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The Alps Deferred: Wordsworth at the Simplon Pass

David S. Miall

Wordsworth's account of crossing the Alps in Book VI of *The Prelude* continues to cause interpretive problems. In particular, the irruption of the imagination at the moment when Wordsworth realizes he has already crossed the Alps has proved difficult to explain: W. J. B. Owen has concluded that the passage, for all its grandeur, is a "poetic failure" on logical grounds (Owen 106); Keith Hanley explains the stresses on the 1805 account as an overcoming of the "alienated subjectivity" of the Coleridgean imagination (Hanley 122); and Hanley, in contrast to W. J. B. Owen, Jonathan Bate, or Thomas McFarland, is one of several critics prepared to accept Alan Liu's reading of the passage as part of a repressed displacement of Napoleon's Alpine crossings (Liu 23-31). Keith Thomas, who develops Liu's reading, argues that the suddenness of the Imagination passage is an echo of Coleridge's moment of impasse on Scafell (Thomas 103). The logical failure is undeniably a contributing cause of this critical disarray. Poems are not arguments, however, and in this essay I propose to defend the structure of Wordsworth's account as we have it in the version of 1805. Wordsworth's unexplained digression makes the passage resistant to being read, but this is because Wordsworth himself is engaged in displacing one construal of his Alpine experience by another. The structure of the passage overall, I will suggest, shows Wordsworth dismissing the picturesque for an ecological, participatory account of Nature.

The enigmatic status of the Imagination passage is also due to the dropping of the cave simile apparent in the earlier drafts of MS WW (1804) — in this argument I partly follow that of W. J. B. Owen. But first I seek to explain the sequence of the account overall — the ascent from Brig through to the Ravine of Gondo. In effect, Book VI tells us, Wordsworth experienced the difficulty of understanding his Alpine crossing in 1790 (this can be glimpsed even in his letter to Dorothy from Switzerland), but his attempt to understand and explain it is deferred until 1804, and not fulfilled until 1805. I call the experience that is to be displaced the "picturesque" under license from Wordsworth's own letter of 1790: he applies the term to his pleasure at the scenes in the upper part of Lake Geneva. At the same

time the term should be qualified by acknowledging that Wordsworth disclaims an orthodox allegiance: this, he says in Book XI, "Although a strong infection of the age, / Was never much my habit" (xi.156-7). Nevertheless, as he sets out for the Alps in 1790 it seems clear that he was aiming for the visual pleasures of the picturesque and sublime, and that what he experienced in the Simplon Pass took its place alongside other instances of disappointed expectation. If the full meaning of his encounter with the Alps did not emerge until 1805, yet it is presented as radically discontinuous with what had gone before, whether in relation to his transit across revolutionary France, the Grande Chartreuse, or Chamonix. If the irruption of the Imagination is to be justified, perhaps it is on this ground. Only such an abrupt transition can alert us to the dramatic difference, the chasm, between the two ways of viewing Nature and prepare us to construe the Gondo Ravine as Wordsworth does. The second or participatory way, I will argue, points to Wordsworth's challenging conception of an ecological reciprocity between Mind and Nature. This, the key aspect of Wordsworth's account, seems scarcely to have been noticed so far.

My reading of Book VI is thus at odds with that of Alan Liu. I suggest that history, in Liu's sense, is not at issue either in the Simplon Pass passage or in those that surround it: not the French Revolution, nor the subsequent presence of Napoleon on these very Alpine passes. According to Liu, "there is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition" (Liu 104). I suggest that there can be no history unmediated by our presence in Nature. Not only does our relation to the environment determine history, but our consciousness is the outgrowth of processes inseparable from our evolution in nature. As Wordsworth asks elsewhere, what remains when the distortions of reason or consciousness are laid aside? He replies, "The laws of things which lie / Beyond the reach of human will or power, / The life of Nature" (xi.97-9). What Wordsworth is struggling to make conscious in *The Prelude* (and not only in the Simplon passage), is his sense of the commonality of the powers in Mind and Nature, temporarily obstructed by the youthful commitment to the visual that he records in "Tintern Abbey" and in *The Prelude*. Through the temporal disruption of his narrative in 1805, Wordsworth is able to rehistoricize his position as a consciousness that simultaneously inhabits and is inhabited by Nature, and transcends Nature. The paradox is apparent in the transit from the Imagination passage to the Gondo Ravine where, in Coleridge's term, Wordsworth first elicits himself from Nature in order to return to her with fuller understanding. I will trace the elignment process as it occurs through the earlier manuscript versions of the Simplon crossing and into the 1805 and 1850 texts.

