishment of the Republic. At first, to a young man with a fiery humanitarian zeal "Bliss was it in that down to be alive". From Paris he went to Blois where two significant things happened. First, Michael-truand Beaupuuy, a humanitarian idealist, converted him to the Republican creed, and secondly, the poet happened to fall in love with Marie-Anne, better known as Annette Vallon, a French girl, his senior by four years, who bore him a daughter, Anne Caroline. It has been suggested that Wordsworth's immediate aesthetic impulse to write a Tragic drama may be remorse at his abandonment of Annette Vallon, but this has been questioned by several critics, including De Selincourt. When Wordsworth returned to Paris in October he was about to be involved with the Girondins, but financial trouble forced him to go back to England. Thus he narrowly escaped execution. For the next two years Wordsworth wandered about in the unhappiest state of mind. Shocked by the excesses of September massacres, "The Great Terror" (initiated by his one-time idol Maximilian Robespierre, who was at first regarded by the Romantics as a champion of social revolution), the humanitarian poet was now a disillusioned man.
In *The Prelude* (Book X), Wordsworth gives us an account of this period of his life, of his dreariness and despair and purposelessness:

... I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
Yielded up moral questions in despair,...

(From *The Prelude* (1805), X, 898-901)

Wordsworth suffers a conflict akin to Marmaduke's, and the poet's moral crisis resembles the hero's plight. The terror described in the play resembles the picture provided in the tenth book of *The Prelude* in the lines describing Paris during the Revolution in 1792. Paris appeared

... a place of fear
Unfit for the repose which night requires
Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam.

(The Preludes, X, 80-82, 1805 text)

The "tigers' roam in the defenceless wood of *The Borderers* also. "The world is poisoned at the heart"(II. 1035), Marmaduke says, and his mental state is a fitting analogue of the poet's own. As Wordsworth describes in *The Prelude*, he sought refuge in abstract thought: analysis became his sole guide, and this arid cerebration destroyed not merely the moral law within him but
also the capacity for feeling. The result was a total loss of conviction, the loss of the power to discriminate between good and evil (The Prelude, X, 889-901, 1805 text). In this sense, Marmaduke and Oswald represent two aspects of Wordsworth's personality, and here we also note the impact of Godwinism. Godwin, in his Political Justice, formulated what may be called a doctrine of anarchism. The doctrine is based on certain propositions — that all men are equal, that man is perfectible, that 'reason' has unlimited power over emotion, and that man should be ultimately guided by pure reason. He hated all man-made institutions which, according to him, were at the root of all injustice. Almost all Wordsworth critics agree that The Borderers illustrates the Godwinian emphasis on reason as the sole authority and the guide to human action. Wordsworth, it may be noted, outgrew the Godwinian influence at the time he wrote the play, and the play is in a sense a refutation of Godwinism. In his Preface to the play Wordsworth analyses the character of 'a young man of great intellectual powers' who flouts conventional morality. We know that Wordsworth found in Paris in 1793 a situation in which piety, local custom and moral habits were thrown away, and the moral choice that such freedom involves is made the central issue in his play. Opportunities of being noble or ignoble are at the disposal of men. This state is not found in a more stable society. Violence and terror may be dangerous, but they are exciting to the nature of man. Of this Godwin says:
All is here, like the society in which it exists, impatient and headlong. Mind will frequently burst forth, but its appearance will be like coruscations of the meteor, not like the mild and equable illumination of the sun.71

This reminds us of Hegel's argument that freedom is terror.72 In connection with the moral issues raised by the Revolution, Wordsworth observes:

The study of human nature suggests this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart ... During my long residence in France I had frequent opportunities of being an eye-witness of this process, and it was while that knowledge was fresh upon my memory, that the Tragedy of 'The Borderers' was composed.73

While critics agree that Wordsworth's play shows the impact of Godwinism, the extent of Godwin's influence has been debated and the question has also been raised whether Wordsworth distorts the Godwinian doctrine. R. D. Havens thinks that the evidence of Godwin's influence on Wordsworth is slight, and that much of what is usually termed Godwinism is likely to have
become familiar to him in France or in England before he read Godwin's book. There are scholars like Legouix who hold that the play is less an exposition of Godwinian ideas than a reaction against them and that the play records a conflict between Godwinism and personal experience. Wordsworth's chief purpose is to exhibit the dangers of trusting to syllogistic reasoning when one has committed a crime. The discovery of the prefatory essay in 1934 has clearly brought to light Wordsworth's intention: he states that The Borderers was written to preserve in memory those transitions in character which he had witnessed during his residence in France. The play is set in a region and a time which leave the characters free from all social influences and restraints. They are free agents who are at liberty to do good or evil. What is, however, disturbing is the potency of evil, and this the play illustrates with all its naked horror. The Romantics believed, as Carl Woodring argues, not so much in natural goodness as in the mysterious and infinite capacity of the human individual for good or evil, and Wordsworth's play exhibits this potentiality for evil as well as for good. The point is not, as Marmaduke says, that the world is poisoned at the core. Marmaduke, Eldred, Herbert and Idonea, all are virtuous. But, in spite of such abundance of virtue, one evil man is able to turn noble altruists into murderers. This idea Wordsworth could derive from the history of the French Revolution alone without consulting Political Justice. William Godwin's doctrine did not,
however, exclude "benevolence" (incidentally we may remember Oswald's elucidatory statement meant for Marmaduke: "Benevolence, that has not heart to use / The wholesome ministry of pain and evil, / Becomes at last weak and contemptible." II. 618-20), if based on rational grounds, neither did it encourage the promotion of self-interest. Oswald is ruthless as, in the words of Mary Moorman, he "repudiates conscientious scruples, pity, remorse and acts as circumstances and 'reason' only direct." Again, Godwin's emphasis on reason as a rule of conduct is aimed at promoting public good, while Oswald's reasoning and distrust of affections turn him into a self-centred egotist. Godwin, it is true, underestimates the value of the emotions and favours complete subjection to reason, but Oswald cannot be regarded as a "Godwinian apologist" in the full sense of the term. Whether the play is a refutation of Godwinian doctrine or not (Garrod calls Wordsworth of this period an "out and out Godwinian"), it shows a distrust of abstract reasoning, and Wordsworth points out the dangerous use which may be made of reason to justify crime. However, this mistrust of abstract speculation should not be taken as a repudiation of reason. Coleridge, following Kant, draws a distinction between the "higher" reason and understanding, and the distinction is relevant in the context of the play. Oswald's reasoning is specious, and Marmaduke yields not so much to rationalism as to "a few swelling phrases, and a flash of truth, enough to dazzle and to blind". Wordsworth, it is true, draws
on his experiences of the French Revolution in his portrayal of evil, but the real source of evil, as the play exhibits, is in the individual soul rather than in the social system, and Marmaduke seeks refuge neither in reason nor in social philanthropic action, but in solitude, in total withdrawal from action. The play thus shifts the focus from the social and political arena to the individual soul. Action, however just and noble, could lead to consequences far different from those intended, and since in action there is danger, the only escape lies in withdrawal from the active world to a life of contemplation. And Marmaduke withdraws from the world of men and action into the seclusion of quietude.

