10

'I only look'd for pain and grief'

set out from Portsmouth as Captain of the *Earl of Abergavenny* in late 1805 John Wordsworth told his brother William that 'I shall make a good voyage of it if not a *very great* one – at least this is the general n.'[1] He meant that he expected it to be profitable; the ship's cargo was at £200,000, and besides 200 crew members the ship was carrying another 200 people as passengers. If all went well the voyage would him close to his dream of retiring to the Lake District with William and ny.

ship set sail from Portsmouth on 5 February 1805 but while off Portill, barely an hour into its journey, it ran into a severe westerly gale. A as taken on board to guide her into the safety of Portland Roads, the harbour between Weymouth and the Isle of Portland. There seems to een a delay in obtaining the pilot and by the time he was on board they st the benefit of a flood tide. The difficult challenge facing him was to he Shambles, but he underestimated the clearance required by a fully- ship. John Wordsworth did not trust pilots, having previously men- to William that 'it is a joyful time for us when we get rid of them.'[2] ne miscalculated[3] and as the ship rounded the eastern end of the Shamnto Portland Roads her way was unexpectedly becalmed. At about 5 he wind dropped and she was swept onto the rocks. A terrifying evening ed as the ship was successively swept on and off the reef. Finally at d 7.30 p.m. she beat her way clear of the Shambles and despite being

ham 155.

563–4.

at least was Wordsworth's view, as reported by Southey to John Rickman on 1 May here was no misconduct whatever, except in the pilot for running her aground' i 321). In one of the various pamphlets concerning the wreck, John Wordsworth orted to have cried, when the ship struck the rock, 'Oh pilot! pilot! you have ruined 564n1).

waterlogged steered towards Weymouth sands. She was too flooded to remain afloat and, shortly after 11, two miles offshore, sank in 66 feet of water. Other ships were nearby, but it was too dangerous for them to approach. John had by this time ascended to the 'hen-coop', the highest part of the ship, where he was heard to utter his last words, 'Let her go! God's will be done.' Shortly after he was washed overboard and for five minutes struggled desperately for his life in a cold and violent sea.[4] Of the 387 people aboard 155 survived. John's body was recovered on 20 March and buried the following day in Wyke-Regis.

Unaware of what had happened three days after the wreck, Wordsworth was busily making progress with the thirteen-book *Prelude* – though at this stage he was still working to a plan of fourteen books, Book X at that time comprising two books. By the end of 1804 the entire work was mapped out and mostly written. There were some gaps between Book X, line 567, and the end of Book XIII, but much of this Wordsworth knew would comprise a redevelopment of materials already composed.[5] It is not known what he was working on when he wrote confidently to Richard Sharp on 8 February, three days after his brother's death, but it is likely to have been some of the earlier drafts in MS Z towards Book X or Book XI.[6]

> My Poem advances quick or slow as the fit comes; but I wish sadly to have it finished in order that after a reasonable respite I may fall to my principal work. . . . By the Bye I ought not to forget that we had a Letter from my Brother The Captain a few days ago from Portsmouth, speaking very favourably of his hopes and in good spirits.[7]

John's 'Letter' had been sent on 24 January. It praised 'Tintern Abbey', 'Michael' and the poems on the naming of places, while taking exception to 'a harshness'[8] in some of Wordsworth's as yet unpublished poems. Critics have argued over what this 'harshness' might be; I suspect John had in mind the sublime confidence of some of the *Prelude* poetry as it is clear that he preferred the compassionate manner of 'The Mad Mother' and 'Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman'. By his 'principal work' Wordsworth meant 'The Recluse', which he was expecting shortly to begin, the conclusion of the fourteen (soon to become thirteen) book *Prelude* being within sight.

4 Wordsworth discussed the length of time for which John struggled in a letter to Richard Wordsworth, *EY* 583.

5 I follow Mark L. Reed; see Cornell *13-Book Prelude* i 56.

6 See Cornell *13-Book Prelude* ii 435ff.

7 *EY* 534–5.

8 Ketcham 156.

A few days later, on Monday 11 February, he and Mary went out for a walk. They returned to Dove Cottage at around 2 p.m. to find that Sara Hutchinson had arrived with news of John's death, plunging Dorothy into a state of terrible distress. His absence had meant that, as Wordsworth told his brother Richard later that day, 'I had no power of breaking the force of the shock to Dorothy or to Mary. They are both very ill.'[9]

This was no exaggeration. On 4 March Wordsworth told Richard that 'I cannot say that the burthen of our affliction in this house is yet much lighter; to time we must look for ease.'[10] Three days later he told Walter Scott that 'we have neither strength nor spirits for any thing.'[11] On 26 March, shortly after hearing of the recovery of John's body, Sara Hutchinson told her friend Mrs Cookson that 'we cannot stir from the house without meeting a thousand fresh remembrances of our loss.'[12] She referred to the fact that John had planted many of the trees and shrubs in the garden at Dove Cottage – a point reiterated by Mary in a letter of 7 March.[13]

The tragedy took a heavy toll on Dorothy in particular; she was described as looking unwell for weeks afterwards and found consolation by meditating on John's last words, as she reported to Christopher: 'a thousand times have I repeated to myself his last words "The will of God be done," and be it so.'[14] In her letter of mid-March to Jane Marshall she repeated those words with the comment: 'I have no doubt when he felt that it was out of his power to save his life, he was as calm as before if some thought of what we should endure did not awaken a pang.'[15] She was a focus of some anxiety made all the worse by the presence of two infant children, John and Dora, who would have witnessed her distress, and whom it was her task to look after. As late as mid-March she reported her inability to cope with John's boisterousness.[16] William and Mary's support was necessary to keep her on an even keel. As she told Richard on 27 February, 'William and Mary have done all that could be done to comfort me, and I have done my best for them.'[17] Later that day she wrote to Christopher, saying 'let us who are left cling closer to each other.'[18]

9 540.

10 552.

11 553.

12 *Letters of Sara Hutchinson*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 7.

13 569n1; see also Dorothy's letter to Jane Marshall, 15 and 17 March 1805, *EY* 560.

14 550.

15 559.

16 567, 570.

17 549.

18 550.

But who was comforting Wordsworth, and what was he suffering? I have suggested in earlier chapters that he had a natural tendency to suppress intense emotion. This is a not uncommon way for Englishmen to behave today; it was more widespread then. I have also suggested that his father's death may have generated feelings of anger.[19] Wordsworth confessed to being 'of a stiff, moody, and violent temper' as a boy,[20] and that passionate nature followed him into adulthood. John's death brought that intensity to the fore. It seems likely that, given Dorothy's state, he was compelled to sacrifice his own comfort from the outset. The day the news came through he reported to Beaumont that they were all 'in miserable affliction, which I do all in my power to alleviate; but heaven knows I want consolation myself.'[21] His tone was almost fearful when he added: 'I shall do all in my power to sustain my Sister under her sorrow, which is and long will be bitter and poignant.'[22] Mary hints at the strain on him in her letter to Catherine Clarkson of 7 March:

> Our beloved William! My dear friend you would love him more than ever, could you but know how he has exerted himself to comfort us and, after all, as he tells us, his, is the greatest loss . . . (Burton 2)

Nearly a month into their grief it is clear that Wordsworth felt in need of comfort and may not have received it. As the letter to Beaumont indicates, one of his main outlets was correspondence, and it is here that one finds most evidence of how he managed his feelings.

