CHAPTER II

WORDSWORTH’S POETRY: THE HERMENEUTIC ADVENTURE

No poet has engaged Hartman’s imagination and critical intelligence so profoundly and consistently as Wordsworth. The largest section in Hartman’s first book The Unmediated Vision (1954) is devoted to a study of Wordsworth and his poetry from a remarkably fresh point of view, and one of his latest books The Fateful Question of Culture (1997) contains a central chapter on Wordsworth as a cultural icon. In between, Hartman has published two full-length works of major importance on the poet—Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814 and The Unremarkable Wordsworth (1987). In the early 1950s Wordsworth had been an undervalued, largely neglected poet and the existing body of criticism on his work was mostly concerned with his romantic ideology, his nature-worship, his transcendental pantheism as well as with controversial issues like his insularity, his moral consciousness, his anti-modernism, the causes of his poetic decline, or his political apostasy. Hartman examines Wordsworth in an altogether different critical frame, seeing his poetry as the expression of a dialectical interaction between self and nature, between self-consciousness and imagination, between the thinking subject and the object of its contemplation. This is essentially a philosophical position, influenced by Husserlian phenomenology, but in extending it to literary commentary and elucidation Hartman is guided by his perception of the textual
quality of Wordsworth’s individual poems as well as the quality of the poet’s work as a whole.

The New Critics who judged poetry in terms of its metaphysical quality, intellectual toughness, impersonality and tonal variation did not accord a high place to Wordsworth in their poetic canon. They saw him as representing an anti-modernist tradition in British poetry. Their facile identification of romanticism with the subjective, the sublime, the abstract or the inspirational also prevented them from gaining a full understanding of Wordsworth’s achievement either as an individual poet or as a poet of a particular historical moment. Hartman does not seek to defend Wordsworth against the strictures of the New Critics either by using their own terms, or by using their method of verbal exegesis. He adopts a positive approach to Wordsworth by linking him with modern poets and Continental philosophers on the one hand, and by tracing his poetic antecedents through Milton to Spenser and the Renaissance, on the other. It is this basic perspective which combines philosophy with literary criticism that gives unity and coherence to the large body of Hartman’s writings on Wordsworth over a period of more than four decades.

In The Unmediated Vision Hartman abstains from referring to the philosophic basis of his criticism, especially in the early chapters, where he is engaged in an “experiment” in confronting poetry directly. In chapter V, however, while discussing the identity between perception and creativity, he dwells at length
on the ideas of Descartes, St. Thomas and Valery to show that the desire for perception "need not in the modern poet involve a denial of the necessity of sense experience or the reality of sense object" (153). The notion of unmediated vision, the theoretical premise on which the whole book is based, is derived from Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Mind*, although Hartman does not make particular mention of phenomenology in the chapters dealing with Wordsworth or the other poets. In *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814* his phenomenological position becomes more explicit in his categories of thinking and mode of analysis as well as in his critical vocabulary. By the time Hartman publishes *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* he comes to see the philosophical significance of Wordsworth's poetry much more clearly. He links the poet’s originality with his philosophic significance:

So startling yet undramatic is Wordsworth’s originality that it is hard not to see him as an inaugural figure for both modern philosophy and poetry. (*UW* xxvi)

He goes on to add that if the intellectual climate changes, "Wordsworth could be taken seriously by a philosopher" and that a deep study of his poetry would make a difference in our thinking (*UW* xxvii).

This approach, which in the absence of a more appropriate term can be called "philosophical," distinguishes Hartman’s hermeneutic commentary on Wordsworth from the works of F. A. Pottle, Northrop Frye and M. H. Abrams who strove to revive Romantic poetry immediately before Hartman and Harold
Bloom came on the scene. Characterizing Hartman’s approach as philosophical does not of course mean that he brings a set of external criteria to the reading of the poetry. It is his sympathetic, sensitive and lingering response to Wordsworth’s poetry that prompts him to realize its radical power to alter our thinking. For Hartman reading the poetry and thinking about it are not different acts. As Donald G. Marshall has accurately stated in his “Foreword” to The Unremarkable Wordsworth, “one simply wants to say he [i.e., Hartman] is thinking with and about the poem. Reading and thinking are here one and inseparable” (UW ix).

Hartman finds a peculiar delight in the very act of interpretation—interpretation which is textually justified. His own testament in this case is important:

Then I began to eat of the tree of knowledge, so that my eyes were multiplied, and where I had seen but a single text I now perceived the formidable legions of variant, if not discordant, interpretations [...] Having tasted these multiple modes of interpretation, I fell in love with the art of interpreting and could not return to my original state. (UV ix)

Hartman’s interpretation of Wordsworth’s poetry constitutes a major part of what is most original and brilliant in his hermeneutic practice. In fact with his work on Wordsworth he has brought hermeneutics to the centre stage of literary criticism. His interpretive commentary of the poetry of Keats, Emily Dickinson,
Wallace Stevens and Valery is no less important, but it lacks the scope and comprehensiveness of his writings on Wordsworth.

In *The Unmediated Vision* Hartman links Wordsworth with Hopkins, Rilke and Valery as poets expressing the dilemma of modern poetry which “results from an almost total break from Judeo-Christian traditions” (xi). Each of these poets attempted a pure representation “distinguished from that of Jewish or medieval Christian thought in that its motive and terminal object is identified not with the God of the Testaments, but with Nature, the body or human consciousness” (*UV* 154). Wordsworth, like the other poets associated with him, perceived the immediate experience of the world unmediated by the Christian theology (as in the case of the Renaissance writers). The fact that Wordsworth has chosen “to stay bound by experience” is an important consideration for Hartman (*UV* xi), as it shows that the poet does not use his imagination for the celebration of the abstract or for the idealization of the apocalyptic impulse.

In his study of Wordsworth in *The Unmediated Vision* Hartman quotes the first twenty-two lines of “Tintern Abbey,” and comments extensively on the passage, with his attention fixed firmly on the text. He notes that the poet describes a particular scene of external nature with its waters, lofty cliffs, orchard tufts, hedgerows and pastoral farms. The poet bears affection to this natural scene, and he states his feeling, without explaining or analyzing it, or relating it to any cause-and-effect nexus. Unlike the religious poets who preceded him such as
Henry Vaughan, Wordsworth does not look at nature “to comprehend immediately the purpose of Creation” or “to search out the appearances of God”; nor does he see external nature “with neoclassic eye as an assemblage of fair and universal forms” (UV 5, 4). He observes a particular scene treating it as independent of the mind which perceives it; but both the mind and the object are held in a certain relationship which Hartman describes as “a dialectic of love”:

The affection he bears to nature for its own sake, ‘the quietness and beauty’ which the presences of nature give to his mind; and this dialectic of love makes up his entire understanding. (UV 4)

Hartman further points out that Wordsworth’s use of personal experience as “sublime argument” has an intense matter-of-factness. He regards the conflict of “intense matter-of-factness and passionate fiction, of the human and enthusiastic imaginations, of the passive and the creative mind” as being “vital to the peculiar strength of ‘Tintern Abbey,’ as, perhaps to all of Wordsworth’s poetry” (UV 8).

In the opening description of the landscape in “Tintern Abbey” Wordsworth’s imagination is held in restraint. But his creative power is released when he comes to describe the smoke rising from among the trees:

and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

Hartman draws attention to the image of the smoke in the passage. He brings together passages from the end of “Tintern Abbey,” from “Michael,” from the Sonnet “Upon Westminster Bridge” and from the journals of Dorothy Wordsworth to show that smoke and mistiness are for Wordsworth images suggestive of freedom, of liberty of movement and the possibility of passionate fiction. They express what Hartman calls “a principle of generosity” which is shared by Nature and the mind, but transcends both.

