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SELF-LOVE AND SELF-NEGATION IN WORDSWORTH AND LEOPARDI: A TYPOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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You are my Saviour
and in humility
I worship you
in the name
of our brotherhood.

You are my Lord
and in knowledge
I will help you
and expect
valiant aid from you
in the midst of the anguish
of this world.

You are the Spirit of Love
and in wisdom
let us join
and rejoice.

ABSTRACT

After an introductory chapter in which I discuss the treatment of the rebellious and reconciled hero in the Romantic literature of England and Italy, especially in the works of Foscolo and Shelley, my analysis becomes more particular and focuses on Wordsworth and Leopardi, whom I first introduce as alienated poets.

I divide the second chapter of this thesis into three sections, dealing respectively with Wordsworth's and Leopardi's celebration of political action, their subsequent disillusionments and attempts at creating an artificial reality through poetry, and their feelings of despondency caused by their unfulfilled human and poetical desires.

In the last chapter, I present Wordsworth and Leopardi as reconciled with man's destiny. Accepting their human limitations and addressing themselves to mankind, they formulate their program for positive human interaction: Wordsworth, by a belief in Christian humanitarianism; Leopardi, by a belief in universal love.

While indicating differences between these two poets, I stress their similarities, mainly to show that they have a common ground in their ethical orientation to human devolopment, and also that, in the pattern of their poetical development, they follow a line of progression from rebellion through despondency to a wise passivity and compassion for mankind. Even though Wordsworth and Leopardi neither met nor influenced each other, their poetry transcends national boundaries, revealing significant affinities in themes and motifs and in poetical attitudes inherent in the Romantic movement in Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

The choice of a comparative analysis of Wordsworth and Leopardi as the subject of this study is motivated by what I see as a similar development in these two poets which, largely because of their different national origins, obvious differences of personal temperament, and an apparent lack of mutual contact or influence, has not been subject to a comprehensive critical analysis.[1] In this thesis, I shall study Wordsworth and Leopardi with the general purpose of providing further support for Wellek, Peckham and Remak's belief -- to name only a few scholars of importance -- that the Romantic movement is not a literary phenomenon limited to a particular European country, but that there are unified, correspondent parallels between the movements in England and Italy.

In his essay, "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History", René Wellek counters Lovejoy's paper, "On the Discrimination of Romanticism", and defends the principle of a unified European Romantic

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[1]Karl Kroeber is the only critic who has attempted to establish links and parallels between some English and Italian Romantics. However, besides a short analysis of Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper" and Leopardi's "Il Passero Solitario" (Karl Kroeber, "The Reaper and the Sparrow: A Study in Romantic Style", Comparative Literature, X, 203-204) the critic devotes no close analysis to Wordsworth and Leopardi. In his book, The Artifice of Reality (Madison and Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), in accounting for the poetry of two English poets, Wordsworth and Keats, and two Italian poets, Foscolo and Leopardi, Kroeber concentrates mainly on the style of these poets. He points out that their Romantic style portrays the natural world in both time and space, and indicates that the limitation of this style is its tendency towards dehumanization.

movement. Whereas Lovejoy argues that the word "Romantic" has come to mean different things, and that the Romanticism of one country has little in common with that of another,[2] René Wellek declares in Europe "the major romantic movements form a unity of theories, philosophies, and styles, and that these, in turn, form a coherent group of ideas each of which implicates the other."[3]

Wishing to define the term "Romantic", Wellek examines in retrospect the characteristics of the literature which called itself "Romantic", and discovers that throughout Europe poets would share the same concepts of nature and its relation to man, the same poetic style, with a use of imagery, symbolism, and myth which is clearly distinct from that of eighteenth-century neoclassicism. With this in mind, the critic states:

> This conclusion might be strengthened or modified by attention to other frequently discussed elements: subjectivism, mediaevalism, folklore, etc. But the following three criteria should be particularly convincing, since each is central for one aspect of the practice of literature: imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for the poetic style. [p. 193]

Wellek applies his definition of Romanticism to the literature of Germany and France; and, while in his view, German literature presents the "clearest case", the critic also affirms that the "whole

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[2]Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticism", in Romanticism: Points of View, ed. Gleckner and Enscoe (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970 [1962]), pp. 66-81.

[3]René Wellek, "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History", in ibid., p. 182. All future reference to this essay will be incorporated in the text.

eclectic movement in France . . . fits into our scheme." (p. 193). Turning to England, Wellek declares that even the great poets of the English Romantic movement constitute a "fairly coherent group, with the same view of poetry, and the same conception of imagination, the same view of nature and mind." (p. 193). Having established such a link between England, Germany and France, he reinforces his statement of a unified European Romantic movement by elaborating on the affinity of the concepts of imagination and other Romantic characteristics among these three European countries.

In this introduction to a comparative study of Wordsworth and Leopardi, it is not my intention to present an historical summary of the debate on the unity and diversity of European Romanticism. Yet, to complete the picture, I cannot fail to mention Peckham, who provides a further contribution to the problem here discussed in his article, "Towards a Theory of Romanticism". In his study, Peckham illustrates especially well his concern with Romanticism as supra-national. Much of the strength of Peckham's criticism resides in his ability to deal sensitively and learnedly with several literatures. He sees relationships between works of different languages, and, for this reason is successful in transcending Lovejoy's argument for discriminating among "Romanticisms".[4]

Siding with Wellek and Peckham, in "West European Romanticism:

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[4]Peckham, "Towards a Theory of Romanticism", PMLA, LXVI (1951) pp. 3-23. This article must be read in the light of his later work, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism: II. Reconsiderations", Studies in Romanticism, I (1961), pp. 1-8; and, most recently, his volume, Beyond the Tragic Vision (New York: 1962).

Definition and Scope" , H. H. H. Remak extends the area of his analysis to comprehend the literatures of Italy and Spain. In attempting to solve the controversy over the unity of the European Romantic movement, Remak draws a comparative table with the aim of providing a definition of Romanticism which might be more detailed and more correct than the one given, for instance, by Wellek. Basically, Remak defeats the cliché that "Romanticism as a whole is 'vague' and 'unrealistic', that it is opposed to classicism and to the eighteenth century, that it is a set body of metaphysics, and that it is politically liberal."[5]

Even from this scanty outline, it should be clear that Wellek, Peckham, and Remak join with many others in the effort to demonstrate that the Romantic literature is the expression of a profound change in Western man's fundamental ways of thinking, feeling, and writing.

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[5] Henry H. H. Remak, "West European Romanticism: Definition and Scope", Comparative Literature, ed. N. P. Stallknecht and H. Frenz (London: Illinois University Press, 1971 [1961]), p. 289. Besides the above article, we should also acknowledge Remak's more recent paper, "Trends of Recent Research on West European Romanticism", in Romantic, ed. H. Eichner (University of Toronto: University Press, 1972), pp. 475-500. In this last paper, wishing to study the Romantic phenomenon in its specific components, Remak encourages students of comparative literature to deepen their investigations of motifs, themes and metaphors in the literatures of different European countries. Referring specifically to critics such as Trousson and Thorsley, Remak advocates study in Romantic themes, Trousson's development of the myth of Prometheus in Le thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne, 2 tomes (Génève: Librairie Droz, 1964), and Thorslev's The Byronic Hero (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962). According to Remak, it is through such studies that critics of comparative literature can better assess the basic characteristics of the Romantic movement, and also achieve a better insight into it, for a more reliable definition of the entire literary period.

In my thesis, I accept this position as a starting point. Wishing to characterize some of the qualities of the first years of the French Revolution and of the years following soon after, I shall attempt to describe more precisely one particular aspect of the general pattern shown above, and, by analyzing Wordsworth and Leopardi, I would like to add color and detail to the general outline of Wellek, Peckham and Remak.

As a comparative study, this attempt does not stand unique in the field of literary criticism. In a similar approach to the Romantic movement in Europe, very many studies have been made of typological affinities. Coleridge has been studied in rapport with some German Romantics,[6] Pushkin has been analyzed in comparison with Byron,[7] Emerson with Novalis,[8] Edgar Allan Poe in connection with Hoffmann,[9] and Hugo and Baudelaire in the light of Poe.[10] Yet, as it has been

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[6]For example: Anna von Helmholtz, The Indebtedness of Samuel Taylor Coleridge to August Wilhelm Schlegel (Madison: University Press, 1907); or, Warren Beach, "Coleridge's Borrowings from the German", English Literary History, no. 9 (1942), pp. 36-58; or, Joachim M. Moore, Herder und Coleridge (Bern: A. Bitterli, 1951).

[7]Walter N. Vickery, Parallelizm v Litteraturnom Razvitii Bairona i Pushkina (The Hague: Mouton, 1963); one of several such studie

[8]For example: Maurice Maeterlinck, On Emerson and Other Essays Three Transcendental Thinkers: Emerson, Novalis, Ruysbroeck, trans. M. J. Moses (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1967).

[9]For example: Gisela M. Maucher, Das Problem der dichterischen wirklichkeit in Prosawerk von E. T. A. Hoffmann und E. A. Poe (St. Louis, 1964).

[10]Two such examples are Pallin R. Burton, "Victor Hugo and Poe", Revue de littérature comparée, no. 42 (1968), pp. 494-519; and Peter M. Wetherill, Charles Baudelaire et la poésie d'Edgar Poe (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1962).

noted above, in regard to Wordsworth and Leopardi, few attempts have been made to link these two poets together.

In fact, at first glance there seem to be too many differences to justify such a study. Leopardi is aristocratic, Wordsworth is not; the literary production of Leopardi presents Titanic characteristics, Wordsworth's production has a heroic orientation which is not strictly Titanic in the classic sense of the word; Leopardi is a non-Christian poet, Wordsworth is Christian; Leopardi's literary background is basically classic and stoical, Wordsworth's is mainly neoplatonic and often folkloric.

Critics of Wordsworth and Leopardi have provided ample evidence of such differences. In the preface to his edition of Tutte le Opere di Giacomo Leopardi, Francesco Flora depicts Leopardi as a man deeply influenced by the study of classical literature:

> Le sue esperienze di vita si mescolavano a quello studio dei classici greci e italiani: perciò quando passarono nella parola assunsero una spontanea parentela con quello educato linguaggio della tradizione.[11]

Still insisting on Leopardi's classical studies, another Italian critic, Luigi Russo, states that, in his life, Leopardi has no experience other than that which he derives from classical authors. According to Russo, if in the prime of their youths figures such as Foscolo and Tommaseo plunge directly into the business of the world, the young Leopardi remains withdrawn and absorbed in his study, acquiring knowledge only from philosophical and literary works:

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[11]Francesco Flora, Introduzione a Leopardi, in Tutte le Opere di Giacomo Leopardi: Volume I, a cura di Francesco Flora (Verona: Arnaldo Mondadori, 1962), p. xii.