Deep, deep and vast, vast beyond human thought,
Yet calm — I could believe that there was here
The only quiet heart on earth.

(III. 1466-68)

"Solitude! — / The Eagle lives in Solitude" (III. 1515-16), says Oswald, but his alienation springs from cold inhumanity. Marmaduke rejects reason and action and retires from the world of men; but he bears the burden of sorrow and penitence. The final impression is tragic but not pessimistic, and while the play exhibits the dreadful power of evil, it also shows the nobility and grandeur of the human soul. But, as Selincourt pertinently observes, though Wordsworth exposes the fallacies of Godwin in *The Borderers*, he has found no satisfying creed to
take its place. Marmaduke, in his perplexity, yields up moral questions in despair, but his withdrawal does not constitute any positive response to the riddle of existence. The unresolved questions, however, deepen the tragic mystery. A work of tragedy does not offer positive solutions or answers; it raises questions, and while it achieves a kind of reconciliation, its effect is also disturbing. And herein lies the special significance of Wordsworth's play. It confronts the reader with several disturbing questions. Should reason be the sole rule of conduct? How are we to explain the paradox that reason and nobly motivated action lead to evil consequences? Is it true that remorse and wisdom do not go together? Are pity, compassion and remorse merely chains of bondage, and should a heroic soul dispense with such "soft" affections? Can murder and violence be justified by the end? The last question involves a fundamental ethical problem: What is the relation of means to ends in moral action? Roger Sharrock has drawn our attention to this aspect of the problem in his illuminating paper "The Borderers: Wordsworth on the Moral Frontier."

How far can the supremely good and proposed by the reformer or revolutionary be pursued by means that are in themselves evil, or in short, can individual human life or happiness be sacrificed for a larger social good, or for another, more valuable human life? Or if there is indeed a supreme social good, is it not logical for any number of individual lives to be sacrificed in its furtherance?
That heinous crimes may be committed in the name of noble motives was personally witnessed by Wordsworth as he observed the different phases of the French Revolution.

V

Coleridge believed that "no man was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher", and he maintained that "Wordsworth possessed more of the genius of a great philosophical poet than any man I ever knew". Wordsworth was not a philosopher in the technical sense of the term; but he felt the pressure of "the burthen of the mystery", of "the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world", and although The Borderers is the work of a prentice, the vexed questionings it raises — Wilson Knight's phrase "metaphysical formulation" is relevant here — place it in a distinct category. However, The Borderers is a play, not a philosophical poem, and it is pertinent to ask how far Wordsworth succeeds in achieving the necessary dramatic progression and movement and in embodying his ideas in concrete situations and characters. In his notes to the play (1842) Wordsworth says that the play was written "without any view to its exhibition upon the stage", and that he had no hope that it would be accepted. The Covent Garden Theatre rejected it when it was offered for performance by the good offices of Coleridge's Nether Stowey circle, and Wordsworth remarks in
his notes that he "incurred no disappointment when the piece was
judiciously returned as not calculated for the stage".\textsuperscript{93} "If
ever", Wordsworth wrote to James Tobin in March, 1798, "I attempt
another drama, it shall be written either purposely for the closet,
or purposely for the stage. There is no middle way".\textsuperscript{94} The Borderers
was evidently meant for the closet; but even a "closet" drama is
enacted — it is enacted in the theatre of the mind, — and while
we should recognize the distinctiveness of Wordsworth's play, it
is necessary to examine how far it fulfills the basic requirements
of a successful dramatic composition.

Wordsworth's play inevitably brings to mind Shakespeare's
tragedies. De Selincourt thinks that it owes far more to Othello
than to any other influence outside the poet's own experience,\textsuperscript{95}
and John Jones observes that what caused Coleridge to "overpraise"
The Borderers — we have already noted that to Coleridge it
seemed "absolutely wonderful" — "is its connection with Othello,
Macbeth, and King Lear".\textsuperscript{96} C.J. Smith works out in considerable
detail the Shakespearian reminiscences, including verbal echoes.\textsuperscript{97}
The correspondences between Iago and Oswald are clear; like Iago,
Oswald "nourishes a contempt for mankind"; he is drawn "passionless
and cynically regardant" and his character is a study in "the
apparently motiveless actions of bad men" (Wordsworth's phrase
in the Preface). Oswald's perseverance in crime recalls Macbeth's
involvement in murderous actions as a relief from guilty thoughts.
His incitement to murder is heavy with Macbeth, and Marmaduke,
recalling Macbeth again, is unable to kill Herbert because he resembles Idonea in his sleep. The lines referring to blood and bloody hands (in the 1797 version) have a distinctly Shakespearian ring: "In the torrent hard by there is water enough to wash away all the blood in the universe ..." (II. 958-9)

Here is my hand — The hue of a pure lily,
A Lady hand — none of your crimson spots.