The episode of the Boy of Winander in the fifth book of The Prelude illustrates the principle of generosity which is apparent everywhere in Nature, while transcending Nature. As the boy stands listening by the lakeside at evening.

a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents: or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind,
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

(The Prelude V, 364-370)
The boy who “hung listening” to the sound and movement of Nature represents the poet who is moved by a responsive Nature, by the principle of generosity in Nature. The poet states his feeling, but does not qualify it by the exertion of his creative will. Hartman distinguishes Wordsworth’s idea of imagination from the creative will, which means “the will to call up experience in all its affective qualities,” and the moral will, by which is meant “the will to understand and interpret experience” (UV 15). The power of the poetic and the human imagination, Hartman explains,

stems neither from the creative will nor from the moral will but from an inherent generosity found now in Nature, now in man, which belongs ultimately neither to Nature as external nature nor to man. It is an ‘interchangeable supremacy,’ and often has no access to man except by way of usurpation. (UV 15)

Wordsworth conceives of Imagination as possessing autonomy just as much as Nature does, and the relation between them, as “Tintern Abbey” and much of his best poetry exemplify, is a truly reciprocal one. Coleridge had a restricted view of this relationship as is evidenced by his statement,

I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life whose fountains are within
Or

O Lady! We receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live.

("Dejection: An Ode", 45-48)

Clarifying the difference between Coleridge’s self-centered or subjective view of Nature and Wordsworth’s belief in the reciprocal generosity of man and Nature, Hartman comments,

The boy Wordsworth receives much more than he gives; the man Wordsworth thinks that to receive depends not on what we give, but on how spontaneously it is given. (UV 20)

Hartman regards Wordsworth’s faith in “the principle of generosity” as being central to the poet’s love and is related to his theory of creativity and cognition. In the poetical preface to The Excursion of 1814 Wordsworth has described his work in a memorable phrase as “the spousal verse” of a “great consummation,” and has proclaimed:

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 of among men–
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish: - this is our high argument.

(The Excursion V, 63-71)

There are three more-or-less conceptual ideas in this passage. The first two, about the exquisite attenuation of the individual mind, as Hartman contends, are epistemological issues actively discussed in scholastic philosophy and in the works of Kant. But the last idea that the Mind and the World blend their might to produce a creation is a typically Wordsworthian concept born of the poet's feeling that cognition is "not only organic, but also immediate and transcendent, one to which both mind and external world are necessary" (UV 21). Cognition is for him an effortless blending of the might of mind and Nature which produces a recognition of love, which is also a mystical principle. In the light of this theory of cognition and perception Hartman returns to the opening lines of "Tintern Abbey" with which he had started his discussion of Wordsworth's poetry. He quotes the lines,

Once again

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,

That on a wild secluded scene impress

Thoughts of more deep seclusion
(4-7)

Hartman first comments on the verb "behold" in "Do I behold." "Behold" is a favourite and scriptural verb that negates the question whether the role of the
mind is passive or active in observing the scene. Interpreting the passage, in terms of Wordsworth's idea of cognition, Hartman says that it gives the effect,

that the impress of external nature on the mind is, by the mind, immediately reconstituted as the quality of the scene before it, and as an inexplicably profounder quality. We thus find preserved the organicity, immediacy and mystery of cognition in an ordinary, unpretentious circumstance. \((UV\ 22)\)

This might seem an epistemological reading of the passage, but it does deepen our sense of the significance of what Wordsworth perceives and records and of the very process and quality of his perception. Hartman's interpretation of the same passage moves on a simpler and more lucid level also. He explains that the scene is secluded, but the poet apprehends "a kind of seclusion deeper than either" in which "cognition and perception are imperceptibly one and the same act, because of a subsistent ground of vision" \((UV\ 23)\). This vision springs from Wordsworth's belief in a principle of mystical revelation.

Hartman notices the presence of an allegorical element in "Tintern Abbey" as well as in the other representative poems of Wordsworth. Allegory is here conceived of as the upshot of the poet's ability to see "human events prophetically subsumed under a divine or transcendent scheme of reference" and also as "a statement on the nature of revelation" \((UV\ 27)\). While Milton seeks revelation in the scriptures, Wordsworth finds it in natural landscape, rural scenery and in the
forms and symbols of daily life. Hartman singles out two images from the opening lines of "Tintern Abbey" as possessing far more significance than they appear to have, indeed, as expressing Wordsworth's sustained sense of revelation. These are the images of the rising smoke and the Hermit in the lines

Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

(21-22)

The smoke, according to Hartman's scheme of interpretation, is the sign of the freed will and the Hermit symbolizes the return of the immortal sea of the spirit. Hartman explains the two images brilliantly:

An inherent principle of love is discovered, smoke rises from the dark woods as if it were a visible sign from an invisible source, of the freed will; and the Hermit appears, fixed near his fire, freed in his perception from the forms of the external world, a relic of eternity and prophet of the immortal sea's return. (UV 35)

The symbolic meaning that Hartman attributes to the Hermit is textually justified and is also supported by an epistemological reading of the works of Wordsworth as a whole. F. W. Bateson has commented, "hermits were one of the conventional properties of late eighteenth century landscape, and their presence guaranteed the aesthetic, non-documentary quality of the picture" (Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation 85). Although Hartman starts by endorsing this conventional or
literal view, he has proceeded to disclose the full symbolic significance of the Hermit in communicating the documentary aspect of Wordsworth's mystic vision.

Hartman's method in his study of Wordsworth has been to reveal "a unified multiplicity of meaning" in the text (UV 45). He moves from an exposition of the literal meaning of the text to an unveiling of the deeper levels of its significance, illuminated by the poet's own theory of imagination, creativity and perception. Hartman demonstrates that Wordsworth's concepts "of the imagination as creative and of the poem as creation reveal a consummation at once mystical and commonplace" (UV 26). By this means he opens up the possibility of reading Wordsworth in new ways. He has abandoned the familiar approach and phraseology of traditional Wordsworth criticism characterized by terms such as pantheism, nature-worship, sublimity and eloquence, and has substituted them with the terms imagination, cognition, perception, "the dialectic of mind and Nature," "the principle of generosity" and reciprocity between man and the external world. Hartman's sustained use of this new set of critical terms is obviously the result of his attempt to blend a philosophical approach with literary criticism in his analysis of Wordsworth's poetry. In his study of Hopkins and Valery the terms vary in response to the thematic and rhetorical concerns of the individual poets, but the critical approach is essentially the same.

Hartman's interpretive method also shows a marked departure from the traditional method of Wordsworth criticism. He starts with a chosen individual
poem or the vital part of a poem, moves on to the rest of the poet's work, the poet's sources, the influence on his works, his relations with previous poets and then returns to a full interpretation of the original poem with a deepened insight, perception and sensitivity, both literary and intellectual. In the process he also throws new light on the general characteristics, the persistent concerns and the peculiar strength which distinguish the work of the poet as a whole. For instance, he underscores "the radical unity of Wordsworth's great works, of the great Ode, "Tintern Abbey" and The Prelude (UV 40), and draws attention to "the pervasiveness of the concept and imagery of continuous revelation in Wordsworth" (UV 30). He dwells on "Wordsworth's vision of the earth as an ocean at ebb tide" and points out the centrality of the sound and image of water in his poetry (UV 32).

