THE TWO-PART PRELUDE OF 1798–99

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In his influential and admirably lucid essay of 1964 on "The Three Forms of The Prelude,"1 J. R. MacGillivray drew attention to the existence of a two-part version of the poem, belonging to the period 1798–1800. It is the purpose of the present article to describe in more detail the circumstances, composition, and chronology of this great early poem, now soon to be in print for the first time.2 In 1958 Helen Darbishire wrote of the two parts of 1799: "These books, occupied with experiences of [Wordsworth's] boyhood, form one vital and self-contained whole."3 Professor MacGillivray rightly went much further in his claims:

In this proto-Prelude of 1798–1800 one observes a much more unified theme and a much stronger sense of formal structure than in the poem completed first in 1805 and published in 1850. The time covered is restricted to childhood and school days only. The single theme is the awakening of the imagination. Each of the two parts has its own limit in time: the first being of childhood and to the age of about ten, the second until the end of school days when the narrator was about seventeen. The whole poem, and each separate part, shows an unusual number, for Wordsworth at least, of devices of formal structure, used, I think, with considerable success.4

I

1799 is a separate and internally coherent form of The Prelude, composed in October 1798–January 1799, and September–December 1799,


2 The early two-part version—here called 1799, as distinct from 1805 (and 1850)—will shortly be available in a Norton Critical Edition, ed. M. H. Abrams. Jonathan Wordsworth, and Stephen Gill. In this essay references to both 1799 and 1805 are drawn from the Norton text. An asterik is used where lines from an early and distinct phase of composition have perforce been identified by reference to a later established text.

3 The Prelude, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1926); revised H. Darbishire, 1959 (referred to below as Prel), p. xlvi.

4 Harvey and Gravil, p. 106.
but including excerpts from *The Pedlar* and related material of early spring 1798. Wordsworth’s theme, as Professor MacGillivray points out, is the awakening of the imagination, and 1799 offers a treatment that is at once fuller and more concentrated than that presented in the first two books of 1805, to which in some sense it corresponds. **Part Two** becomes *Book Two* with relatively little change; **Part One** has been plundered to provide matter for the later books of 1805. The Drowned Man of Esthwaite is transferred from 1799, I.258 to 1805, V.450; and still more important is the relegation to 1805, XI.258 of 1799, I.288–372, including not only the two great “spots of time,” but the preceding doctrinal passage (“There are in our existence . . .”), on which the thought of the two-part poem had turned.\(^6\)

In December 1799 two separate, and virtually identical, fair copies were made of the two-part *Prelude*;\(^7\) Wordsworth then turned his attention elsewhere, writing in the early months of 1800 first *The Brothers* and *Hart Leap Well*, then a version of *Home at Grasmere*, *Book One of The Recluse*. Nothing within 1799 itself would lead one to suppose that he intended later to extend the narrative. He had carried his self-enquiry through the formative periods and childhood and adolescence, in which he rightly felt the sources of his creative power to lie. He had taken evident pains with formal structure, and in the final lines had dedicated the work to Coleridge in a way that strongly suggests completeness. External evidence is scanty—its absence is not surprising at a period when there is no Dorothy Wordsworth journal to offer progress-reports, when Wordsworth’s letters to Coleridge (for whom the poem was written) are known to have been lost, and when Coleridge’s replies exist only in brief quotations—but it is clear that at this stage 1799 was thought of merely as an adjunct to *The Recluse*, and that

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\(^5\) The name *Pedlar* is used here, as in Jonathan Wordsworth’s *The Music of Humanity* (London and New York, 1969), to indicate the autobiographical lines describing the character and upbringing of the narrator inserted by Wordsworth in *The Ruined Cottage* of March 1798, but later for a time separated from the main story. For the possibility that a distinction between *The Pedlar* and *The Ruined Cottage*, made here largely for convenience, was at one stage made by the poet himself, see *The Music of Humanity*, pp. 164–66.

\(^6\) In making structural comparisons between 1799 and 1805, one should bear in mind that there was an intervening stage, the five-book *Prelude* of early spring 1804. In this version, of which no fair copy survives, the Drowned Man appears in Book IV, and the remainder of the “spots of time” sequence is used, very impressively, to form the conclusion to the final book. An essay reconstructing the five-book *Prelude* is in preparation.

\(^7\) *Prelude*, MSS. V and U (MSS. 22 and 23), described below under Section n. Catalogue numbers of MSS at the Wordsworth Library—as opposed to the names of particular MSS—are drawn from the 1972 renumbering of Dove Cottage Papers, 1785–1814.
Wordsworth was under pressure to get on with the major project. It was not on the face of it a moment at which he was likely to be planning an extended autobiography. There is, however, one form of evidence which makes it unwise to assume that the two-part Prelude was in Wordsworth's mind a completed work. When copying a finished poem it was Dorothy Wordsworth's habit to conclude with "The End," and both the 1799 manuscripts that she transcribed have merely "End of the Second Part." It is not, finally, a matter of great importance; whether or not Wordsworth expected at some future date to add to it, the poem had reached in the autumn of 1799 a form of which he clearly approved—hence the fair copies—and which was inevitably destroyed in the reorganizations of 1804–1805.

1799 was not continued—extended by the addition of further parts, or books, as Dorothy Wordsworth presumably thought would be the case when she completed her transcription; it was used as material towards a new and quite different poem, the five-book Prelude of spring 1804, which was in turn broken up in the making of 1805. The distinctness of these early Preludes is important, but has been ignored by scholars and critics (apart from Professor MacGillivray), and was naturally irrelevant to the poet himself. Wordsworth's retrospective patterning of events is seen especially in the Preface to The Excursion, where he relates all his earlier work to The Recluse, and creates through the metaphor of the Gothic church an impressive sense of logic and coherency. The Recluse was of course never completed, but the concept of the great philo-

8 "O let it be the tail-piece of 'The Recluse'! for of nothing but 'The Recluse' can I hear patiently," Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford 1956–71), 1, 538—hereafter cited as Griggs. The fact that 1799 was to be part of the larger scheme of The Recluse would of course preclude the discussion of publication that so frequently signals Wordsworth's completion of a poem.

9 Of the two MSS concerned, RV (D.C. MS. 21) contains only Part Two, and is thus less impressive as evidence; V is, however, a clear case. (MS. U, the third MS of 1799 likely to be relevant, is transcribed by Mary Hutchinson, not Dorothy Wordsworth, and in fact has no colophon.) We owe this evidence, together with much generous and useful criticism, to Mark Reed, who is firmly of the opinion that 1799 is not a completed work.

10 It is possible that Wordsworth still intended to add some prefatory lines to explain the disquiet that lies behind his opening question, "Was it for this...?" but there was nothing to stop his writing such an introduction during the revisions of Part One that took place as he prepared 1799 for the fair copies, V and U. In fact MS evidence such as it suggests that as with The Thorn, also originally to have had an introduction, he became used to his abrupt opening; in MS. II (D.C. MS. 19) and the Christabel Notebook (D.C. MS. 15), both of late 1798, the poem begins with "was" in the lower case; in the fair copies made a year later the "w" is capitalized. In neither V nor U does the copyist leave room for further composition.