The disappointments that Wordsworth experienced in 1790 in Switzerland follow a consistent pattern, and it is important to approach his first

attempts to explain the Simplon experience within this framework. In all, there are four episodes of disappointment: two are noted by Wordsworth in his letter to Dorothy of September 6 1790, and, I will argue, two are recorded in Book VI. Taking them in chronological order, the first occurs at Lake Geneva:

The lower part of the lake did not afford us a pleasure equal to what might have been expected from its celebrity; this owing partly to its width, and partly to the weather, which was one of those hot gleamy days in which all distant objects are veiled in a species of bright obscurity. But the higher part of the lake made us ample amends: 't is true we had the same disagreeable weather, but the banks of the water are infinitely more picturesque, and, as it is much narrower, the landscape suffered proportionally less from that pale steam which before almost entirely hid the opposite shore. (*Letters* I.33)

This suggests that Wordsworth's aim in visiting Europe in 1790 was consistent with this later account:

The state to which I now allude was one
In which the eye was master of the heart,
When that which is in every stage of life
The most despotic of our senses gained
Such strength in me as often held my mind
In absolute dominion. (xi.170-5)

Wordsworth was not specifically a devotee of the picturesque in the sense of Gilpin, who advocated knocking corners off the structure of Tintern Abbey to make it more harmonious, and who debated the merits of a shipwreck he encountered at Margam as a subject for a picturesque painting (Gilpin 49, 123-6). But he had, he tells us, originally included the term "Picturesque" in the title of *Descriptive Sketches*, his first account of the Swiss tour (72). In Book XI he criticizes his neglect of other modes of response in favour of the eye, and as he goes on to make clear, his approach in 1790 was governed by the same "despotic" eye for the appearances of nature, "when through the gorgeous Alps / Roaming, I carried with me the same heart" (xi.240-1). In Book XI he is, of course, about to contrast this superficial approach with the spots of time, in which his experience of nature was unmediated by prior expectations. But his experience in the Alps was not one of the spots of time, and it is important to appreciate what made the difference.

The second example occurs when Wordsworth crosses the Col du Balme and first sees Mont Blanc: he tells us that he was "grieved / To have a

soulless image on the eye / That had usurped upon a living thought / That never more could be" (xi.453-6). Chamonix, he continues, made "rich amends" (460).

The third example occurs during the Simplon crossing. Although it is not clear from the passage as we have it, either in *1805* or *1850*, that the "eye was master of the heart," the earliest manuscript version containing the cave passage, later relocated to Book VIII (711-41), shows that Wordsworth's response to learning that he had already crossed the Alps was, among other things, another disappointment of the eye. I will seek to show this in more detail below.

The fourth example is Wordsworth's response to the Rhine Falls below Schaffhausen, recorded in his letter: "Magnificent as this fall certainly is, I must confess I was disappointed in it. I had raised my ideas too high" (*Letters* I.33). As Lucy Trott has shown, the topos of expectation and disappointment occurs elsewhere in Wordsworth (and in other writers, such as Coxe or Hutchinson), but she does not show how it arises specifically from Wordsworth's investment in the pleasures of the eye, as I argue here. In addition to this enumeration in the letter and in Book VI, Wordsworth's commitment to the pleasures of the eye during his journey is apparent from several other places in his letter. As he prepares to leave the Berneser Oberland and journey on to Basle he remarks,

We are now . . . on the point of quitting the most sublime and beautiful parts; and you cannot imagine the melancholy regret which I feel at the idea. I am a perfect enthusiast in my admiration of Nature in all her various forms; and I have looked upon, and as it were conversed with, the objects which this country had presented to my view so long, and with such increasing pleasure, that the idea of parting from them oppresses me with a sadness similar to what I have always felt in quitting a beloved friend.