(V. 2243-4)

The presence of Lear, John Jones says, is more pervasive. Herbert is "meek and patient, feeble, old and blind", and like Lear, he is dispossessed and exposed in utter helplessness. Jones points to the savagery of setting in the two plays, to the background of desolation, storm, and human violence, and shows how Wordsworth's play recovers something of Lear's "giant perplexity in the face of the primary forms of things." Jones, however, thinks that The Borderers merely presents "the externals of Shakespearean tragedy", that we do not feel in Wordsworth's play the pressure of the "terrible weight" of suffering that gives veracity to Shakespeare's tragic vision.

Jones's comment on the deficiency in Wordsworth's play involves the question of dramatic objectification. Jones speaks of Wordsworth's "reckless inattention to coherence of plot and consistency of character"; and before we examine these two aspects, it may be useful to discuss how far Wordsworth achieves
dramatic progression and concreteness. Comparing Coleridge's Remorse with Wordsworth's play, R.M. Fletcher says that The Borderers is too "static" for theatrical production. A drama of ideas cannot be expected to have a quickened pace, and Wordsworth had a positive aversion to melodramatic suspense; but is Wordsworth's play too halting for aesthetic enjoyment?

The setting of the opening scene is a road in a wood where two of the band of the Borderers, Wallace and Lacy prepare to take their post "to strip the Scottish Foray of their spoil". Through the servant Wilfred we come to know immediately after that "Nobody loves this Oswald". A few minutes later enter Marmaduke and Oswald. In answer to Marmaduke's question, "The wild rose and the poppy, and the shade: which is your favourite Oswald?", Oswald answers significantly, "that which, while it is strong to destroy, is also strong to heal". Oswald now starts poisoning Marmaduke's ear against Herbert and Idonea and when Marmaduke decides that "this day will suffice to end her wrongs" the wily villain says warily: "But if the blind man's tale should yet be true?" We know in this scene how blind Herbert dotes on his daughter ("My dear, my only child"). We also know how Idonea admires Marmaduke: "All gentleness and love... Is he not strong? Is he not valiant?" Herbert's disapproval of her choice is apparent: "Thou wouldest be leaning on a broken reed — this Marmaduke". "That cold voluptuary villain Clifford" is also introduced indirectly. The opening scene thus puts the audience or the readers in possession of almost all the information.
necessary to understand the plot. The second and third scenes help in developing the plot and are devoted to further exposition. We meet the hero and the villain and learn of the other characters — the girl, her father and the beggar woman. The most important part of the exposition is the presentation of the central problem: Has Oswald any plan to reenact his own past through Marmaduke? (Oswald's subsequent statement in Act IV is pertinent: "Know then that I was urged, / ... was driven, / To seek for sympathy, because I saw / In you a mirror of my youthful self.") With Oswald's entrance the suspense deepens and it continues up to the turning point when Oswald confesses the whole deception. Like Shelley's Count Cenci Oswald surrenders to sadistic excitement and his heinous design has an air of awe and thrill. Cenci says that all men enjoy a "secret peace" when their sensuous and revengeful instincts are satisfied. We remember here Marmaduke's lonely musings:

In terror
Remembered terror, there is peace and rest

(III. 146)

This is a "strange" and "hideous" spectacle (III. 116) of a good man's mind getting perverted. From Aeschylus to the Renaissance the question has disturbed the sensitive thinkers — should action be free from all restrictions and can murder be justified even for a noble end? To "guard the innocent" (I. 63)
Idonea, Marmaduke is persuaded by Oswald to murder her old and blind father. This is Oswald's argument:

Os. — The wise abjure
All thoughts whose idle composition lives
In the entire forgetfulness of pain.
— I see I have disturbed you.

Mar. — By no means.

Os. — Compassion! Pity! Pride can do without them;
And what if you should never know them more!
He is a puny soul who, feeling pain,
finds ease because another feels it too.
If e'er I open out this heart of mine
It shall be for a nobler end —— to teach
And not to purchase piling sympathy.

(III. 1549 — 1559)

Remorse and wisdom cannot go together, but suffering and nobler end can. Compassion and pity are for the puny soul. Murder and violence can be justified by the noble end and suffering can be identified with action. Consequently, "Nightmare Conscience" is conquered (II. 866) by Marmaduke; Herbert is left alone on a deserted heath where he dies. The circle thus completes itself and Marmaduke observes:
Conflict must cease, and, in thy frozen heart,
The extremes of suffering meet in absolute peace.
\[\text{V. 2185 - 6}\]

Conflict, however, does not cease, and Oswald says, suffering is "permanent, obscure and dark". The final effect of the play is sombre — Marmaduke's concluding speech on his expiatory pilgrimage does not quite dispel the gloom, — and we note how the action from Act II onward is set in a bleak atmosphere that reinforces the moral crisis focussed in the play.