The day after writing to Beaumont he responded to a letter of condolence from Southey by saying that 'grief will, as you say, and must, have its course.'[23] There is a certain reluctance, if not resentment, in Wordsworth's reiteration of Southey's platitudinous observation; it was as though he felt his head bowed to a yoke. In a letter to Thomas Clarkson on 16 February he again commented: 'We shall endeavour to be resigned: this is all I can say; but grief will have its course.'[24] The same day he told his brother Christopher that 'We have done all that could be done to console each other by weeping together.

[19] See chapter 6 above, p. 132.

[20] *Prose Works* iii 372.

[21] *EY* 541. Wordsworth once told Thomas Moore that, 'such was his horror of having his letters *preserved*, that in order to guard against it, he always took pains to make them as bad and dull as possible' (*Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence of Thomas Moore* ed. Rt. Hon Lord John Russell, MP (8 vols, London, 1853–6) vii 198). The exceptions to this were the letters he wrote to Beaumont, as those quoted in this chapter demonstrate.

[22] *EY* 542.

[23] *EY* 543.

[24] *EY* 544.

I trust we shall with the blessing of God grow calmer every day.'[25] Again, there is a certain hollowness in that expression of trust, and it would prove futile, at least at first. His letter to Southey was answered by a visit to Dove Cottage when their grief was at its height, 13–15 February, which 'comforted us much', as Wordsworth told Thomas Clarkson.[26] The benefit of Southey's presence was that it relieved pressure on Wordsworth and provided another party to whom he could articulate his feelings. As rivals for Coleridge's affections they hadn't been close before this, but Southey's kindness marked the beginning of a deep and genuine friendship that lasted until his death. It certainly altered Dorothy's opinion. Before this, she told Lady Beaumont, Southey had seemed to possess 'nothing of the dignity or enthusiasm of the Poet's Character', but while at Dove Cottage 'he wept with us in our sorrow, and for that cause I think I must always love him.'[27] Southey later recorded that he had been 'dreadfully shocked' by John's death.[28] His visit lasted only a few days, and the deep reservoir of grief that had built up within Wordsworth had still to find release after his departure.[29]

The Wordsworths had learnt to share their grief in 1787, when delayed mourning for their parents had overcome John, Christopher, Dorothy and William thanks to the delay in sending horses to carry the brothers to Penrith. In 1805 their pain was worse for the fact that it was the loss of one of their number that had revived the process. The mourning of 1805 was different in other ways from that of 1787. In 1805 Dorothy's reliance on him made it harder for Wordsworth to express his feelings, and he channelled them instead into metaphysical questions. This began with the letter to Beaumont of 21 February in which he exclaimed 'Alas! what is human life!'[30] The next day to Southey he exclaimed, 'human life! after all, what is it!'[31] In both cases this was half-exclamation, half-question. Irritated by misleading reports in the newspapers in which John's conduct had been maligned, he was inspired in a letter to Beaumont of 12 March to amplify this:

[25] *EY* 543.

[26] *EY* 544.

[27] *EY* 577.

[28] Warter i 318.

[29] Southey made a second visit to Dove Cottage *c.*20 February, which he reported to John Taylor on 9 March: 'Poor Wordsworth is almost heart-broken by the loss of his brother in the Abergavenny, – his best and favourite brother. I have been twice over with him and never witnessed such affliction as his and his sister's' (*A Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late William Taylor of Norwich*, ed. J. W. Robberds (2 vols, London, 1843),

[30] *EY* 541.

[31] *EY* 543.

> Why have we sympathies that make the best of us so afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the supreme governor? Why should our notions of right towards each other, and to all sentient beings within our influence differ so widely from what appears to be his notion and rule, if every thing were to end here? Would it be blasphemy to say that upon the supposition of the thinking principle being destroyed by death, however inferior we may be to the great Cause and ruler of things, we have *more of love* in our Nature than he has? The thought is monstrous; and yet how to get rid of it except upon the supposition of *another* and a *better world* I do not see. (*EY* 556)

The obvious answer to the last of these questions is 'yes'. So often thought of as the most pious and god-fearing of the Romantic poets, Wordsworth was fully capable of blasphemous thoughts. Grief compelled him to face up to his deepest feelings in response to the question, 'what is life?', posed in earlier letters. This comment to Beaumont shows that in framing it Wordsworth wanted to know what kind of justice underlay a divinely ordered system in which, as he had written in 'Ruined Cottage' MS B, 'the good die first, / And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust / Burn to the socket.'[32] In 1797 no answer had been given, and Margaret's tragedy was understood to be a fact of life. In the letter to Beaumont Wordsworth goes further, implying that human beings are mere playthings of whatever 'governor' ruled the planet.

This important letter goes on to extol John's many virtues before adding, 'and we see what has been his end!'[33] Wordsworth suggests that there is little point in being virtuous if the reward is an early death; again, he implicitly points an accusing finger at God. He turns immediately to a proxy, Edward Young, and copies out a passage from *Night Thoughts*. The appeal of this particular poem is clear. Young had written, 'Our Birth is nothing but our Death begun.'[34] In that belief he had set out to compose a poem of consolation, designed to show how the orthodox Christian might live a virtuous life in the hope of eternal reward. When he read Young shortly before writing to Beaumont, Wordsworth must have been seeking reassurance. He probably began reading *Night the Seventh*, 'The Infidel Reclaim'd', from the start, and then thought it worth copying out the following passage:

> When to the grave we follow the renown'd
> For valour, virtue, science, all we love,
> And all we praise; for worth, whose noon-tide beam,
> Enabling us to think in higher style,

[32] Ll. 150–2.
[33] *EY* 556.
[34] *Night Thoughts* v 719.

> Mends our ideas of ethireal powers;
> Dream we, *that* lustre of the moral world
> Goes out in stench, and rottenness the close?
> Why was he wise to know, and warm to praise,
> And strenuous to transcribe in human life
> The mind almighty? Could it be that fate
> Just when the lineaments began to shine
> And dawn the Deity, should snatch the draught,
> With night eternal blot it out?
> (*EY* 556, from *Night Thoughts* vii 205–17)

For Young these questions were rhetorical. The implication for him and his readers was that we are all divine and each contain some spark of immortality; stench and rottenness were not 'the close'. In the context of Wordsworth's letter, however, the tone is less persuasive. No doubt he would like to believe, with Young, that God had a divine purpose and that it was beneficial to John, but coming immediately after the suggestion that 'we have *more of love* in our Nature than he [i.e. God] has,' *Night Thoughts* reads more like a statement of doubt than of belief.