It is worth noting that Hartman does not mention in the body of his essay any British or American critic of Wordsworth except Coleridge (Dr. Johnson, Basil Willey and Wilson Knight find a place in the "Bibliography and Notes"). The range of intellectual ideas which has determined his attitude towards Wordsworth is mainly European. Perhaps Hartman's is the first important study of Wordsworth within the frame of European thought and epistemological categories. This is one of the distinctive factors which account for the remarkable freshness and originality of the work. Another noticeable feature of the Wordsworth essay, and indeed of the whole book The Unmediated Vision, is the sheer delight Hartman finds in the act of interpretation, the spirit of élan with which he pursues
it. The Unmediated Vision records his youthful and pioneering hermeneutic adventure.

Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814, which came out ten years after The Unmediated Vision, carries on the preoccupations of the earlier work on a larger and more comprehensive scale. Some of the germinal ideas and insights contained in The Unmediated Vision are now further developed or reformulated with greater precision to provide an intellectual and aesthetic framework for the elucidation of almost the entire body of Wordsworth’s poetry. Hartman is now conscious of the philosophical assumptions underlying his perspective on Wordsworth and overtly refers to his interest in phenomenology as a method of describing, analyzing and interpreting an author’s work. Throughout the study he maintains a clear focus on Wordsworth’s poetic account of the growth of his mind and on the poet’s consciousness of his own consciousness. The emphasis on the dialectic of mind and Nature and on the reciprocity of man and the external world is also continued as being crucial to an interpretation of a large number of poems. But Hartman makes it repeatedly clear that Wordsworth was careful in emphasizing the essential autonomy of both the individual mind and Nature, in spite of their reciprocal relationship.

A significant new aspect of Hartman’s preoccupation now is with the centrality of Wordsworth’s concept of imagination, and with the peculiar difficulties involved in exploring its relation to his poetry. John Jones in his
influential book The Egotistical Sublira (1954) has focused on the nature and history of Wordsworth’s imagination, viewing imagination as being superior to the objects on which it is employed. Hartman, on the contrary, examines the dialectical manner in which imagination and nature interact upon each other, and identifies the particular periods in the growth of the poet’s mind when he achieves his ideal of imaginative consummation. Further, Hartman lays consistent emphasis on Wordsworth’s attempt during different periods of his development to humanize his originally transcendent imagination.

Another significant feature of Wordsworth’s Poetry is that Hartman relates his judgment of the existing body of criticism on the poet, in the form of assent, disagreement or refutation. This is critically important because despite his use of continental philosophical ideas, in the matter of practical judgments he works within the context of an Anglo-American critical tradition on Wordsworth, to which his own work is a major contribution. This is why, writing in 1970, John Purkis described the book as “the high peak of recent work” on Wordsworth (A Preface to Wordsworth 195). Angus Fletcher acclaimed the book as Hartman’s “masterful study of the great Wordsworth” and said, “Hartman makes one wish to read Wordsworth anew and shows one how to do that, with fresh approaches” (“The Great Wordsworth” 595, 598).

The freshness of Hartman’s approach is evident even in the opening section of Wordsworth’s Poetry, consisting of a focused interpretation of “Tintern Abbey”
and the three short lyrics "The Solitary Reaper," "The Boy of Winander" and "Strange Fits of Passion." What connects these poems, according to Hartman, is not Wordsworth's nature-worship, his love of solitude or his meditative habits, but "the minute attention he gives to his own most casual responses, a finer attention than is given to the nature he responds to" (WP 5). The primary emphasis here is a phenomenological one—the poet's consciousness of his own states of consciousness stirred and quickened by scenes of nature or events. Hartman examines with close attention to the text how Wordsworth's self-consciousness is linked to the subject, form and structure of his particular poems. Self-consciousness is distinguished from both subjectivity and egotism, which are key terms bandied about in traditional Wordsworth criticism from Thomas Jeffrey and Hazlitt to Willard Sperry and F. W. Bateson.

Keats's famous phrase "egotistical sublime" strikingly expresses a fault related to what has been described as Wordsworth's "mental bombast," variously pointed out or condemned by Anna Seward, Jeffrey, Coleridge and Hazlitt. Hartman argues that Wordsworth's egotism is inseparable from "something precariously 'spiritual' which was not exhausted by his overt choice of scenes from low or rural life" (WP 4-5). He goes on to observe that "when Wordsworth depicts an object he is also depicting himself or, rather, a truth about himself, a self-acquired revelation" (WP 5). The basis of his spiritual life was his contact with nature which was a source of renovation and self-renewal for him. It is true that there is sometimes a disproportion between Wordsworth's emotional response
to a scene and the scene itself. Hartman holds that such a disproportion is natural to a man conscious of himself, and that it links Wordsworth's precarious condition to a self-consciousness that may appear egotistical. Thus in exploring the significance of Wordsworth's poetry Hartman shifts critical attention from the qualities associated with the poet's "egotistical sublime" to the nature and growth of his self-consciousness and its "actual or hidden relation to the possibilities of self-renewal" (WP 6).

This is the perspective in which Hartman offers his interpretive readings of "The Solitary Reaper," "The Boy of Winander," "Strange Fits of Passion" and "Tintern Abbey." In this context he introduces two relatively new concepts, that of the poet Wordsworth as a halted traveller and of "surmise" as a rhetorical figure in romantic poetry in general and in Wordsworth in particular.

Frederick A. Pottle has attempted a somewhat detailed analysis of "The Solitary Reaper," a poem which he judges to have "the degree of complexity necessary for full illustration of Wordsworth's theory" (Wordsworth Centenary Studies 40). Hartman's analysis of the poem is more extensive than Pottle's and aims at illustrating a complex set of ideas about the nature of Wordsworth's reflexive consciousness, about the image of the poet as a halted traveller and about "the poetry of surmise" in which Wordsworth seems to have excelled. "The Solitary Reaper" expresses the poet's response to a Highland lass who harvests alone in the field singing a melancholy song to herself. The poet is strongly
moved, but he does not say why he is moved. Hartman observes that the initial surprise turns into something pensive and that there is "an inward sinking" as if the mind is moved by itself after having been moved by the Highland girl:

The inward sinking or turning—the reflexive consciousness—is quite clear. The poet himself is made to stop, reflect, and listen, like a traveller who has come on the scene by chance. (WP 7)

Hartman’s commentary on the poem seen as the expression of the poet’s self-consciousness runs as follows: The opening stanza presents a strange situation in which a Highland girl reaps alone, singing a melancholy song to herself. (Reaping is usually a communal and joyful activity.) This situation arouses something more than surprise in the poet; it arouses in him a sense of the mystery of life. The opening line “Behold her, single in the field” is addressed to the reader while the fourth line “Stop here, or gently pass” is said by the poet to the reader or to himself. Again, “O listen!” is addressed either to the reader or to the poet himself which shows that both the reaper and her song have the power to halt the traveller. The poet presents the image of a halted traveller.

The poet’s strong initial response to the situation intensifies his self-awareness. It “signals the influx of an unusual state of consciousness which is quickly normalized” (WP 16). The poem is “a reaction to this consciousness as well as its expression” (WP 16). It is the product of two kinds of consciousness, “old and new, ordinary and supervening” gathered around the image of the solitary
Highland girl (WP 16). The supervening consciousness can be identified with imagination. Hartman’s commentary illuminates a common pattern that imagination takes in Wordsworth’s poetry and which is typified by the developing structure of “The Solitary Reaper.” In Hartman’s words, this pattern consists of,

- a moment of arrest, the ordinary vital continuum being interrupted;
- a separation of the traveller-poet from familiar nature;
- a thought of death or judgment or of the reversal of what is taken to be the order of nature;
- a feeling of solitude or loss or separation. (WP 17-18)

Some of the elements in the pattern may vary, and some appear obliquely. All the same it is paradigmatic of the way in which Wordsworth’s self-consciousness expresses itself when moved and quickened by a strange or unusual external situation.

