WISE PASSIVENESS IN "RESOLUTION AND INDEPENDENCE"

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摘　要

華滋華斯對他爲文的拾水蛭者初稿的批評頗爲重視。他重新修訂此詩用以表明「作者的感覺」，體現他對拾水蛭者的情感反映，以便與讀者分享。正如本詩之題目所示，<決心與自立>現所強調的乃是老人帶給敍述者的衝擊。本文爲四部分，試圖探討敍述者如何接受此一衝擊。第一部分，把本詩置於華滋華斯與另一詩人柯瑞治的文學對話的脈絡裡；第二部分著重敍述者與拾水蛭者之間之缺乏溝通；第三部分討論敍述者的頓悟（spot of time）和他的改變；第四部以敍述者之無爲的智慧（wise passiveness）解釋頓悟的現象。

When William Wordsworth's poem on the Leech-Gatherer, subsequently published as "Resolution and Independence," was first written, it was, to put it mildly, lukewarmly received by Sara and Mary Hutchinson, who thought the Leech-Gatherer's speech "tedious" (Shaver 367). Since the Leech-Gatherer is the focus of the poem, it should come as no surprise that the poet's immediate response to this piece of criticism was strongly defensive. He complained in a letter dated 14 June 1802 that his first readers had not "read with the feelings of the Author." He further suggested that

> it is of the utmost importance that you should have had pleasure from contemplating the fortitude, independence, persevering spirit, and the general moral dignity of this old man's character. (Shaver 367)

Dorothy Wordsworth also came to her brother's defence, thus advising Sara Hutchinson in the same letter:

> . . . ask yourself in what spirit it was written--whether merely to tell the tale and be through with it, or to illustrate a particular character or truth etc etc. (Shaver 367)

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Both passages imply that Sara should have read the poem with an open and sympathetic mind and that, moreover, there is more to the poem than meets the eye.

Such protests aside, Wordsworth must have weighed the criticism seriously, for he proceeded to revise the poem, particularly to manifest "the feelings of the Author," to flesh out his emotional reaction to the Leech-Gatherer in the poem so that, presumably, it may be more readily shared by his readers.[1] The project turns out to be much more significant than a minor revision of the characterization of the Leech-Gatherer. As indicated by the present title--"Resolution and Independence"[2]--the poem now places as much emphasis on the impact the old man gives to the narrator. This paper attempts to examine how the narrator receives this impact--how, that is, he attains "wise passiveness" through a spot of time. Special attention will be paid to the curiously devised "dialogues" in the poem, and what they imply for the narrator's epiphany.[3]

I. A Poetic Dialogue

The yearning for continuity in his relation with nature and with his former self has always been one of Wordsworth's great concerns. It finds expression in many of his poems, perhaps nowhere more explicit than in "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold," which ends with

> The Child is Father of the Man;
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety.
>
> (7-9)[4]

Nature, to Wordsworth, is permanent; it is *the* foundation of his entire existence:

> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.
>
> (*Tintern Abbey* 109-111)

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[1] On the revisions of the poem as a "revelation of Wordsworth's artistic growth," see Stephen Maxfield Parrish 216-20.

[2] The poem was originally untitled. See Jared R. Curtis, *Wordsworth's Experiments with Tradition* (Ithaca, 1971) 97, 186-187.

[3] Citations from "Resolution and Independence" are from Gill, ed., *William Wordsworth* 260-264.

[4] Unless otherwise indicated, citations of poems by William Wordsworth are from Gill, ed., *William Wordsworth*. Line numbers are given in parenthesis.

Thus, in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality,* when the things in nature he used to see he can see no more, the poet-narrator takes great alarm, asking persistently:

> Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
> Where is it now, the glory and the dream?
>
> (56-57)

The anxiety is by no means alleviated when Coleridge, in his *Letter to Sara Hutchinson,* the first version of "Dejection: an Ode" and generally construed as a direct response to the first four stanzas of Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode,* observes:

> O Sara! we receive but what we give,
> And in *our* Life alone does Nature live.
> Our's is her wedding Garment, our's her Shroud--
>
> (296-98)[5]

For, if this is the case, nature is then subject to our mind and our perception; nothing could claim autonomous existence. It might even mean that we are the *source* of everything, a presumptuous supposition that threatens Wordsworth's view of nature and his belief. It is therefore "an instinct for self-preservation" (Newlyn 118) that propels Wordsworth to write about the Leech-Gatherer, his reply to Coleridge's menacing challenge, as it were, whereby he reasserts his own belief.