11 The changing, often muddled, relationship of The Recluse to 1799 and 1805 is discussed at various points in this essay. The only sections of the poem to be completed were Home at Grasmere (belonging to 1800 and 1806) and The Excursion.
sophical poem dominated the thinking of Wordsworth’s middle years, and in particular his attitude to *The Prelude*:

Several years ago, when the Author retired to his native Mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers. . . .

*The Prelude* thus takes its place in an orderly progression, to be followed by *The Recluse*. "The result of the investigation"

was a determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society; and to be entitled, The Recluse; as having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement. . . . the two Works have the same kind of relation to each other . . . as the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic Church. (*Prose Wks.*, iii, 5)

And so it goes on, even the minor poems becoming "Cells, Oratories, and sepulchral Recesses." Wordsworth is rearranging the past, but is perhaps guilty more of foreshortening than of distortion. Looking back, he sees *The Recluse* solely in terms of retirement to Grasmere, forgetting that the scheme had been devised at Alfoxden in March 1798. And with *The Prelude*, he not surprisingly sees only the thirteen-book version of 1804–1805, which fits into his Grasmere pattern, and was his final product.

Wordsworth’s reconstruction has naturally been influential. Miss Darbishire after her perceptive comment that the two parts of 1799 “form one vital and self-contained whole” goes on: “When he had consigned them to fair-copies, he failed to proceed: he failed even to compose the opening of Book I” (*Prel.*, pp. xlvi–xlvi). For her, as for de Selincourt, whose edition of 1926 she was revising, the exciting fact was that *The Prelude*, published in fourteen books in 1850, had been completed in thirteen in 1805. 1799 could be regarded only as early work on 1805. For this reason she confuses Part One, 1799, with Book One of 1805, and talks of Wordsworth's failure to proceed, as if he had at this stage a definite scheme in mind for the poem that finally evolved. More serious still is the fact that in her edition—regarded by many as definitive —1799 readings are noted as if they were variants of 1805. For all but the most attentive reader, chronological perspective must inevitably be destroyed. The attempt to reassert such a perspective leads at once to

the surviving Wordsworth manuscripts of 1799. These are listed below—
more for reference than for consecutive reading—with a summary of
their immediately relevant contents, and an assessment of the dating
factors involved.

II. MSS CONTAINING 1799 MATERIAL

MS. JJ of Prelude (D.C. MS. 19), October/November 1798; original drafts
of lines corresponding to 1799, I.1-26, 50-66, 130-41, 186-98, 27-49, 374-
410, 69-129. Though in a different order from 1799, Part One, and clearly
still in composition, these drafts form a coherent sequence. They are followed
by a series of unconnected passages (some of them reworkings of the earlier
material), notably There was a Boy, further drafts of 1799, I.107-29 and
67-80, a brief draft of “I would not strike a flower,” and lines contributing
later to 1799, I.458-62, and Wordsworth’s “Glad Preamble” (1805, I.20,
43-46).13

Christabel Notebook (D.C. MS. 15), probably late November/early December
1798; Part One material was originally present on seven consecutive
leaves, but of these all except the first, bearing 1799, I.1-31, have been cut
out. Initial letters on the stub show the recto of the second leaf to have carried
lines 32-62, and this sequence extended to line 64 (presumably in fact to 66)
at the top of the verso; for the centre of the verso there is no evidence—it
may have been blank—but at the foot stood a version of 1799, I.186-93. Lines
194-98 stood at the top of the third recto (the second stub), followed by a
gap and 1799, I.374-95.14 396-424 were almost certainly present on the verso
as the following recto held 425-36, a nine-line version of 437-53, and the
last lines of Part One, 454-62. The recto of the fifth leaf contained a re-
drafting of the final lines, 440-62, and it is a fair guess that the preceding
verso contained second thoughts on 411-40.

Similarly, the presence of the end of the Boating episode, 1799, I.102-29,
on the sixth recto implies its beginning, 81-108, on the verso of the fifth leaf;
and the conclusion of the Skating lines, *1799, I.179-85, at the top of the
seventh recto suggests 150-78 on the verso before. Immediately following the
Skating episode come the two redundant passages, “Not the more / Failed
of the description of cracking ice (later incorporated as 1799, I.229-33). Nothing
is discernible on the verso of this final stub, but the page may have
contained lines 1-28 of the Alfoxden fragment “There is an active principle,”
as 29-45 stand on the verso of the leaf that follows.16

13 There was a Boy was at this stage without ll. 26-32 of the version printed in
Lyrical Ballads, 1800 (1805, V.414-22); a text of “I would not strike a flower,”
transcribed from “MS. 18A,” is found in Prel. pp. 612-14. JJ is presented as Norton,
Appendix (1).

14 Line 373 is unwritten; a space is left for it even in the final 1799 fair copies,
V and U. We are indebted to Robert Woof for identification of 1799, I.194-98, on
the second stub, which enabled us at a late stage to correct a false assumption as to
the dating of the “spots of time.”

15 Printed in Poetical Works, ed. E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire (Oxford,
1940-49), V. 346—hereafter cited as PW.

16 The fragment was largely incorporated in Excursion, IX.1-26, 128-52, but has
not yet been published in the early form; see PW, V, 286-91, and app. crit., 472-73.
William and Dorothy Wordsworth to Coleridge, probably 21 December 1798; as well as two Lucy Poems and Nutting, contains "Skating" (1799, I.150–85) and the Boating episode (1799, I.81–129).

"18A" (D.C. MS. 16), probably late December 1798–mid-February 1799, and May 1799; 1799 entries of three kinds:

1. A fair copy in Wordsworth’s hand, now represented by four stubs and single intact leaf, but implying a coherent 400-line version of Part One. Marginal calculation preserved in the MS—

246
145
391 (400)

—together with line-numbering on the extant leaf, reveals that 246 lines were present in the fair copy, and that a further 145, though transcribed elsewhere, were to be included. Traces of initial letters on the recto of the first stub confirm the presence of 1799, I.1–15 on the upper part of the page; three letters plus an indented line at the bottom of the second recto strongly suggest lines 80–83; while a line-ending near the top of the third verso indicates a passage from MS. II, which persisted until V, and stood at 1799, I.189. It is in fact virtually certain that the first five and two-thirds pages contained a version of 1799, I.1–198, but without the Skating episode (ll. 150–85), yet to be incorporated, and the preceding lines (142–49), probably written a year later. The fourth recto held lines 388–419, and it is likely that this sequence began on the previous page, perhaps at line 379. That it continued on the verso is established by the tail of line 437 halfway down the page. The fifth recto is the intact leaf, and contains the final lines, 451–62. As pointed out below, the 145 lines to be included can only have been the “spots of time” sequence (1799, I.134–372), and the six or so lines that follow.