It is interesting that Wordsworth concludes his copy at line 217, because Young's sentence continues for another line or so:

> . . . With Night eternal blot it out, and give
> The Skies Alarm, lest Angels too might die?
> (*Night Thoughts* vii 217–18)

Wordsworth may have chosen to omit this because it articulated his own fear too closely. Young is after all postulating something that must have seemed heretical. With John's death an angel *had* been condemned to death – something as inexplicable as Fate's snuffing out of the shining 'Lineaments' of the virtuous. Paradoxically Young, who had sought to promote Christian belief, had helped Wordsworth open up an avenue of doubt and scepticism.

In 1796 Coleridge told Thelwall that Wordsworth was 'at least a *Semi*-theist',[35] which may have been another of way of saying that he had no need of a redeemer, as Wordsworth later claimed.[36] It is worth bearing in mind that when described as a semi-atheist Wordsworth had only recently renounced his adherence to the philosophy of Godwin, who was described by Coleridge as 'the very High priest of Atheism'.[37] According to the thirteen-book

Griggs i 216.
Morley i 158.
Griggs i 215.

Prelude it was not atheism that led to that renunciation but the interminable interrogation of the mind.[38] In the wake of the Terror, there is good reason to think that, besides reacting against Godwin, Wordsworth also rejected outright atheism. At Racedown he read Louvet's *Narrative*, which warned against 'atheism reduced to principle'.[39] And during his residence in London he was a regular visitor to Joseph Fawcett's sermons at the dissenters' meeting-house at Old Jewry in the city. He later remembered that Fawcett's 'Xtianity was probably never very deeply rooted, &, like many others in those times of like shewy talents, he had not strength of character to withstand the effects of the French revolution & of the wild & lax opinions which had done so much towards producing it & far more in carrying it forward in its extremes.'[40] These are the judgements of Wordsworth in his seventies, so it is not surprising that they are implicitly critical of Fawcett. In the 1790s, however, there is reason to think that as a semi-atheist Wordsworth was intrigued by Fawcett's religious views, which were influenced by Plato. In a sermon on omnipresence Fawcett described God as

> the living soul that inhabits, and animates every living thing; that propels every drop through every vein; that produces every pulsation of every artery, every motion of every limb, every action of every organ, throughout the whole animal kingdom. . . . He is the life of the world: at once the maker, the inspector, and the mover of all things.[41]

Platonic notions of God occur throughout Wordsworth's poetry, and he was well-acquainted with them; at some point prior to 1810 he took possession of Coleridge's copy of Thomas Taylor's translation of *Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides, and Timaeus*.[42] They provided a useful way of conceiving of the unifying cosmic force that would bring about the millenarian enlightenment envisaged in such 1798 'Recluse' fragments as 'There is an active principle'. Indeed, there is good evidence for believing that Wordsworth's religious notions were in some ways Platonic. When dismissing German metaphysicians to Caroline Fox in 1844 he pulled back slightly from his criticisms: 'However, they have much of Plato in them, and for this I respect them: the English,

[38] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* x 888–904.

[39] Jean Baptiste Louvet de Couvray, *Narrative of the Dangers to which I have been exposed* (London, 1795), p. 70. For details of Wordsworth's reading see *WR* i 89.

[40] *FN* 80.

[41] As quoted in Leslie Chard, *Dissenting Republican* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), p 151.

[42] See *WR* ii 167–8.

with their devotion to Aristotle, have but half the truth; a sound Philosophy must contain both Plato and Aristotle.'[43]

All the same, these ideas remain general, and Wordsworth tended to refrain from saying anything more specific. One of the most perceptive comments on his religious views dates from 1815, when Henry Crabb Robinson said that Wordsworth's religion was 'like [that] of the German metaphysicians, a sentimental and metaphysical mysticism in which the language of Christianity is used, which is a sort of analogy to this poetic and philosophical religion'.[44] That may be about as close as anyone ever got to pinning him down on matters which were probably, as in many people at the time, constantly under review and subject to revision.

What evidence there is suggests that in 1805 Wordsworth's creed was by no means conventional, and that he was capable of the questioning to which John's death appears to have given rise. Belief where it occurred in Wordsworth's early work had been located principally in the hope that the dead might be reclaimed through intense communion with natural things. Although there is abundant evidence of a belief in that kind of imaginative vision, there is none in an intervening deity. So it is that human tragedy takes its inevitable course in 'The Ruined Cottage' MS B and *The Borderers*, the beneficent God of Coleridge's verse being absent. 'The Recluse' was to preach the virtues of a divine agency and in refashioning himself as its author Wordsworth had found it necessary to postulate something like the Coleridgean creator – hence the recurrence of 'God' in poetry of 1798 onwards. All the same, I suspect that Robinson was correct in suggesting that for Wordsworth God was a means of referring to an innate, metaphysical divinity that resided within the mind.

John's death stripped away any ability to pretend, and made it impossible for Wordsworth to fudge questions of fundamental conviction. One aspect of this was to address the question of his own culpability. 'Poor blind Creatures that we are!' he told Richard Sharp, 'how he hoped and struggled and we hoped and struggled to procure him this voyage.'[45] Like the guilt he had felt in 1787, the sense that he had somehow been complicit in the events that destroyed his brother may have been related to the anger of the moment which, though frequently suppressed, is almost invariably present in his written statements. This quickly mellowed into acceptance. As Wordsworth told one of the survivors of the wreck: 'It was God's Will that he should not return to us and we must reconcile ourselves to our loss and make it of use to us to

Peacock 76.

Morley i 158.

LY 572.

prepare us for similar separations.'[46] John's last words, which Dorothy had repeated thousands of times since their first utterance, had become embedded in Wordsworth's tormented emotions.

His poetic vocation was intricately entwined with his feelings for John. On the day the news came through he described John as 'meek, affectionate, silently enthusiastic, loving all quiet things, and a Poet in every thing but words'.[47] That was fundamental to his response to the death, and would be repeated. It was no flight of fancy. In succeeding weeks he commented that 'I never wrote a line without a thought of its giving him pleasure, my writings printed and manuscript were his delight and one of the chief solaces of his long voyages.'[48] This is borne out by John's extant letters, and by Wordsworth's comment to Mary and Dorothy that the 'loss of John is deeply connected with his *business*'.[49] As late as 1812 he told Lord Lonsdale that 'My Brother had entirely sympathised with my literary pursuits, and encouraged me to give myself entirely to that way of Life, with assurance that [if] I stood in need of assistance, and he proved fortunate, it should ever be ready for me.'[50] At the very least Wordsworth regarded his brother as a partner and a patron. It would not be fanciful to suggest that he felt he owed John his vocation and what success he had enjoyed: 'he encouraged me to persist, and to keep my eye steady on its object.'[51] It was natural that he should commemorate him in verse. In mid- to late April, having written no poetry since 11 March, he