> Se un Foscolo e perfino un Tommaseo forono condotti dalle loro esperienze e dalle loro ricerche a foggiarsi una idea di storia letteraria d'ispirazione civile e moralistica . . . l'esperienza del Leopardi non procede oltre la concezione dell'arte retorica.[12]

Again according to Russo, it is through authors such as Aesychius Milesius, Porphyrius, Dion Grysostomus, Aelius Aristides, and Fronto that the young Leopardi matures.[13]

As Professor F. M. Todd points out, it is experience rather than literature which leads Wordsworth to negate his position as a radical revolutionary, and embrace the beliefs of a true conservative.[14] Unlike the aristocratic Leopardi, who is deeply affected by the authors of ancient Rome and Greece, but who stands aloof from popular movements, Wordsworth is lured by the appeal of life; like Foscolo and Tommaseo, he spends his youth fully participating in the political and social events of his time. Influenced by Godwin, the young Wordsworth becomes involved in the French Revolution, giving his heart to the cause of the oppressed people in the name of freedom. Only after the unsuccessful turn of the French Revolution does he change his instinctive attitude of optimistic humanism to one of true conservatism.

Yet, such obvious differences not withstanding, there are unifying elements which might justify my choice of these two poets.

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[12]Luigi Russo, I [illegible]ssici Italiani: Volume III; L'Ottocento, a cura di Luigi Russo ([illegible] : San[illegible]ni, 1960), p. 563.

[13]ibid.

[14]F. M. Todd, Politics and the Poet: A Study of Wordsworth (London: Methuen, 19[illegible], pp. 49-60, passim.

In this study, I set out to explore the general evolution of their attitudes towards man's place in the world and in society -- an evolution which, in both Wordsworth and Leopardi, seems to move from rebellion and isolation to despondency and, at last, to an attitude of wisdom and resignation.

With this in mind, I divide this thesis into three main chapters. In the first chapter, I attempt to summarize the link between rebellion and despondency in the literature of the Romantic period in England and Italy during and after the French Revolution. I focus on Foscolo's Jacopo Ortis and Shelley's Prometheus Unbound in order to indicate a progression from a position of alienation, rebellion and despondency towards one of tolerance and acceptance.

In the following two chapters, my analysis becomes more particular, dealing specifically with the poetry of Wordsworth and Leopardi, their response to the French Revolution and Napoleon, their attempts at creating an artificial reality after the disillusionment with political action, and their hope that manking can be saved, not through political action, but by means of an act of love, and, finally, their acceptance of man's place in the world.

Throughout the study, my arrangement will be thematical rather than stylistic: I shall put emphasis on the thematical development and the recurrent motifs of the poetical compositions under consideration. Thus, whereas in the first chapter and in the sections which are entitled "The Artifice of Reality" and "From Alienation to Reconciliation", I follow the dramatic development within the literary works in an attempt to trace a psychological growth, in the remaining sections I shall gather themes and motifs, subordinating to them the

specifically stylistic qualities of the poems of Wordsworth and Leopardi.

However, so as to keep from losing sight of the literary context of their times, and in order to stress their common ethical and humanitarian qualities, I shall always attempt to create links with other English and Italian poets and writers. Even if modestly successful, my specific purpose throughout will be to aid the reader in reaching a better understanding of Wordsworth and Leopardi, my constant aim being a strengthening of the concept of a unified Romantic movement, of which these two poets are so much a part.

CHAPTER I

THE SECOND METAMORPHOSIS OF SATAN

To trace succinctly the development of the rebellious hero, and to indicate at the same time the way in which this hero was employed by some Romantic writers, we must first consider Mario Praz's The Romantic Agony. In the chapter entitled "The Metamorphoses of Satan", Praz shows that the myth of the untamed rebel was already common to the Prometheus of Aeschylus and to the Capaneo of Dante.[1] After Aeschylus and Dante, authors such as Marino, Tasso and Milton had used and modified the same myth in order to point out the rebellious qualities of certain characters in their works. When his analysis gets closer to the Romantic writers, Praz focuses his attention on Byron. At this point, in order to emphasize the tendency which he sees in Byron to stand out as a fatal and diabolic figure, the author provides evidence of typological affinity between the man Byron and Milton's Satan. The remaining part of his study deals with early nineteenth-century "homme fatal", whom Praz portrays as playing complex sado-masochistic games, and whom he casts in the destructive role of decadent "vampire".

However, Praz's survey of the development of the rebellious

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[1]Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony (La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica), trans. Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1939 [1933]), p. 55.

hero from ancient to modern times is incomplete. Raymond Trousson presents another aspect of the evolution of the Romantic hero: the humanizing of the Titan Prometheus, and the correspondent deemphasizing of his diabolic qualities. Trousson states that, for the Romantics, Prometheus is no longer merely a mythological character, but "une représentation symbolique d'une situation humaine exemplaire".[2] Trousson sees Prometheus as a rebellious hero, a type whose myth is a heightened, but intensely human drama: "le héros est celui qui donne à ce drame une issue."[3] He is thus the hero who excells beyond each situation: "qui dit Prométhée, pense liberté, génie, progrès, connaissance, révolte."[4]

Trousson's consideration of the human qualities of the rebellious hero, however, still leaves the survey incomplete. That is, in Romantic literature, along with the portraits of the Satanic and rebellious characters (literary creations by poet-heroes such as Blake and Byron), we also find those of the wise and submissive heroes. In fact, if it is true that poets such as Alfieri, Foscolo, Blake and Byron provide examples of the rebellious character, other poets such as Wordsworth, Manzoni, Leopardi, Keats and Shelley present another type of the Romantic hero, the type who, after an initial rebellion, is willing to accept his life with heroic endurance and wise passive

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[2]Raymond Trousson, Le thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne, Tome I, p. ii.

[3]ibid., p. iv.

[4]ibid.

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A specific example of the rebellious hero placed in a world with which he is always at odds, and in which it seems that he is forced to live as if in exile, far away from an ideal homeland which he refers to as Heaven, is found in Foscolo's Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis (1796-1817). This work, often misunderstood as a pale reflection of Goethe's Werther,[5] clearly indicates the problem of the despondency and alienation of the hero. This is a useful work, not only because the tragedy of the protagonist is depicted in its religious, political and emotional aspects, but also because critics have underestimated the elements of despondency in it, elements which link the hero of the novel directly to the character of the old king in Alfieri's Saul and to the rebellious Titan in Byron's "Prometheus".[6]

As a direct externalization of Foscolo himself, the protagonist of the novel exemplifies through his heroic actions the political

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[5]In his study, Ugo Foscolo (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1970), Douglas Radcliff holds the conventional understanding of Ortis as merely an extension of Werther. Another critic, Ricardo Massano, in his essay, "Goethe e Foscolo: Werther e Ortis", in Problemi di Lingua e Letteratura Italiana del Settecento (1962), pp. 231-38, begins by admitting that Werther was popular in Italy, and that in the first edition of his novel, Foscolo had Goethe in mind. However, he concludes by acknowledging that the last edition of Jacopo Ortis is more typically Foscolian. The edition which I am following here is the third edition, because it is definitive, and because the protagonist of this edition distances himself from Werther and is portrayed with very strong political feelings which, in the first edition, are only superficially sketched.

[6]Italian critics such as De Sanctis have considered Foscolo's novel primarily as "un romanzo del suicidio", stagnant in Jacopo's resolution of death. It is Luigi Russo who first sees in the novel lyrical elements under the influence of Alfieri: "La nota lirica o ideale dominante nelle Ultime Lettere non è il suicidio o la passione

fervour of the time. Writers and poets such as Silvio Pellico, Di Breme, Manzoni, Leopardi, Mazzini, and other personalities of the Italian "Risorgimento" were deeply affected by the hero of Jacopo Ortis. For them, Ortis was a persona of the young, passionate, and politically frustrated author. Silvio Pellico, for instance, wished to take the hero of the novel as a model around whom he would have adjusted his life. Russo states:

> I giovani del Risorgimento lottavano, combattevano, pativano prigionie ed esilii, traendo alimento dalla lettura delle Ultime Lettere di questo preteso suicida. Quella è morte impetrata per bisogno di libertà, e il Catone uticense della tradizione antica e dantesca diventa un contemporaneo di Jacopo, facendosi anche lui scolaro di Vittorio Alfieri: una morte dunque che è una tempestosa aspirazione ad una più alta e libera meta.[7]

Jacopo is visiting "il Signor T" and falls in love with his daughter, Teresa. Teresa returns his love, but she cannot marry him because her father has promised her to Odoardo. Jacopo is furious but helpless. Apart from his suffering of love, he also suffers because the French Revolution has disappointed him, and because his country is still not free. Moreover, he has no religious conviction, and the idea of God does not console him. Overwhelmed by despondent feelings, he withdraws up the Euganei mountains where he commits suicide. First conceived under the influence of Goethe's The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774), Foscolo's last edition focuses on the theme

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infelice per Teresa, ma la visione di un paesaggio sepolcrale e insieme un'accesa mitologia politica di derivazione alfieriana." (I Classici Italiani: Volume III, p. 17).

[7] ibid., p. 18.

of frustrated heroism.[8] Let us examine this theme more closely.

In Jacopo Ortis, had the protagonist fulfilled his love, he might have reconciled himself with both nature and life. During a morning walk, in observing the spectacle of a rainy day, Jacopo feels deeply touched ("Ho veduto la natura più bella che mai" [p. 12]), celebrates the beauty of a golden, cloudy sky ("le nuvole dorate . . . salivano sulla volta del cielo . . . [p. 12]), and, when Teresa pledges her love to him with a kiss, wanders bewildered in the fields. For a moment he feels completely transfigured, as if enlightened by a spark of divine love:

> Dopo quel bacio io sono fatto divino . . .
> Mi pare che tutto s'abbellisca ai miei sguardi:
> il lamentar degli augelli, e il bisbiglio de'
> zefiri fra le frondi sono oggi più soavi che mai. [p. 56].

But the unfulfilment of his love for Teresa freezes Jacopo's existence and causes him to question issues, such as the political situation, with skepticism.