Three sentences later he continues in the same vein:

Ten thousand times in the course of this tour have I regretted the inability of my memory to retain a more strong impression of the beautiful forms before me; and again and again, in quitting a fortunate station, have I returned to it with the most eager avidity, in the hope of bearing away a more lively picture. (*Letters* I.36)

Although Wordsworth distanced himself from the picturesque (xi.155-7), his use of the term "station" here brings him close to the stance popularized by West in his Lake District tour (1778). Here the tourist was directed to the most picturesque views by detailed descriptions and maps of the best "stations" from which to view the lakes and mountains.

At length there a Peasant chanced to pass
 From who we leard that we had missed our road
 Which lay within the rivers bed
 For a few steps & then along its course
 In short that all the road before us
 Was downward, or give at once
 The substance of this was [the] Alps were crossed 26'

The MS suggests that more is lost here than the route. As Wordsworth's first draft shows, the plain view sought by the picturesque observer is literally obstructed by rain and vapours. The news conveyed by the Peasant appears to effect a shift in Wordsworth's mind, analogous to the sight of the blind beggar in London, when "My mind did . . . turn round / As with the might of waters" (vii.616-7). The cave imagery that follows is Wordsworth's retrospective attempt to convey the extent of the change. But to tie the response more closely to the Peasant's news, Wordsworth begins to draft a second version:

After a little scruple & short pause 26'
 Of a rude shed before we in this spot
 Had waited long a peasant chanced
 As when a Traveller from the light of day
 Doth pass in to som high & gloomy cave
 The Grottoe of Antiparos or the den
 Of Yordas among Craven's mountain tracts

The description of the cave takes up the literal vapour of the afternoon, but refigures it as a deceptive view of spectres and smoke:

With interchange of aspect in change & interchange 27r
 Like spectres, give to the Solid stone
 The motion & the qualities of smoke on all sides
 Distending with a visible motion
 But this illusion of movement then fades.
 It settles at length 27'
 Into a perfect hollow & he beholds
 Distinctly all the naked vault [?]
 And grieves at the remembrance of [?]
 Into a clear & perfect view in which
 He reads distinctly as a written book
 The Vault of solid stone above

Unlike his transit up the shores of Lake Geneva, the mist in the Simplon does not draw back to show Wordsworth the picturesque that he had come to see. Here the mist points to the impoverishment of his expectations, which had painted with "spectres" and "smoke" a false vision on the landscape and, in effect, imprisoned him within a perceptual cave. The Peasant's words show him that the scene he had come to see was in fact "lifeless as a written book" (viii.727).

The importance of the cave passage to Wordsworth is shown by his revision of it, and its relocation in Book VIII as a way of explaining his response to London. In its final location, the cave passage shows more clearly the pattern of expectation and disappointment. As might be expected, Wordsworth broaches this pattern first in the preceding book on London. In childhood, he says, fabulous tales of history or romance "fell short, far short, / Of that which I in simpleness believed / and thought of London" (vii.88-90). Again, mentioning the evocative names of Vauxhall and Ranelagh, he notes that on arriving in London he left such "fond imaginations" behind and "looked upon the real scene . . . With keen and lively pleasure even there / Where disappointment was the strongest" (vii.136-142). Thus, in recounting once again his first arrival in London in Book VIII, the cave analogy provides a more elaborate explanation of the phases of expectation, disappointment, and recompense. He first remarks in hindsight, "great God! / That aught external to the living mind / Should have such mighty sway, yet so it was" (viii.700-01). It is his sense of what London is that initiates the first phase of the analogy — apparently a compact sense of power made up of all that the child at Hawkshead had come to believe about the city: in the cave it is what the traveller "sees, or thinks / He sees" (716-7), shapes and forms "Like spectres" (723). But this, as he notes in the following paragraph, is followed "By a blank sense of greatness passed away" (744). In the second phase the traveller is faced with the scene "in perfect view / Exposed and lifeless as a written book" (726-7). But in the third phase pleasure is found even in disappointment: there is "a new quickening," the forms before him take on another meaning, endowing them with life "recognised or new." As Wordsworth puts it a few lines later, the real London now is a chronicle, a place of "strong sensations teeming as it did / Of past and present" (752-3).