We have the darkly disturbing intuitions of The Prelude: "infernal orgies" and "the very superstition of the place" (II. 660 - 1), "half-ruined castle" and the dungeon entrance (II. 724), "nipping cold" (II. 727), "odd moaning" (II. 751), "the howls in dismal night" (IV. 1765), the "beating" of the storm (IV. 1882). The cold desolate moor provides an appropriate background: "... A Chapel on the summit of one — Moon behind the rocks — night stormy — irregular sound of a bell" (IV. opening scene). This setting is irrevocably described as a "morbid procession" and "spectrotype of horror" (XXI. 930). The setting reinforces the sense of mystery and the moral perplexity. What strikes us in the play is this moral perplexity, and the significance of The Borderers lies in the emotional disturbance that it provokes in the mind of the reader rather than in the delineation of action. The delineation of the plot is evidently weak — the play hardly measures up to Aristotle's criterion that the artist's creativity
is in the 'making' of the plot — and we may refer to several weaknesses that impair movement and dramatic effect. Consider, for instance, the opening scene. The curtain rises on the two outlaws, Wallace and Lacy, who just stand still and talk. There is nothing in their conversation which might convey a sense of mystery and ominous foreboding. (The opening scene of *Hamlet* offers a significant contrast: the frosty night, the officers keeping watch on the battlements, and the portent of dire events.) Wallace, Lacy, and the servant Wilfred, it is true, throw light on the characters of the hero and the villain, and their comments foreshadow the coming events; but while their statements serve the purpose of exposition, their eulogies and denunciations are ineffectually direct and we miss the concrete rendering of characters and situations. They line up immediately and irrevocably on the side of virtue with their constant and repetitious references to Marmaduke, "our young Chief" (I. 4); "our much-loved Captain" (I. 14); and "our confiding, open-hearted leader" (I. 10). The noble Marmaduke is placed against Oswald, "one of crooked ways"; a "perverted soul". It is a lifeless antithesis, offered second-hand, in stilted dialogue by two people who speak as one. Unlike the wedding guest in *The Ancient Mariner* who participates in the old man's tale, Lacy and Wallace remain lifeless entities and are not integrated into the dramatic structure. Again, the scene between Marmaduke and Oswald, when they overhear Herbert and Idonea pledge vows of eternal devotion,
weakens the dramatic realism. Such instances may be multiplied. Reference may also be made here to the uneven pace of the action and the consequent weakening of the dramatic tension. Consider, again, the opening scene. "The troop will be impatient", Lacy calls out, "let us hie"; but no one moves. Then, too much begins to happen at once. The obvious fast pace of Act I works to the detriment of the rest of the acts because the reader misses the sense of progression, the gradual crescendo that gives the necessary intensity to the climactic moment. (Wordsworth later conceded that "the action was too far advanced in ["the first Act."]\textsuperscript{103} It is relevant here to point to Shakespeare's delineation of the plot in Othello. The epithet "honest" is applied to Iago by almost every character in the play, and the trust reposed in him even by his wife shows how well Iago wears his mask. There is nothing of this in Cinthio's tale, and the reputation of Iago gives credibility to the central action. In Wordsworth's play, however, Oswald's malignity is exposed even at the very beginning, and this weakens not only dramatic suspense and the intensity of an effect but also credibility. The action reaches the climax in Act IV; but there is no real confrontation, and the emphasis is on contrasting ideals. Oswald's elaborate confession of betrayal and criminal intent is an attempt at complexity, but it only causes confusion and slows down the movement. This exposition of Oswald's past is really delayed continuation of what was begun in Act I; it is
an unhappy intrusion into the action when Marmaduke should be rushing off to save old Herbert from death and not stopping to hear a gothic tale. Wordsworth's observations on the play in a letter to his daughter are pertinent in this connection: "I am glad you like the tragedy. I was myself surprised to find the interest so kept up in the fourth and fifth Acts." After Oswald's confession the play moves haltingly, and there is an excess of sentimental effusion. In facing the final catastrophe, it is true, Marmaduke attains a lonely grandeur, and we note his metamorphosis from a passive, sentimental character to a noble sufferer; but the tragic effect often degenerates into pathos. Consider, in particular, Marmaduke's farewell scene with Idonea. When Marmaduke confesses his guilt, Idonea breaks into his confession at convenient pauses in order to reassert her love: the effect aimed at is sentiment, but the result is sentimentality. Marmaduke's farewell speech has a quiet dignity becoming a heroic endurer — Wordsworth does not make his hero commit suicide and thus a melodramatic conclusion is averted — but his direction to his "Brothers in arms" to raise a monument to record his story in words "delicate in their touch / As light itself" sounds mawkish when we recall Hamlet's words to Horatio:

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story. (V. ii)
What further weakens the dramatic effect is the substitution of abstract arguments for dramatic speech and concrete situations. The extent of Godwin's influence on the play may be debated, but it is undeniable that "plodding intellectualism" leaves an impression of stodginess.

Benevolence, that has no heart to use
The wholesome ministry of pain and evil,
Becomes at last weak and contemptible.

(II. 618 - 20)

You have obeyed the only law that sense
Submits to recognize; the immediate law,
From the clear light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent Intellect.

(III. 1493 - 96)

As time advances either we become
The prey or masters of our own past deeds.
Fellowship we must have, willing or no;
And if good Angels fail, slack in their duty,
Substitutes, turn our faces where we may,
Are still forthcoming; some which, though they bear ill names, can render no ill services,
In recompense for what themselves required.
So meet extremes in this mysterious world,
And opposites thus melt into each other.

(III. 1521 - 30)
You of late have seen
More deeply, taught us that the institutes
Of Nature, by a cunning usurpation
Banished from human intercourse, exist
Only in our relations to the brutes
That make the fields their dwelling.

(III. 1574 - 79)

I now perceived
That we are praised, only as men in us
Do recognise some image of themselves,
An object counterpart of what they are,
Or the empty things that they would wish to be.
I felt that merit has no surer test
Than obloquy; that, if we wish to serve
The world in substance, not deceive by show,
We must become obnoxious to its hate,
Or fear disguised in simulated scorn.

(IV. 1822 - 31)

We subsist
In slavery; all is slavery; we receive
Laws, but we ask not whence those laws have come;

(IV. 1856 - 58)
T.S. Eliot thinks that the primary failure of nineteenth-century poets when they wrote for the theatre was in their dramatic language, and that this was due largely to their limitation to a strict blank verse which, after extensive use for non-dramatic poetry, had lost the flexibility which blank verse must have if it is to have the effect of conversation. Dramatic speech is a kind of action and must reflect the inner tension of characters. Wordsworth's language is chiefly a medium of thought, of introspective reflection. Marmaduke's last words, for instance, are not action-in-speech, but agitated meditation. There are flights of ideas, long-drawn philosophisings which do not acquire the necessary concretion; ideas, to be effective in a dramatic context, must carry the pressure of sensation, and Wordsworth's diction is often ineffectually abstract. There are passages of great lyric beauty—consider the lines:

"Hush! 'tis the feeble and earth\_wind / That creeps along the bells of the crisp heather" (III. 1263 - 64) — but they lack the modulation of intense feeling and dramatic relevance. Wordsworth's verse can be sometimes the medium of consciousness, but often it drifts into vagueness and decoration (I. 165 - 81). The speeches of the pilgrims in Act II (679 - 93, 702 - 19) are long and tedious, and Oswald's long-winded utterances (X. 602-24, 1073-93, Act II) lack emotional urgency. Oswald's soliloquy in Act III (1142-74) contains grand phrases; but most of the lines are not broken in the middle, and the words sound like monotonous argumentation. Wordsworth's poetry, as evident in the play, is
capable of expressing moments of great vision and deep pathos, and despite the occasional clumsiness of the verse, it proves an effective medium for philosophical and lyric statements; but his statements often refuse to draw to a close and he fails to modulate his blank-verse to make it the vehicle of the true voice. But while the contention that Wordsworth's verse fails to convey the urgency of dramatic action is substantially true, his style shows occasionally a controlled intensity, and he is able to breathe life even into abstract argumentation:

Action is transitory — a step, a blow,
The motion of a muscle — this way or that —
'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity.

(III. 1539 – 44)

There are several passages that show the rhythmic variations necessary to convey the intricacy of the thought-process, and the blank-verse achieves the necessary flexibility to render the sinuosities of the mind's responses:

... three nights
Did constant meditation dry my blood;
Three sleepless nights I passed in sounding on,
Through words and things, a dim and perilous way;
And, wheresoe'er I turned me, I beheld
A slavery compared to which the dungeon
And clanking chains are perfect liberty.
You understand me — I was comforted;
I saw that every possible shape of action
Might lead to good — I saw it and burstforth,
Thirsting for some of those exploits that fill
The earth for sure redemption of lost peace.

(IV. 1772 - 83)

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

(II. 776-86)

The conversation of Eldred and Eleanor in Act IV shows Wordsworth's
deft use of spoken speech, and some lines in the dialogue have
a poignancy and a visual vividness:
Eld. He did not seem to wish for life: as I was struggling on, by the light of the moon I saw the stains of blood upon my clothes — he waved his hand, as if it were all useless; and I let him sink again to the ground.

(IV. 1924 - 28)

The blank verse in The Borderers, says Mary Moorman, is clumsy, but she adds that there are passages "when it suddenly bursts into great poetic splendour". Wordsworth makes an attempt to use blank verse as a mode of speech and dialogue through shiftings of pauses and varied modulation, and his verse occasionally attains the intensity of dramatic speech reflecting the variety and change of moods. But while such poetry may serve as the medium of consciousness, it does not quite meet the fastidious demands of dramatic dialogue, and it leans towards the lyrical, or the meditative, or the philosophical. Wordsworth writes in The Prelude that he was "a better judge of thoughts than words", (Book VI.106) and this is an apt commentary on the language and versification of The Borderers.

VI

The chief significance of The Borderers, we have noted, is in the disturbing moral questions that it raises in the mind of the reader rather than in the construction of the plot and the
delineation of character. However, we may recall that Coleridge found in the play "profound touches of the human heart", and this insight into the human heart is an attribute of dramatic genius. An exposition of the main characters of the play is, therefore, relevant in this context, and it is necessary to find out whether and how far Wordsworth's delineation of characters bears out Coleridge's approbation.

When Marmaduke speaks of Oswald in respectful terms, and Oswald speaks his sweetly coated poisonous words against Herbert and Idonea, the drama has already started, and Wordsworth deserves credit for keeping up our interest in the motivations of Oswald and Marmaduke. The two main characters are really types rather than individuals; but it would not be enough to say that they are mere personifications of ideas, and we are offered an insight into the inner workings of their minds. Oswald, after his perpetration of a crime, is initially stricken with remorse, but he later regains his self-possession. In the process, however, he develops into a misanthrope, an indifference to all moral and emotional values. Like the ancient Mariner he was "on a dead sea under a burning sky", he brooded over his injuries, "deserted / By man and nature" (IV. 1698). In a "Kubla Khan" setting of "deep chasm" and "roaring streams", and sometimes, on a moonlit hill he perceived "mighty objects" "to elevate our intellectual being" (IV. 1809-10). At last, he came back, a
"being" and "alone", untouched by "shame" or "fame", and this indifference to moral scruples he regarded as "freedom". As Wordsworth observes in the Preface:

... he quits the world in disgust, with strong misanthropic feelings. In his retirement, he is impelled to examine the unreasonableness of established opinions; and the force of his mind exhausts itself in constant efforts to separate the elements of virtue and vice. It is his pleasure and his consolation to hunt out whatever is bad in actions usually esteemed virtuous, and to detect the good in actions which the universal sense of mankind teaches us to reprobate. While the general exertion of his intellect seduces him from the remembrance of his own crime, the particular conclusions to which he is led have a tendency to reconcile him to himself. His feelings are interested in making him a moral sceptic, and as his scepticism increases he is raised in his own esteem. After this process has been continued some time his natural energy and restlessness impel him again into the world. In this state, pressed by the recollection of his guilt he seeks relief from two sources, action and meditation. Of actions those are most attractive which best exhibit his own powers, partly from the original pride of his own character, and still more because the loss of authority and
influence which followed upon his crime was the first circumstance which impressed him with the magnitude of that crime, and brought along with it those tormenting sensations by which he is assailed. The recovery of his original importance and the exhibition of his own powers are therefore in his mind almost identified with the extinction of those powerful feelings which attend the recollection of his guilt... Power is much more easily manifested in destroying than in creating. A child, Rousseau has observed, will tear in pieces fifty toys before he will think of making one. From these causes, assisted by disgust and misanthropic feeling, the character we are now contemplating will have a strong tendency to vice. His energies are most impressively manifest in works of devastation.