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[8] At the beginning of the work, one finds this note, written by Lorenzo Alderani, alias Foscolo himself: "Pubblicando queste lettere, io tento di erigere un monumento alla virtù sconosciuta; e di consacrare alla memoria del solo amico mio quelle lagrime, che ora mi si vieta di spargere sulla sua sepoltura. -- E tu, o lettore, se uno non sei di coloro che esigono dagli altri quello eroismo di cui non sono eglino stessi capaci, darai, spero, la tua compassione al giovane infelice, dal quale potrai forse trarre un esempio e conforto." (Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis, 1796, Collana internazionale no. 68 [Milano: Bietti, n.d.] , p. 1). All future references to this work will be incorporated in the body of the thesis, with page numbering in accord with the above edition.

Particularly disappointed by the anarchic and tyrannic turn of the French Revolution, Jacopo vacillates between idealism and frustration. Because he believes that, if his countrymen unite, they can redeem their own country, Jacopo writes letters to his friend, Lorenzo Alderani, which are filled with noble gestures of political glory. Standing out in disdain, he both reproaches his fellow countrymen for their long years of internal struggle, and addresses himself to them with cries of protest: "Oh! per chi quel sangue? . . ."(p. 84). Above all, Jacopo attempts to mythologize glory.

Manzoni's Aldechi, in particular the fifth scene of Act III, is influenced by Foscolo's (or Jacopo's) nationalistic ideas; however, Foscolo's protagonist is more assertive than Manzoni's. Jacopo's desire for military action is "un furor di guerra", a rage for fighting which overwhelms him and which would have enabled him to do battle, had he only found the occasion suitable and others ready to follow him:

> Aggrappandomi sul dirupo della vita, sieguo alle volte un lume chi'io scorgo da lontano, e che non posso raggiunggere mai . . . O Gloria! tu mi corri sempre dinanzi. [p. 87].

But Jacopo knows that reality is gloomy. Because of the cowardice of his countrymen, he never succeeds in accomplishing his dream of glory. Unable to initiate any action by himself, he remains in solitude, questioning the heroism of his fellow citizens and vituperating them.

In presenting Jacopo's tragedy, Foscolo portrays the conflict between real and ideal life in unsolvable terms. Following his sexual and political frustrations, Jacopo rejects ordinary people, and separates himself from them, identifying only with great poets and artists. Moreover, indulging in erotic dreams, he also imagines that he belongs to another world where ideally he can meet Teresa, and where he can enjoy beautiful and pleasant visions.

It is impossible to say that the novel's protagonist is misanthropic, because he hates no man; yet, one can safely affirm that he despises vile people ("nè umana forza, nè prepotenza divina mi faranno recitare . . . la parte del piccolo briccone" [p. 26]), and that he feels indifference for ordinary man ("E'ti pare che se odiassi gli uomini, mi dorrei come fo de' lor vizi? Tuttavia poi che non so riderne . . . io stimo meglio partito la ritirata" [p. 26-27]).

Having thus confessed that nothing binds him to the great majority of mankind, Jacopo wishes to find ties of union between himself and famous persons:

> Dianzi io adorava le sepolture di Galileo, del Machiavelli, e di Michelangelo, e nel appressarmivi io tremava preso da brivido . . . l'unico mortale ch'io desiderava conoscere era Vittorio Alfieri [pp. 78-79].

Like the poet Alfieri, Jacopo is despondent and passes many hours of his day in absolute isolation, thinking about himself in his own room ("la mattina mando per una Bibbia a Odoardo . . . e quando

gli fu recata, si chiuse. A mezzodì uscì a spedire la sequente lettera, e tornò a chiuder[pp. 111-12]). Thus living in isolation, Jacopo colors himself with pride.

In Romantic literature, pride constitutes a very recurrent weakness in the nature of the alienated hero. On the one hand, we find Foscolo's protagonist exemplifying this attitude in Jacopo Ortis; on the other hand, we find a poet such as Keats, who, in dramatizing the fall of the Titans in Hyperion, also deals with the self-esteem and the self-love of the Romantic hero. Specifically in Hyperion, in describing the conditions of the fallen Titans, Keats contrasts their former superiority in Heaven with their present state of loneliness and misery on earth.[9] Like Keats' Titans, Foscolo's Jacopo is a hero who, attempting to depart from the earth, proudly aspires towards Heaven to repossess his former happiness. Foscolo further characterizes Jacopo's pride by placing him away from ordinary people by the banks of a river, where Jacopo imagines himself entertained by nymphs and goddesses ("Io sento vezzeggiare la faccia . . . mi veggo dinanzi le Ninfe ignude . . invoco le Muse e l'Amore" [p. 57]).

Anticipating the conceited attitude of Arnold's Empedocles and Ibsen's Borkman and the Master Builder, Jacopo too climbs high

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[9] John Keats, Hyperion, in English Romantic Writers, ed. by David Perkins (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1967), Bk. I, 55-56, 123-24. All future reference to this work will be incorporated in the body of the thesis.

summits ("Ho visitato le mie montagne . . . O mie solitudini!" [p. 57]) and, setting his mind on God and Teresa,[10] he theatrically declares that the world beneath him will never contaminate him ("Ma io muoio incontaminato, e padrone di me stesso, e pieno di te, . . ." [p. 132]).

From the fact that Jacopo derives pleasure from the insoluble conflict between his dreams and the crude life of the world about him, it is evident that he is a romantic egoist. Thus, Teresa is important, not for what she is, but for what she represents to Jacopo's ego. He loves her because he finds himself reflected in her, and because he shares with her the same weaknesses and the same strengths. When Teresa's father interferes with him, Jacopo wishes to protest and to free himself and Teresa from the tyranny of this man. But Jacopo never actually stands against "il Signor T". Instead, he listens to his injunctions, submits, and leaves Teresa.

Although depicted as a real character, and although Foscolo's inspiration springs from one of his own unhappy love experiences, Teresa's role is limited. As Russo points out, she is not the cause of Jacopo's suicide:

> La tragedia di Jacopo . . . non è tragedia amorosa, ma tragedia di passione disperata, tristezza per l'umana

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[10]At this point, one should be quick to clarify that, when Jacopo mentions God, he usually identifies his idealized woman with Him. Leopardi also humanizes God, in "Amore e Morte" and "Alla mia donna".

> malizia (gli umani delitti), tristezza per la libertà perduta e per la patria venduta. In questa complessa ispirazione Jacopo si allontana da Werther, che è innanzitutto un eroe tragico per la passione esclusiva dell'amore.[11]

Moreover, in the novel, apart from the protagonist, who is convincingly portrayed, other characters are presented as abstracted accessory figures. With this in mind, Teresa can be understood as an externalization of the hero's own mind, because she has no substantial human qualities. Russo states:

> La donna Foscoliana è un po' come la donna angelica degli stilnovisti, la donna che conduce a Dio, la quale qui nel Foscolo, è diventata l'intelligenza motrice che conduce all'amore della libertà . . .[12]

Thus, to account for the melancholy and the aspiration towards the divine in Foscolo, we can see Teresa as we see, for instance, Serpentina, the daughter of Archivarius, who lives in the Utopian world of Atlantis in Hoffmann's The Golden Pot. Likewise, Teresa does not belong to this world. Jacopo has a beautiful vision of her ("Oh! un altro bacio, e abbandonami poscia a' miei sogni e a' miei soavi deliri" [p. 62]); yet, as soon as the vision is over, he

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[11]Russo, I Classici Italiani, p. 80.

[12]Luigi Russo, "Foscolo Politico", in Belfagor, Anno 2 (1947), pp. 137-69. This essay is the first interpretation of Foscolo as a political figure. Russo introduces this interpretation again in his book, I Classici Italiani. This latter work forms the basis of my analysis of Jacopo Ortis in this chapter.

becomes deeply saddened because he discovers that he has only been dreaming ("Questa notte io cercava brancicando quella mano . . . : ma le coltri molli di pianto . . . -- tutto tutto mi gridava: Misero, tu deliri! Spaventato e languente mi sono buttato boccone sul letto abbracciando il guanciale e cercando di tormentarmi nuovamente e d'illudermi." [p. 62]). Thus, in a tone which reminds us of the delirium of Anselmus in speaking about Serpentina, Jacopo ejaculates his sorrow: "Cos'è più l'universo? quàl parte mai della terra potrà sostenermi senza Teresa?" (p. 74). In this way, even though Jacopo knows that he cannot possess Teresa, he insists on loving her, and finds pleasure in tormenting himself: "Mi compiaccio della mie infermità." (p. 83).

Jacopo also attempts to salvage his life by cherishing a second fantasy world -- the world of his childhood. But in cherishing this world, Jacopo does not trust in the power of his imagination. His quest for an internal reality which might replace the gloomy external one is feverish. Like Saturn in Keat's Hyperion ("But cannot I create? Cannot I form? Cannot I fashion forth / Another world, another Universe, / To overbear and crumble this to naught?" [Bk. I, 141-45]), the hero of Jacopo Ortis is fascinated by the power of the imagination: "Tutto, tutto quello ch'esiste per gli uomini non è che la loro fantasia." (pp. 59-60). He remembers the world of his childhood ("le pianure si ricordano . . . della mia fanciullezza sul monte dei pini che serba tante dolci e funeste mie rimembranze" [p. 79]), and nourishes hope for the future ("Io stava più di

prostrato, parlando con le mie speranze" [p. 79]). Yet his mind is not as firm as, for instance, that of Wordsworth, and in the novel Jacopo s mbs, admitting that past and future mean nothing to him ("A lor io guardai nel passato -- allora io mi voltava avidamente al futuro; ma io errava sempre nel vano, e le mie braccia tornavano delùse, senza poter mai stringere nulla, e conobbi tutta tutta la disperazione del mio stato" [p. 89]). Left with no illusions, Jacopo reflects on the incomprehensibility and mystery of life.

Anticipating Leopardi and Shelley (and reminding us also of dramatists such as Strindberg and Betti of A Dream Play and Frana allo Scalo Nord), Foscolo has Jacopo remark that, in the world, glory, knowledge, youth, riches, and virtue are all phantoms (" la gloria, il sapere, la gioventù, le ricchezze . . . tutti fantasmi" [p. 36], and also " . . . quella virtù che forse, ahi! forse non è che voto nome" [p. 42]). Moreover, Foscolo shares with Leopardi the belief that nature is indifferent. In Jacopo Ortis, in fact, the protagonist addresses nature ironically and calls it stepmother ("La natura? ma se ne ha fatti quali pur siamo, no è forse matrigna?" [p. 43]). In having Jacopo meditate on the role which mere chance ("prosperità cieca" [p. 16]) plays in life, Foscolo also ponders the importance of fate, deepening the problem in its metaphysical direction in a manner similar to Shelley's in Prometheus Unbound (1820), and closely correspondent to such twentieth-century literary interpretations as the plays cited above by Betti and Strindberg. The ties which these dramatists have with Foscolo are numerous. They are

different from Foscolo only in that their answer to the problem of mystery in the world is optimism, whereas Foscolo's is tragedy.