The cave analogy is relocated to London, I would suggest, because the new imagery of the third phase still imposes meaning, partly derived from books (viii.769), on a chaos of sense impressions; it is still within a cave. The artificiality and impoverishment of London street life is, in the end, an assault on Wordsworth's senses which he cannot assimilate, although anchored momentarily by the sight of a beautiful child (vii.368-71) or the blind beggar (613). While the reality of London "makes amends" for which the cave analogy is an appropriate expression, the Simplon crossing offers

a much more challenging insight; thus the cave analogy must be dropped. Before it goes, however, it provides a context for locating the three phases in which that insight is developed.

What Wordsworth appears to realize is that the cave passage has taken on a life of its own, which makes it unwieldy for the Simplon Pass context. While trying to explain the effect of the Peasant's news on him, he has found himself elaborating an account of the projective powers of imagery in an extended simile. Thus Wordsworth pauses - (Keith Hanley notes that two leaves appear to be missing in the manuscript at this point) - and reflecting on this process writes:

Imagination crosd me here 28'
 Like an unfatherd vapour, & my verse
 Halts in mid course. I paused in a cloud
 That stoppd me, but tis cleared & broken up
 And populous shapes unfold
 before me the true pathway of my verse

The true pathway will require the excision of the cave passage, but Wordsworth meanwhile is led to reflect on the wayward power of his own imagination in creating it. Unlike the picturesque "vapour" of expectations fathered by Gilpin or Coxe, Wordsworth's simile of a vapour for the imagination is "unfatherd." With this one, striking adjective, Wordsworth writing in 1804 distances himself from the picturesque inheritance that shaped his response to the Alps in 1790, and out of his "deep and genuine sadness" (vi.492) retrieves confirmation of the sovereignty of the mind. He also registers the apparently autonomous power of the imagination which, in creating the cave simile, has had "such strength / Of usurpation" (532-3) as to derail his narrative.

W. J. B. Owen, offering what he regards as the "standard view" of the crossing in 1805, sees the Imagination passage as "what is commonly called a writer's block with regard to the historical narrative" (Owen 101). My reading of MS WW, on the contrary, suggests that Wordsworth's imagination in creating the cave simile is active and powerful, but too much so for its context. The "writer's block" conception seems at odds with the claim that Owen goes on to make, that "the intrusion of the simile of the cave should be attributed to Imagination"; that is, Imagination refers not to the experience of the Alps in 1790 (as it is made to do in 1850), but to Wordsworth's act of writing in 1804 (Owen 102). In this sense the "vapour" of the Imagination "usurps" Wordsworth's immediate purpose, but as it does so it reminds him of the significance of the powers it brings with it, where the "vapour" that thwarts the visual sight (an echo of Wordsworth's actual disappointment in the mist and rain) prepares for the extraordinary

gains accruing from the inward sight. The "eye and progress of my song" that imagination disrupts, in other words, contains an allusion to the picturesque eye on which imagination supervened.

That Wordsworth associates vapour with imagination is apparent at several other points in the poem, notably the shepherd suddenly seen through fog (viii.400-01), the vapours around Snowdon (xiii.47-9), and the mist that "Advanced in such indisputable shapes" of the second spot of time (xi.381). Keith Hanley is surely correct in hearing in the latter example an echo of the ghost of Hamlet's father (*Hamlet*, I.iv.43), but the oedipal reading he proposes of both this and the Simplon Pass passage diminishes the power with which imagination is reconfigured by Nature. Just as the relocated cave passage continues beyond the first two phases of illusion and disillusion to endow London with reinvigorated imagery, the third phase of the Simplon crossing reconfigures Mind and Nature in response to the Gondo Ravine. This, in part, is what the Imagination passage itself anticipates. As Wordsworth put it, in his first fragmentary statement in MS WW, "populous shapes unfold / before me the true pathway of my verse," shapes that will shortly be shown to us in the Ravine. The 1805 version, in comparison, speaks of "visitings / Of awful promise" (533-4), and celebrates at greater length the contrast between the visible of the picturesque and the invisible of the imagination when "the light of sense / Goes out in flashes" (534-5). Thus,

The mind beneath such banners militant
Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
That may attest its prowess,

since what "attests" limits the imaginative power to what can be represented, that is, reproduced in sensory terms.