Hartman’s concept of the poetry of surmise also helps him in attempting a full interpretation of the complexity of “The Solitary Reaper.” Milton’s line, “Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise” is meant to “interpose a little ease” during his lament for Lycidas. But in romantic poetry surmise has a more vital, more formative function than in Milton. Hartman defines surmise as being “fluid in nature”:
It likes "whether...or" formulations, alternatives rather than exclusions, echoing conjectures (Keats' "Do I wake or sleep?") rather than blunt determinateness. (WP 8-9)

"The Solitary Reaper" expresses states of mind based on or animated by surmise. "Stop here, or gently pass" is an instance occurring in the first stanza which is directed against the purely determinate. Hartman points out that the third stanza consists of two surmises, first about the possible historical or mythical past associated with the theme of the song ("Will no one tell me what she sings?"). Second, related to the return to the familiar theme:

Or is it some more humble lay,

Familiar matter of today?

(21-22)

Surmise has its effect on the rhythm, on the verbal figures, on variations of mood, and in fact on the entire poem, except on the opening lines where the poet presents a specific and concrete picture of the solitary Highland girl. By the use of surmise Wordsworth achieves an expansion of spirit and mood. As Hartman finely puts it,

By surmise he multiplies his moods, if not the phenomenon. His surmises have a pattern, which is to proceed through the solitary to the social and from stasis to motion, or to make these
interchangeable. Yet everything stays in the realm of surmise, which
approves in any case, of such fluidity. \( WP \) 8

In Wordsworth, unlike in Milton, surmise is not merely a rhetorical figure
or even a figure of thought, but a whole way of feeling and expression and an
inalienable part of the poetic texture. In “The Solitary Reaper” the poet’s mind
moves away from the present object to the past and the future, but keeps returning
to it. Surmise means for the poet a sustained inner freedom of a mind, “aware of
itself, aware and not afraid of its moods or potentialities” \( WP \) 12, and is in this
way linked to the poet’s self-consciousness.

It is evident that Hartman’s analysis of “The Solitary Reaper” does not
move at the level of theme, or diction, but penetrates into the peculiar modes of
feeling, response and self-awareness that form the deeper structure of the poem.
David Perkins has highlighted the figure of “the wanderer as a symbolic character”
in Wordsworth \( Quest \ for \ Permanence \ 29 \). Hartman’s idea of “the halted
traveller” is a more accurate description of the role of the poet in lyrics like “The
Solitary Reaper” and “The Daffodils” and in longer poems such as “Resolution
and Independence.” In one of the best interpretations of “The Solitary Reaper”
appearing before Hartman’s, Frederick A. Pottle demonstrates how Wordsworth
transfigures the matter of common perception, and achieves an extension in human
experience by pushing “his boundaries out in space from Arabia to St. Kilda” and
by extending “the boundaries in time” \( Centenary \ Studies \ 41 \). This probably is
one of the germinal ideas which Hartman develops in his own extended commentary on the poem. His distinctive method, however, is to reveal by text-based commentary how the poet’s mind repeatedly returns to the object of perception or the initial image with renewed or intensified self-consciousness. Hartman relates consciousness to imagination by seeing imagination as “consciousness at its highest pitch” (*WP* 18). In Wordsworth’s poetry Nature is the chief power which guides and fosters the growth of self-consciousness.

Hartman’s interpretations of “The Boy of Winander” and “Strange Fits of Passion” confirm the validity of his reading of Wordsworth’s poetry as the expression of various aspects of self-consciousness awakened by external events or scenes of nature. “The Boy of Winander” records the experiences of a small boy who was sensitive to the sights, sounds and objects of Nature, who

Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,

That they might answer him.

The owls would shout, scream and halloo and produce a “jocund din,” in response to his call. But when there came a pause of silence he felt “a gentle shock of mild surprise” which “carried into his heart the voice/of mountain-torrents” and impressed upon his mind Nature’s visible scenes,

With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,

Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received

Into the bosom of the steady lake.
In the last stanza the death of the boy is mentioned, but the cause is not given. The poet then refers to his visit to the churchyard where

A long half-hour together I have stood
Mute—looking at the grave in which he lies.

Thomas Jeffrey has condemned and slighted this poem saying that the boy does nothing but “amuse himself with shouting himself to the owls, and hearing them answer,” and that “for the sake of this one accomplishment [...] the author has frequently stood mute, and gazed on his grave for half an hour together.” (Rev. of Lyrical Ballads 18). Against Jeffrey’s scoffing condemnation, Hartman establishes the view that this is one of the finest poems of Wordsworth that shows how a child’s consciousness is formed by the random, but beneficial influence of Nature. The poem was composed in 1798 and later Wordsworth included a revised form of it in Book V of The Prelude. Hartman observes that in both versions the child grows into a consciousness of Nature “accompanied by the idea that she [Nature] forms the child the more deeply as her action is less consciously present to him” (WP 19). “A gentle shock of mild surprise” felt by the boy and “the visible scene” which “would enter unawares into his mind” are signs of the boy’s recognition that nature has its own separate life. His consciousness of nature leads him to a consciousness of his own self.
The untimely death of the boy indicates that the emergence of his self from the undifferentiated consciousness of nature was not complete. Describing the significance of the boy's death in the scheme of the poem, Hartman says,

Instead of waking from consciousness of nature into consciousness of self, he falls like Sleeping Beauty into the gentler continuum and quasi immortality of nature. (WP 19)

The death of the boy is symbolical. The boy represents the poet's own former self which is now buried in the past. As the poet gazes at the grave he is sinking into inwardness and is mourning the loss of a prior mode of being. His mute gazing at the grave for "a long half-hour together" shows partly inward mourning and partly meditation on a loss which leads him to a deeper awareness of the relation between self-consciousness and Nature.

Rounding off his elucidation of the last stanza of "The Boy of Winander" Hartman observes significantly, "The poet at the grave is, in fact, a type of the halted traveller" (WP 22). The idea of the halted traveller is carried over to his reading of the lyric "Strange Fits of Passion" which is one of the most remarkable of the Lucy poems. It describes in a simple, but suggestive and resonant style a traveller riding to the cottage of his beloved, "beneath an evening-moon." Just before reaching the cottage a wayward thought strikes his mind that his beloved Lucy might be dead. Gilbert T. Dunkling has remarked that this lyric, like the other Lucy poems and "The Solitary Reaper" is in "a plain style which is
admirable” (Centenary Studies ix). Hartman notes that the poem works by understatement and rhetoric of implication except in the first stanza in which “fits” and “dare” contrast with the understatement that follows.

Although “Strange Fits of Passion” does not directly render the moment of self-consciousness, it does express, as Hartman observes, “a mind moving ever closer to it” (WP 23). As long as the rider in the poem is in a state of dream (“Kind Nature’s gentlest boon”) he is not aware of his own self and consequently he is under the illusion of deathlessness. He continues to travel in a slowed movement, fixing his eyes on the moon. When finally the moon drops behind the cottage of his beloved Lucy, the thought that she might be dead occurs to his mind suddenly and strangely,

‘O mercy!’ to myself I cried,
‘If Lucy should be dead!’