In the absence of any religious and humanitarian belief, Foscolo has his protagonist challenge God and long for self-destruction. Jacopo laments his condition of sorrow to an inexorable Heaven, and, foreseeing that for the future his life will continue to be a wretched one, like a Satanic rebel he isolates himself in desperation and loneliness ("Dio non mi ode. Mi condanna . . ." [p. 67] and also "Io mandava alla divinità i miei ringraziamenti, e i miei voti, ma io non l'ho mai temuta" [p. 67]). In so doing, Jacopo reminds one of Byron's Prometheus. Not only does he alienate himself from Heaven, but he celebrates his victory over an unknown supernatural force with a heroic act of self-destruction: "making death a victory". Having meditated on his misery, and, realizing that God has forced him to suffer, Jacopo takes his revenge on Him by deciding to commit suicide ("Ed io sento in me stesso che agli estremi mali non resta che . . . la morte" [p. 86]). Facing his end boldly, Jacopo heroizes death.

In poets such as Alfieri and Leopardi, one also finds that, to assert his own strength and courage, the alienated character celebrates death with heroism. In regard to this heroic celebration of death, Alfieri and Leopardi are probably the poets closest to Foscolo, particularly if one thinks of "Alla Morte" and "Bruto

Minore".[13] In Jacopo Ortis, sharing both the courage of Alfieri and the pride which Leopardi attributes to Bruto, Jacopo too feels the heroic appeal of death ("Oh, se gli uomini si conducessero sempre al fianco la morte, non servirebbero si vilmente" [p. 89]), and, captured by it with firm resolution he finally delivers himself to death. At this point, with Jacopo's death, let us shift our focus of attention from the alienated hero to the adjusted one.

An alternative to the destructive energies of Jacopo is found in Keats' Hyperion, which presents a very subdued picture of the alienated hero and prepares us to understand the optimistic attitude of Shelley. It is in Hyperion, in fact, that we see the transition from Foscolo to Shelley. This transition involves changes in both philosophy and outlook on life. Specifically, if in Jacopo Ortis Foscolo rejects the illusions which he calls phantoms, in Prometheus Unbound Shelley accepts them and, in believing that love can redeem mankind, brings new enthusiasm and optimism into life.

In Hyperion, it should be pointed out, Keats realizes a composition whose basic tone is not only one of heroic protest but also one of human sadness and resignation. He brings to a human

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[13] In "Alla morte", Alfieri confesses that he has to learn how to face death, if he wants to die as a hero: "Uomo sei tu grande o vil? Muori e il saprai". In "Bruto Minore" Leopardi rejects virtue, and encourages suicide as an act of rebellion against the gods.

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about its conclusion are possible. However, on the basis of what Keats writes, one thing is clear: considering the importance of Fate in the world, Keats does not protest, but in the stoic realization that "We fall by course of Nature's law" (Bk. II, 181), he accepts his human condition and submits. At this point, we might consider that, if Foscolo concludes the quest of his protagonist's life with suicide, and if Keats withdraws from the ordinary world to choose the dignified isolation portrayed in Hyperion, Shelley overcomes the positions of these two poets by believing that a new Golden Age is still to come.

In the poetical analysis of the Titan-hero, with the characterization of the Titan Prometheus, in Prometheus Unbound, an important change occurs. This poem explores all the questions central to Shelley--the nature of man, the relationship between man and his gods, fate and free will, the nature of good and evil, and the nature of the role of love and imagination in the regeneration and recreation of the world. Prometheus himself is Shelley's example of the supreme man and, therefore, the poet, who, as he says in the "Defence of Poetry", while searching for laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, beholds the present as it is.

In his dramatic poem, Shelley's concern with the human place in the universe is one of his essential motives for myth-making. Prometheus is actually the creator of mankind, and champions the course of his own creation even against the superior claims of the

gods. This Titanic hero can certainly be considered a symbol of Shelley's life, since throughout his life the poet has always manifested a "passion for reforming the world" [14] and for improving the condition of the oppressed majority of men. In Shelley, at first this passion takes the form of an active radicalism--the same impulse which leads Foscolo and the Lake Poets to support the French Revolution. Then, relying not so much upon reform from without, in the attitude of both Wordsworth and Leopardi, Shelley believes in internal change brought about by poetry as the only power which can activate and ennoble the human soul. Thus, by creating man, Prometheus is a symbol of man's highest potential.

By the end of the poem, Shelley's conception of Prometheus is much like the idea of Christ who, as he says in his "Essay on Christianity", was divine in the fullest sense. He was a perfect man. Not only did he teach and live by the doctrines of love and forgiveness, but he also maintained those values through great suffering. However, in the poem, Shelley does not reconcile Prometheus with any recognized divinity. Jupiter is not the supreme God who must be treated with reverence; he is a mere product of man's mind. By creating Jupiter, man has deified his own mind, and now must suffer the inevitable effect of that deification. Jupiter is the thought of man; and Prometheus, who has established

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[14] Percy Bysshe Shelley, Preface to Prometheus Unbound, in English Romantic Writers, pp. 981-82.

Jupiter over his father Saturn, is the mind which originated that thought. As he says, in Act I, "I gave all he has";[15] Prometheus' tortured condition, then, symbolizes the necessarily enslaved condition of man to the universe. However, Prometheus symbolizes more than the self-enslaved man. He has given Jupiter all but control over his will. In his opening speech Prometheus declares that his mind is now free. It no longer contains the violence and vengeance which is Jupiter. Correspondingly, to complete the early suggestion in his preface, Shelley says that Prometheus is initially a Satanic rebel, but he achieves a state which is "exempt from Satan's taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandizement". (I, i, 381-82). Like Christ, he has forgiven his oppressor; by this great act of forgiveness, Jupiter has become not his present thought, but his previous thought. The torturous effects of this previous thought will remain, however, until he actively substitutes a new cause for the old.

Thus, unlike Alfieri's, Foscolo's and Byron's heroes, who in pride stand up to challenge Heaven, Shelley's Prometheus is "Wise . . ., firm and good, / But vainly wouldst stand forth alone in strife / Against the Omnipotent" (I, i. 360-62). Rather than victory, Prometheus sees defeat in suicide ("the grave hides all things beautiful and good: / I am a God and cannot find it [peace] there, / Nor would I seek it: for . . . / This is defeat,

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[15] Shelley, Prometheus Unbound, I, i, 381-82. All future references to this work will be incorporated in the body of the thesis.

fierce king, not victory" [I, i, 639-42]), and advocates a universal brotherhood in the name of love, pitying the Gods of Heaven, because he knows that, since they are subject to chance, they too are apprehensive and unhappy.

Speculating about the problem of chance in the world, Shelley identifies it with evil which is overruled by love. Chance is seen as the obscure force of the universe which, according to the prophecy of Prometheus, will overthrow the domain of Jove in Heaven. Chance is superior even to the Gods themselves; it controls everything "but eternal love" (II, iv, 120). Thanks to love, the poet foresees the advent of a Utopian world of happiness in which good will triumph, and love "free from guilt or pain" (III, iv, 198) will make "earth like heaven" (III, iv, 160). Excited by the vision of heavenly bliss, Prometheus exclaims: "Go, borne over the cities of mankind / On whirlwind footed coursers" (III, iii, 76-77), and, in so doing, Shelley emphasizes his victory: "this, like thy glory, Titan . . . is along Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory" (IV, 576, 578). Again in the name of love, Shelley reconciles the figure of the poet with common men, thus stressing the concept of the poet as the apostle of mankind. Poets such as Wordsworth and Leopardi dwell on this same concept of the poet-apostle, in their late compositions.

As it has been pointed out in this analysis, with Shelley the Romantic hero becomes the wise man who is at the opposite pole of the type of the rebellious hero exemplified by Ugo Foscolo in Jacopo Ortis and analysed by Mario Praz in the essay cited at the

beginning of this study.

Yet, although these two heroes are antithetical, we can state that the progression from one to the other type does exist. We acknowledge, of course, that there are poets, such as Blake, who in their poetical activity never reach a phase of reconciliation with external reality. Yet, in overcoming their former positions of rebellion and despondency ending in self-destruction, poets such as Wordsworth and Leopardi do adjust themselves to their external world. During this period of adjustment, they may feel that real life is agonizing, but, confiding in the firmness of their minds, they reject suicide. Moreover, believing in ideals such as love, they see their roles as the prophets of mankind, and, by teaching everyone their message, they often nourish great hopes of improvement for the future of mankind. Thus, with the belief that mankind can be saved through an act of love, and with the expectation that their goals of universal brotherhood might one day be fulfilled, the Romantic heroes present a unique orientation which continues to appeal to the humanitarian instincts of our own age.

CHAPTER II

THE REBELLIOUS HEROES

1. The Apotheosis of Heroism

With specific regard to the theme of heroism, Wordsworth and Leopardi show a similar development. Disillusioned with the French Revolution, Wordsworth condemns present times to celebrate the glory of the past. Leopardi also glorifies the past, juxtaposing its greatness to the misery of the present. In order to revive spiritual integrity in contemporary society, both poets choose great examples of heroism to apply to the common man. Yet, confronted with the decadence and moral apathy of present times, they both reject the political reality, speculate on the role of fate and destiny in the world, and momentarily experience extreme despondency.

To analyze the development of the theme of heroism, I have chosen some of Wordsworth's and Leopardi's compositions which present similar thematic qualities: Leopardi's "All'Italia (1818), "Sopra il monumento di Dante" (1818), and "Ad Angelo Mai" (1820); and Wordsworth's The Prelude, Books IX, X, and XI. In depicting the early stages of Wordsworth's development, these three books of The Prelude exhibit an orientation to which the three poems of Leopardi can be seen as directly correspondent, although chronologically they were composed much later, and although they are even less representative of "absolute biographical truth" than is the case

with the three books of The Prelude.