> had a strong impulse to write a poem that should record my Brother's virtues and be worthy of his memory. I began to give vent to my feelings, with this view, but I was overpowered by my subject and could not proceed: I composed much, but it is all lost except for a few lines, as it came from me in such a torrent that I was unable to remember it; I could not hold the pen myself, and the subject was such, that I could not employ Mrs Wordsworth or my Sister as my amanuenses. (*EY* 586)

Wordsworth's grief, which had produced anger, now became the source of inspiration, as in 1787 when 'The Vale of Esthwaite' had radically altered course subsequent to the delayed mourning for his father. When he returned to *The Prelude* in late April 1805 he was similarly changed. The poem to Coleridge was largely complete, but important passages had yet to be com

46 *EY* 579.
47 *EY* 541.
48 *EY* 565.
49 Burton 2.
50 *Supp.* 104.
51 *EY* 547.

posed. He told Beaumont that he had two books to write, probably referring to Books XII and XIII.[52] As he drafted the first of these in MS Z, he found an opportunity to pay his first tribute in verse to his brother with a passage which envisages his ideal audience – those who 'read the invisible soul':

> . . . men for contemplation fram'd,
> Shy, and unpractis'd in the strife of phrase,
> Meek men, whose very souls perhaps would sink
> Beneath them, summon'd to such intercourse:
> Theirs is the language of the heavens, the power,
> The thought, the image, and the silent joy;
> Words are but under-agents in their souls;
> When they are grasping with their greatest strength
> They do not breathe among them: this I speak
> In gratitude to God, who feeds our hearts
> For his own service, knoweth, loveth us
> When we are unregarded by the world.
> (*Thirteen-Book Prelude* xii 266–77)

This purports to describe an entire class of men but is a portrait of John. It was he who, as Wordsworth told Beaumont, was 'modest; and gentle: and shy, even to disease'.[53] To such people words are 'strife', a conflict from which they retreat. Instead, as honorary poets, they speak the higher language of the inspired when their souls are at their zenith. Only in the light of John's demise does the concluding statement make sense. Wordsworth's claims are made 'In gratitude to God', who nourishes our spirits for his 'own service'. That service and its larger purpose remains beyond our comprehension. But what he wrote Wordsworth consciously attempted to build within himself a trust in providence. That meant compelling himself to pay homage to a higher will and accept that John's death must have had its logic.

Confronted once again with *The Prelude*, he found himself increasingly out of sympathy with the self that had written it. Much had been composed in a mood of proud hope, spurred on by the irrevocable knowledge that he was the poet-prophet of 'The Recluse'. In the wake of John's death that hope turned empty, and on concluding *The Prelude* about 20 May he told Beaumont that it 'seemed to have a dead weight about it, the reality so far short of the expectation'.[54] That disappointment left its mark on the manuscript. Above the title-page of Book XI in MS Z he commented: 'This whole book wants

I follow Reed; see Cornell *13-Book Prelude* i 58.
EY 548.
EY 594.

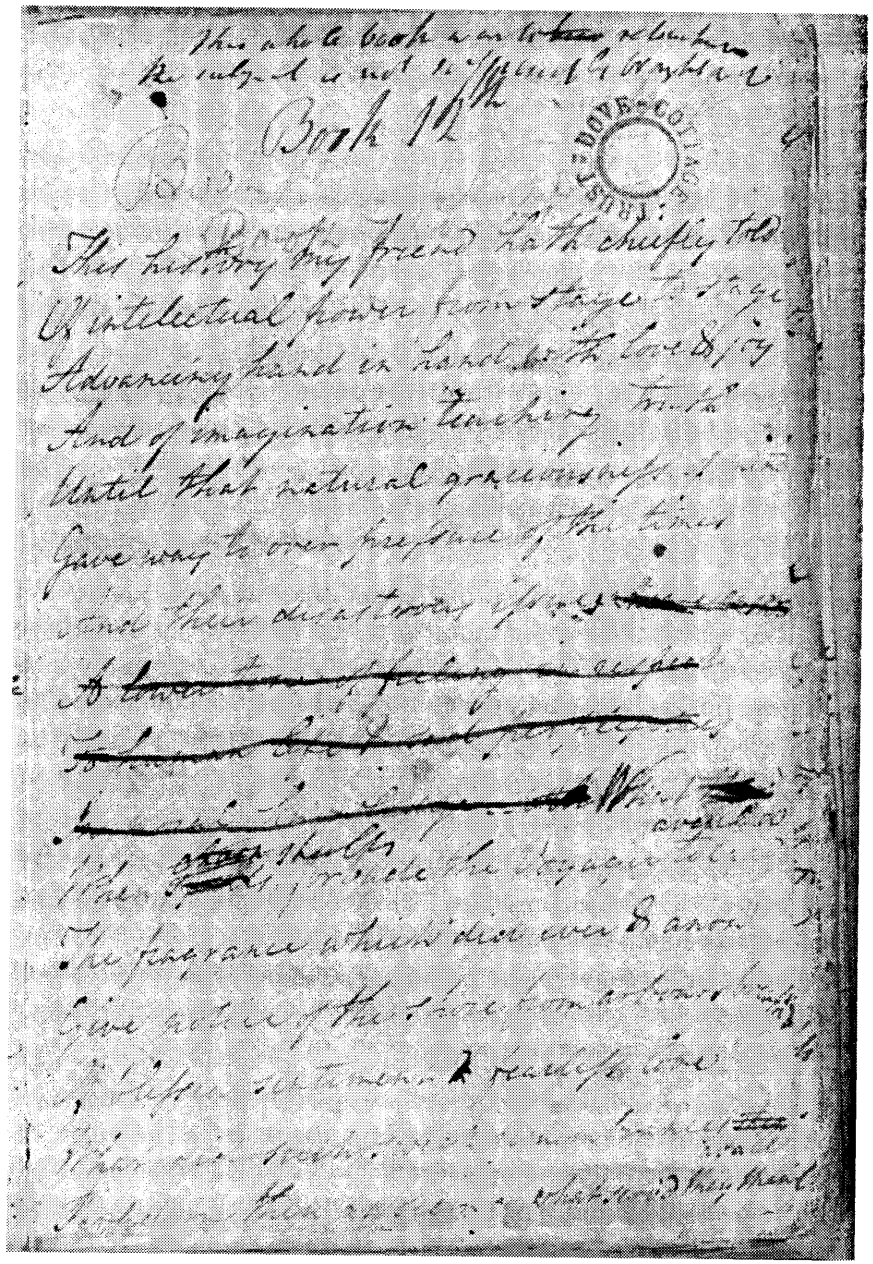

Figure 18. DC MS 49, 5r. *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*: 'Book 12th'; note the deleted lines in which Wordsworth criticizes his Godwinian self harshly in the wake of John's death.

retouching the subject is not sufficiently brought out.'[55] Further indications of how grief had altered him appear further down on the same page where five lines are deleted from the text, in which he criticized himself for his attachment to Godwinism,