Oswald has no "mild effusions of thought", and "the milk of human reason is unknown to him" and his character shows "the dangerous use which may be made of reason when a man has committed a great crime". His cynicism has a dark logic which seeks the Majesty of Him who rules the world in darkness and in tempest. "Benevolence", he says, "that has not heart to use / The wholesome ministry of pain and evil, / Becomes at last weak and contemptible,"

The element of chance plays such a significant role in life —— where a cat's sneeze might prevent a crime (III. 1565 - 67) —— that to Oswald the logic of remorse should have no place in the scheme of life. "A withered tree" or a "worn out horse" is
destroyed, so why should an old man be spared? Like Nietzsche he censures the moralists for preaching that "misery is a sacred thing," and for him "power" is "life", "breath" and being. Like Milton's Satan he revolts, like Iago he spins motives. Consciousness of evil is subdued in Oswald by what looks like a spiritual power. He mocks rhetorically at his own death, and prefers "a heap of rubbish" to die by (V. 2284-85). Wordsworth brings out successfully the almost superhuman grandeur of the villain; his monstrosity is repellent, but he also casts a strange fascination, and we share, at least partly, Marmaduke's admiration:

I do more,
I honour him. Strong feelings to his heart
Are natural; and from one can be learnt
More of man's thoughts and ways than his experience
Has given him power to teach: and then for courage
And enterprise—what perils hath he shunned?
What obstacles hath he failed to overcome?
(I. 32-8)

Marmaduke stands sharply contrasted with Oswald. In the opening lines, when referring to Oswald's "Crooked ways", Wallace pays rich compliments to his "open-hearted Leader" (I. 1-10). He is friend and father of the oppressed (II. 634). However, he suffers from a morbid excess of imagination, and Oswald fully exploits this weakness. He finally succumbs to
Oswald's superior intellect and fails to distinguish between appearance and reality. He considers the helpless agony of the blind old man (III. 1319-20), but it is a dangerous logic of "nightmare conscience". His inner convulsions find poignant expression in his speech to Oswald which is really an interior monologue:

—— I think, again —— my breast
Concentres all the terrors of the universe:
I look at him and tremble like a child:

(II. 784 - 86)

Marmaduke is placed in a peculiar situation where to respect humane values will be hypocritical. His earlier memories of tender love are crushed as soon as they rise — "no more shall I have human feelings". Just before the dropping of the final curtain we find him obsessed with the "phantoms" and "darkness deepening darkness" mocking both Oswald's morality and life itself. And the tortured wanderer recalls the Wandering Jew.

Herbert and Idonea look like symbols of wronged innocence. Herbert is not only saintly, he is also "blind, old, alone, betrayed, in darkness!" These are the beggar woman's impressions:

'Tis a feast to see him,
Lank as a ghost and tall, his shoulders bent,
And long beard white with age — yet ever more,
As if he were the only Saint on earth,
He turns his face to Heaven.

(I. 460 - 64)

Being a god-fearing man, he believes that in hellish thunder the guilty man shudders and the helpless and innocent are protected by Providence (II. 788-92). He is kind and loving, but he sternly warns Marmaduke:

Lost Man! if thou have any close-pent guilt
Pressing upon thy heart, and this is the hour
Of visitation.

(III. 1307)

Idonea impresses us by her quiet charm, inward grace and virtue. A "dear daughter" to her father, a "precious relic of that time for my old age", Idonea is shown as an embodiment of noble devotion of a daughter to her helpless father to whom she clings pathetically. Although greatly wronged by Marmaduke, she retains her sweet femininity; her devotion to Marmaduke who represents for her "all gentleness and love" is unswerving and she represents the norm of sanity in a world that is out of joint.

Wordsworth, as De Selincourt reminds us, was an eager student of Shakespeare, and his characters inevitably bring to mind the Shakespearian parallels: Oswald reminds us of Iago,
Marmaduke of Hamlet and Macbeth, Herbert of Lear, Idonea of Cordelia, Imogen and Desdemona. But we also feel, to use De Selincourt's phrase, the "immeasurable distance" which separates Wordsworth's work from Shakespeare's dramatic achievement, and the weakness of Wordsworth's characterization may be traced to several factors. While Wordsworth explores the mystery and potency of evil, all his characters, with the exception of Oswald, are intrinsically good, and his design has the simplicity of a morality play. The goodness that Wordsworth presents is essentially passive, and what such passivity evokes is pity rather than tragic feeling. Herbert's aged lonely figure "under the arch of heaven" doomed by "the good God, our common Father" (III, 1343 - 45), crying, struggling, calls to mind Lear's agonies, but he lacks the complexity and the awful grandeur of Shakespeare's character. And we note a similar lack of complexity in Idonea: she shows a quiet dignity and inner reserve of strength and expresses righteous indignation when deceived, but her suffering does not attain the tragic elevation. In Marmaduke, Wordsworth seeks to portray a tortured, sensitive idealist, passing through hell-fire and undergoing spiritual convulsion, but the character is not adequately realized. He is professedly a man of action, but his excessive proneness to fantasy and his Robinhood-like idealism produce an effect of feebleness and take away much of the edge of his suffering. The impression persists that he is essentially
a weak character, an easy dupe, and the readiness with which he accepts the story of Idonea's corruption does not carry the necessary credibility. What is more damaging to Wordsworth's conception is that the experience of suffering and evil is not given, to use Eliot's phrase, an adequate "objective correlative". Marmaduke says that the world is "poisoned at the heart" (II.1036), and Wordsworth shows the power of evil to cloud the moral vision and pervert the moral order, but the terror of moral convulsion is insufficiently felt. There are several passages which, taken out of the dramatic context, convey poignantly the vexed questionings that confront the scrupulous conscience, but explicit statement is no substitute for dramatic rendering. This absence of an adequate "objective correlative" explains the diminution of the tragic effect and also the insufficiency of motivation in the characters. In the case of Oswald, the motivation is not only inadequate but also obscure, and De Selincourt draws attention to this flaw in Wordsworth's conception. Much has been written about Iago and the question of Iago's motivation has baffled critical endeavours; but while ambiguity adds to the complexity and depth of Iago's character, the obscurity in Wordsworth's play only confuses the issue. The prime weakness of the play, De Selincourt thinks, lies in the "plot's unsuitability for making clear the central idea on which the poet is working". The criticism is valid, but the impression persists that the poet's own conception is inchoate, and even the Preface does not
fully explain the author's intention. What is, we may ask, Oswald's motive? Is his malignity prompted by hatred and a jealous love of power? In the opening scene, Wilfred warns Marmaduke that Oswald hates him: 'you have saved his life', Wilfred says, and "gratitude's a heavy burden / To a proud soul" (I. 30 - 31). Oswald's soliloquy in Act II is revealing in this context:

The villains rose in mutiny to destroy me;
I could have quelled the Cowards, but this Stripling
Must needs step in, and save my life. The look
With which he gave the boon — I see it now!
The same that tempted me to loathe the gift.