The argument of the Imagination passage, then, turns on a contrast between the visible and the invisible, and in this respect it continues Wordsworth's debate about his own prior subjection to the picturesque, his "degradation," as he put it Book XI, "when through the gorgeous Alps" he roamed (xi.240-2). In contrast, Hanley argues that the passage shows "the glorious recovery of the imaginary subject" within the symbolic order (Hanley 120). In the Gondo Ravine passage, Hanley adds, "Wordsworth found his true direction in the fixation that followed trauma" (124). It represents "the terms of Wordsworth's eventual entry into the symbolic domain — a domain that for Wordsworth is also the protraction of an imaginary borderland that need never be crossed" (125).²

The Gondo Ravine passage, on the contrary, is impressive because it embodies in their most elemental form the powers that correlate Mind and Nature. But Wordsworth locates this recognition within the same sense of

conflict and unity that has attended previous accounts: in the mind "There is a dark / Invisible workmanship that reconciles / Discordant elements, and makes them move / In one society" (i.332-5). Nature "sanctifies," he says, "Both pain and fear, until we recognise / A grandeur in the beatings of the heart" (i.439-41). In the Ravine Wordsworth recognizes a conflict of forces which, nevertheless, appear like "workings of one mind" (vi.568). His account does not, as picturesque writers do, lay out nature as a prospect for consumption, but rather as an elemental form of communication. It enables Wordsworth's participation in the energies he observes, a power that Tim Fulford has remarked in *Home at Grasmere* or the poems of Wordsworth's Scottish tour. For example, in Wordsworth's treatment of Ossian or the Gaelic voices that he heard, Fulford argues, "their unintelligibility and alien morality is made to sponsor his own writing — which resists the picturesque by offering itself as a *voicing* of the scene's ghostly energies rather than as a view of its prospects" (Fulford 191). Similarly, speaking of the shepherds' cries described in *Home at Grasmere* (407-11) Fulford notes that these are "raised into participation with the mysterious communicative energies which animate nature and render all human distinctions tentative" (Fulford 173).

The sense of resistance in the Gondo Ravine, of immense powers in conflict, of barely emergent meaning, conveys forces that are operative not only in Nature; it also signifies processes of resistance and conflict that work to form the mind. The "Invisible workmanship," made more palpable here, perhaps, than at any other point in the poem, reveals Imagination to be grounded within opposing forces as powerful as those that have formed the Ravine, geologically speaking. Wordsworth's vision of the Ravine, as Alan Bewell observes, uses a "language of trauma" that he has used elsewhere (Bewell 273), connoting the suffering endured by the earth in its formation as well as the "madness" of its first inhabitants (iii.151-5). If this is trauma, however, it is overcome by Wordsworth's revelation that the mind is formed by the same processes that occur in the Ravine: the "Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light, / Were all like workings of one mind" (vi.567-8), a mind, that as the Miltonic echo suggests, is creative like that of God.

The Simplon crossing, I have been arguing, demonstrates the replacement of an inadequate visual response to Nature derived from the picturesque, where "the mind / Itself were nothing, a mean pensioner / On outward forms" (vi.666-8). Wordsworth's description of the Ravine places special emphasis on its various sensory components, in accord with the argument he presents later that Nature herself "thwarts / This tyranny, summons all the senses each / To counteract the other and themselves" (xi.178-9). It is less easy to show what Wordsworth's renovated view of Nature represents. He appears to argue for a view of Nature and Mind in which the

same powers are operative and interactive: the Gondo Ravine passage is a more radical presentation of this view than we have anywhere else in the poem, which is why an understanding of it is critical to understanding Wordsworth's project as a whole.

Yet the transit from the picturesque to the interactive has not been seen by other commentators on the Simplon, despite Wordsworth's frequent references to this framework for understanding. According to Geoffrey Hartman, for example, in crossing the Alps Wordsworth's mind, "desperately and unself-knowingly in search of a nature adequate to deep childhood impressions, finds instead *itself*, and has to acknowledge that nature is no longer its proper subject or home." The lesson he learns shows the independence of Imagination from Nature; or as Herbert Lindenberger put it, "When crossing the Simplon . . . Wordsworth affirms his fealty to a world well beyond nature" (Lindenberger 178). Thus, Hartman adds, the Ravine of Gondo "depicts a self-thwarting march and counter-march of elements, a divine mockery of the concept of the Single Way" (Hartman 39, 47).