As part of an on-going dialogue between the two poets, the poem points from the very beginning to an essential and categorical difference that separates them. Whereas in *Letter to Sara Hutchinson* an ominous storm brews both inside and outside Coleridge, in "Resolution and Independence" the night's storm, despite the "great seriousness" of the poem's first two lines (Alexander 126), is benign and beneficial:

> There was a roaring in the wind all night;
> The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
> But now the sun is rising calm and bright;

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[5] The poem is quoted from John Beer, ed., *Coleridge's Poems.* It is a commonplace that Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode,* Coleridge's *Letter to Sara Hutchinson,*, and Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" form some kind of a dialogue between the two poets. For a detailed and illuminating discussion of this, see Lucy Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* 117-137.

The birds are singing in the distant woods;
Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
The jay makes answer as the magpie chatters;
And all the air is fill'd with pleasant noise of waters.

All things that love the sun are out of doors;
The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;
The grass is bright with rain-drops; on the moors
The Hare is running races in her mirth;
And with her feet she from the plashy earth
Raises a mist; which, glittering in the sun,
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

(1-14)

Alive, vital, and life-giving, the world of nature "exists and endures outside [Wordsworth's] own mind: a world of substantial, literal, and animate things, which have their own energies--their own processes of growth and change" (Newlyn 119). Into such a real and permanent world Wordsworth introduces himself:

I was a Traveller then upon the moor;
I saw the Hare that raced about with joy;
I heard the woods, and distant waters, roar;
Or heard them not, as happy as a Boy:
The pleasant season did my heart employ:
My old remembrances went from me wholly;
And all the ways of men so vain and melancholy.

(15-21)

What Wordsworth does here is tantamount to a declaration that, unlike Coleridge, he can and does feel the joy of nature outside his finite and fallible mind. The shift in verb tense from the present to the past has caught some critical attention. J. H. Alexander sees it as a device similar to flash-back:

> Wordsworth begins in the present with two introductory stanzas, and . . . casts his thought back to a similar "pleasant" season when he had experienced . . . those "blind" thoughts which may not be altogether understood or easily resisted. (126)

Newlyn, on the other hand, thinks it "heightens the disjunction between poet and scene, as though he is time-bound in a permanence beyond him" (122). Both readings are plausible and useful.

It is true that the poet-narrator may, for a brief moment (when "The pleasant season did my heart employ"), be free from his "old remembrances . . . / And all the ways of men so vain and melancholy"; yet, even here, one cannot but notice "a living mind open to the terror of discontinuity" (Hartman 268). However hard Wordsworth tries to prove the existence of continuity between himself and either nature or his former self, a poet's haphazard future still bothers him. Thus, on that morning "from the might / Of joy in minds that can no farther go" (22-23), he sinks low in dejection:

> And fears, and fancies, thick upon me came;
> Dim sadness, and blind thoughts I knew not nor could name.
> (27-28)

It is a dejection in which the poet-narrator cannot find solace even in the Nature with its "blissful Creatures" (32). For, though "a happy Child of earth" who walks "Far from the world . . . and from all care" (31-33), he is still relentlessly haunted by a wayward thought to think that

> . . . there may come another day to me,
> Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.
> (34-35)

The poet-narrator realizes that all his life he has been in a "summer mood" (37);

> As if all needful things would come unsought
> To genial faith, still rich in genial good[.]
> (38-39)

While appreciating his "genial good," he now seems to lose his "genial faith." He begins to worry that "there may come another day to [him]; / Solitude, pain of heart, distress and poverty" (34-35). This "fear of disintegration is at its most intense" (Newlyn 125) right before he meets the Leech-Gatherer:

> By our own spirits are we deified:

We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof comes in the end despondency & madness.

(47-49)

The encounter itself, totally unexpected, is heavily colored with supernaturalness.