> whence ensu'd
> A lower tone of feeling in respect
> To human life & sad perplexities
> In moral knowledge[56]

In the light of John's death Godwinism must have seemed more spurious than ever, for grief and suffering were devalued by it. That these harsh judgements were affected by thoughts of John is corroborated by the lines that follow:

> What avail'd,
> When Spells forbade the Voyager to land,
> The fragrance which did ever and anon
> Give notice of the Shore, from arbours breathed
> Of blessed sentiment and fearless love?
> What did such sweet remembrances avail,
> Perfidious then, as seem'd, what serv'd they then?
> My business was upon the barren seas,
> My errand was to sail to other coasts . . .
> (*The Thirteen-Book Prelude* xi 48–56)

In May 1805 Wordsworth could hardly have described himself as a mariner 'upon the barren seas' without thinking of John. Once again the idea of his being in John's situation is turned against himself. He becomes a stranger to 'blessed sentiment and fearless love', where John had been no such thing. Wordsworth is recalling Satan inhaling 'odorous sweets' as he approaches Eden,[57] but even Satan had been commendably attracted to their source. As he looks back, Wordsworth sees himself as having been alienated from the 'sweet remembrances' of family and friends, seduced by sterile systems of thought.

The new perspective forced upon him had distanced him further than ever from the optimism of the 1790s, leading him to regard that younger self less sympathetically than he would otherwise have done. John's death reminded

See figure 18 opposite.
Ibid.
Paradise Lost iv 156–66.

him of why he became a poet and of the forces that once inspired him – grief, guilt and betrayal. By comparison with that the redemptive plan of 'The Recluse' must have seemed meretricious and etiolated. Completion of *The Prelude* gave him scant pleasure because it wasn't something he wished any longer to have written. What was more, he told Beaumont,

> the doubt whether I should ever live to write the Recluse and the sense which I had of this Poem being so far below what I seem'd capable of executing, depressed me much: above all, many heavy thoughts of my poor departed Brother hung upon me; the joy which I should have had in shewing him the Manuscript and a thousand other vain fancies and dreams. (*EY* 594)

Alongside the sense in which John was a partner in the process of composition went the feeling that the preface to 'The Recluse' was a disappointment, 'far below' what he felt he could do. Its advocacy of the faith that looks through death, and the transcendental impulses that accompanied it, must have seemed like a betrayal of his brother's memory.

On 8 June Wordsworth went fishing with a neighbour at Grisedale Tarn where he had last parted from John. Overcome by emotion, he left his friend and 'in floods of tears'[58] composed the first of three elegies, which were written at around the same time: 'I only look'd for pain and grief', 'To the Daisy' ('Sweet Flower! belike one day to have') and 'Distressful gift! this Book receives'. 'For much it gives my soul relief / To pay the mighty debt of Grief,' he had written in 1787.[59] It proved so again, the debt now as then being both the composition of poetry and the shedding of tears:

> . . . And undisturb'd I now may pay
> My debt to what I fear'd.
> Sad register! but this is sure:
> Peace built on suffering will endure.
> ('I only look'd for pain and grief' 13–16)

These words are uttered in humility, and throughout the poems occasioned by the tragedy a similar tone recurs. He had learnt, directly from John, that God's will would be done. His anger had subsided and given way to pained submission. He had to learn to see it as a blessing; God had laid upon his brother 'A consecrating hand'.[60]

In the third of these confessional poems, and the least well-known, he turned

[58] *EY* 599.
[59] 'The Vale of Esthwaite' 286–7.
[60] 'I only look'd for pain and grief' 60.

to a commonplace book left at Dove Cottage by John on his last departure and mused on its contents. It concluded:

> But now – upon the written leaf
> I look indeed with pain and grief,
> I do, but gracious God,
> Oh grant that I may never find
> Worse matter or a heavier mind,
> For those which yet remain behind
> Grant this, and let me be resign'd
> Beneath thy chast'ning rod.
> (ll. 36–43)

It is a chilling sentiment, made all the more so by the original reading of the second line: 'With heart oppressed by pain and grief'. The experiences of the months since 11 February had oppressed Wordsworth, making him feel subject to the chastening hand of a stern master. Tragedy had brought his beliefs into question. What did his brother's abrupt and tragic end say about the nature of the universe? Was it harmonious with the idea of the 'redemptive process in operation'[61] that 'The Recluse' was to illustrate? Could it be reconciled with the concept of a merciful God? Shortly before the elegies were written Mary had copied a lightly revised version of the waiting for the horses episode into Book XI of the thirteen-book *Prelude* where his father's death

> With all the sorrow which it brought appear'd
> A chastisement; and when I call'd to mind
> That day so lately pass'd, when from the crag
> I look'd in such anxiety of hope
> With trite reflections of morality,
> Yet in the deepest passion, I bow'd low
> To God, who thus corrected my desires . . .
> (xi 369–75)

Wordsworth read these lines before writing the elegies to John, and it is likely that they helped him comprehend his loss as the exercise of divine power. But where in *The Prelude* the perspective is partly that of a boy whose imagination has generated unreal connections between disparate events, the elegies for John establish the chastening rod of the Almighty as a reality, brought to bear on a sensibility that had forgotten the value of humility. There was no irony in this, as there arguably had been in the *Prelude* spot of time, where the 'trite

[61] *Table Talk* ii 177.

reflections' were responsible for the vengeance of a tyrannical God; in the elegies Wordsworth is attempting to express genuine meekness towards a divine power whose acts he cannot understand. How shallow the sublime aspirations of the Snowdon passage must have seemed to a poet whose most personal and heartfelt utterance of the moment was in the name of resignation 'Beneath thy chast'ning rod'.

We do not know exactly when Wordsworth first saw Beaumont's painting, *A Storm: Peele Castle*, but it must have been at least a year after John's death. Beaumont's original pen-and-wash study had been engraved by Thomas Hearne in 1783, and by 1806 had given rise to two oil paintings of the scene. Wordsworth visited London in spring 1806, arriving on 4 April. During his stay he was based in Grosvenor Square, close to Beaumont, at whose house he may have seen one of the oils before it was hung in the Royal Academy. Wordsworth saw it again at the Academy on 2 May.[62] He also saw the pen-and-wash study, and told Beaumont that it was the better of the two.[63] 'The picture was to me a very moving one,' he told him, 'it exists in my mind at this moment as if it were before my eyes.'[64] It would have brought back to him the days he spent at Rampside in 1794, close to Piel Castle, its wrecked ship recalling John's fate. Scholars scrupulously date Wordsworth's 'Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm' to 'between *c.*20 May and 27 June 1806',[65] to indicate that it was composed shortly after Wordsworth's departure from London. Beaumont read it by the end of June, and confessed himself 'not a little elated' by it.[66]

I was thy Neighbour once, thou rugged Pile!
Four summer weeks I dwelt in sight of thee:
I saw thee every day; and all the while
Thy Form was sleeping on a glassy sea.