(27-28)

Jeffrey has criticized the whole poem and especially these last lines as representing the “fantastic and affected peculiarities in the mind or fancy of the author.” (Rev. of Lyrical Ballads 19). Hartman attempts a close reading of the poem focusing on the symbolic significance of the moon (which appears in all but the first and last stanzas) and the psychically established link between Lucy and the moon. He points out that the moon is “not a static symbol but part of an action” and that “its sudden drop punctuates a hypnotic progress” (WP 23). As the
moon's drop breaks the hypnosis, the traveller or the lover feels his self-consciousness returning and with that comes the thought of death. The intervening consciousness of death implicitly connects the poem with "The Boy of Winander" which ends with the death of the boy, and also with "The Solitary Reaper" in which the poet refers to "some natural sorrow, loss, or pain" as the probable theme of the maiden's song.

The image of the halted traveller which Hartman finds to be of central importance in Wordsworth’s poetry occurs in the beginning and also towards the end of "Tintern Abbey." Hartman locates it "in the slowed rhythm and meditative elaboration" of the first lines of "Tintern Abbey" (WP 26). It is expressed by a peculiar "wave effect" of rhythm which shows resistance to abrupt progression while there is internal acceleration. There is a sense of halting and the feeling of climax is avoided. Linking the effect of rhythm to the poet's state of consciousness Hartman says, "By this wavering rhythm the halted consciousness flows precariously into the continuousness of meditation" (WP 27).

What begins as a meditation on a personal feeling or experience in Wordsworth ("I hear," "I see," "I have felt") leads to the poetic statement of a principle of universal interest. Nature is for the poet a source of the renewal of spirit, but he is also aware of his separate mortal being, and consequently the fear of death, of separation from the sources of renewal, recurs in him. Hartman observes that towards the end of "Tintern Abbey" "the halted traveller faces once
more these fears and tries to overcome them” (*WP* 28). Wordsworth turns from nature to Dorothy for a glimpse of his own past self and for assurance that this moment will survive in the memory of his sister.

One not very insignificant contribution of Hartman to Wordsworth criticism is that he has illuminated the connection between Wordsworth’s poetry and the epitaph as a genre. In doing this he has taken the clue from Wordsworth’s own observations in his *Essays upon Epitaphs*. Wordsworth has spoken of man’s “desire to survive in the remembrance of his fellows” and has said that a good epitaph “ought to contain some thought or feeling belonging to the mortal or immortal part of our nature touchingly expressed” (*Wordsworth: Poetical Works* 729-731). D. D. Delvin comments, writing on the subject in detail much later than Hartman, “The epitaph emerges as the quintessential poem, or as the epitome of what Wordsworth considers the truest poetry” (*Wordsworth and the Poetry of Epitaphs* 115). He adds pointedly, “An epitaph continues memory to posterity; it speaks of death and a continued life in memory and hope” (*Epitaphs* 118). Hartman introduces the idea of the inscription in his commentary on the last verse of “Tintern Abbey” where Wordsworth addresses Dorothy:

> What could have been an inscription, written not far from a ruined abbey and addressed implicitly to a passing Stranger, is now directed to the person at his side, “Thou my dearest Friend, My dear, dear Friend.” It becomes a vow, a prayer, an inscription for Dorothy’s
heart, an intimation of how this moment can survive the speaker's death. (*WP* 28)

This provides a new insight into the essential nature of the poetic mode in "Tintern Abbey." In "The Solitary Reaper" too Hartman finds a variant of the epitaph as the harvest scene strangely reminds the poet of death, loss and separation. The image of the girl and her song bring the poet into the shadow of death; but death gives way to a sense of continuance as the poem progresses:

That shadow is lightened or subsumed as the poem proceeds, and the usual image pointing like an epitaph to the passerby is transformed into a more internal inscription testifying of continuance rather than death. (*WP* 12)

Hartman's response to "The Solitary Reaper" here shows a finely balanced perception of what the poem says and what it suggests. The analogy of the epitaph does not prevent him from grasping the complex development of the poem's theme. On the contrary, it enables him to keep track of the subtle variations in feeling, mood and image, which constitute the life of the poem. In "The Boy of Winander" the characteristic mode of the epitaph is much more explicit than in "The Solitary Reaper" or in "Tintern Abbey." The resemblance to the epitaph is clear in the last stanza of the poem where the death of the boy is mentioned and the poet gazes at the grave in meditative silence. Hartman appropriately describes the poem as "a beautifully extended epitaph" (*WP* 20).
The second chapter of **Wordsworth’s Poetry 1784-1814** entitled “Via Naturaliter Negativa” expresses a strikingly unconventional approach to *The Prelude*. Hartman deliberately avoids discussing familiar issues such as the epic quality of *The Prelude*, the philosophical sources of the book in Hartley, Godwin or Rousseau, or the many textual revisions of the poem that Wordsworth made between 1805 and 1850. The main focus of Hartman’s interest is in the growth of self-consciousness in Wordsworth as pictured by the poet in the various magnificently evoked episodes in *The Prelude*. Agreeing in principle with the position developed by John Jones in *The Egotistical Sublime* (1954) and Harold Bloom in *The Visionary Company* (1961) that the Romantic poets do not have a unified vision and that they are not fundamentally nature poets, Hartman pursues in close detail Wordsworth’s experience of the precarious relationship between imagination and nature.

The sources of Wordsworth’s creative power depend partly on his imagination and partly on his acknowledgement of the guidance of Nature. Hartman finds an opposition between these two sources of Wordsworth’s creativity:

An unresolved opposition between Imagination and Nature prevents him from becoming a visionary poet. It is a paradox, though not an unfruitful one, that he should scrupulously record nature’s workmanship, which prepares the soul for its independence from
sense-experience, yet refrain to use that independence out of respect of nature. (*WP* 39)

This carefully worded statement sums up Hartman’s basic approach to *The Prelude* and the problems it raises for the interpreter. It relates to the conflict between the absolute dominance of Nature on the poet’s mind and the claims of imagination which is intrinsically autonomous. Hartman distinguishes between Wordsworth’s attitude towards Nature in 1790 and 1804. Before 1790 Nature had sovereign power over Wordsworth’s mind and feeling, on his very being. But in 1790 during his crossing of the Alps, which is described in Book VI of *The Prelude* (the 1850 version), he was greatly disappointed with Nature, and began to feel that he had a separate existence of his own, a separate consciousness. In 1804, fourteen years after the event, he has the revelation that the higher power which hides within him and which separates him from Nature is Imagination:

\[
\text{Imagination—here the power so called} \\
\text{Through sad incompetence of human speech,} \\
\text{The awful Power rose from the mind’s abyss} \\
\text{Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,} \\
\text{At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;} \\
\text{But to my conscious soul I now can say—} \\
\text{“I recognize thy glory.” (*The Prelude* VI 592-99)}
\]

By saying that imagination which rises from “the mind’s abyss” is like “an unfathered vapour” Wordsworth means that it does not issue from any external
power such as Nature and that it nearly originates in itself. The poet comes to
discover that imagination is independent of Nature and sense-experience and that
it is an autonomous power capable of guiding him, “but this discovering, which
means a passing of the initiative from nature to imagination, is brought out
gradually, mercifully” (WP 41). The last part of Book VI of The Prelude was
probably composed in 1799 and therefore Hartman holds that perhaps till that time
Wordsworth thought nature his whole guide. After 1804 imagination moves the
poet, at times through the agency of Nature. As a poet Wordsworth continues to
observe and to respond to the life of Nature, but his actuating impulse is not mere
love of natural fact or natural objects. He is impelled primarily by his experience
of imagination. Hartman puts the point clearly:

   Wordsworth, therefore, does not adhere to nature because of natural
   fact, but despite it and because of human and poetic fact.
   Imagination is indeed an awe-ful power. (WP 48)

   In examining his later poetry it is difficult to decide at what stage he
transfers his allegiance from Nature to imagination or back from imagination to
Nature. The to-and-fro movement is a fluctuating one and is “bounded by some
cyclical or dialectical pattern” (WP 67). A recollected event often represents the
poet’s initial, instinctive response to nature, but the meditation which follows after
an intervening period of time shows his imaginative apprehension of the
significance of that event. This pattern repeats itself in The Prelude. It is his
imagination that takes the poet beyond Nature, to the infinity. Describing the power of imagination Wordsworth wrote in Book VI of *The Prelude*.