(II. 917 - 21)

In another soliloquy Oswald resents Marmaduke's leadership:

They chose him for their Chief! - what covert part
He, in the preference, modest youth, might take,
I neither know nor care. The insult bred
More of contempt than hatred;

(II. 551 - 54)

But if Oswald be impelled by hatred and envy, why should he seek to recreate through Marmaduke his own past history? He has rejected the conventional moral codes and emotional values and he feels a sense of freedom born of intellectual triumph. De Selincourt poses, in this connection, a pertinent question.
If Oswald hates Marmaduke, why should he act in such a way as to lead the object of his hate to share with him his intellectual supremacy and freedom? Another motive may be suggested. Oswald, haunted by his own crime, may feel miserable and debased and his intention may have been to degrade the young idealist to his own level. There is, however, no indication in the play that Oswald suffers from a sense of guilt and remorse, and what strikes us about his character is his complete — and menacing — self-possession, his complete freedom from emotion. Is Oswald, unlike Iago, a disinterested intellectual, a prophet with a new message, however false and dehumanizing, seeking to convert the world to his doctrine and way of life? In a soliloquy Oswald says that his contempt and hatred are both "flown" and that "either e'er existed is my shame" (II: 554 - 55); but a genuinely disinterested intellectual is an idealist, however degrading his idealism may be, and we do not perceive this purity in Oswald's character and action. Is Oswald, then, a new Mephistopheles, an embodiment of motiveless malignity, seeking to wreck vengeance on goodness and destroy the moral order? Wordsworth in his notes refers to "the apparently motiveless actions of bad men", and adds that the motives are "intelligible to careful observers". That Oswald's villainy is motiveless is suggested by Wallace.
Natures such as his
Spin motives out of their own bowels, Lacy!
I learn'd this when I was a Confessor.
I know him well; there needs no other motive
Than that most strange incontinence in crime
Which haunts this Oswald.

(III. 1427 – 32)

In the latter part of his speech, however, Wallace says that Oswald is impelled by a love of power:

Power is life to him
And breath and being; where he cannot govern,
He will destroy.

(III. 1432 – 34)

The obscurity and the insufficiency of motivation weaken the tragic effect: Wordsworth seeks to render a grim spectacle of pain and evil and looks beyond pain, but as John Jones rightly observes, "he cannot present a world broken on the wheel." Wordsworth, says De Selincourt, is more interested in Oswald's philosophy than in Oswald, and this reflects both the weakness of the play and its significance. The moral issues that
the play raises have a contemporary relevance in the context of the French Revolution, but they have also a continuing relevance. What is the relation of ends to means? Should emotions and moral codes be subordinated to reason? Is evil inherent in human nature? The observations of M. Legouis are pertinent in this connection:

Imagine Godwin's arguments for the necessity of extirpating all the human feelings read in the light of '93; conceive his condemnation of all traditional rules of conduct interpreted by aid of the wholesale executions decreed by the Mountain in the name of public welfare, or, in other words, of the greatest amount of human happiness, and The Borderers acquires a meaning... it reflects a reality which is only too impossible to deny. 119

The Borderers is a historical document of considerable significance, and its significance is also perennial; but it is not a realistic play in the usual sense of the term, and it cannot be regarded as a successful dramatic work. To call it a poetic drama would also be partly misleading, for it has a definite social and psychological basis. As we read the play three things press on our consciousness: the destructive power of evil working through the latent malignity in human nature, the perplexity of the human conscience, and the image of
wronged innocence. And if Wordsworth fails to present a world "broken on the wheel", he is able to produce the effect through suggestive images that acquire the character of symbols. Consider, for instance, the savagery of the setting and the background of desolation: the sombre landscape, the desolate moor, the ruined castle, the deserted chapel, the dark dungeon, and the howling storm reinforce the convulsion in the moral order, deepen the horror of evil, and correspond to the predicament of Marmaduke and Herbert. The hard rocks suggest remorseless intellect and also the superhuman power of evil. The dark dungeon is equally suggestive of the mystery of evil and its disconnection with the moral order, and it is a physical analogue of the moral dungeon in which Oswald is self-exiled: Marmaduke's descent into the dark cave to kill Herbert is symbolic of his surrender to the power of evil. The deserted chapel on a ridge of rocks and the "fitful stroke" of the chapel-bell presaging Herbert's death have an obvious religious significance and seem to suggest the withdrawal of grace from an evil-ridden world. The image of a lonely wanderer is recurrent in Wordsworth's poetry, and it is a dominant symbol in The Borderers, suggesting anguished conscience and also the plight of the innocent in a morally perverted world. Marmaduke in the last scene chooses the life of a wanderer severed from the normal world, and the lonely figure of Herbert, abandoned on the moor, haunts our conscience. (In an earlier version, a pilgrim, a lonely wanderer through "deep woods / And trackless wastes"
is introduced in Act III, and Wordsworth later omitted the scene perhaps because of the obvious parallelism.) But if Wordsworth's emphasis in the play is on pain and evil, he also shows how goodness and benevolence are ranged against the powers of darkness. Idonea,\textsuperscript{124} like Lucy and the Solitary Reaper, is a life symbol, shining like a star, sending out gleams of light on a dark landscape. And if Idonea represents the moral conscience of humanity, we have also the visual image of a solitary star that shines through a crevice above Marmaduke's head and prevents him from committing a heinous crime:

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

(II. 984 - 990)
NOTES AND REFERENCES


6. Ibid.

7. See Jones, pp. 42-43.


12. Ibid., p. 735.


17. Ibid.


20. LWD, The Later years (1821-30), I(1939), p. 471 (see letter to Dyce, April 30, 1830 and also letter to Fletcher, April 6, 1825).