In this analysis I am less concerned with "absolute biographical truth" (this would necessitate many other documents) than with its poetical expression. Thus, I hope to investigate the progression of Wordsworth's poetical mind in order to show that, although his literary background and political beliefs are different from those of the young Leopardi, nevertheless, when the French Revolution disappoints this English poet, he moves into the same political realm as does Leopardi. Confronted with hostile environments, both poets withdraw into solitude, and, abandoning social issues, refuse to come to grips with public life.

However, before reaching more negative conclusions, Wordsworth and Leopardi nourish great feelings of hope, and attempt to improve the moral standards of their societies. It is true that, in the course of his poems, Leopardi projects feelings of desperation and skepticism:

> Io son distrutto,
> . . . che scuro
> M'è l'avvenire, e tutto quanto scerno
> È tal che sogno e fola
> Fa parer la speranza.[1]

Yet Leopardi's skepticism is a defensive mechanism. Placing himself in the position of a judge, the poet finds it easy to criticize his society. However, his attitude is never detached. Believing that

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[1] Giacomo Leopardi, "Ad Angelo Mai", in Tutte le Opere di Giacomo Leopardi: Volume I, a cura di Francesco Flora (verona; Mondadori, 1962), ll. 34-38. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Ac. 34-38.

positive action is synonymous with life, Leopardi is eager to enter the field of action. Even though he never believes in political battle, he portrays himself with the wisdom of the indefatigable and mythological Sisyphus. By providing great examples of heroism he invites man to accept life in the hope that, through slow but continuous change, he can attain a higher and better form of existence.

At this stage, Wordsworth is not as prudent and measured as Leopardi; unlike the latter, he believes that mankind can improve its lot only through political action. For this reason, thinking that the French Revolution is necessary, he commits himself to it and follows positive thinkers and soldiers such as Godwin and the French officer Beaupuy.

It is during this period that Wordsworth is trapped by "thoughts abstruse".[2] Enhanced by his juvenile enthusiasm and envisioning the advent of a new political era of prosperity, Wordsworth, unlike the conservative Leopardi, identifies strongly with the French people's attempt to overthrow the old regime:

> "Tis against that
> That we are fighting," I with him believed
> That a benignant spirit was abroad
> . . . that poverty
> Abject as this would in a little time
> Be found no more, . . .
> And finally, as sum and crown of all,
> Should see the people having a strong hand
> In framing their own laws [Pre, IX, 517-23, 529-31]

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[2] William Wordsworth, The Prelude, in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ed. Hutchinson and De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1971 1904), IX, 397. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Pre, IX, 397.

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Continuing the celebration of military heroism, the poet wishes to further honour the French Revolution. First he refers to tyrannic power, then, condemning despotism, he searches for great examples of noble behavior, and avails himself of heroes such as Brutus who had greatly opposed ancient tyranny and died for liberty. Like Brutus, Wordsworth too is willing to sacrifice his life for a superior cause: "Doubtless, I should have then made common cause / With some who perished; haply perished too." (Pre, X, 229-30). Moreover, ennobling the common man, the poet elevates everyone to his own rank in a celebration of human nature: "Elate we looked / Upon their virtues; saw, in rudest men, / Self-sacrifice the firmest." (Pre, IX, 385). Thus praising the French patriots, he becomes the champion of heroic enterprises: "There is / One great society alone on earth: / The noble living and the noble Dead." (Pre, XI, 393-95).

However, Wordsworth's feelings of enthusiasm for military action are soon curtailed. With the imperialistic turn of the French Revolution he loses all hopes of great times to come, and becomes the apostate of republican belief. Pondering the massacres of the Revolution, in Book X of The Prelude Wordsworth frowns on popular upheavals and compares them to tides and earthquakes which no one can arrest:

> . . . The tide retreats
> But to return out of its hiding-place
> In the great deep;
> . . . The earthquake is not satisfied at once;
> And in this way I wrought upon myself,
> Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried,
> To the whole city, 'sleep no more'. [Pre, X, 81-87].

Later on, in Book XI, in condemning the French Revolution, Wordsworth also expresses his deep contempt for imperialism:

> But now, become oppressors in their turn,
> Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defense
> For one of conquest, losing sight of all
> Which they had struggled for. [Pre, XI, 206-209].

Furthermore, in Book IX he confronts the mob, and, unmasking the base ambition of political leaders, censures them, since he sees them as being unable to fulfill noble ideologies:

> I stared and listened, with a stranger's ears
> To Hawkers and Haranguers, hubbub wild!
> And hissing Factionists . . .
> I scanned them all. [Pre, IX, 57-59, 62].

Thus, acknowledging the misery of present times, Wordsworth finds both his imagination and his hope destroyed: "It was a lamentable time for man, / Whether a hope had e'er been his or not." (Pre, X, 384-85). Left with no hope, he alienates himself from the political environment.

In the light of Leopardi's classical education and aristocratic background, it is not difficult to understood his attitude towards the French Revolution: he stands aloof, mistrusts any belief in popular movements, and avoids committing himself to militancy. However, looking with grief at the tyranny of Napoleon, Leopardi not only condemns it, but also makes clear that, as far as his political creed is concerned, he would always fight despotism and support a constitutional monarchy.[4]

Realizing the servile condition of his own country, Leopardi laments contemporary decadence in an effort to instill national pride in the Italians of his day. Thus, employing the same arguments which

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[4]Russo, I Classici Italiani: Volume III, p. 559.

Foscolo uses in "I Sepolcri" and Manzoni employs in "Aprile 1814", he addresses himself to his countrymen and exhorts them to react against the dictatorship of Napoleon:

> Chi non si duol? Che non soffrimmo? Intatto
> Che lasciaron quei felli?
> Qual tempio, quale altare o qual misfatto?[5]

Thinking of the Italians fighting in Russia in the service of Napoleon, Leopardi's condemnation of contemporary Italy becomes fierce. Unable to justify the behavior of his fellow-citizens, Leopardi asks: "A che pugna in quei campi / L'Itala gioventude?",[6] and, in sorrow, reflects:

> Oh misero colui che in guerra è spento
> Non per li patri lidi e per la pia
> Consorte . . .
> Ma da nemici altrui
> Per altra gente. [All, 51-52].

In such a sad frame of mind, Leopardi ironically epigrammatizes the foolishness of his fellow-citizens ("Moriam per quella gente che t'uccide."[Sopra, 153]). Feelin contempt for the mob, he calls common people "turba", and labels them with denigratory adjectives such as "immonda". (Ad, 39). For a brief period in his life, Wordsworth, like Leopardi, admonishes human ignorance. Following the crisis in his political belief, Wordsworth chastizes the French people whom he calls rebels, and feels disenchanted with any optimistic faith in human nature. He concludes: "Then was the truth received into

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[5]Leopardi, "Sopra il monumento di Dante", in Tutte le Opere: Volume I, 11. 117-19. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Sopra, 117-19.

[6]Leopardi, "All'Italia", in ibid., 11. 51-52. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as All, 51-52.

my heart, / . . . If new strength be not given . . ., / The blame is ours." (Pre, X, 664, 469-70). To recover from his crisis, he undergoes a phase of self-confrontation in the shelter of his sister Dorothy's home. Helped by her, he attempts to regain confidence in himself as a poet: "The beloved Sister . . . / Maintained for me a saving intercourse / with my true self; . . . / She, in the midst of all, preserved me still / A Poet." (Pre, XI, 335, 341-42, 364-47).

Leopardi considers himself one of the few brave figures in his own country. In emphasizing his superiority to his fellow citizens in "Sopra il monumento di Dante", he first convinces himself that he should desert them: "Levati e parti." (Sopra, 196). Then, in presenting Italy as a lonely widow ("vedova e sola" [Sopra, 200]), he adumbrates himself in the figure of solitary Italy and, in identifying his destiny with that of his country, dramatizes the whole description.

And there is more. Reacting to the cowardice of his nation, Leopardi declares that he is still a man of courage, projects himself with aristocratic nobility, and affirms that if common people are naive and servile, he is brave enough to be concerned with the condition of his country: "Bennato ingegno, or quando altrui non cale / . . . a te ne caglia." (Ad, 46,48). Moreover, conscious of his excellence, Leopardi identifies himself with great figures of the past. With Dante, he gives vent to his contempt for the misery of his contemporary fellow beings: "Padre, se non ti sdegni, / Mutato

sei da quel che fosti in terra." (Sopra, 137-38). He also identifies himself with Alfieri, whom he depicts as a fierce and disdainful man ("Disdegnando e fremendo" [Ad, 166]), and whom he employs as an added example of glory: "Ei primo e sol dentro all'arena / Scese, e nullo il seguì." (Ad, 163-64). In the canzone "Ad Angelo Mai" Leopardi accomplishes a further identification with Tasso.

In particular reference to Tasso, Leopardi wishes to stress his conviction that heroism is a great virtue. The poet is aware that common people might ignore the firmness of the hero's mind and call him insane: "Chi stolto non direbbe il tuo mortale / Affanno anche oggidì, se il grande e il raro / Ha nome di follia." (Ad, 144-46). Yet Leopardi believes that heroism is not folly. By means of his identification with Tasso and other poetical figures of the past, Leopardi celebrates heroism and sees himself an outstandingly virtuous man, providing moral education to his countrymen.

A similar process of identifications also occurs in Wordsworth: yet, as we have already pointed out, Wordsworth accomplishes his identification with both poetical and political figures when he still believes in the French Revolution. During the time of this political belief, the poet evokes Brutus, and Ariosto's characters, and identifies himself with Beaupuy, and also with the French people who have participated in the Revolution.

However, even after Wordsworth experiences political disillusionment and finds solace in Nature, Dorothy, and Coleridge, he loses no heroic fervor, but, succeeding in finding remedies which

might support his life, he relies upon himself, nourishing belief in his poetical mission. This is especially evident in later passages in The Prelude (Pre, X, 146-47) and in some of the sonnets of 1801 and 1802.

Conscious of their superiority, both Wordsworth and Leopardi catch glimpses of greatness in their poetical future. Returning to the literary works of past civilizations, they derive examples of glory which they employ for the moral revival of the present. In so doing, they attempt to stimulate their fellow citizens to noble and courageous actions. Ignoring chronology for the moment, let us examine this tendency in both poets.