I spied a Man before me unawares:
The oldest Man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

(55-56)

The word "unawares" here may modify either the narrator or the man or both; the ambiguity suggests the poet-narrator's initial surprise and passiveness: he did not *seek* the encounter. Rather, like his counterpart in "The Discharged Soldier," he is thrust upon an almost supernatural figure:

My course I stopped as soon as I espied
The Old Man in that naked wilderness;
Close by a Pond upon the further side
He stood alone: a minute's space, I guess,
I watched him, he continuing motionless:
To the Pool's further margin then I drew;
He being all the while before me full in view.

(55-63)

Once the contact is made, however, the "oldest Man" with his "grey hairs" and standing "alone" "in that naked wilderness" immediately commands the narrator's whole attention.

On one hand, the old man's sorry state of deprivation, his "naked simplicity," seems precisely the projection of the narrator's current worries--of poets ending in "despondency and madness." The old man's wretchedness chastises him for ever entertaining the idea that life is *always* a "summer mood." At this moment, he seems unwittingly to identify himself with the old man, seeing perhaps in the latter an old poet, mad and despondent. On the other hand, he is at the same time struck by the vastness of yet another difference between them: while he himself wavers mentally in the wilderness of uncertainties, this old man, though utterly deprived and all by himself, looks literally as firm as a rock. The narrator is "awed" by the "supernatural" image, and yet, as a person who has "lived in pleasant thought"

and been "rich in genial faith," he chooses to believe that this encounter is "by peculiar grace, / A leading from above, a something given" (50-51)--a direct refutation of Coleridge's "we receive but what we give" (Newlyn 125, n16). In his letter to Sara Hutchinson, cited above, Wordsworth takes pains to explain his nearly "supernatural" impression of the man:

> A person reading this Poem with feelings like mine will have been awed and controuled, expecting almost something spiritual or supernatural--What is brought forward? 'A lonely place, a Pond' 'by which an old man *was* far from all house or home'--not stood, not sat, but '*was*'--the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible. (Shaver 366)

It is indeed a peculiar impression. As the narrator goes on to tell us, the old man seems to belong, not to "all house or home," but to nature:

> As a huge Stone is sometimes seen to lie
> Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
> Wonder to all that do the same espy
> By what means it could thither come, and whence;
> So that it seems a thing endued with sense,
> Like a Sea-beast crawled forth, which on a shelf
> Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself.
>
> (64-70)

What comes across here is the Leech-Gatherer's stillness and his borderer feature. Under the imaginative gaze of the poet-narrator, he seems to keep changing his shape or "identity"--from a stone, to a "thing" endowed with sense, to a sea-beast. Later on, this oldest man is likened to a cloud, and his voice to a stream.[6] Interestingly, the transfiguration is always into some natural objects, elemental and permanent: qualities that the poet seems to be in most need of in his moment of doubt and uncertainty. Wordsworth calls our attention to the fact that "'by [a pond] an old man *was* far from all house or home'--not stood, not sat, but '*was.*'" This insistent emphasis, as has been pointed out, "supports a distinction between being as mere presence and being as existence. The leechgatherer has been always there:

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[6] Parrish takes note of the fact that Wordsworth sees the three images here--stone, sea-beast, and cloud--as "illustrat[ing] the imagination's various powers" (220).

this is no case of projection, but of 'something given'" (Newlyn 125). The distinction is important, for it shows that Wordsworth rejects Coleridge's statement in the *Letter to Sara Hutchinson*: "we receive but what we give, / And in *our* Life alone does Nature live."

II. Monologues as Dialogue

Accepting the old man's physical existence, the narrator starts to peep and gaze at him, in very much the way his counterpart in "The Discharged Soldier" peeps at the ghostly Soldier. He finds him

> . . . not all alive nor dead,
> Nor all asleep; in his extreme old age:
> His body was bent double, feet and head
> Coming together in their pilgrimage;
> As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage,
> Or sickness felt by him in times long past
> A more than human weight upon his age had cast.
>
> Himself he propped, his body, limbs, and face,
> Upon a long grey Staff of shaven wood:
>
> (71-79)

Having scanned his "object," the narrator, again like his counterpart in "The Discharged Soldier," comes up with a similar conclusion: the old man is a borderer between life and death who is crushed under "more than human weight." The way he approaches the Leech-Gatherer also reminds us of "The Discharged Soldier"--he does so by way of talking about some unimportant topic first. In this case it is the weather: "This morning gives us promise of a glorious day" (91). Plain and polite though the remark is on the surface, it is ironic, if not comic, for the reader. For this seemingly offhand comment on the weather cannot erase, at least for the reader, the distinct impression that *this* morning can hardly promise a glorious day or future for the poet-narrator.