In a more recent account, Theresa Kelley sees the Gondo Ravine passage as a turn from the sublime back towards the beautiful and the representable:

The speaker is lost — lost in the Alps and lost to himself as sense experience, desire, and will evaporate before a sublime abyss. Yet in the Ravine of Arve [sic] passage that follows, the same tenor is given vehicles which press toward the code of representability which the beautiful advances.³

Her later argument thus stresses the visual component of the Ravine rather than, as I have done, its conflicting powers. Moreover, like the trauma that Hanley perceives behind Wordsworth's account of the Ravine, Kelley argues for the fixity of the scene: the relation to the beautiful, she suggests, "turns here on the relative fixity or fixedness of the visual, whose 'despotism' Wordsworth and his contemporaries acknowledged even as it seduced their vision" (Kelley 11, 108).

In contrast, I argue that the Gondo Ravine is at the opposite extreme from either fixity or the picturesque. In itself, the passage conveys the participatory sense that Wordsworth elaborated in his fragmentary essay on "The Sublime and the Beautiful." The "one mind" to which Wordsworth appeals is evoked by power:

it rouses us to a sympathetic energy & calls upon the mind to grasp at something towards which it can make approaches but which it is yet incapable of attaining — yet so that it participates force which is acting upon it (*Prose* II.354)

The overall place of the Ravine passage in the Simplon crossing, written by Wordsworth some fourteen years after the experience it represents, is also reminiscent of the process of reflection on nature that in "On Poesy or Art" Coleridge called eloinment (258). As Coleridge explained in a lecture, carefully distinguishing sight from sense, "The sense of sublimity arises, not from the sight of an outward object, but from the reflection upon it: not from the impression, but from the idea" (*Lectures* I.544). As both Coleridge and Wordsworth showed, feeling is the vehicle of the idea.

Wordsworth had earlier presented his own less specific version of eloinment in his Preface of 1800, where his account of the feelings that "overflow" in the making of poetry shows their evolution over time: "our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings" (*Prose* I.126). While such feelings, as Wordsworth's account claims, enable us to distinguish what is "really important to men," they also demonstrate a lawfulness in relation to memory. Coleridge observed this during his visit to Sockburn in November 1799 in a note that he considered important enough to repeat nearly four years later in October 1803. His memory of a particular print on the wall, he notes, is "made a Thing of Nature by the repeated action of the Feelings" (*Notebooks* I.1575). Over time, in other words, the original feeling is modified in a way that foregrounds the enduring significance of the memory (what that was for Coleridge is unclear, except that it is associated with his first love for Sara Hutchinson). As "a Thing of Nature" the memory has been endowed by feeling with a formative power. Similarly, Wordsworth's feelings in response to the Gondo Ravine have over time become "a Thing of Nature" that correlate with the forces operative in the Ravine itself.

What is wrong with the picturesque response to nature is that it is tied to the representable. As Wordsworth's letter of 1790 shows, he anxiously returned to significant viewpoints "in the hope of bearing away a more lively picture." In most versions, the picturesque is essentially an aesthetic of the static, the freeze-dried image, as Alan Liu has shown (Liu 65). But this is not the case in the Simplon Pass. The feelings that have emerged by 1804 or 1805 have been modified by the influxes of thought and feeling, so that their role is transformed from what they might have been in 1790. More specifically, they have the transformational power to re-envision the Alpine landscape and to evoke its anticipatory powers for human thought. In the Imagination passage Wordsworth speaks in general terms of his sense of "something evermore about to be" (542). In the Ravine he frames his account more precisely in terms of the transformational process itself that shapes the Ravine, and by analogy, the mind as well. The great principle of imagination, as Coleridge puts it in a lecture of 1808, is the balancing of "Images, Notions or Feelings . . . conceived as in opposition to each other — in short, the perception of . . . Identity and Contrariety" (*Lectures* I.84).