The celebration of the past is one of the most peculiar characteristics of Romantic poetry. In the first chapter of this thesis, I pointed out that Ugo Foscolo's Jacopo Ortis provides examples of the apotheosis of the past. Foscolo does the same in "I Sepolcri", in which, in order to create a clear-cut image of superiority of the times of antiquity over the present times, he juxtaposes the corrupt present of Europe to the glorious and pious past of Greece.[7]

Like Foscolo, Wordsworth and Leopardi set out to glorify the past. In evoking the figures of ancient heroes, the poets employ them mainly as moral edification for the masses. Therefore, for moral purposes, Leopardi, like Foscolo, recollects the past to derive

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[7] Ugo Foscolo, "I Sepolcri", in I Classici Italiani: Volume III, a cura di L. Russo (Firenze: Sansoni, 1960), ll. 50-295, passim.

from it superior standards of behavior. In emphasizing the contrast between an excellent past and a decadent present, in "All'Italia" the poet focuses on the superiority of Rome and Greece, and in so doing, establishes the central theme of his poem:

> Oh venturose e care e benedette
> L'antiche età, che a morte
> Per la patria correan le genti a squadre;
> E voi sempre onorate e gloriose,
> O tessaliche strette. [All, 61-65].

He employs this same principle first in "Sopra il monumento di Dante":

> Volgiti indietro, e guarda, o patria mia,
> Quella schiera infinita d'immortali,
> E piangi e di te stessa ti disdegna, [Sopra, 11-13].

Then in "Ad Angelo Mai":

> A percoter ne rieda ogni momento
> Novo grido de padri. [Ad, 19-20].

Likewise, in order to provide moral examples for his countrymen, Wordsworth celebrates ancient times:

> They first of all that breath should have awaked
> When the great voice was heard from out the tombs
> Of ancient heroes. [Pre, 381-83].

Moreover, in the poem which the poet dedicates to Venice, in realizing that ancient glory is passed away, he laments that which "once was great",[8] and presents himself as being akin to poets such as Byron, who, in Childe Harold, expresses the same lamentation for

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[8] Wordsworth, "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic", in Wordsworth: Poetical Works.

the loss of the Republic of Venice.[9] Thus, feeling that the glory of antiquity cannot be brought back again, Wordsworth colours his evocation of the past with deep nostalgia.

Availing himself of classical figures, myths, and legends, Leopardi too colours with nostalgia such episodes as that of "Le Termopili". In evoking this episode, Leopardi, alias the ancient bard "Simonide", sets out to celebrate the glorious death of three hundred Spartans killed resisting the Persian army of "Serse":

> E sul colle d'Antela, ove morendo
> Si sottrasse da morte il santo stuolo,
> Simonide salìa,
> Guardando l'etra e la marina e il suolo. [All, 77-80].

In reminiscing such a heroic action, Leopardi punctuates the episode with strong ejaculations of joy:

> Oh viva, oh viva
> Beatissimi voi
> Mentre nel mondo si favelli o scriva. [All, 118-20].

He also worships the Greek soldiers:

> Ecco io mi prostro,
> O benedetti, al suolo,
> E bacio questi sassi e queste zolle,
> Che fien lodate e chiare eternamente
> Dall'uno all'altro polo. [All, 127-31].

Aware of his role as a poet, he sets out to eternalize their heroic death.

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[9] George Gordon, Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, in Byron: Poetical Works, ed. F. Page (3rd ed; London: Oxford University Press, 1970), Canto IV, ll. 1-135.

Prima divelta, in mar precipitando,
Spente nell'imo strideran le stelle,
Che la memoria e il vostro
Amor trascorra o scemi. [All, 121-24].

Captured by his own evocation, Leopardi wishes that he had died with these soldiers, and in so doing, imparts to the whole description a sweet, nostalgic tone:

Deh foss'io pur con voi qui sotto, e molle
Fosse del sangue mio quest'alma Terra. [All, 132-33].

Leopardi's nostalgia for a time which is gone forever recurs frequently in his poetry. In "Ad Angelo Mai", for instance, he recalls Petrarca's lyrics for Laura with unconsolable sorrow. Overwhelmed by such a memory, Leopardi not only establishes imaginary links between himself and Petrarca, he also attempts to echo the melody of Petrarca's verses in his own poem:

E le tue dolci corde
Sussurravano ancora
Dal tocco di tua destra, o sfortunato
Amante. [Ad, 66-69].

The poet is also fascinated by Ariosto:

O torri, o celle,
O donne, o cavalieri,
O giardini, o palagi! A voi pensando,
In mille vane amenità si perde
La mente mia. [Ad, 111-15].

Yet, even when Leopardi feels nostalgic about the past, he never loses contact with the present. Wishing that man still lived a noble life, and emphasizing their own intellectual and moral superiority, both Wordsworth and Leopardi share the same conviction concerning the prophetic role of the poet in modern society. Nourishing this conviction, these two poets hope to reconcile them-

selves with external reality. Thus, in addition to their examples of the heroes of the past, they have intimations about their greatness as apostles of mankind and refer to themselves as figures of fortitude which the masses should follow.

In The Prelude, apart from indicating the apostolic roles of some ancient noble figures, Wordsworth also alludes to contemporary examples of apostleship, including himself as one of those Prophets who live their lives " . . . aloft / In vision" (Pre, X, 437-38). Therefore, if by looking back to the past Wordsworth can worship humanitarians such as Empedocles and Archimedes (Pre, XI, 424-49), when the poet considers present times, he integrates these examples of apostleship with some contemporary ones. Thinking of his friend Coleridge, Wordsworth makes him champion of virtue and places him in a pure pastoral environment: " . . . on the brink / Thou will recline of pastoral Arethuse." Furthermore, by means of this Sicilian brook, he suggests a link with Milton, who in "Lycidas" had used that mythical name.

With Milton in mind, Wordsworth in 1802 further reflects about his prophetic role. In "Poem XIV", by addressing himself to Milton with an apostrophe close to Leopardi's apostrophe to Dante, Wordsworth exhorts Milton to assist his fellow citizens with moral examples:

Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters:
.....
Give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.[10]

Like Wordsworth, Leopardi is aware of his poetical apostolate, and, believing in positive action, he too entertains the hope of a possible reconciliation with external reality. Applying himself to the Italians, the poet exhorts them to love their own country:

Amor d'Italia, o cari,
Amor di questa misera vi sproni
.....
Quali a voi note invio, sì che nel core,
Sì che nell'alma accesa
Nova favilla indurre abbian valore? [Sopra, 35-36, 49-51].

Yet, after having expressed his concerns for the Italians of his time, Leopardi has a moment of hesitation, and, confronted with their apathy, subdues his love for mankind under skeptical considerations: "Chi ti compiangerà / se .... altri non cura." (Ad, 142-43). At this point, not only does the poet avoid reconciling himself with ordinary man, but he also prepares himself to express his disappointment and his grief.

Standing out as a rebellious Titan, Leopardi curses his fellow citizens, and, feeling contempt for them, alienates himself from his environment. According to the poet, the Italians of his own time have no respect for themselves and, therefore, they cannot

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[10] Wordsworth, "Poem IV: London 1802", in Wordsworth: Poetical Works.

be considered as an integral national entity: "dove sono i tuoi figli!" (All, 41). Overwhelmed by grief, the poet remains fiercely alone and, longing for heroic death, makes the same agonized gesture as Alfieri and Foscolo: "io solo / Combatterò, procomberò sol io." (All, 37-38).

Moreover, isolating himself from the rest of mankind, Leopardi provides further evidence of his aristocratic superiority by speculating at great length about the concepts of "Taedium vitae", "Il nulla", and some metaphysical problems which ordinary man cannot comprehend. In a nihilistic frame of mind, he examines the laws of natural necessity in the universe, and observes that life has no purpose. Thus reaching the lowest ebb of pessimism, Leopardi anticipates Matthew Arnold's Empedocles on Etna and predicts the melancholy trends of mid-nineteenth century literature.

At this point in his speculations, Leopardi fully recognizes his boredom in a society which does not believe in imagination and nourishes no superior aspirations. In "Ad Angelo Mai", the poet addresses himself to the Italian priest who has discovered the manuscript of Cicero's De Republica, and, realizing that contemporary man is bored and apathetic, ironically asks Mai why he has brought back to light Cicero's manuscript:

> Italo ardito, a che giammai non posi
> Di svegliar dalle tombe
> I nostri padri? Ed a parlar gli meni
> A questo secolo morto, al quale incombe
> Tanta nebbia di tedio? [Ad, 1-5].

Using analogical devices, the poet emphasizes the danger of "noia"

on contemporary man, and imagines his apathetic society to be in the attitude of a patient, who, left with no strength, is kept motionless in a straight-jacket: "A noi le fasce / cinse il fastidio." (Ad, 73-74). Thus speculating, the poet discovers that "noia" is a phenomenon of the present age and falls into deep dejection. Leopardi admits that the poets of the past at times felt despondent; yet, he thinks that they were never bored. Thus, comparing himself to them, he declares that he suffers more than all the other poets who lived before him mainly because he is an isolated voice in an age of materialism.

Another characteristic of modern times which further alienates the poet from his age is that of nothingness, "Il nulla", as Leopardi calls it. In antiquity people had a specific meaning of their lives because they believed in religion and supernatural phantoms; in contemporary times life has neither purpose nor meaning. Nowadays, the poet says, empirical rationalists have disenchanted life and forced everyone to undergo a meaningless existence: "A noi presso la culla / Immoto siede, e su la tomba, il nulla." (Ad, 74-75). Leopardi is convinced that, in his time, the advocates of empirical rationalism have deprived man of all the delights of imagination and all the beliefs which, in antiquity, had elevated man's life to the realm of the transcendental. In acknowledging them, the poet expresses his nihilistic convictions about contemporary existence: "Solo il nulla s'accresce . . . Ombra reale e salda / Ti parve il nulla." (Ad, 100, 130-31). He concludes

his argument by rejecting his society once again.

Having thus speculated about the problems of "noia" and "Il nulla", Leopardi deepens his investigation by questioning the role which mere chance has in the world. This investigation develops with a dramatic contrast. Even though the poet thinks that man can be master of his own destiny ("O con l'umano / Valor ›rse contrasta il fato invano?" [Ad, 14-15], and also "Dove la Persia e il fato assai men forte / Fu di poch'alme franche e generose" [All, 56-57]), yet, in acknowledging the moral decadence of his own country, Leopardi nourishes feelings of pessimism and is prone to believe in the prevalence of hostile laws of natural necessity:

> Perchè venimmo a si perversi tempi?
> Perchè il nascer ne desti o perchè prima
> Non ne desti il morire
> Acerbo fato? [Sopra, 120-23].