As the old man makes a reply, the poet in the narrator detects certain stylistic traits of the old man's speech:

> A gentle answer did the Old Man make,

> In courteous speech which forth he slowly drew:
> . . . . . .
> And there was, while he spake, a fire about his eyes.
>
> His words came feebly, from a feeble chest,
> Yet each in solemn order followed each,
> With something of a lofty utterance drest;
> Choice word, and measured phrase; above the reach
> Of ordinary men; a stately speech!
> Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
> Religious men, who give to God and Man their dues.
>
> (92-93; 98-105)

Something peculiar seems to be happening here. This "thing endued with sense" has now come alive to the observer--we are told there is "a fire about his eyes" when he speaks. Moreover, the speech is such that, in certain respects at least, the speaker partakes of the quality of a poet. This makes the poet-narrator unconsciously identify himself with the Leech-Gatherer. "Indeed," comments David Morse, "the leech-gatherer may well be viewed as a poet *manque*, with his 'Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach / of ordinary men" (249). On the other hand, his dread for a miserable future also proportionally increases, looming large almost as a reality. As if to verify--or is it to refute?--the worst of his premonitions of his future as a poet, he begins his simple questioning:

> 'What kind of work is that which you pursue?
> This is a lonesome place for one like you.'
>
> (95-96)

And he learns from the Leech-Gatherer that

> . . . he to this Pond had come
> To gather Leeches, being old and poor:
> Employment hazardous and wearisome!
> And he had many hardships to endure:
> From Pond to Pond he roamed, from moor to moor,
> Housing, with God's good help, by choice or chance:
> And in this way he gained an honest maintenance.
>
> (106-112)

The Leech-Gatherer's trust in God and his "genial faith" in maintaining an honest living are reminiscent of a telling moment in "The Discharged Soldier." There, when the title-hero is advised to "[ask] relief or alms,"

> He said, 'My trust is in the God of heaven,
> And in the eye of him that passes me.'
>
> (164-65)

If the situation here appears less embarrassing for *this* narrator, it is because his question and doubt is couched in phrases that sound less blunt or offensive. Significantly, having learned this much about the Leech-Gatherer's faith, the poet-narrator internalizes him, while totally unmindful of the latter's physical presence:

> The Old Man still stood talking by my side;
> But now his voice to me like a stream
> Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide,
> And the whole Body of the Man did seem
> Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
> Or like a Man from some far region sent
> To give me human strength, and strong admonishment.
>
> (113-119)

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the old man's "whole Body" seems like one whom he "had met with in a dream." What is this man? Could he be his former self who used to live in "genial faith"? He might also be his future self as imagined while he still kept his faith intact. In any case, this old man in his extremities admirably exemplifies the faith that seems to have newly deserted the poet-narrator. The strength and admonishment the narrator feels derive, we may assume, from his recognition of the old man's absolute spiritual fortitude in face of extreme material deprivation.

But the poet-narrator is too sophisticated, his malaise of despondency too serious, for such an easy and straightforward answer to work immediately. The deepest fear creeps upon him again:

> My former thoughts returned; the fear that kills;
> The hope that is unwilling to be fed;
> Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;

And mighty Poets in their misery dead.

(120-23)

The "fear that kills" needs the administration of double-strength medicine; the recalcitrant soul requires further admonition. The narrator is prompted to ask again:

'How is it that you live? and what is it you do?'

(126)

At the back of these repeated questions lurks the narrator's obstinate doubt. He just cannot accept the fact that a man can still retain his genial faith under what seem to be the most impossible circumstances. Thus he feels impelled to ask again. But the old man's reply, instead of clearing away his doubt, intensifies his anxiety; for he seems to confirm the deepest and the worst of the narrator's fears by depicting a bleak picture for himself. Now, "with a smile" (127) he repeats:

'Once I could meet with them on every side;
But they have dwindled long by slow decay;
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may.'