In such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours whether we be younger or old,
Our destiny, our being’s heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there.

(599-605)

In January 1824 Wordsworth wrote to Walter Savage Landor, “Even in poetry it is the imaginative only *viz.* that which is conversant [with], or turns upon infinity, that powerfully affects me” (*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* 134-5). Hartman argues that Wordsworth’s experience of the supremacy of imagination is linked to the birth of a sharper self-awareness. This is a significant stage in the growth of his consciousness, and it is minutely chronicled in *The Prelude*. Wordsworth believed in the possibility of his renovation through natural means, which also meant for him the self-assuring renewal of his poetic spirit. His vision is non-apocalyptic, based on a faith in “unviolent regeneration” (*WP* 30).

The episode of Mount Snowdown described in Book XIV of *The Prelude* presents Wordsworth’s culminating vision of the “interchangeable dominance” of
imagination and nature. The episode falls into three parts: first, the poet and his friend climb the mountain in thick fog, accompanied by a guide; then the poet has a vision of a bright light flashing on the ground and of a roar of waters rising with one voice, "Heard over earth and sea" and "felt by the starry heavens" (59, 60); thirdly, this is followed by the poet’s meditation on the meaning of this version. Commenting that this version is difficult to interpret “not only for us, but for the poet himself” (WP 60), Hartman observes succinctly, “The episode is Wordsworth’s most astonishing avoidance of apocalypse” (61).

Wordsworth takes his vision to be the revelation of the mighty mind or the inner power of Nature which is analogous to the power of imagination. He has a clear intuition that the power which Nature exhibits to the external senses,

Resemblance of that glorious faculty is the express
That higher minds bear with them as their own –

(The Prelude XIV, 88-90)

Hartman recognizes the supreme importance of this culminating vision of Wordsworth on the relation between imagination and Nature. It shows that the poet does not repose faith in an apocalyptic idea of death and rebirth, but believes in the possibility of insight and regeneration through the power of imagination and the beneficent influence of nature. Wordsworth in a sense identifies regeneration with his poetic self-renewal. Hartman offers a balanced and perceptive critique of Wordsworth’s vision in The Prelude when he says that the poet
does not express faith in nature but rather in the quickening relation of imagination to nature. Nature, however, is real and important enough. Spreading light and life in subtle, not catastrophic ways, it has brought the poet to his present faith that self-renewal is possible without a violence of apocalypse. (WP 68)

This complex notion of the relation between imagination and nature forms one of the central concerns of Hartman in his chronological examination of the poet’s works in the third chapter of *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814*. This chapter constitutes what is finest in Hartman’s hermeneutic commentary on Wordsworth. It begins with an elucidation of Wordsworth’s early poems “The Vale of Esthwaite,” and “An Evening Walk” and “Descriptive Sketches,” ranges through his great poetic works such as “The Ruined Cottage,” “Lyrical Ballads,” *The Prelude* and the major lyrics, and then rounds off with a study of *The Excursion* and a brief, but vibrant epilogue.

In traditional Wordsworth criticism the early works of the poet are dismissed as derivative of neoclassical style and consequently unworthy of critical notice. H. W. Garrod is one of the few critics to realize that,

as a part of literary history it is of first-rate interest; and an understanding of it is essential to a just appreciation of Wordsworth’s later and greater work. (Wordsworth 40)
Garrod’s interest, however, is in the way in which the early poetry expresses Wordsworth’s revolutionary fervour and his subsequent shift to an extreme form of individualism under the influence of Godwinism. Hartman chooses to relate the early works to aspects of Wordsworth’s consciousness which find fuller and more mature expression in his later poetry. He acclaims “The Vale of Esthwaite,” written at the age of seventeen, as “Wordsworth’s first sustained original poem” (WP 76), and locates its significance in its sensitive treatment of the mind of the poet, both at the personal and the generic levels. “An Evening Walk,” which many critics including Garrod find to be “most artificial” (Garrod 41), is subjected to a fresh reading by Hartman. He emphasizes the implicit theme of the poem which is related to the growth of a poet’s mind and which reflects the poet’s sense of a spiritual development approaching its crisis.

Descriptive Sketches (1793) which is one of the more famous of Wordsworth’s early poems also draws enthusiastic comments from Hartman. Admitting that there is a strenuous element in style and versification, Hartman contends that the poem throws light on the difference between “the nature the poet hoped for and the nature he found” (WP 104). This is a significant difference which appears in the later poetry as a conflict between mind and nature, or as alternating claims made by them for virtual autonomy. Hartman further notes that Descriptive Sketches records this conflict while he was still in its grip, whereas in The Prelude he is “bent over a deepening insight.” (WP 109)
Hartman's comments on "Salisbury Plain" further advances his phenomenological argument that each important poem of Wordsworth is to be considered intrinsically as well as in terms of its place in the total development of the author's oeuvre. F. W. Bateson has described "Salisbury Plain" as "a promising but very imperfect poem" (Wordsworth: A Re-interpretation 36). Hartman values the poem more highly. He observes that Wordsworth achieves a subtler form in versification by the use of distinctively Spenserian features. But his more important comment is centered on the thematic concerns of the poem. It is in this poem, Hartman argues, that Wordsworth first records his consciousness of imagination as an entity separate from nature. The idea of autonomous imagination is here linked to the idea of self-consciousness. Hartman makes a detailed and perceptive comparison between Jung's concept of individuation and Wordsworth's own idea of it as prefigured in "Salisbury Plain."

As a man, Wordsworth is realizing what consciousness—or better, self-consciousness—implies. As a poet "he is coming to know the autonomy of imagination. According to Jung, something very similar to the spot syndrome accompanies the process of self-discovery or individuation. True individuality, says Jung, is achieved when (conscious) ego and (unconscious) self are reconciled by means of controversion. The self is pictured by his as the centre of the unconscious to which the ego turns in any effort of regeneration. The individual is whole when ego and self are one, or rather in
communication and partnership (therefore more than ‘one’). (WP 123)

This is a brilliant moment in Hartman’s foray into psychological criticism. Later on, he interpreted one of Wordsworth’s Lucy poems, “A Slumber did my Spirit Seal,” in terms of the Freudian concepts of displacement and euphemism. In the passage quoted here the emphasis is on the resemblance between Wordsworth’s struggle for self-discovery and the Jungian notion of individuation. Wordsworth recognizes the self as “the centre of the unconscious,” but is not content to be at one with the self. He sees his self as being “in communication and partnership” with nature. Hartman thus exposes the psychological significance of the theme of Salisbury and shows how it is related to the development of Wordsworth’s major preoccupations as a poet.