So pure the sky, so quiet was the air!
So like, so very like, was day to day!
Whene'er I look'd, thy Image still was there;
It trembled, but it never pass'd away.

62 His ticket was supplied by Joseph Farington; see Farington vii 2742.
63 See Reed ii 321–2.
64 *MY* i 63.
65 Reed ii 43.
66 Quoted in Felicity Owen and David Blayney Brown, *Collector of Genius: A Life of Sir George Beaumont* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 123.

How perfect was the calm! it seem'd no sleep;
No mood, which season takes away, or brings:
I could have fancied that the mighty Deep
Was even the gentlest of all gentle Things.

Ah! THEN, if mine had been the Painter's hand,
To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,
The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream;

I would have planted thee, thou hoary Pile!
Amid a world how different from this!
Beside a sea that could not cease to smile;
On tranquil land, beneath a sky of bliss:

Thou shouldst have seem'd a treasure-house, a mine
Of peaceful years; a chronicle of heaven: –
Of all the sunbeams that did ever shine
The very sweetest had to thee been given.

A Picture had it been of lasting ease,
Elysian quiet, without toil or strife;
No motion but the moving tide, a breeze,
Or merely silent Nature's breathing life.

Such, in the fond delusion of my heart,
Such Picture would I at that time have made:
And seen the soul of truth in every part;
A faith, a trust, that could not be betray'd.

So once it would have been, – 'tis so no more;
I have submitted to a new controul:
A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
A deep distress hath humaniz'd my Soul.

Not for a moment could I now behold
A smiling sea and be what I have been:
The feeling of my loss will ne'er be old;
This, which I know, I speak with mind serene.

Then, Beaumont, Friend! who would have been the Friend,
If he had lived, of Him whom I deplore,
This Work of thine I blame not, but commend;
This sea in anger, and that dismal shore.

Oh, 'tis a passionate Work! – yet wise and well;
Well chosen is the spirit that is here;
That Hulk which labours in the deadly swell,
This rueful sky, this pageantry of fear!

And this huge Castle, standing here sublime,
I love to see the look with which it braves,
Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time,
The light'ning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves.

Farewell, farewell the Heart that lives alone,
Hous'd in a dream, at distance from the Kind!
Such happiness, wherever it be known,
Is to be pitied; for 'tis surely blind.

But welcome fortitude, and patient chear,
And frequent sights of what is to be borne!
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here. –
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

The most successful of the elegies to John, 'Elegiac Stanzas' speaks of the change wrought on Wordsworth by his brother's death. It is in the first place a personal testimony to his grief, but is also about the morality of aesthetics.

Wordsworth looks back on an earlier self whose confidence and mood were such that had he been a painter he would have depicted the Castle as a sublime eminence in the midst of Elysian quiet. He is really talking about a way of seeing the world – a vision that favours the transcendent, the sublime, the imaginatively enhanced. He readily acknowledges the seductiveness of that vision, his diction ('tranquil', 'dream', 'sunbeams') admitting the idealizing faculty of the imagination, something that remained with him from Hawkshead days until the near completion of the thirteen-book *Prelude* in early 1805. What else had the climbing of Snowdon been about, or the cave simile, or indeed the spots of time? That had seemed at the time a trust that could not be betrayed; now it was exposed as a 'fond delusion of my heart' that left him 'in a dream'. It was he who, implicitly, had been betrayed, led away from the truth. He looks back affectionately at his old self and sublime tendencies, but distress has been the occasion for renunciation. Attractive they may have been, but those impulses were false. Grief has humanized him, stripped him of the ruthless and not entirely human urge to aestheticize. A year after his loss, the pain is as keen as ever, and unchanging. It has permeated his understanding, returning him to solid earth.

The tempestuous weather and stricken vessel of Beaumont's painting is an index of this undeluded perspective. As he gazed upon it Wordsworth comprehended the Castle (which he once imagined in a sun-drenched spot of time) as symbolic of fortitude in the face of sorrow – 'The light'ning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves'. It is a new understanding that makes him feel sorry for anyone blind enough to continue pursuing childish dreams.

Wordsworth had been resident at Rampside in his mid-twenties, but this poem really looks back on an aesthetic predisposition he had possessed until John died – the power that had enabled him to compose *The Prelude*. It had been betrayed by events and, by implication, revealed him to have been a teller of falsehoods – a traitor, in other words, to the truths he had understood in 1787. Recognizing that, the poem embraces a more grounded knowledge of the place of suffering in human life. 'Elegiac Stanzas' is about the abdication of a certain kind of imaginative vision – 'A power is gone, which nothing can restore' – and is as much an elegy for that as for his brother. As in the elegies composed the previous year, he strives to inculcate a proper humility towards a divine order he cannot understand, but which has demonstrated the centrality of pain in human life. It has become a sacred obligation to John that he submit to this 'new controul'. Wordsworth had never been far from the memory of grief as it had struck him in 1787, but over the years it had become a submerged force in his work. It would be hidden no longer. From now on, it was a principal determinant in his aesthetic. The acceptance of fortitude and patience is a way of signalling that the psychological background to his work, while important, is to be valued for itself, not as part of a transaction whereby engagement with nature led automatically to some sort of superficial reward.

In this light the hope in the last line seems attenuated until one recalls the Collect for the Order for the Burial of the Dead in the *Book of Common Prayer*, where we are instructed 'not to be sorry, as men without hope, for them that sleep in him'.[67] That counsel bears comparison with the Pedlar's command to be 'wise and chearful', when the poet is stricken with grief at Margaret's fate at the conclusion of 'The Ruined Cottage' MS D. The difference is that by 1805 Wordsworth's hope occurs within the context of a declaration that he continues to suffer and to mourn. Grief will not be assuaged by assurances that the dead are at peace; on the contrary, it accepts bereavement as permanent and enduring, and refuses to expiate it with transcendent experience. This insight could have come only with age, and was one of the few blessings (if that is the correct term) for the tragedy of John's death.

The anger that had erupted in semi-blasphemous declarations to Beaumont in summer 1805 (a year before) had been reconfigured as trust in the wisdom

[67] For further discussion of this allusion see Edward Wilson, 'An Echo of St Paul and Words of Consolation in Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas"', *RES* 43 (1992) 75–80.

of a higher order – although Wordsworth does not invoke God by name. However, its promise of eternal life commended Christianity as a means of consolation, and as time passed he would become increasingly reliant on it, and more explicit in reference to it, on those grounds.