In the Gondo Ravine Wordsworth catches this process in a remarkable and baffling series of paradoxes, "woods decaying, never to be decayed, / The stationary blasts of waterfalls / . . . Winds thwarting winds" (vi.557-60).⁴ The woods change but remain the same; the waterfall appears still while in constant motion: Wordsworth shows us at the moment of inception the transforming process that is central to feeling, maintaining identity within difference. It is a process in which sight is deceived, since it can see only one half of this equation; hence, for an agent adequate to his insight Wordsworth must envisage the process as the "workings of one mind, the features / Of the same face" (568-9).

In his acute sense of the correlation between human feelings and the processes of nature, Wordsworth puts forward what, in the late twentieth century, we can regard as an environmentalist credo, one that, in the end would contain and begin to account for human history.⁵ Within the framework recently proposed by Lawrence Buell, Wordsworth's *Prelude* aligns with at least three of Buell's four principles: the poem shows how "human history is implicated in natural history," human interest is not "the only legitimate interest," and a sense of "the environment as a process rather than as a constant" is implicit (Buell 7-8; the quotations are originally in italics). The Gondo Ravine passage is a prime example of this last criterion. But it also exhibits another essential feature of Buell's system: it refrains from anthropocentrism (Buell 20). With the single exception of the winds, which are construed as "bewildered and forlorn" (560), Wordsworth does not attribute human feelings to the scene before him — a technique that evades what is unique or distinctive about the ecosystem in question. This is to "other" nature. As Buell also points out,

nature has historically been not only directly exploited but also the sign under which women and nonwhites have been grouped in the process of themselves being exploited even while being relished as exotic, spontaneous, and so forth.

Thus nature is "doubly otherized in modern thought" by being made to "subserve human interests" (21). By avoiding this trap the Ravine passage has the effect of foregrounding the processes at work in the Ravine as far as possible in their own terms; only then does Wordsworth indicate their correspondence in the human realm by seeing them as "like workings of one mind." It is a "mind" that appears to include the processes of both Nature and Mind, and one, moreover, prepared to accommodate both "Tumult and peace" and "the darkness and the light" (567). The "great apocalypse" perhaps anticipates the union of Man and Nature that would result from the final cathartic resolution of the opposed forces that constitute the "one mind."

Meanwhile, by a transit through the "unfathered vapour" of Imagination in the process of writing *The Prelude*, Wordsworth has been able to

return to the Alpine scene and re-envision it as the site of those transformative powers from whose conflict comes Nature, our self-consciousness, and the process inherent in both that points to "infinite." This is perhaps the place where an ecological poetics might begin.

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Notes

1. For the Rhine Falls, too, Wordsworth will eventually makes amends, incorporating it as an example into his account of "The Sublime and the Beautiful" (*Prose* II.356). This is discussed by Kelley (174).
2. David P. Haney, in similar vein, argues that "the poet has built a rhetoric that can accept the eternal deferral of reference in the 'evermore about to be,' but not one that can easily withstand the force of imaginative usurpation" (Haney 24). But Wordsworth's account of imagination emphasizes process here, not reference; it is, to use Coleridge's term (*Biographia Literaria* II.244) about becoming, not understanding.
3. Despite the careful work of Max Wildi (1959/62) and Donald Hayden (1983) in establishing the place of Wordsworth's Simplon crossing and its error, commentators continue to misplace it: while Kelley conflates the Gondo Ravine with the Arve (which is in Chamonix), Francis King (1992) moves the Simplon Pass and the Gondo Ravine into Italy.
4. Thomas, who argues that Coleridge's poem on Chamonix lies behind Wordsworth's Simplon account, cites lines from Coleridge's poem that anticipate the Ravine passage without pointing this out: "those precipitous, black, jagged rocks / For ever shatter'd, and the same for ever" (40-41); the torrents that "Motionless" (a reference to the glaciers) "stopped at once amidst their maddest plunge!" (50-51). (Thomas 97). Of course, Coleridge was also particularly interested in forces in nature that implied change within constancy, seeing in them a symbol of the mind: e.g., *Notebooks*, II.2832, 3156.
5. It is not clear whether Thomas intends his reading to situate history within nature, yet in his comment on the Gondo Ravine passage he concludes suggestively: "Wordsworth . . . finds in nature not only ma-

terial proof of imagination's workings . . . but the material evidence for his answer to history. For what is political struggle, military opposition, or the rise and fall of a Napoleon Bonaparte but an imagination of natural process materialized in the human?" (Thomas 113).

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