Wordsworth’s only verse drama The Borderers belongs to the same period as “Salisbury Plain.” Although Coleridge praised the play, comparing it with Schiller’s The Robbers, for those profound touches of the human heart which both works contain, criticism since Swinburne has been on the whole expressly unfavourable. Bernard Groom has commented that the play’s dramatic action is secondary “and that the early poems, especially The Borderers are “of far less intrinsic value than their successors” (The Unity of Wordsworth’s Poetry 23&11). F. W. Bateson also shares this judgment, “As drama and dramatic poetry, it must be admitted, The Borderers possesses little or no interest” (Re-interpretation 122).
But he goes on to add that the play “should not really be read as drama but as concealed autobiography” (Re-interpretation 122).

Hartman’s phenomenological approach does not require him to use biographical facts or data about the poet for the interpretation of The Borderers. He admits that the work is “mediocre as drama” (WP 125). The supreme importance of the play, however, for him lies in its exploration of the ruinous powers of the intellect, in isolation from nature and moral truth. Oswald who is an Iago-figure in the play sees the intellect as a weapon of criminality. His consciousness of self is born of betrayal, of a crime against nature. He persuades his trusted leader Marmaduke to kill Herbert, the innocent father of Idonea with whom Marmaduke is in love. Oswald betrays his leader into treachery and guilt, justifying his action on the ground that he himself has once been betrayed. Hartman examines the play as a “philosophical drama” (WP 127), tracing in it “the crime-punishment-remorse sequence” (WP 131), which Coleridge had treated somewhat extensively in “Osorio” and more vigorously and pointedly in “The Ancient Mariner.” The Borderers, according to Hartman’s reading, shows the perils of an individuality based exclusively on the intellect, and acting in violation of nature. The play also bears evidences of Wordsworth’s positive thinking which links it to “The Ruined Cottage” and The Prelude. Hartman comments that Wordsworth
is seeking a view which would not entail connecting individuality and violation. That view is attained, however precariously, in “The Ruined Cottage” and The Prelude. These two great poems are founded on the hope that man does not have to violate nature to become human. (WP 135)

“The Ruined Cottage” was finished in spring 1798 and was revised and incorporated into the first Book of The Excursion. On reading the poem in manuscript Coleridge wrote that it is “superior [...] to anything in our language which in any way resembles it” (cited by F. W. Bateson 124). More than a century later F. R. Leavis praised it as “the finest thing that Wordsworth wrote” (Revaluations 179). John Jones declared that it “takes a decisive step into maturity” (The Egotistical Sublime 79). Hartman’s attitude to the poem is consistent with the high praise that his predecessors have accorded it. But unlike them he connects the poem thematically with The Borderers, arguing that both the works are predicated on the notion that “consciousness is not a simple violation of nature” (WP 135). “The Ruined Cottage” shows how Wordsworth overcomes the crisis which arises from his separation of the mind from nature and the later inclination of the mind to rejoin nature:

The child grows from a stage in which it walks with nature, to one in which it is in search of nature, finally to a crisis when nature no longer suffices. This crisis is overcome when it is seen that Nature
itself taught the mind to be free of nature and now teaches the mind
to be free of mind and mingle with nature once more. (*WP* 135)

Hartman here states the essential principle of development underlying
Wordsworth’s conception of the growth of the poet’s mind. He also critically
examines the manuscript of “The Ruined Cottage” and finds that the early version
gives clear evidence of the “spot syndrome” and “the omphalos” feeling. The poet
is stirred by the spirit of place, and “the memory of peculiar and place-bound
experience” continues to be the well-spring of his poetry even in *The Prelude* (*WP*
140).

In discussing *The Lyrical Ballads* Hartman’s attempt is to reconcile the
traditional realistic perspective with the visionary effects of the poetry. Poems
such as “The Thorn,” “Michael,” “Simon Lee” and “Heart-Leap Well” have been
found to be great or lacking in greatness, judged in realistic terms. Hartman points
out that most of these poems are built around a “spot,” whether in nature or in the
psyche. The characters in the poems are important not in themselves but for the
psychology of imagination that they exemplify. In one way or the other
Wordsworth is here concerned with the question of the separation of the
imagination from nature. Hartman regards the gigantic leaps of the hart in “Hart-
Leap Well” as the emblem of the vigour with which the separated imagination
seeks to return to nature. The thorn in the poem of that title is similarly taken as “a
symbol of the emergent self conserving its being despite everything” (*WP* 147).
Hartman's critical method allows him to blend particular comments on individual poems with general observations on the total effect of the poetry. While examining the stylistic, thematic and generic features of the more significant poems in *The Lyrical Ballads* he also reaffirms a formula on the beneficial effect of Wordsworth's poetry. The suggestions usually advanced for the regeneration of man are political, social or religious. Wordsworth offers the prospect of a different mode of regeneration or renovation of feeling. It is a simple faith in the creed that nature can lead to the birth of a new consciousness in us during this life. Hazlitt, Mill and Arnold were attracted to this creed. In Hartman’s words, *The Lyrical Ballads* bears out the truth that, 

there are, if we trust nature, infinite chances for man’s feelings to be renewed; [...] This renewal, moreover, as the “universal truth” and “stealing” influences of spring attest, is gentle to the point of not requiring the compulsion of externally framed laws or the gratification of reason. (*WP* 152)

In this context Hartman highlights another aspect of Wordsworth’s modernity which is revealed in the Lucy poems. These poems reveal Wordsworth’s deeply felt vision that human consciousness is bound to nature by a stronger chain than rationality or ratiocination. Wordsworth’s idea of humanization in these poems is that of “a precarious transition from imagination to the philosophic mind” (*WP* 160). His experience is essentially modern; it is that of
"a person still meditating and deepening the experience of which he talks" (WP 162). This is what connects The Lyrical Ballads with The Prelude and the Great Ode.

Of Wordsworth’s major lyrics “Intimations of Immortality” is undoubtedly his highest achievement. It is his Great Ode. As Bernard Groom has remarked, “Even those who object to it on philosophical grounds seldom question its success as poetry” (The Unity 89). Yet the poem has been a confusing one for interpreters. Margaret Drabble has said that “it is neither easy nor clear” and that “its meanings have been the source of endless discussion” (Wordsworth 123). Hartman’s reading shows that the confusion is not related to Wordsworth’s use of philosophical ideas drawn from Rousseau, Plato or the Stoic thinkers or theological ideas drawn from the psalms. He interprets the poem in the light of Wordsworth’s distinctively individual conception of the progress of the soul. The poem is not merely about growing up or ageing or the loss of visionary gleam. Hartman sees the ode in its deeper aspects, as an expression of “man’s growth into humanity” (WP 177), founded on the idea of the soul’s eventual turning to nature. Wordsworth presents two kinds of transition, first from unconscious self-love to love of nature, and secondly, from conscious self-love to love of man. Wordsworth’s faith in human regeneration is inevitably based on his faith in nature.