Before hearing of John's death Wordsworth had declared that when *The Prelude* was complete 'I may fall to my principal work.'[68] That may have been a realistic hope on 7 February 1805, but by 3 June he was doubting whether 'I should ever live to write the Recluse'.[69] Such doubt was a warning. Aware of it or not, his altered way of thinking and feeling was inimical to the composition of his 'principal work'. Its mission had been to describe 'the necessity for and proof of the whole state of man and society being subject to and illustrative of a redemptive process in operation – showing how this Idea reconciled all the anomalies, and how it promised future glory and restoration'.[70] For someone who had bidden farewell to the idealizing faculty so as to bow his head to 'frequent sights of what is to be borne' this would be an uphill struggle. It had been difficult enough to conclude *The Prelude*, which had been no more than a preface to 'The Recluse', unburdened as it was by the weight of philosophical exegesis required to make sense of Coleridge's redemptive philosophy. What's more, most of *The Prelude* had been written before John's death. It could not have been written now, leaving 'The Recluse' further from reach than ever.

As Stephen Gill suggests, 'The Recluse', impossible though it was, 'became a trust, made sacred by his brother's death'.[71] John had believed in Wordsworth's greatness, perhaps more than Coleridge, and Wordsworth felt duty-bound to demonstrate that such faith had not been misplaced. Incidentally, he was at this point no less persuaded of radical principles than in earlier times; the journalist John Taylor, having met Wordsworth in May 1806, found him 'strongly disposed towards Republicanism':

> His notions are that it is the duty of every Administration to do as much as possible to give consideration to the people at large, and to have *equality* always in view; which though not perfectly attainable, yet much has been gained towards it and more may be.[72]

This summary of Wordsworth's political notions, though seldom cited, is an important one. By comparison with the views even of the enlightened Whigs

[68] *EY* 534.
[69] *EY* 594.
[70] CC *Table Talk* i 308.
[71] Gill 241.
[72] Farington vii 2785.

among whom he circulated, Wordsworth was understood to be radical. The term underlined here, 'equality', was still associated with the French Revolution, which by 1806 was seen to have led lamentably to the rise of Napoleon, crowned Emperor two years previously. Although Wordsworth did not support Napoleon, he remained attached to the ideals for which the Revolution had been fought. This went hand in hand with a distrust of those in power; according to Dorothy in March 1806, he believed that 'there is no true honour or ability amongst them.'[73] His prevailing determination to go forward with 'The Recluse' arose as much out of those convictions as out of intense feelings over his brother's death.

In the absence of Coleridge's notes, now said to have been destroyed, Wordsworth in December 1805 set himself to read 'for the nourishment of his mind, preparatory to beginning' work. However, Dorothy observed, in her letter to Lady Beaumont, 'I do not think he will be able to do much more till we have heard of Coleridge.'[74] Coleridge was still felt to possess the key to 'The Recluse' and its theories. Though expected to return to England upon hearing of John's death, he dallied in the Mediterranean, much to Wordsworth's distress. 'We have lately had much anxiety about Coleridge,' he told Beaumont, 'What can have become of him?'[75] By July 1806 Coleridge's continuing silence was, Wordsworth told Walter Scott, 'very vexatious and distressing'.[76] The standard edition of Coleridge's letters contains nothing whatever between 21 August 1805 and 17 June 1806 – an astonishing hiatus for such an inveterate letter-writer. No one but Coleridge seemed to understand the reason for the delay or refusal to communicate; Mary Lamb composed a poem about it, 'Why is he wandering o'er the sea? / Coleridge should grow with Wordsworth be.'[77] All the same, his absence conveniently provided an excuse for not writing 'The Recluse', leaving Wordsworth free to 'meditate'. As Dorothy reported in January 1806, 'his thoughts are employed upon the Recluse.'[78] In all likelihood he was reviewing the manuscripts of 'Home at Grasmere' which had broken down in 1800. By 23 July he had begun to reorganize them and by early September had a more or less finished copy.[79] How much was written during those months? Scholars continue to deliberate, but it seems likely that despite telling Beaumont that he had written 'nearly

[73] i 11.
[74] 664.
[75] i 8.
[76] i 52.
[77] Lorrs ii 166.
[78] i 2.
[79] datings derive from letters; *MY* i 58, 79. Scholars continue to dispute precise composition; see Cornell *Home at Grasmere* 16–22.

1000 lines', most were actually composed in 1800, work during summer 1806 consisting largely of reorganization and some revision.[80] There was cause to be generous to himself in progress reports to his patron, who set as much store by 'The Recluse' as Coleridge.

Wordsworth nurtured the expectation that Coleridge would shortly return and approve of his labours, bless them, and furnish him, at least verbally, with instructions and advice as to how to continue. On 1 August he promised Beaumont: 'Should Coleridge return so that I might have some conversation with him upon the subject, I should go on swimmingly.'[81] There is a tactical advantage in his insistence that continuation of 'The Recluse' depend on Coleridge's safe return and co-operation – something far from guaranteed. (Incidentally, these facts support the hypothesis that Coleridge had not been told about or shown 'Home at Grasmere' in 1800 or since; otherwise Wordsworth would not have told a mutual friend, Beaumont, that it had been largely written in 1806 – something Coleridge would have been able to contradict had he seen it before.)

By early August Coleridge was not far distant. His ship was in quarantine off Plymouth on 11 August and landed in Kent on the 17th. Even then he delayed getting in touch. The Wordsworths fondly invented reasons why; Dorothy told Catherine Clarkson: 'No doubt C. has not written himself because he is afraid to enquire after us,' alluding to their grief over John.[82] Coleridge resided in London, writing spasmodically (and unrevealingly) to the Wordsworths without committing himself to a meeting. The situation was similar to that in 1799, when on return from Germany he abstained from travelling north until a chance meeting with Cottle.

By 1806 it is likely that Coleridge preferred London life to the less comfortable existence in the Lake District, and if the truth be known felt no desire to see the Wordsworths. He couldn't say that and instead excused himself in a manner that roused almost as much contempt as if he had. Wordsworth wrote to Beaumont from Grasmere on 8 September:

> he dare not go home, he recoils so much from the thought of domesticating with Mrs. Coleridge, with whom, though on many accounts he much respects her, he is so miserable that he dare not encounter it. What a deplorable thing! I

[80] James A. Butler concurs. He observes that *Home at Grasmere* was worked on in 1806, with transitions added and parts stitched together. But the bulk of it draws on material composed in 1800. In particular, MS R of the poem is likely to date from 1800, and a certain amount of poetry composed for 'Michael' in 1800 may have been considered by Wordsworth as part of *Home at Grasmere*.

[81] *MY* i 64.

[82] *MY* i 71.