Thus, with his apostrophe to destiny, Leopardi, as a solitary Titan, stands out in rebellion against both his society and the supernatural.

Wordsworth also questions supernatural powers. In considering the influence of fate in the world, this poet analyzes it in Christian terms. In dealing with the problem of free will and divine providence, the young Wordsworth takes a look at the condition of Europe, is upset by the French Revolution, and dismisses as ineffectual the intervention of divine powers on the events of the world. In emphasizing his belief in the hostile influence of fate, the poet dramatizes his state of mind:

'The lordly attributes
Of will and choice,' I bitterly exclaimed,
'What are they but a mockery of a Being
Who hath in no concern of his a test
Of good and evil. [Pre, XI, 309-13].

Therefore, believing for the time being that everything in the world is ruled by mere chance, Wordsworth's orientation approaches that of Leopardi; he shares with him the same feelings of despondency and the same mistrust of political action.

On the one hand, wishing to condemn his society, Leopardi exclaims: "Morte domanda / Chi nostro mal conobbe, e non ghirlanda." (Ad, 134-35). On the other hand, Wordsworth is overwhelmed by melancholy:

Most melancholy at that time, O Friend,
Were my day-thoughts,
.....
Such ghastly visions had I of despair
And tyranny, and implements of death. [Pre, X, 397-98, 402-403].

Wordsworth concludes his quest in the following state of mind:

I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
Yielded up moral questions in despair. [Pre, XI, 302-305].

Thus, advancing along different paths -- the path of experience in Wordsworth's case and that of philosophical thought in Leopardi's -- both poets reject political reality, and experience despondency. Leopardi withdraws in isolation; Wordsworth, the victim of political disillusic also withdraws from the social world of events. Refusing to renounce their ideals, Wordsworth and Leopardi stand aloof, and, in so doing, present typological characteristics which, especially in the case of Leopardi, recall to a certain degree the Byronic or Foscolian hero-types. Like these heroes, after the failure of a social

compromise, Wordsworth and Leopardi experience despair. But this despair is only momentary. They seek recovery by setting out to create an artificial reality in the private worlds of their own imaginations.

2. The Artifice of Reality

In The Byronic Hero, Peter Thorslev argues that Faustus and Cain represent respectively the hero who thirsts after infinite knowledge and the solitary wanderer who always has about him an air of the mysterious and the supernatural.[1] Whereas Thorslev limits his analysis to the characters of Byron's poetry, in this section I hope to prove that both Wordsworth and Leopardi, in their poetry and their lives, exhibit an aspiration towards the infinite, a desire to cultivate the power of their poetical imaginations, and a concern about their individual liberties which is in many ways similar to that expressed by the literary prototypes which form the basis of Thorslev's study.

To bring into focus Wordsworth's and Leopardi's attempts at creating a reality which transcends the limits of ordinary life, I will concentrate on the significance which these two poets attribute to nature and to the recollection of their past lives. Through nature and through these recollections, both poets set out to rehabilitate themselves, and in putting their minds to work again after their disillusionment with political activity, they provide themselves with further evidence of their superiority and excellence as poets.

In this discussion, I will refer specifically to the "spots of time" passages in The Prelude, and to Leopardi's "A Silvia" (1828) and "Le ricordanze" (1829). I shall also take into account Leopardi's short composition "Alla Luna" (1820), not only because I think that this composition contains in nuce the theme of memory peculiar to the

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[1] Peter Thorslev, The Byronic Hero (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), pp. 22-23.

other two lyrics just cited above, but because it is my intention to indicate that Leopardi's passage from the poems of patriotic love to those of recollection develops progressively.[2] Although Leopardi's treatment of the theme of memory is different from Wordsworth's, both poets arrive at the conclusion that, with no human comfort, glory achieved by means of poetry is not satisfactory, and can still leave the poet despondent.

There are at least two reasons for considering the "spots of time" passages in The Prelude. The first reason is that they offer an invaluable insight into the functioning of Wordsworth's poetical imagination. The second reason is that they are associated with Wordsworth's ideas of Nature and Imagination.

Wordsworth first describes these "spots of time" in the following passage:

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> That with distinct pre-eminence retain
> A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
> By false opinion and contentious thought
> Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
> In trivial occupations, and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
> Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
> A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
> That penetrates, enables us to mount,
> When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen. [Pre, XII, 208-18].

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[2] Commenting on Leopardi's "Le ricordanze", Russo states that the title and the motif grew in the mind of Leopardi over a period of fifteen years. He refers specifically to the fragments of October 7 and October 25, 1821, in Zibaldone to better illustrate Leopardi's dedication to this theme of memory. (Russo, I Classici Italiani: III, p. 761).

They are first valuable as emotional catalysts. The "spots of time" are conjured up when the poet's mind is in a state of sadness, depression, disillusionment, or some similar state; they effect a change in his mental disposition. It is crucial to note here the context in which these "spots of time" appear: they are introduced in Book XII when Wordsworth is labouring to explain how his Imagination and Taste are restored after a period of disillusionment with the French Revolution and after a period when he has yielded "up moral questions in despair" (Pre, XI, 305). Thus, the recollection of the "spots of time" helps the poet to restore these faculties.

They are, however, more than mere recollections which trigger off a change from a low emotional state to a high one. They have a "virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced, / That penetrates, enables us to mount, / When high, more high." (Pre, XII, 216-18). In the first spot of time which Wordsworth recalls for us, this virtue is in evidence. After being frightened by the sight of a murderer's initials in a place of execution, Wordsworth's mind imposes a "visionary dreadness" (Pre, XII, 256) upon a rather ordinary scene detailed by a naked pool beneath the hills, a beacon on a summit and a girl bearing a pitcher and labouring against the wind. Later on in the company of someone he loves, he feels "A spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam." (Pre, XII, 266). Wordsworth explains this "spot of time" as feeling coming in aid of feeling: that is, it is a feeling gained through the memory of past experiences, with the mind imposing itself upon the same external

scene to intensify the feeling of present pleasure.

Wordsworth also states: "This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks / Among those passages of life that give / Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how, / The mind is lord and master--outward sense / The obedient servant of her will." (Pre, XII, 219-23). These lines are important in that they reiterate Wordsworth's view of the imaginative power of the perceiving mind which he declares in "Tintern Abbey". There he states that he is still " . . . lover . . . / . . . of all that we behold / From this green earth, of all the mighty world / Of eye and ear,--both what they half create, / And what perceive."[3] Here Wordsworth is expressing his idea of the mind as partially creating what it perceives. To the poet the power of the mind or the creative process of the mind, what might be called the imagination, alters its perception of external nature.

At the stage of development referred to in these passages, Wordsworth's idea of the creative power of the mind is really a description of his own poetic imagination rather than any description of the working of the mind in general. Possessed of a highly sensitive and creative mind, Wordsworth's imagination succeeds both in transforming and in recreating the external world it perceives. To Wordsworth,

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[3] Wordsworth, "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey", in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ll. 103-107. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Ta, 103-107.

> . . . poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of re-action, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins.[4]

Here the poet is again describing the particular manner in which his mind functions poetically. Note, however, how this passage is also an almost exact description of the recollection of a spot of time and how the mind works during such a recollection. It suggests that the spell of Wordsworth's best poetry has its source in the evocation of these "spots of time".

Invariably, however, the "spots of time" are associated with nature. This idea is implied in the word "spots" which suggests rural and urban places and locations such as Tintern Abbey and London in Book VIII of The Prelude. Their association with nature is more evident though in the two "spots of time" which Wordsworth recalls for us in Book XII.

Earlier in Book I of The Prelude Wordsworth declares that he has been " . . . fostered alike by beauty and by fear . . ." of nature. During the two "spots of time" he recalls for us in Book XII, nature evokes the same response from Wordsworth. In the first "spot", the sight of the murderer's initials and the mouldered gibbet on a moor infuses a dreariness onto the next scene he sees. The

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[4] Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads", in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, p. 740.

description of this next scene elicits the beauty of a surrealistic painting.

> A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
> The beacon on the summit, and, more near,
> A girl, who bore a pitcher on her head,
> And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
> Against the blowing wind. [Pre, XII, 249-53].

This "spot of time" shows the impact of the natural scene upon the mind of Wordsworth. The beauty and fear exerted by nature on the poet strengthens the feeling of elation he feels upon coming back to the same region. During the next spot of time Wordsworth, anxiously anticipating his return home for Christmas, mounts a lofty crag. The details of the scene--stormy, windy weather, a naked wall which shelters him, near him a single sheep and a hawthorn and, below the crag, the plain and the two highways--are remembered sharply when his father dies soon afterwards. Wordsworth feels the death of his father as a kind of chastisement and " . . . trite reflections of morality . . . " (Pre, XII, 314) are felt by him during his subsequent communion with nature. Wordsworth's imagination thus endows nature with a moral purpose. Again, there is beauty and fear of nature.

Yet Wordsworth sees more than a moral purpose in nature. In other experiences, which have the same characteristics, even though they are not explicitly called "spots of time", Wordsworth perceives a unity of nature through the imagination. One of these experiences is the crossing of the Simplon Pass in Book VI. Just as in the last spot of time described, Wordsworth feels an anxious

anticipation. When, however, he learns that he has crossed the Alps without realizing it, his imagination dispels the feeling of disappointment and invests the landscape he comes across--decaying woods, waterfalls, rocks, crags, and winds--with a unifying intelligence. Wordsworth's mind transcends the ordinary reality of the scene and penetrates into an elevated state of divinity and eternity, a penetration which Wordsworth describes in another transcendental experience in Book XIV:

> . . . a mind
> That feeds upon infinity . . .
> . . . a mind sustained
> By recognitions of transcendent power,
> In sense conducting to ideal form,
> In soul of more than mortal privilege. [Pre, XIV, 70-71, 74-77].

In addition to this transcendental experience, the significance of the "spots of time" cannot be overemphasized when we consider their association with childhood. Taking their date from the poet's earliest childhood, the "spots of time" are scattered everywhere in his life. Specifically in simple childhood the poet sees something of the base on which man's greatness stands. His childhood returns to him almost from "the dawn / Of life: the hiding-place of man's power / Open." (Pre, XIV, 277-79). Wishing to give substance to what he feels, Wordsworth recollects his days gone by in order to enshrine "the spirit of the Past" (Pre, XIV, 285) and restore his mind. In the introduction to the ode "Intimations of Immortality", Wordsworth bears testimony to the dreamlike vividness with which childhood is invested, and, in writing this poem, he sets out to celebrate the divinity of childhood as well as to lament its loss,

which, according to him, involves the loss of freshness on the threshold of experience.