(131-33)

What lies in wait for the old man is certain disaster; he can see his means of life dying away. Yet the old man talks about it detachedly, almost unconcernedly, "with a smile." To the narrator's disturbance and confusion, his own preconceived ideas of the poor solitaries in "distress and poverty," especially poets, just cannot apply to this wretched old Leech-Gatherer standing in front of him. He cannot understand. In spite of his quiet identification with the old man, he notices that there is no true meeting point between them. They are so similar and yet at the same time so different, so close to each other and yet so far apart. He has asked the same questions repeatedly, and each time the old man answers politely and cheerfully, but they are only separate monologues, not genuine dialogue.[7]

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[7] But there is no denying that the poem has what Morse calls "a dialectical character": it develops a dialogue between the poet and the object of his perception and the development of the poem has a double function—to exhibit to the reader both what the poet perceives and the poet himself in the process of perceiving it" (249).

The lack of real communication borders on the comic. The oddity of the situation is humorously caught in the following two lines from Lewis Carroll's parody of the poem:

> But his words impressed my ear no more
> Than if it were a sieve.
>
> ("On the Lonely Moor" 7-8)[8]

This may be, for Coleridge, a classic case of Wordsworth as a "*Spectator ab extra*" --one who has "feeling *for*, but never *with*" his characters (Coleridge *Table Talk*, July 21, 1832; Feb. 16, 1833; qtd. in Lindenberger 206). It has also prompted Herbert Lindenberger to charge that all of Wordsworth's solitary characters are, "in one way or another, projections of his own self, his hopes, fears, and depths of despair and they receive only so much characterization as Wordsworth needs to portray his own subjective states" (212). In the present case at least, it must be conceded that there seems to be little or no evidence of true communication, on the verbal level, between the narrator and the Leech-Gatherer.

III. The Spot of Time

Despite the lack of communication, the narrator has, before he knows it, found himself enlightened, as the famous closing couplet clearly indicates:

> 'God,' said I, 'be my help and stay secure;
> I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely Moor.'
>
> (146-47)

What has transpired to effect the amazing change, this quantum leap? William Heath explains the intriguing phenomenon as follows:

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[8] Anthony E. M. Conran, however, thinks Lewis Carroll makes the "vein of implicit comedy . . . too obvious and trivial." The comic strain, he believes, and correctly so, "lies in the efforts of one person to adjust the other to his own vision. It is the comedy of a solipsist faced with something outside himself." He also points out that "It is comic for a cloud-man to blend matter with his discourse, 'cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind, but stately in the main.'" See Conran's "The Dialectic of Experience: A Study of Wordsworth's *Resolution and Independence*," *PMLA* 75 (1960): 74.

> The Leechgatherer *tells* the poet nothing--he *becomes* something that the poet creates; and in creating, the poet reaches a sense of equilibrium, of balance and ease. Through the poet's imaginative act the firmness of mind that the Leech-gatherer is *seen* to exhibit becomes communicable. (135)

The admirable explanation brings us perhaps as close to the true circumstances as one can possibly hope for. But one must not forget the role of the obstinate questioning in bringing about the spot of time. In the letter to Sara Hutchinson, Wordsworth takes pains to stress the strong feeling of "supernaturalness," pointing to the significance of the questions:

> This feeling of spirituality or supernaturalness is again referred to as being strong in my mind in this passage--'*How came he here* thought I or what can he be doing?' (Shaver 366)

Wordsworth presses these questions harder in his revision to make manifest his own incredulity concerning this encounter.[9]

So powerful and enlightening a moment may be recognized as the poet's epiphany. Robert Langbaum lists the following as his criteria for epiphany: 1) incongruity, 2) insignificance, 3) psychological association, 4) momentaneousness, 5) suddenness, and 6) fragmentation or the epiphanic leap ("The Epiphanic Mode" 341).[10] The poem under discussion fits all six of them. It is therefore not difficult, from this point of view, to account for the oddity of the poem, or to see why the ill-communicated dialogue between the Leech-Gatherer and the poet can yet result in fruitful consequences for the latter. This phenomenon has also been explained in terms of the concept of the "spot of time," which, as Jonathan Wordsworth succinctly formulates, is a moment

> showing the expected progression from detailed and quite ordinary description, through the poet's heightened and heightening response, to a new, odder, and more general vision. (2)

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[9] Whereas in the first draft the questions are asked only once (88-89), in "Resolution and Independence" they appear twice (95-96, 126).