> have written to him to say that if he does not come down immediately I must insist upon seeing him somewhere. If he appoints London, I shall go.[83] (*MY* i 78–9)

But Wordsworth had a while yet to wait. No doubt Coleridge was quite sincere in not wanting to cohabit with his wife, but his lack of enthusiasm at the prospect of seeing Wordsworth was underlined by a continuing reluctance to agree a time and place either in London or elsewhere. One possible explanation, Molly Lefebure proposes, is that morphine addiction had now reduced him to a state of organic psychosis: 'His body's chemistry was radically altered by his drug, completely orientated to morphine and thus totally disorientated to all else.'[84]

No fortuitous encounter with Cottle would impel Coleridge northwards. What caused him to jump on the Carlisle stage was sex. His Mediterranean tour and its various distractions, which had included a flirtation with the opera singer Cecilia Bertozzoli, had given rise to a string of sexual fantasies which added fuel to his hopeless passion for Sara Hutchinson,[85] whom he was convinced was in love with him. In a notebook entry on 10 April 1805 he had written of how in sleep images were 'forced into the mind by the feelings that arise out of the position & state of the Body and its different members', adding that so far 'Sleep has never yet desecrated the images, or supposed Presences, of those whom I love and revere.'[86] In another notebook entry, beneath Sara's name, he wrote a phrase from a play he had recently read: 'This *dwelling* Kiss'.[87]

He began the journey north with the intention of tracking her down. Disembarking at Penrith, he found out that she was with the Wordsworth ménage, at that moment at Kendal *en route* to Coleorton where they were to spend the winter at the Beaumonts' country seat. I suspect that Molly Lefebure surmises accurately that Coleridge had little genuine interest in seeing the Wordsworths at that moment – quite the opposite in fact, if as seems likely his objective was Sara Hutchinson.[88] Having ascertained her whereabouts he dashed to Kendal and, instead of taking a room in their hotel, booked into another nearby. From there he sent for Wordsworth, with whom he wished to discuss his decision to separate from his wife. It was 26 October 1806, more than two months after his return to England. Something of his feeling for Sara at this time may be gathered from a notebook entry written a month later:

[83] This letter survives; *MY* i 80.

[84] *Bondage of Opium* 447.

[85] Discussed by Lefebure, ibid., pp. 428–9; *Darker Reflections* 35–7, 41, 43.

[86] *Notebooks* ii 2543.

[87] *Notebooks* ii 2961.

[88] *Bondage of Opium* 448.

> I know, you love me! – My reason knows it, my heart feels it / yet still let your eyes, your hands tell me / still say, o often & often say, My beloved! I love you / indeed I love you / for why should not my ears, and all my outward Being share in the Joy – the fuller my inner Being is of the sense, the more my outward organs yearn & crave for it / O bring my whole nature into balance and harmony. (*Notebooks* ii 2938)

This was pure fantasy. Sara could not stand to be close to him, and on seeing him again in Kendal she, like William and Dorothy, was horrified by what had become of him. Molly Lefebure says that morphine led Coleridge to declaim 'in his puppet's voice'.[89] If so, the performance would have been disturbing. As Dorothy told Catherine Clarkson,

> We all went thither to him and never never did I feel such a shock as at first sight of him. We all felt exactly in the same way – as if he were different from what we have expected to see; almost as much as a person of whom we have thought much, and of whom we had formed an image in our own minds, without having any personal knowledge of him. . . . He is utterly changed; and yet sometimes, when he was animated in conversation concerning things removed from him, I saw something of his former self. But never when we were alone with him. (*MY* i 86)

Dorothy was acutely aware that they were in the company of a sick man: 'that he is ill I am well assured. . . . His fatness has quite changed him – it is more like the flesh of a person in a dropsy than one in health; his eyes are lost in it.'[90]

They remained with him from Sunday evening till Tuesday morning, when Dorothy, Mary and the children departed for Coleorton. Sara and Wordsworth remained with Coleridge one more night. It was an unconventional and potentially scandalous thing for Sara to have done,[91] and there must have been good reason for it. We do not know what they discussed, but it must have had something to do with Coleridge's feelings for her. It had been decided that he would move in with the Wordsworths when they moved house, and perhaps he and Sara needed to work out some *modus vivendi* before that took place. Whatever they discussed, Coleridge believed after that meeting that Sara loved him as much as he loved her.

It is doubtful as to whether Coleridge was able to discuss artistic matters with Wordsworth. This was not the man who in early 1804 had inspired the

[89] *Bondage of Opium* 449.

[90] *MY* i 87.

[91] Richard Holmes suggests that Wordsworth acted as go-between for Coleridge and Sara; see *Darker Reflections* 76–7.

five book, and then the thirteen-book *Prelude* by proposing its new function as preface to 'The Recluse'. Nor was he the man whose notes – verbal or written – would describe its philosophical content. It is not surprising that Wordsworth chose not to show him 'Home at Grasmere' either now or later. The reason cannot have been disappointment with the poem as he had expressed satisfaction with it in letters to Beaumont a month before; it was disappointment with Coleridge. He could not see how he would be able to nudge the poem, let alone suggest how to develop it. As his illusions evaporated, Wordsworth must have begun to doubt the quality of what he had done and question the entire project. Before long 'Home at Grasmere' was no more than a quarry from which he would mine parts of *The Excursion*. Anxiety about 'The Recluse' had effectively been displaced by anxiety about Coleridge. Two weeks later Wordsworth wrote to him from Coleorton saying that he was 'most anxious to hear of you', adding of the Beaumonts that 'their love of you is very great and they are most anxious to hear from you.'[92]

Having announced their separation to his wife, Coleridge joined the Wordsworths at Coleorton where, on a series of evenings concluding 7 January 1807, William read all thirteen Books of *The Prelude* to Coleridge as the conclusion to the task first envisaged in early 1804. Years later Coleridge remembered that 'thro' the whole of that Poem "με Αὔρα τις εἰσέπνυσε μυστικωτάτη"' – 'a certain most mystical breeze blew into me.'[93] In response he wrote his last great poem, 'To William Wordsworth', which in 1815 Wordsworth asked him not to publish as its 'commendation would be injurious to us both'.[94] It was a revealing request (which, incidentally, Coleridge could disregard, including the poem in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817)). The suppression of both *The Prelude* and the adulatory poem it inspired was necessary in 1815, given the perceived failure of *The Excursion* and the increasingly provisional nature of 'The Recluse'.

Even at Kendal in late October 1806, Wordsworth must have felt, all the more acutely for its proximity to John's death, the impact of loss. He had been looking earnestly forward to reunion with Coleridge, and the chaotic meeting in Kendal did not meet his expectations. That Coleridge was so hugely altered would have intensified the feeling that their relationship was no longer mutually inspiring. Soon after the encounter he composed a lament for the confidence they had once shared.

MY i 90–1.

Griggs iv 574. The quotation is from Aristophanes, *The Frogs* 313–14.

MY ii 238.

A COMPLAINT.

There is a change – and I am poor;
Your Love hath been, nor long ago,
A Fountain at my fond Heart's door,
Whose only business was to flow;
And flow it did; not taking heed
Of its own bounty, or my need.

What happy moments did I count!
Bless'd was I then all bliss above!
Now, for this consecrated Fount
Of murmuring, sparkling, living love,
What have I? shall I dare to tell?
A comfortless, and hidden WELL.

A Well of love – it may be deep –
I trust it is, and never dry;
What matter? if the Waters sleep
In silence and obscurity.
– Such change, and at the very door
Of my fond Heart, hath left me poor.