2. Among the many unpublished Wordsworth poems and fragments reserved for future use that Dorothy transcribed in “18A” are “Skating” (*1799, I.150–85), with its two overspill passages, mentioned under the Christabel Notebook above, and the Alfoxden fragment “In storm and tempest.” These entries belong very probably at the later Goslar period (January–February 1799), perhaps to the early summer at Sockburn. “In storm and tempest” must have been incorporated in Part Two, as lines 352–71, ca. October 1799.

3. A link-passage of four and a half lines has been added by Wordsworth to the end of the Part One fair copy; and on the verso a six-line attempt, now heavily crossed out, has been made at a beginning for Part Two. Both drafts date probably from May 1799. Related materials in the notebook include “There are who tell us,” Nutting, and “I would not strike a flower.”

17 Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1935), revised C. L. Shaver (1967), p. 295—hereafter cited as EY. Shaver prints the letter as 14 or 21 December 1798, but Mark Reed (Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Early Years [Cambridge, Mass., 1967], pp. 259–60—hereafter cited as Chron) establishes that the alternatives should be 21 and 28 December, and that in all probability the letter was completed on the 21st.

18 The figure 240 appears opposite I.456.


20 See Section IV, below, the first paragraph under Phase 2.

21 Printed as Norton, Appendix (2); the fragment ends in There was a Boy.
Peter Bell MS. 2 (D.C. MS. 33), summer 1799: “I seemed to learn.”

Contributes only lines 251–54 to the final text of Part Two, but at the earlier stage represented by RV had provided sixteen lines at 1799, II.464/5. Three unpublished fragments precede “I seemed to learn,” and may also have been written with 1799 in mind, though the material was never used.

MS. RV of Prelude (D.C. MS. 21), ca. September–early December 1799; fair copy of Part Two in the hands of Wordsworth, Dorothy, and Mary Hutchinson, totaling 491 lines as against 514 in 1799. The MS is without II.140–78, but at II.464/5 includes a sixteen-line passage from Peter Bell MS. 2 that is not found in the final version. A lost MS is presupposed in which the bulk of Part Two had been composed before Dorothy began the fair copy, and in which Wordsworth continued to draft new material as the copying proceeded. In its original form RV was without II.6–45, but when the copy reached line 292 (II.400) Wordsworth turned back to the beginning, erased the first five lines, wrote a 32-line version of II.1–33 on the blank recto of the leaf, and II.34–45 over his erasure on the verso. At the same stage he inserted four lines in place of one at II.89–92, and probably three for two at II.274–76—making a total of forty-three new lines. He then did a sum in the margin opposite II.400:

\[
\begin{align*}
292 & \\
43 & \\
335 & 
\end{align*}
\]

His figures at this point were correct; in his next line-count, taken when he handed thecopying over to Dorothy five pages later, they became markedly inaccurate. II.411–25 had been first transcribed in a version of eight lines, then expanded successively to eleven and sixteen and finally cut to the fifteen of 1799, and during the process Wordsworth apparently lost touch with the numbering he had just taken pains to bring up to date. His figure “360,” at II.442, makes sense only if one assumes that he forgot the ten uncounted lines that followed his calculation, reckoning instead from the beginning of the passage that had been causing him trouble, and—because he was counting in twenties—started at 340. Transcription after this proceeded regularly until the concluding lines, II.497–514, which were roughed out by Wordsworth in the MS before being copied by Dorothy. Part Two was thus completed in 453

22 Norton, Appendix (3).

23 We owe to Mark Reed the suggestion—undoubtedly correct—that II.1–5 were erased at the top of the verso. He has further pointed out that Wordsworth’s amanuensis in this MS was not, as has been thought, Sara Hutchinson, but Mary.

24 Other marginal additions in the MS are either too long, or clearly later in composition, or already included in the copyists’ line-count. It is possible that the single-line change that Wordsworth had in mind was the interlining of II.299, not the expansion at II.274; but the expansion in fact involved a gap left in the MS, and it is likely that such gaps had by this stage been filled.

25 The correct number would have been 348. Alternative explanations of Wordsworth’s discrepancy are not more probable. One could, for instance, assume that the marginal additional of II.425b–37 was already present, and that Wordsworth wrote 360 in error for 380; but in that case he also miscounted the lines actually in front of him by three (or two, if the deletion at II.417/b had yet to be made). It is easier to believe that he forgot uncounted lines from previous pages.
lines, but further marginal additions at II.250–55, 333–51, and 425b–37, and the interlining of II.299,26 brought the total to 491.

MSS. V and U (D.C. MSS. 22 and 23), late November—early December 1799; duplicate final texts of 1799, V copied by Dorothy Wordsworth, U by Mary Hutchinson. The two MSS draw on common sources—RV for Part Two, probably “18A” and the missing “spots of time” MS for Part One—and their exact chronological relationship cannot be established. At the beginning of the poem V is certainly the earlier of the two, but later there are corrections in U that appear in the base text of V. U lacks 1799 I.142–49 (but leaves a space, as the lines have been drafted in V), and also I.373 (again a space is left, this time for a line required but unwritten). V, at this stage the earlier MS, preserves at I.142 a nineteen-line version of 186–200; the text then breaks off, and at the top of a fresh page Dorothy goes back to I.135, from where the lines run unbroken to the end. Between the false-start and the final copy, the Skating episode and its introduction (I.142–85) have been incorporated. V leaves a space (as does U) for the unwritten I.373, and in Part Two lacks the first fifty-three lines, now represented by stubs. Certain revisions in V date presumably from spring 1801; the MS may also contain work of January/February 1804 towards Books One and Two of the five-book Prelude.

III. ORIGINS AND ACHIEVEMENT OF 1799

The Prelude was not finally so named until 1850, after the poet’s death. MS. A of 1805 is headed, “Poem, Title not yet fixed upon, by William Wordsworth, Addressed to S. T. Coleridge.” 1799 too had been “the poem to Coleridge”; the phrase is used by John Wordsworth in April 1801,27 and Coleridge had been told that the poem was addressed to him at least by October 1799 (Griggs, 1, 538). This is no merely formal dedication. 1799 was composed at Goslar and Sockburn with Coleridge absent, but constantly in mind. It has no elaborate introduction—1805, I.1–271, though incorporating earlier material, belongs to 1804—but opens abruptly with a string of questions: “Was it for this . . . ?” “For this did’st thou / O Derwent . . . ?” “fairest of all streams / Was it for this . . . ?” The fact that this sequence, together with the Birdsnesting, Woodcock-snaring, and Boat-stealing episodes, appeared in MS. Jf of October/November 1798 suggests that the new autobiographical direction taken by his poetry at Goslar may from the first have been associated by Wordsworth with guilt at the failure to justify his private sense of being “a chosen son.”28 Specifically in Wordsworth’s mind was failure to go ahead with The Recluse, planned with Coleridge at Alfoxden in the previous March. It is for this reason that Coleridge is from the first implicitly, before long explicitly, the person to whom 1799

26 See n. 22, above.
is addressed. Line 8 (present in JJ) includes a direct quotation from *Frost at Midnight*, and the link is one that Coleridge himself would instinctively have understood. Wordsworth is going back to examine the childhood of natural influence which he felt to be the source and guarantee of his poetic power, and which in *Frost at Midnight* Coleridge had wished that his own child, Hartley, might enjoy. At the end of Part One Wordsworth harks back to self-reproach and *The Recluse*. "Meanwhile," he writes, in lines specifically addressed to Coleridge,

my hope has been that I might fetch
Reproaches from my former years, whose power
May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
To honorable toil.  