27. PW, Hutchinson, Essay, Supplementary to the Preface, p. 745.
29. PW, Hutchinson, p. 734.
30. Ibid., p. 738.
31. Ibid., p. 752.
32. Ibid., p. 734.
33. BL, Shawcross, II, chap. XVII, p. 31.
38. See J.R. MacGillivray, "The Date of Composition of The Borderers", MLN, XLIX, February 1934, pp. 104-111.

43. O. J. Campbell and P. Mueschke, among others, have praised the character of Oswald, the apostle of a new morality. See "The Borderers as a Document in the History of Wordsworth's Aesthetic Development", MP, XXIII (1925-26), May, 1926, pp. 465-82.

44. Mary Moorman, pp. 306-7.

45. Knight, SD, p. 34. See also Knight, GL, p. 214.


52. Oxford Lectures, p. 163.


59. See Evans, especially pp. 217-18. Evans enumerates various elements that go to form the Gothic background.


See also Emile Legouis, *Wordsworth and Annette Vallon* (1922).


70. Preston, Introduction xxi - xxii.


73. See *PW*, De Selincourt, I, p. 342 (Wordsworth's notes to *The Borderers*, 1842).


75. See E. Legouis, *Wordsworth in a New Light* (1923). E. de Selincourt, however, like G.M. Harper, tried to establish the close relation of Wordsworth's play to Godwin's *Political Justice* by bringing to light for the first time the hitherto unknown prefatory essay in which the poet analyses the intellectually gifted character of Oswald
who flouts moral values that people normally respect.
(See Oxford Lectures). The essay appears in MSB and is also printed in PW, De Selincourt, I, pp. 345-49. It was first published in The Nineteenth Century and After (1926), pp. 723-41.

76. PW, De Selincourt, I, p. 342 (Notes).


78. Mary Moorman, p. 307.


80. Priestly, iii, pp. 102-3.
George Sampson says that The Borderers "may be described as Godwinism illustrated by consequences". He quotes lines 1485-87 and lines 1493-96 (Act III) spoken by Oswald to Marmaduke in his support. (LB, ed. George Sampson (Methuen, 1959), Introduction, xviii.


83. The Borderers, Act I, lines 563-64.


87. Ibid.


89. S.T. Coleridge, Specimens of the Table Talk, July 21, 1832 (Pub. 1836), p. 175.

90. Knight, GL, p. 212.

91. See Wordsworth's notes to the play (1842) in PW, De Selincourt, I, p. 342 (Notes).

92. Ibid., p. 343 (Notes).

93. The fact remains that Wordsworth constantly thought most lovingly of The Borderers and inquired eagerly from Germany just a year later to know its fate. (See SH, Shawcross, chap. XIV.) In the meantime, neither the manuscript was destroyed nor read by anybody, not even by Charles Lamb who "would pay five and forty thousand carriages to read Wordsworth's tragedy, of which I have heard so much and seen so little". (See LB, Preface). At last in 1842
Wordsworth decided that the play should be published in his life time and not left to his heirs to see to its fate. Accordingly, he carefully revised it without making the "slightest alteration" in the conduct of the story or the composition of the characters. It was included in the volume entitled "Poems Chiefly of Early and Late Years". (See R.D. Havens, op. cit., p. 16.) Undoubtedly Wordsworth attached great importance to this play as it embodies some of his favourite ideas.


98. Jones, p. 57.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., pp. 55, 61.

101. Ibid., p. 55.

102. Fletcher, p. 48.
103. LWD, The Later Years (1841–50), III (1939), p. 1122 (letter to Dora Quillinan, April 7, 1842).

104. Ibid.

105. Jones, p. 54.


108. FW, De Selincourt, I, p. 345 (Notes).

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid., pp. 346, 348.


112. Ibid., p. 174.

113. Ibid., pp. 163–64.

114. Ibid., p. 163.

115. Ibid., pp. 163–64.

116. FW, De Selincourt, I, p. 343 (Notes).


119. Quoted by De Selincourt in *Oxford Lectures*, p. 171.

120. A lonely and dark moor forms the central landscape in *The Borderers*, as in *Guilt and Sorrow* and *Peter Bell*.

121. Consider in this connection heaps of stones from St. Cuthbert (*Inscriptions, XV*); the ruined abbey of St. Mary silenced by an invisible bird (*The Prelude, II, Lines 102-28*); the churches in Book V of *The Excursion*, *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, *The Sonnets Composed in Roslin Chapel during a Storm* and *A Palace of Burial in the South of Scotland*.

122. The image of an isolated spirit in the background of Nature recurs in Wordsworth. The Female Vagrant is friendless (*Guilt and Sorrow*, line 446); Margaret, crying for her son, has "no other earthly friend" (*The Affliction of Margaret*, XI, line 77); Emily Morton's only earthly friend is a "White doe". Michael, the leech gatherer, the old Cumberland beggar — all are friendless and lonely.

123. An aged, blind, lonely figure, almost a ghostly specimen of humanity, is often found in Wordsworth: consider the blind old man of *Juvenilia* (No. XV), the blind beggar and the ghostly soldier of the *Prelude*, the lanky apparition of *The Vale of Eamsonite*, the old man of *Resolution and Independence*, the old man of *Animal Tranquility and Decay* — to mention a few.
The image of a lonely young girl appears in both the very early and late poetry of Wordsworth, especially in the poetry written during the period 1798-1807. The link between the landscape and a young girl is close (e.g. Juvenilia, The Anacreon, Beauty and Moonlight, Lucy, Solitary Reaper, etc.). Even in The Borderers we find Idonea as a lonely suffering child brought up "by lowly nature" (V, line 2334).