[10] Langbaum (341) credits the first four criteria to Morris Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel.*

Thus the narrator's description seems ordinary at first; but, seeing the Leech-Gatherer as "by peculiar grace, / A leading from above, a something given" (50-51), his response becomes at once heightened and heightening.[11]

The epiphanic mode, Langbaum points out, carries with it certain structural implications: poems written in this mode are all "lyrical," being "devoted to intensifying an object into radiance rather than to telling a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Even narrative . . . is lyricized and rendered relatively static" (344). Although in "Resolution and Independence" there is hardly any linear movement, there is much intensification of the old man into what Langbaum, following James Joyce, calls "radiance"--that is, "the intensification of the object's realistic quality, its 'whatness,' as revealed in an instant" ("The Epiphanic Mode" 343). This is achieved in the narrator's internalization of the Leech-Gatherer.

If the old man appears to the poet-narrator's eye as a border-state figure, can he at the same time be a reflection of the poet-narrator who, in a different sense of word, is also in a border-state? Troubled by uncertainties, the narrator may be said to suffer in a limbo of attaining and not attaining a truthful vision. Having quietly identified himself with the old man, the poet-narrator becomes all the more

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[11]Thomas De Quincey gives this account of what Wordsworth once said about his own perception:

> I have remarked, from my earliest days, that, if under any circumstances the attention is energetically braced up to an act of steady observation, or of steady expectation, then, if this intense condition of vigilance should suddenly relax at that moment any beautiful, any impressive visual object, or collection of objects, falling upon the eye, is carried to the heart with a power not known under other circumstances. (Sackville-West, qtd. in Curtis 15)

In the present case, the poet's attention has been focused on the alarming vicissitudes of life, and as he is engaged in this activity, an "intense condition of vigilance" possesses his entire being. That may help to explain why at first he takes no notice of the Leech-Gatherer who is right in front of him and who seems, moreover, so supernaturally old. But the similarity between this Wordsworthian way of perception and the present case ends here. In his encounter with the Leech-Gatherer, without relaxing from the vigilance the narrator is thrust upon "an impressive object"--a Leech-Gatherer endowed with many striking features and some attributes of a poet.

self-conscious--he is acutely aware of the old man's spiritual superiority and physical inferiority. The recognition of both the sameness and the difference between himself and the Leech-Gatherer puzzles as well as fascinates the poet-narrator. He has asked him mundane questions in the hope of placing him in a human context that he can understand and to which he can relate. He wants to know what this all too mysteriously supernatural being is. With each questioning, he tries to read the old man's mind and to penetrate into the whatness of this old man. The attempt has so far failed, as he finally admits:

> While he was talking thus the lonely place,
> The Old Man's shape & speech all troubl'd me;
>
> (141-42)

For the narrator, the Leech-Gatherer's presentation is definitely impressive. This "decrepit" man in a lonely moor speaking so "stately" and graciously troubles him. It is all too sharp a contrast to be reconciled with and all too "spiritual or supernatural" to be confronted with. The poet-narrator, preoccupied as he is with his personal troubles and preconceived ideas, is unable to believe his eyes and ears. He refuses to take the old man *as he is*. Instead, he repeats his questions, which reveal his doubts about the old man's way of life and his seemingly impregnable and incorrigible genial faith.

As has been pointed out earlier, the poet-narrator's chief concern is perseverance under all circumstances so as to preserve that continuity with nature so precious to him. Here he confronts with a man who, by virtue of the genial faith he displays concerning his trade and in repeating his own story, may be regarded as an emblem of perseverance or continuity. Yet he refuses to believe that this can be possible--until the internalization comes to its high point:

> In my mind's eye I seem'd to see him pace
> About the weary Moors continually,
> Wandering about alone and silently[.]
>
> (143-45)

On seeing the Leech-Gatherer "both *pace* (with a sense of purpose) and *wander* (without ceasing, without ever reaching his destination), the narrator sees the "whatness" of the old man--the "quality of purposive but ceaseless activity" (Curtis 110) which the poet has finally penetrated and has long been reluctant to admit.