(1799, I.448–51)

At the end of Part Two, addressing Coleridge again, he returns to *Frost at Midnight*. It may be that he expected at some future date to carry his poem on beyond adolescence, but there can be no doubt that for the moment—November/December 1799—he is rounding it off:

Thou, my friend, wast reared
In the great city, 'mid far other scenes,
But we by different roads at length have gained
The self-same bourne.

For thou has sought
The truth in solitude, and thou art one
The most intense of Nature's worshippers,
In many things my brother, chiefly here
In this my deep devotion.  

(1799, II.496–99, 505–509)

The first two lines are direct quotation, as at the beginning of Part One; those that follow enthrone Wordsworth's love of Coleridge and his faith that despite their different childhoods, and their separation of the past year, they are working to the selfsame end. It is significant that when in May 1805 Wordsworth had the task of finishing his "Poem to Coleridge" in thirteen books his mind turned back to this conclusion, and, despite all that had occurred in the intervening years to make it seem unlikely, he reasserted their singleness of purpose. As "prophets of Nature," he and Coleridge would go forward, "joint-labourers in a work
Of...redemption" (1805, XIII.432–34). Even the millennial euphoria of 1805 in fact shows Wordsworth recollecting his earlier lines;29 yet 1799 ends finally not in a manifesto, but with a blessing:

Far thee well.
Health and the quiet of a healthful mind
Attend thee, seeking oft the haunts of men—
But yet more often living with thyself,
And for thyself—so haply shall thy days
Be many, and a blessing to mankind."  

(1799, II.509–14)

29 Compare 1805, XIII.444–45, with 1799, II.478–96.
It is a fitting conclusion to a poem in which Coleridge has not only been present throughout, but has been increasingly so from draft to draft (see Section iv, Phase 2, below). In the last intensely personal lines Coleridge's differentness is admitted. Unlike Wordsworth he will seek, as he has sought in Germany, "the haunts of men"; and when alone he will live often for, as well as by, himself. These can now be recognized as the conditions of his peculiar ability to serve mankind.

There is in fact a sense in which 1799 shows Wordsworth moving away from Coleridge. A letter received from him as Part Two was nearing completion could still be used as source-material, but the central patterns of thought that 1799 reflects are new since Alfoxden and the period of Coleridge's strongest influence. In particular, Wordsworth seems to have left behind, though not rejected, his belief in the One Life, expressed with such passionate conviction in The Pedlar of February–March 1798, and with half elegiac, half dogmatic, allegiance in Tintern Abbey of July. The great climactic sequence of Part One shows Wordsworth forced by lack of a transcendental frame of reference to define in purely human terms what are the sources of his power, and of his confidence:

There are in our existence spots of time
Which with distinct preeminence retain
A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
By trivial occupations and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds—
Especially the imaginative power—
Are nourished and invisibly repaired. (1799, I.288–94)

The lines recall Tintern Abbey, but now the "heavy and the weary weight" is lightened by memories not of landscape "interfused" by presence of the One Life, but of odd, often guilty, moments, whose power is that of primal experience, never fully explained, but vividly evoking the strength and the capacity of the individual human mind. 1799 starts, incongruously, from a sense of failure; but in its intuitions goes far beyond any crudely "philosophical" poem that Wordsworth might have written had he felt able in October/November 1798 to go ahead with The Recluse.

IV. COMPOSITION OF 1799

Phase 1: October 1798/February 1799; represented by drafts in II, the letter of Wordsworth and Dorothy to Coleridge (probably 21 December 1798), and fair copies, now largely stubs, in both the Christabel Note-

30 The millennial passage referred to above, II.478–87, derives from Coleridge's now fragmentary letter of ca. September 1799 (Griggs, I, 527).
book and “18A.” JJ opens with the questioning, “Was it for this / That one of the fairest of all rivers,” and contains not only the Birdsnesting, Woodcock-snaring, and Boat-stealing episodes, but the transitional invocations of 1799 to personified forces of Nature (“Godkins and Goddessings,” in Coleridge’s later phrase). Wordsworth’s drafts are rough, and extend backwards in a very irregular progression from the end of the notebook, but though he clearly did not set out to write a poem of any length or importance, he soon became aware that one was taking shape. At the end of the Woodcock-snaring episode he totaled the lines so far written—94—and continued in terms that show a new consciousness of purpose: “doubting, yet not lost, I tread / The mazes of this argument.” In all JJ contains a little over two hundred lines, in coherent sequence, of the poem that was to become 1799, Part One. The fact that it contains as well There was a Boy, which had been read by Coleridge in Ratzeburg before his letter of 10 December (Griggs, 1, 456), enables us to date it with certainty October/November 1798. The other datable MS of this early German period—Wordsworth and Dorothy’s letter of mid-December—contains three passages of blank verse, representing by chance recent work of three quite separate kinds: (1) the Skating lines, which, together with the two overspill passages mentioned above, were inspired not by guilt and self-searching, as was the material in JJ, but by the winter scenery at Goslar;31 (2) the Boat-stealing, selected by Dorothy “from the mass of what William has written, because it may be easily detached” (EY, p. 240), but from the first a part of 1799; (3) Nutting, said by Wordsworth in his Fenwick Note to have been “intended as part of a poem on [his] own life, but struck out as not being wanted there,” but regarded by Dorothy as separate, and found in no extant MS of 1799.32

The Christabel Notebook provides more evidence as to the development of 1799. Stubs show that the MS originally contained four independent sequences: 1799 I.1–66, the opening lines, together with the Woodcock-snaring and Birdsnesting episodes (which have changed

31 The Skating lines were not incorporated in Part One until Wordsworth was working on MS. V, late November–early December 1799. In autumn 1798 he clearly regarded them as separate—though the most recent evidence of their separateness seems probably to be a misreading of a very difficult MS. Dorothy in the mid-December letter to Coleridge describes Nutting (as in de Selincourt’s reading, Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth [Oxford, 1935], p. 206), not the Skating episode (see Shaver’s reordered text, EY, p. 238), as “the conclusion of a poem of which the beginning is not written.”