Hartman’s critical strategy changes when he comes to examine The Excursion (1814). F. W. Bateson’s pronouncement that it is “one of the dullest
books of its kind in the English language" sums up the general critical opinion on the work (Re-interpretation 170). Bernard Groom who holds that the work has imaginative power is forced to admit that, "The Excursion introduces a new didactic note which has damaged its reputation for a large body of readers" (The Unity 104). Hartman examines The Excursion to gain "an understanding of where Wordsworth fails (rather than, immediately why)" (WP 292). His diagnostic approach yields deep insights into both the weakness and strength of this most ambitious of Wordsworth's works. He locates the failure of the verse in a separation between the visual and the visionary which results in the atrophy of both. The visual is usually neglected while the visionary, is rendered "by an oblique and self-conscious voice" (WP 293). The voice of the Wanderer who is the persona of the poet is increasingly abstract. The strength of the poem, according to Hartman's analysis, is that it does not deny the power of imagination. Besides, he holds that it is "a strongly consistent poem in terms of genre, subject, and argument" (WP 296). The genre is rooted in the eighteenth century topographical and contemplative poetry of Thomson, Akenside and Cowper. The subject of the poem is nature as the ground of imagination blended with the spirit of place. The argument of the poem, as Hartman interprets it, relates to the nature and power of imagination. Wordsworth believes, led probably by sheer faith, that imagination can be naturalized:
If hope [...] truly blends with the world, despondency or visionary despair will cease, the earth will satisfy imagination wholly, and be as Paradise Regained. (WP 302)

Throughout The Excursion Wordsworth expresses his faith in nature’s power to regenerate the soul and to effect a “marriage of mind and nature, of imagination and this world” (WP 318). Admitting that Books V to IX are much too lengthy to be poetically justified, Hartman still holds a brief for them as they emphasize “The inward principle that gives effect/To outward argument” (V.572-73) The Wanderer expresses Wordsworth’s noble conception of the Chain of Being, supported by an active principle of life in which the distinction between individual things is not blurred:

There is an active principle alive
In all things, in all natures, in the flowers
And in the trees, in the very pebbly stone
That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
The moving waters, and the invisible air

(The Excursion V. 286-90)

This passage unequivocally reveals Wordsworth’s respect for individual beings as well as his intuitive faith in the Great Chain of Being. Hartman affirms that those who say that Wordsworth “advocated rural nature as a panacea” are
really misreading the poetry and restricting the real power of his imagination which “circulates rejoicing through infinite arteries of links” (*WP* 320-323).

In the “Epilogue” Hartman mainly investigates the symbolic and spiritual meaning of Wordsworth’s ballad “The White Doe of Rylstone.” He sees the poem as expressing Wordsworth’s conception of two kinds of imagination—the Catholic and the Protestant. The Catholic imagination is represented by the Nortons in the ballad, who are a corporate entity culminating totemically in their banner. The Protestant imagination, according to the symbolic scheme Hartman discerns in the poem, is represented by the heroine Emily and her brother Francis. They have a more decidedly individual relation to their conscience, which is also in a sense a more natural relation. It is the white doe that helps Emily to renew her relationship with nature, and the doe is to some extent humanized. Hartman accords a high place to “The White Doe” in Wordsworth’s poetic canon, as it is one of the last attempts of the poet to preserve the notion of a Sympathetic Nature which is “vital not only to poetry but also to human development” (*WP* 330).

The despondency and melancholia of Wordsworth’s declining years have been variously attributed to his political disillusionment, to his personal isolation and stubbornness or to the failure of his poetic genius. Hartman finds a truly poetic reason for the poet’s “heart-sickness” during his last years. Wordsworth felt, as is increasingly clear from his poetry, that man and nature were growing irremediably apart. He thought it his great mission to bridge the gap, to reconcile nature and the
human mind. It is “the burden of this secret consciousness” (*WP* 337) that has been misconstrued as the “egotistical sublime.” But Keats who coined the phrase in dispraise of Wordsworth also revered him for his knowledge of the human heart. Comparing Wordsworth with Milton, Keats has said, “He [Milton] did not think into the human heart as Wordsworth has done” (*The Letters* 282). Hartman probes into the heart of Wordsworth’s poetic achievement without allowing himself to be swayed by facts about the poet’s life, the political situation of the time or about the more obvious intellectual climate of the period. Hartman’s attention is steadily fixed in the way the poet’s self-consciousness develops on the basis of a conception of the interactive relationship between mind and nature. Hartman investigates this relationship not in abstract intellectual terms, but in terms of poetic embodiment, manifest in the poem’s verbal texture and coherence of form. All the same, he consciously eschews the explicatory method followed by the formalist critics such as Cleanth Brooks or Robert Penn Warren. His procedure is anti-formalist in spirit and in principle.

Resisting the tendency to make absolute or peremptory judgments, Hartman generally contents himself with offering interpretations of poems individually or in their relation to other poems. His work on Wordsworth in the opening chapter of *The Unmediated Vision* and in the whole of *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814* reveals his hermeneutic genius at its best and most dynamic. His half-distinct, half-disguised phenomenological approach which centres on a sustained exploration of Wordsworth’s concern with consciousness renders his criticism
recognizably different from that of traditional Wordsworth detractors as well as enthusiasts. His emphasis on understanding rather than on evaluation, and his attempt to reconstruct the meaning of the text in terms of the poet’s intentionality are striking features of his phenomenological approach. In the history of the interpretation of Wordsworth’s poetry Hartman’s contribution is certainly innovative. In his scholarly “Critical Bibliographies” which form a substantial part of *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* Hartman has given some clues on his differences from earlier critics as well as on certain points of similarity which he shares with more recent critics such as John Jones, M. H. Abrams and Harold Bloom.

In 1985, twenty-five years after the appearance of *Wordsworth's Poetry*, Hartman published *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* which is a collection of fourteen essays written by him on various occasions. What unifies the essays in this collection is Hartman’s attempt to place the poet in a European context and to bring out his fundamental significance for the cultural life of our time. Renewed attention to Wordsworth is justified as Hartman senses a situation in which the poet’s reputation has suffered a deplorable setback:

In England Wordsworth remains, for the most part, a cottage industry. On the Continent he has not been received as more than a parochial nature-poet. In our own intellectual circles, despite more complex readings, his reputation remains fickle. (*UW* xxvi)
Hartman's effort now is to establish Wordsworth's claim to be considered as a philosopher and poet comparable with the greatest writers in Europe. He compares aspects of Wordsworth's work and thought with those of Goethe, and Holderlin, and the intellectual positions of the poet are explored in relation to those of Hegel and Heidegger. For instance, he juxtaposes Wordsworth’s poem "The Danish Boy" with Goethe’s ballad “Erlkönig” and analyses the similarity in the concepts of character, voice and psyche exemplified by both the poems: In another essay Hartman observes that Hegel and Wordsworth “have entered an epoch in which philosophy forms an alliance with art in order to resist the political. As for Heidegger, Hartman regards Wordsworth as his forerunner and comments that “Wordsworth’s Being and Time is, as it were, his ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’” (UW 202).

Hartman’s overt statement that Wordsworth is “an inaugural figure for both modern philosophy and poetry” represents an advance from the position taken in The Unmediated Vision and Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814. Hartman has only partially succeeded in vindicating his new claim for Wordsworth and that probably explains why The Unremarkable Wordsworth has had a less powerful impact on the readers than the two earlier works. Hartman seems to overemphasize the philosophical import of Wordsworth’s poetry and this is probably a weak position to take. However The Unremarkable Wordsworth does take Wordsworth criticism to new and challenging areas and proves that Wordsworth’s poetry has an enduring and vital quality which makes it responsive to diverse critical
approaches. Hartman himself has explored the poetry using the tools of
deconstructive and psycho-analytic criticism; an enquiry into this aspect of
Hartman's innovative criticism forms part of Chapter IV of this study. But the
stages by which his critical method and canon moved beyond formalism into
deconstructive criticism will be traced in the chapter that follows.