Only when he is ready to let go of his preconceived ideas, is he ready to take him not *as he is like* but *as he is*--an exemplar of continuity. Seeing the Leech-Gatherer's whatness, he can now lay to rest his doubt. It is in this sense that the "supernatural" old man succors him, giving him "human" strength. The narrator has humanized the supernatural.[12]

Yet, is this moral lesson what the poem is all about? Newlyn does not think so; she observes:

> To see him simply as the emblem suggested by the title is to miss the "trouble" he creates in Wordsworth's mind. Wandering about, "alone and silently," he is a reflex of the poet's deepest fears. (137)

True, the fear of discontinuity, the fear of suffering all by himself in his old age makes the narrator lose his genial faith. The internalization of and identification with the old man enables the narrator to face his deepest fears squarely. As the epiphany dawns on him, he declares,

> . . . when he [the Leech-Gatherer] ended,
> I could have laughed myself to scorn, to find
> In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
>
> (143-45)

After all the questioning and internalizing, the narrator sees not only the old man's whatness but his own too. The fact that the old man is able to retain his genial faith in spite of all *real* extremities puts to shame the narrator and his fear of *imagined* extremities. He cannot but "[laugh himself] to scorn" in finding so firm a mind in so weak a man. While suspecting the deepest fear might still be lurking, he says a prayer in hope of clinging to the precious Leech-Gatherer, who indeed provides medicine for man.

The "terror of discontinuity," though obscure and dark, will not now trouble him, as his epiphany reveals. He is again strong, as strong perhaps as the girl he sings in the 1799 version of *The Prelude:*

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[12] This instance may serve as an example of what Abrams calls natural supernaturalism—"to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine," one of the characteristics of the Romantic literature (68).

A Girl who bore a Pitcher on her head,
And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
Against the blowing wind.

(I, 317-19)

IV. "Wise Passiveness"

There is in fact nothing unusual about the Leech-Gatherer enlightening the poet-narrator. The former is a borderer, who, even if he himself possesses none, can still inspire vision of truth or wisdom "in the eye of the beholder."[13] But it does appear that the narrator's spot of time is linked to what may be called "wise passiveness."

Toward the end of the poem, the narrator identifies, succinctly, "the lonely place, / The Old Man's shape and speech" as things that "troubled" him. Unable from the start to take the encounter truthfully as "a something given," the poet-narrator obstinately tries to project the Leech-Gatherer in his own mind. He has fruitlessly transfigured him through the whole span of the hierarchy. That is to say, instead of taking the old man as he is, the narrator tries to shape him with his own shaping imagination. When the narrator tells us that not only the Leech-Gatherer's "shape" but also his "speech" troubles him, we know the latter's "stately" speech has caused the poet in the narrator to detect a potential poet in the wretched old man. He even sees in the Leech-Gatherer his own picture "in old age." This quiet identification compels the poet-narrator to ask his questions with greater urgency and persistence. Such an endeavor is also evident in "The Discharged Soldier," where the narrator tries to shape the soldier according to his own fancy. Like his counterpart in "The Discharged Soldier," this poet-narrator needs to watch and to receive. Just as Wordsworth thinks Sara Hutchinson ought to be more sympathetic to him, so the poet-narrator in the poem needs to see the Leech-Gatherer as something that simply *is*, nothing more and nothing less. He has to respect the indelible humanity and naked dignity of the old man.

The revised version puts more emphasis on *how* the poet-narrator is inspired to "resolution and independence" by the seemingly "boring" Leech-Gatherer in the first draft. Wordsworth has, after all, listened to his first readers with an open

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[13] Jonathan Wordsworth makes the comment in connection with a discussion of "The Discharged Soldier" (*Borders of Vision* 15).

mind and addressed the issue they raised. With a little wise passiveness, true dialogue becomes possible—not just between poets or between the poet-narrator and the Leech-Gatherer, but also between the poet and his reader.

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