32 Though the Christabel Notebook and “18A” show it and the companionpiece, “I would not strike a flower,” to have been developed at considerable length during the Goslar period.
places since \( JJ \); 1799, I.186–98, “Ye Powers of earth,” leading into 374–462 (all drafted in \( JJ \), save 411–57); 1799, I.81–129, the Boat-stealing, in its final form as in the letter to Coleridge (\( JJ \) drafts had been very rough); *1799, I.150–85, the Skating lines, as in the letter to Coleridge, together with the two overspill passages. It seems likely that Wordsworth transcribed the first sixty-six lines of Part One because he thought his work largely complete and wished to make a fair copy, and that the abrupt transition from 1799, I.66 to 186 (effectively from l. 66 to 150, as the Skating lines, 1799, I.150–85, have yet to be incorporated) shows him leapfrogging material that has been established in \( JJ \). On the other hand the fact that the copy runs straight on from line 198 to 374 probably means that none of the intervening material has been composed: lines 206–33 (the Card-playing sequence) belongs to late 1799; 234–372, the “spots of time,” could have been established elsewhere and therefore omitted,33 but no evidence exists to suggest that the passage has yet been composed; 198–205 was almost certainly written as a lead-in for the “spots.” Effectively, what the Christabel entries suggest is a rationalization of \( JJ \) into a version of Part One lacking the “spots of time.” The presence of the Boat-stealing out of sequence could be explained by the fact that more than the other left-out material—certainly more than the other \( JJ \) episodes—it needed to be tidied up.34 The Skating lines, fourth of the Christabel entries, were, as has been noted, essentially distinct.

As regards the dating of the Part One material in the Christabel Notebook, there is no evidence save what can be deduced from the relationship of the MS to the mid-December letter to Coleridge. Dorothy’s versions of the Skating and Boat-stealing episodes are, as far as can be judged, identical to those of the notebook; which could mean either that they derive from a common source, or that the letter was copied from the MS. There can be no certainty: the stubs do not really provide sufficient evidence. Dorothy’s third text, however, is of a poem—Nutting—that survives complete in the Christabel Notebook, and here there can be no doubt that hers is the later version. Not only does she incorporate corrections interlined in the MS, but in fact her text produces a number of readings that suggest an unrecorded intervening stage. Relative position in Wordsworth’s MSS is not strong evidence, but the Nutting drafts and fair copy follow the 1799 entries in the Christabel Notebook, and its likely that they did so chronologically.

The early phase of 1799 composition concludes with “18A,” where, as

33 No drafts survive, and the lines are not in fact transcribed in “18A,” though their presence there is clearly indicated.

34 See the \( JJ \) drafts, Norton, Appendix (1).
is so often the case, the entries are slightly later than those of the Christabel Notebook. As a result of Wordsworth’s line-count—

\[246\]
\[145\]
\[391\] (400)

—they are also much clearer in their implications. There can be no doubt on this occasion that Wordsworth set out to make a fair copy of a completed piece of work, and none of the untranscribed material was to be thought of as part of the whole. Of the 246 lines that once stood in the notebook, 241 can be established confidently as 1799, I.1–141, a seventeen-line version of 186–98, plus ca. 379–462; the 145 lines preserved elsewhere can only be the “spots of time” sequence (I.234–372), plus the six or so following lines not present in the “18A” fair copy, but found in the Christabel Notebook (I.373–ca. 378). The version thus produced would be of 386 lines, against Wordsworth’s total of 391—not a surprising discrepancy, but the possibility exists that in fact he miscounted. Also implied by the “18A” line-count is an addition bringing the total up from 391 to 400. Seven of the nine lines in question were almost certainly the link-passage, I.198–205, needed to form a bond between Wordsworth’s invocation to the “powers of earth,” and the introduction to the “spots of time,” beginning at I.234—the other two were presumably interlinings elsewhere in the MS. The sixty-two lines of 1799 that are neither present nor implied in the “18A” text were the Skating episode (I.150–85—already written, but copied into “18A” as a separate fragment), plus its introduction (I.142–49) and the Card-playing sequence (I.206–33), the last two passages being composed at the time of MS. V (though the second takes in earlier material—see Phase 2, below). Four lines should be subtracted from this total of seventy-two to take into account revisions in V, leaving a discrepancy of six. This could be reduced to one if it were assumed that the original poem of “18A” was indeed of 386 lines, not 391.

The “18A” version of Part One cannot be dated with any precision. It too, despite the new material, could precede the mid-December letter to Coleridge, but perhaps it is safer to assume that it followed shortly afterwards. Dorothy’s reference to “the mass of what William has written,” certainly seems more applicable to the Christabel Notebook than to the orderly, as well as completed, work of “18A.” And her statement that the Boat-stealing “may be easily detached” could well reflect

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35 Line 373 was unwritten, but would probably have been represented as a gap, and reckoned within Wordsworth’s line-count.

36 The curtailed sequence had persisted since JJ.
the fact that in the Christabel Notebook the sequence does stand separate, though it had been from the first an integral part of 1799.

Phase 2: May, and September–December 1799; represented by drafts towards a start on Part Two in “18A,” a fragment in Peter Bell MS. 2, MSS. RV, V, and U. The drafts of “18A” are brief but important. Beneath the concluding line of the Part One fair copy Wordsworth has written,

Here we pause
Doubtful; or lingering with a truant heart,
Slow & of stationary character,
Rarely adventurous, studious more of peace
And soothing quiet which we here have found

and on the verso of the same leaf there is a heavily crossed out beginning to Part Two:

Friend of my heart & genius, we had reach’d
A small green island which I was well pleased
To pass not lightly by, for though I felt
Strength unabated, yet I seem’d to need
Thy cheering voice or ere I could pursue
My voyage, resting else for ever there.

It is conceivable that the first draft is earlier, recording a mood at Goslar in which Wordsworth, having finished Part One, felt genuinely unwilling to go on; but it seems more likely that both date from a moment after the Wordsworths had visited Coleridge in Göttingen on their way back to England, and that the earlier mood is merely recalled as a linking-device. That Wordsworth should have felt unable to go on to a second part without Coleridge’s encouragement is entirely credible. It is not likely that up to this point the poem had actually been addressed to Coleridge, but he had been in Wordsworth’s mind from the first—as friend and fellow-spirit, but also as judge of the intrinsic value of what was being done. It was inevitable that Wordsworth should wish for his blessing before going on with work that kept him from the “honorable field” of The Recluse. The probable date for the “18A” false-start is May 1799, soon after the Wordsworths’ arrival at Sockburn, though it could have been made after one of their two visits to Coleridge at Göttingen, in mid-March and on 20 or 21 April.37

When Wordsworth came finally to compose Part Two, he began not with the “18A” draft opening, but with the first five lines as they stand in the finished text. These led straight into the main narrative, “We ran a boisterous race” (II.46), and it was not until 292 lines had been transcribed that he went back to the opening, and wrote in II.6–45.

37 For evidence regarding the Wordsworths’ visits to Göttingen, see Chron, pp. 264–66. The first may never have taken place.
There can be little doubt that he did so at the very end of November 1799, having returned to Sockburn from a tour of the Lakes that included a visit with his brother John (and Coleridge) to Hawkshead, the now shockingly changed scene of their schooldays:

A grey stone
Of native rock, left midway in the square
Of our small market village, was the home
And centre of these joys; and when, returned
After long absence thither I repaired,
I found that it was split and gone to build
A smart assembly room that perked and flared
With wash and rough-cast, elbowing the ground
Which had been ours.  

(1799, II.31–39)\(^{38}\)

Working backwards from this date one finds little evidence that helps to place either composition or transcription of the first two-thirds of Part Two. Christopher Wordsworth in his Memoirs of the poet (1851) quotes from two Coleridge letters of the period, but their chronological implications are difficult to assess. The first has been mentioned above as the source of Wordsworth’s political fervour at II.478–87, but is vaguely placed by Christopher in “summer 1799,” and dated ca. 10 September by Griggs on no very impressive evidence,\(^{39}\) the second belongs to 12 October:

I long to see what you have been doing. O let it be the tail-piece of ‘The Recluse!’ for of nothing but ‘The Recluse’ can I hear patiently. That it is to be addressed to me makes me more desirous that it should not be a poem of itself. To be addressed, as a beloved man, by a thinker, at the close of such a poem as ‘The Recluse,’ a poem non unius populi, is the only event, I believe, capable of inciting in me an hour’s vanity, nay, it is too good a feeling to be so called; it would indeed be a self-elevation produced ab extra.

Wordsworth had clearly written to Coleridge describing his work on Part Two, and telling him of the dedication. If one could assume that he had done so recently, and that the information was news to Coleridge, it would be evidence that no great progress had been made before, say, the beginning of September—but it is difficult to make firm deductions when we do not even know what was said in other parts of the letter that Christopher chose to quote. The Wordsworths reached Sockburn ca. 1 May; it could be that the abortive attempts to start Part Two were

\(^{38}\) The dependence of these lines, which became 1805, II.34–41, on Wordsworth’s visit to Hawkshead of 2 November 1799 is pointed out by Miss Darbishire, Prel. p. 520.

\(^{39}\) Memoirs of William Wordsworth (1851), i. 159—hereafter cited as Memoirs; reprinted, Griggs, i, 527. The lines influenced by Coleridge’s letter were copied into RV in November—early December, but drafted elsewhere, and cannot be dated.
made soon afterwards, and that it was not until late summer that serious composition began. The completion of Part Two is fortunately much easier to date. Wordsworth returned to Sockburn on 26 November, having parted from John on the 5th, and from Coleridge about the 18th, and spent the last week of his tour alone. Since he habitually composed while walking, it seems fair to assume that he had the lines recording his reactions to the Hawkshead visit of 2 November already in mind. As has been seen, he inserted these himself in MS. RV, and then made two or three smaller additions, bringing his total to 335. Of the 118 lines that remained before the basic copy was complete, almost a third are incorporated earlier material—the pantheist sequences from *The Pedlar*, 204–22, and *Peter Bell*, MS. 2—and it is probable that at least one other section had been drafted before Coleridge’s sudden arrival at Sockburn on 25 or 26 October. Little in fact stood between Wordsworth and the poem’s completion; and when he wrote, he wrote fast. In the concluding lines, actually drafted in RV, he returned to *Frost at Midnight*, quoted in the opening of Part One, making by his allusion the point that this too had been a Conversation Poem. His final blessing of Coleridge, recalling Coleridge’s of Hartley in *Frost at Midnight* and his own of Dorothy in *Tintern Abbey*, has yet a nonliterary reference as well—during their tour Wordsworth and Coleridge had decided to go their separate ways. Wordsworth had found Dove Cottage and deliberately chosen it as a retreat from the world; Coleridge, by contrast “seeking . . . the haunts of men” (II.511), had returned to the South.

How soon Dorothy began work on MS. V one cannot say, but there could be no cause for delay. Composition was complete, but in the final stages of Part Two RV had degenerated into a working MS: Part One was still represented by copy in two different places, and must by now have seemed to Wordsworth in need of revision. V could even have been begun before RV was completed; certainly it is not likely to be much later. In terms of new work, it involved eight lines at I.142–49, as a lead-in to the Skating episode (now incorporated for the first time) and the Card-playing sequence, I.206–33, composed as a companion-piece, and similarly emphasizing normality amid the guilts and strangeness of the poet’s childhood experience. The significant changes in Part Two at this stage are the three marginal additions to RV described

The writing of II.478–87 need not have been an immediate result of receiving Coleridge’s updated letter, but after three weeks of Coleridge’s conversation it would be a little surprising to find Wordsworth so close to his earlier written words. It seems easiest to assume that the lines had been composed before the walking tour; and were ready to be transcribed on Wordsworth’s return.

Coleridge had received while at Keswick the offer of a position as leader-writer on the *Morning Post.*
above, the insertion of II.140–78, and the cutting of the eighteen panthe-
ist lines from Peter Bell MS. 2, which in RV had stood at II.464/5. These
and other smaller corrections required Wordsworth’s presence
during the transcription, but need not have taken him any considerable
time. It cannot be proved, but in all probability both U (started later,
but first completed) and V were transcribed during the three-week
period, 26 November–17 December, after Wordsworth’s return from the
Lakes, but before he and Dorothy set out for Grasmere.42

V. 1799 AND THE RECLUSE, 1800–1803

As has been said, the fact that Dorothy Wordsworth concluded her
transcription of MS. V with “End of the Second Part” implies that she,
and presumably her brother, expected there to be a third. The pains
taken to round the poem off, the dedication to Coleridge, and the deci-
sion to make the two fair copies must, however, suggest that Wordsworth
regarded his task as for the moment complete. Coleridge was no doubt
pressing him to start on The Recluse; and in the “Glad Preamble,”
composed in its original form on or soon after 18 November 1799, there is
evidence that he felt a momentary confidence at the prospect of doing
so.43 The “mild creative breeze” that had appeared briefly in a rough
draft at the end of MS. I/ a year before, is now “a power”

Which, breaking up a long-continued frost,
Brings with it vernal promises, the hope
Of active days, of dignity and thought,
Of prowess in an honorable field. (1805, L.49–52)

It is strange to think of the great poetry of Goslar, and especially of
1799, in terms of frost and inactivity; but for Wordsworth at this period,
prowess could be shown only in the “honorable field” of The Recluse.
Three weeks spent in the company of Coleridge—“of nothing but The
Recluse’ can I hear patiently”—had no doubt left him eager to get on.
1799 had been justified by Coleridge, but only as a tailpiece, not a sepa-
rate work; Part Two had to be brought to a conclusion, but the idea of

42 The fact that Mary Hutchinson transcribed MS. U means that if the two fair
copies do not belong to November–December 1799 they cannot have been made
before her visit to Grasmere of late February/early April 1800. There is no evidence
in favour of this later date.

43 The “Preamble” became, of course, 1805, L.1–54, but must originally have been
a free-standing poem, or effusion. It could perhaps have been intended as material
towards The Recluse, but was not associated with The Prelude until January 1804.
John Finch (Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth [Ithaca,
1970]), establishes that it was written, or begun, the day Wordsworth parted from
Coleridge on Ullswater. The passage, however, concerns the choice of Dove Cottage
as a future home, and may well in its final shape include material written after the
move to Grasmere, 20 December 1799.
composing further parts must for the moment have seemed very remote. In the event, of course, Wordsworth's attempts to write The Recluse were not a success; had they been, it is most unlikely that a longer version of The Prelude would ever have been composed.

Wordsworth and Dorothy reached Dove Cottage on 20 December 1799, and before beginning work on The Recluse he wrote The Brothers and Hart Leap Well, both of them based on material gathered in the previous weeks. In February 1800 Coleridge is recorded as commenting, "I grieve that "The Recluse' sleeps" (Memoirs, 1, 160); but by 10 March Wordsworth is apparently well under way with composition of Home at Grasmere. Neither at this nor at any other stage had he a clear idea as to how a great philosophical work should be written; and so the vale that in the "Glad Preamble" had symbolized his hopes for the future became also the subject of his poem. He was still writing autobiography, but had updated it to the present, and called it The Recluse. He had, of course, his rationale for doing so. En route for Grasmere, in December, he and Dorothy had felt at Hart-leap Well an "intimation of the milder day / Which is to be, the fairer world than this." "Both in the sadness and the joy," Wordsworth writes,

we found
A promise and an earnest that we twain,
A pair receding from the common world,
Might in that hallowed spot to which our steps
Were tending, in that individual nook,
Might, even thus early, for ourselves secure,
And in the midst of these unhappy times,
A portion of the blessedness which love
And knowledge will, we trust, hereafter give
To all the vales of Earth, and all mankind.

(PW, v, 319–20 app. crit.)

Looking back in 1832, Coleridge said that in The Recluse Wordsworth was to have described

the pastoral and other states of society, assuming something of the Juvenalian spirit as he approached the high civilization of cities and towns, and opening a melancholy picture of the present state of degeneracy and vice; thence he was to infer and reveal the proof of, and necessity for, the whole state of man and society being subject to, and illustrative of, a redemptive process in operation, showing how the idea reconciled all the anomalies, and promised future glory and restoration.45

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44 The date is fixed by a reference to the full moon in Home at Grasmere MS. B (D.C. MS. 59); the poem has not yet been printed in this early form, but see PW, v, 320–31 app. crit.
Coleridge’s memories may have been distorted by time, but in fact the terms he uses are very close to those of his letter to Wordsworth of summer 1799 (Griggs, i, 527), and to those used at the conclusion of *Home at Grasmere*. Here Wordsworth, in the millennial lines published in a revised form as a “Prospectus” of *The Recluse* (*Excursion*, 1814), recognizes that to achieve his great purpose he must go beyond immediate and congenial surroundings,

Must turn elsewhere, and travel near the tribes  
And fellowships of men, and see ill sights  
Of passions ravenous from each other’s rage....  

must hang  

Brooding above the fierce confederate storm  
Of Sorrow barricadoed evermore  
Within the walls of Cities.  

(PW, v, 339)

In practice, of course, the kind of objective poetry implied was impossible for Wordsworth—Shelley’s later comment was unkind, but to the point:

he never could  

Fancy another situation,  
From which to dart his contemplation,  
Than that wherein he stood.46

Wordsworth worked on *Home at Grasmere* in 1800, briefly in 1801 and 1803, and extensively in 1806, but to judge from his surviving MSS does not appear even to have tried to approach “the high civilization of cities and towns.” He was aware of the need to show “the whole state of man and society” as subject to a redemptive process; but he could not do so. *Christabel*, even *Kubla Khan*, might have been finished, if Coleridge had been in the right mood; *The Recluse* could never have been completed.

How much of *Home at Grasmere* was written during Wordsworth’s original burst of composition it is very difficult to say. MS evidence, as John Finch has shown, points to extensive work in the summer of 1806, but it seems likely that at least a nucleus of the poem belongs to spring 1800, and that at the same time—though not necessarily as an integral part of *Home at Grasmere*—Wordsworth composed the “Prospectus.”47 There is nothing to suggest that composition went on after

46 *Peter Bell the Third*, Part iv, 37–40.
47 As Finch points out (Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies, pp. 19–28), no MS of *Home at Grasmere* is earlier than 1806, and it is unlikely that the work existed in any coherent form before that date. Taken to its logical conclusions, his evidence would relegate to 1806 not only much of the narrative, but also the “Prospectus,” which in MS. B concludes the poem. The content and mood of the “Prospectus,” however, make 1800 much the more probable date. Four months after writing the “Preamble” it is credible that Wordsworth should go out of his way to brave his Christian
Coleridge’s arrival at Grasmere on 6 April; and the latter part of the year was given over to work on the second volume and Preface of *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 (published January 1801). Evidence of work, probably on *Home at Grasmere*, certainly on 1799, is provided by John Wordsworth’s letters of late March–early May 1801. Dorothy and Sara Hutchinson were at the time preparing MSS of Wordsworth’s unpublished poetry for John to take on his next voyage, as she and Mary did exactly three years later for Coleridge to take to Malta; and their copying certainly affected, if it did not dictate, the pattern of Wordsworth’s work. The bulk of John’s references are to 1799, but the first is apparently to *Home at Grasmere*: “I am glad to hear that Wm is going on with the recluse” (Ketcham, p. 110; John’s italics). It has been assumed that John simply regarded 1799 as *The Recluse*, but such confusion seems unlikely when Wordsworth himself laid such stress on the poem’s relative unimportance; and it would be odd too that in a sequence of letters John should use this form of reference only once. Probably in fact Wordsworth was attempting to get with *Home at Grasmere*, but allowed himself to be sidetracked into revision of 1799, part of which Sara Hutchinson was engaged in writing out. By 7 April, John has received “Sara’s copy of Wm’s poems,” referred to later as “two large & ful sheets of poetry unpublish’d of Wm’s & copied by sara” (Ketcham, pp. 113 and 116). How much of 1799 was included in this MS there is no means of telling; and as John would be very unlikely to distinguish between “part” (section) and “Part” (Book), it is no great help that on 7 April he wishes that Dorothy could send him “the first part of the poem” (Ketcham, p. 114). On 22 April, however, he thanks her for sending a further MS.

I thank you for the poems you have copied—I always liked the preface to Peter Bell & would be obliged if you could send it to me—the female vagrant I have not yet read with corrections I was much pleased with the corrections in the (2) in the poem(s) to Col: the beginning of what Sara copied is very much improved and I like the poem altogether much better than at Grasmere indeed I have been exceedingly pleased with it & it continues to improve upon me—

Wordsworth’s corrections to *The Female Vagrant* are preserved in his letter to Anne Taylor of 9 April (*EY*, pp. 328–29); but it is difficult to

predecessor and assert that his own humanist theme is inherently greater than Milton’s epic narrative of Heaven and Hell. That he should do so after the death of John (February 1805), and after his acceptance in *Peele Castle* three months later of the “new control” of Christian orthodoxy, is too difficult to believe. The “Prospectus” as we know it may certainly contain later revisions—the reference to an after-life, for instance, in l. 7 of the MS. B text (*PW*, v, 338)—but in its conception it cannot be

1806.

48 Ketcham, p. 119; two angle-bracketed deletions have been omitted.
establish what, or how much, new work had been done on 1799. On 3 May John speaks of additions as well as corrections (Ketcham, p. 124), but these need not have been extensive. At first sight his crossed out “2d” might imply that most, or all, of the corrections that pleased him were in Part Two (in which case he could have been asking Dorothy on 7 April for a complete text of Part One, as opposed to the early lines). But there were hardly any significant additions between Part Two, 1799, and Book Two, 1805; whereas Part One in MS. V contains a number of passages that could well belong to 1801. Nor would “the beginning of what Sara copied” be a likely way of referring to the opening of Part Two. The probable explanation of John’s reference is that Sara sent only an excerpt from 1799 in her “two large & ful sheets”; or else that she began her text of the poem at some point in Part One which she thought would appeal especially to John. Three possible openings suggest themselves: (1) 1799, I.67, “The mind of man is fashioned . . . .”; (2) 1799, I.81, beginning of the Boat-stealing episode; (3) 1799, I.198, where Wordsworth turns from the solitary experiences of the early lines to the “home amusements” that John would not doubt have shared. In each case V shows extensive revisions and additions that could belong to the fortnight between the MSS of Sara Hutchinson and Dorothy Wordsworth.

Whatever additions may have been made at the time of John’s departure in spring 1801, they were certainly within the framework of the two-part poem of 1799. The first hint of an extension comes at the very end of the year. On 26 December 1801 Dorothy records, “Wm wrote part of the poem to Coleridge”; and on the next day, “Mary wrote some lines of the 3d part of Wm’s poem.”49 The immediate impulse for this new beginning came almost certainly from Wordsworth’s reworking of The Pedlar, recorded on the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd.50 Though written in the third person, The Pedlar had of course been Wordsworth’s first major autobiographical poem. In summer 1799 he had excerpted from it for Part Two the pantheist sequence, “From Nature and her overflowing soul” (1799, II.446–64), using it to describe his own experience in late adolescence. Now, in December 1801, he came in his revision on the final assertion that the Pedlar was “a chosen son,” and on the description of his otherness, “Some called it madness—such it might have been. . . .” In terms of his own life this mood had characterized his early Cambridge days; and he now decided to take the sequence into his autobiography. It was not a surprising decision, for 1799 had

50 Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, pp. 71, 73; the reference of 23 December is in fact to The Ruined Cottage.
been from the first a justifying of his sense of being chosen—"a quest for evidence of election." To confirm this reconstruction there is the fact that the rough pencil-draft of the opening of Part, or Book, Three is found on the inner cover of "18A," unquestionably the MS in which Wordsworth was working on *The Pedlar* in December 1801.\(^{51}\)

In a wider view, what had happened was that for the second time Wordsworth had failed to write *The Recluse*. The optimism of November 1799 and the "Glad Preamble" had proved unfounded; *Home at Grasmere*, millennial in its aspirations, but in fact disastrously limited in scope, had come to a halt. In terms of *The Recluse* all other work was irrelevant, but as well as its version of *Home at Grasmere*, 1800 had produced *The Brothers, Michael*, and the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*; 1801, by contrast, had seen little achievement of any kind. By December Wordsworth was translating Chaucer, and taking up old work (*The Pedlar*) to refurbish. There must have been a very strong temptation to go back into what had come so easily before as an alternative to *The Recluse*—the story of his early life. Some considerable part of a third book was clearly written at this stage—enough for Mary Hutchinson to copy, and for Wordsworth to think worth reading aloud—but the letters of January–March 1804 do not suggest that composition went beyond the first two hundred or so lines.\(^{52}\) In fact it is virtually certain that the point reached in December 1801 was *1805, III.167*, the conclusion of the excerpt from *The Pedlar*, "Did bind my feelings, even as in a chain." Wordsworth has not at this stage taken his poem on into adulthood; he has merely brought his exploration of youth to the culmination that might have been predicted on the basis of *The Pedlar*. In effect he is concluding 1799 a second time, and at a more logical place. The decision to expand his enquirey, turn it into the account of "Imagination . . . Impaired and Restored" which is at the centre of both the five- and thirteen-book *Preludes*, belongs to January 1804. "Wednesday, Jan 4th," writes Coleridge in his notebook, "in the highest & outermost of Grasmere Wordsworth read to me the second Part of his divine Self-biography.\(^{53}\)

For both Wordsworth and Coleridge the concluding lines especially would have made poignant reading. Still unable to go ahead with *The

\(^{51}\) These drafts are valuable evidence that Wordsworth in the previous spring had been revising 1799, not making an extension.

\(^{52}\) See Wordsworth to Wrangham, late January/early February 1804 (*EY*, p. 436); to Hazlitt, 5 March 1804 (*EY*, p. 447); and to Coleridge, 6 March 1804 (*EY*, p. 452). Lines towards a third book may also have been written in the second half of 1803 (see Dorothy Wordsworth to Mrs. Clarkson, 25 March 1804; *EY*, p. 459).

Recluse—attempts to do so had apparently been made in the previous summer and autumn\textsuperscript{54}—but wanting in the stress of this immediately pre-Malta period to do something for Coleridge, Wordsworth decided to extend the poem that had been dedicated to him in the optimism of 1799.

\textsuperscript{54} On 10 June 1803 Wordsworth according to Coleridge had The Recluse "sub malleo ardentem et ignitum" (Griggs, ii, 950); four months later, on 14 October, Coleridge reported excitedly, "He has made a Beginning to his Recluse"—Wordsworth, he said, had yielded to his "urgent & repeated—almost unremitting—requests and remonstances—& [would] go on with the Recluse exclusively" (Griggs, i, 1012–13); but in fact little or nothing seems to have been achieved. Coleridge’s optimism is put in its true perspective by sisterly comments on 13 and 21 November: "William has not yet done anything of importance at his great work," and "William has written two little poems on subjects suggested by our Tour in Scotland—that is all that he has actually done lately" (EY, pp. 421, 423).