The association in Wordsworth of the "spots of time" with Nature, Imagination, and Transcendental leads us to some of the most important motifs in the poetry of Leopardi, specifically Leopardi's poetic of the sublime, which the poet supports with examples of recollection based, as in Wordsworth's poetry, on sensory and extrasensory perceptions.

To Wordsworth as well as to Leopardi the pleasure derived from poetry has among its principal causes the confused remembrances of life which poetry initiates by means of images recollected in tranquillity. For this reason, on the one hand Wordsworth repairs to his "spots of time" to restore his mind and to comfort himself as a poet (" . . . thence would drink / As at a fountain" [Pre, XIV, 325-26]). On the other hand, Leopardi avails himself of recollections to activate his poetical world. Leopardi believes that, since the present cannot be poetical because the poetical consists of the distant, a true poetical mind feeds upon whatever is ancient, vague and infinite. Thus, longing for a reality which the poet alone can create, Leopardi, like Wordsworth, aspires toward the transcendental through poetry.

With regard to the poetic of the sublime in Leopardi, in Night and the Sublime in Giacomo Leopardi (1970), James Perella succeeds in presenting Leopardi's extrapolation of his ars poetica.[5]

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[5] James Perella, Night and the Sublime in Giacomo Leopardi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 117-39.

Here, in order to emphasize the thematic affinity of Wordsworth and Leopardi, rather than citing this critic, I prefer to quote a passage from Zibaldone, in which Leopardi celebrates the memories of his past life in the specific effort of enhancing his poetical flight and aspiring to the supernatural.

> Per la copia e la vivezza ecc. delle rimembranze sono piacevolissime e poeticissime tutte le immagini che tengono del fanciullesco, e tutto ciò che ce le desta (parole, frasi, pitture, imitazioni o realtà ecc.). Nel che tengono il primo luogo gli antichi poeti, e fra questi Omero. Siccome le impressioni, così le ricordanze della fanciullezza in qualunque età sono più vive che quelle di qualunque altra età. E sono piacevoli per la loro vivezza anche le ricordanze di immagini e di cose che nella fanciullezza ci erano dolorose e spaventose ecc. E per la stessa ragione ci è piacevole nella vita anche la ricordanza dolorosa, e quando ben la cagione del dolore non sia passata e quando pure la ricordanza lo cagioni o l'accresca, come nella morte dei nostri cari, il ricordarsi del passato.[6]

Especially when he brings into focus the memories of childhood and his belief that the dreadful experiences of the past intensify in the poetic evocation the appeal of the lyric composition, Leopardi is reinforcing for us the same concepts expressed by Wordsworth in The Prelude, XII. If the "spots of time" offer us an insight into the manner in which Wordsworth's mind functions poetically, and a associated with his ideas on Nature and Imagination, Leopardi's poetic of the sublime explains the way the poet sets his mind t find and strengthen the correspondence which he sees between hi

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[6]Leopardi, "Frammento, 25 ottobre 1821", in Tutte le Opere di Giacomo Leopardi, Volume III: Zibaldone, a cura di F. Flora Verona: Mondadori, 1961), p. 1244.

poetic imagination, nature, and other external objects entering into his poetical realm.

In "Alla luna", insisting on his desire of creating a poetic reality in which his mind can expatiate with freedom, Leopardi applies himself to Nature and projects himself with the same attitude of protest which is present in the character of Jacopo Ortis and in the Titans portrayed by Keats in Hyperion. Reflecting upon his incessant suffering, Leopardi too longs for the infinite: he addresses himself to the moon which he transforms into his own private confidante. "O graziosa luna", the poet affectionately calls the moon.[7]

In "Alla luna" although the poet considers that his mind will always be affected by sorrow, he admits that there is pleasure in recollecting the past, assigning thus to memory the value of emotional catalyst which Wordsworth also assigns in The Prelude. Leopardi states, "E pur mi giova / La ricordanza," (A, 10-11) and with this statement begins the poetry of his dear wonderings. Moreover, in the same poem, Leopardi, like Wordsworth, speculates about the purifying value which memories have for him. Not only does he feel enhanced because the remembrances of his aspirations, which he has nourished during his childhood, enable him to overcome the particularly gloomy mood of the present, but also because by means of his memories he feels able to mount high summits and proclaim

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[7] Leopardi, "Alla luna", in Tutte le Opere: I, 1. 1. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as A, 1.

his creative role as a poet.

Leopardi believes that the attractiveness of modern poetry rests in its pathos. Thus, he sets out to write "A Silvia", in which he presents feelings recollected in joy and sorrow and the pathetic motif of the death of a beautiful girl in the prime of her youth.

Elaborating his concept of pathos in a mood akin to Edgar Allan Poe, Leopardi affirms that Silvia is a pathetic figure for she dies in the prime of life, when she should enjoy all the pleasures of love. To the poet, youth is able to elevate the soul to a superior world; since death is a melancholic motif, the death of a beautiful young woman is consequently the most poetic topic in the world.[8]

Finding its soil in the atmosphere of distant memories, the appeal of "A Silvia" springs from a divided state of mind. On the one hand, Leopardi feels the fascination of beautiful youth; on the other, he discovers that youth is melancholic because death can destroy it. It is this realization which leaves his soul with intermingled feelings of joy and sadness. Although in the poetry of Wordsworth youth is celebrated because of its divinity, the English poet never colors his description with pathetic sadness. In contrast, in "A Silvia", Leopardi focuses on this sadness, especially when he considers the

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[8]Leopardi, "Frammento. 30 giugno 1823", in Tutte le Opere di Giacomo Leopardi, Volume IV: Zibaldone, a cura di F. Flora (Verona: Mondadori, 1962), p. 60. In connection with Poe, I have in mind the essay, "The Philosophy of Composition", in which Poe dwells on the same motif of beauty and the sublime which Leopardi treats in the fragment cited above.

vanity of all the virginal graces of Silvia, of her voice, and all her beauty:

> Sonavan le quiete
> Stanze, e le vie d'intorno,
> Al tuo perpetuo canto,
> Allor che all'opre femminili intenta
> Sedevi, assai contenta
> Di quel vago avvenir che in mente avevi.
> Era il maggio ordoroso; e tu solevi
> Così menar il giorno.[9]

Like the song of the young girl in "Il canto di una fanciulla" (1828), that of Silvia deeply stirs the mind of the poet. Leopardi knows that young people have a strong and beautiful appeal; yet he also knows that this appeal dissolves as soon that youth is victimized by the hostile elements of life.

Dwelling on the idea of this hostility, Leopardi internalizes the description of the poem by shifting his attention from the symbolic figure of Silvia to the particular condition of his own life. The identification of Silvia with the young poet is easily accomplished: not only does Silvia die when, at the apex of her youth, she should enjoy the fulfilment of all her dreams; the poet's youth also vanishes when, enduring hardship and assiduous study, he grows up sickly and deformed. In a letter to Mai (30 March 1821) Leopardi confesses:

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[9] Leopardi, "A Silvia", in Tutte le Opere: Giacomo Leopardi, Volume I, ll. 7-14. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Sil, 7-14.

> Saprà com'io fino dai 10 anni mi sia dato spontaneamente agli studi in maniera, che in questa età di anni 22 quando la gioventù dovrebbe incominciare, ella è già terminata e passata per me.[10]

Yet the lyrics of Leopardi never remain at a stagnant standstill for very long.

Although the poet is aware that life and experience destroy man's illusions, he fully recognizes the importance of his illusionary phantoms, because they can elevate him to a superior level of experience. Like Wordsworth, Leopardi believes in the power of his imagination. To accomplish his imaginative flights, he aspires to Heaven, expressing his thirst after the eternal and the infinite:

> Mirava il ciel sereno,
> Le vie dorate e gli orti,
> E quinci il mar da lungi, e quindi il monte
> Lingua mortal non dice
> Quel ch'io sentiva in seno. [Sil, 23-27].

Again like Wordsworth, who expresses the idea of the mind as the partial creator of what it perceives, Leopardi is sensitive to his external natural world. He transforms it into an intensified, imaginative landscape which might allow him to better gratify his dreams. He sighs:

> Che pensieri soavi,
> Che speranze, che cori, o Silvia mia!
> Quale allor ci apparia
> La vita umana. [Sil, 28-31].

But the vision of beauty never lasts for a long time.

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[10] Leopardi, Tutte le Opere di Giacomo Leopardi, Volume V: Lettere, a cura di F. Flora (Verona: Mondadori, 1949), p. 311.

Confronted with crude reality, the poet allows pessimistic considerations to take place, and addresses himself to the mysterious forces of life which he considers responsible for his unhappiness.

> O natura, o natura,
> Perchè non rendi poi
> Quel che prometti allor? Perchè di tanto
> Inganni i figli tuoi? [Sil, 36-39].

Here, by means of rhetorical questions which culminate in "di tanto inganni i figli tuoi?", Leopardi anticipates the definition of "natura matrigna" which will be developed further in such later compositions as "La Ginestra".

Thus entertaining sad reflections, in the final two stanzas of "A Silvia" Leopardi subjectivizes the description and intensifies its poetical appeal. After the pleasant evocation of his past memories, the poet is left with the sad conclusion that he has no hope and that his life is and will remain a ruined one:

> Anche perìa fra poco
> La speranza mia dolce: agli anni miei
> Anche negaro i fati
> La giovanezza. [Sil, 49-52].

Thus, stressing the futility of his life, Leopardi exemplifies in his destiny the fate of mankind and universalizes his sorrow:

> Questo è quel mondo? Questi
> I diletti, l'amor, l'opre, gli eventi
> Onde cotanto ragionammo insieme?
> Questa la sorte dellé umane genti? [Sil, 56-59].

Having discovered that everything in the world is vain and that sorrow is universal, Leopardi ends the composition with

an idea reminiscent of Foscolo,[11] of death as the only reality which triumphs over beauty, life and hope:

> All'apparir del vero
> Tu, misera, cadesti: e con la mano
> La fredda morte ed una tomba ignuda
> Mostravi di lontano. [Sil, 60-63].

This thought about death suggests the transition from "A Silvia" to "Le ricordanze". However, before dealing with this last poem, it is useful to focus our attention on "Le rimembranze" (1816) to point out the continuity of the theme of memory in Leopardi.

In "Le rimembranze" not only does the poet stress the concept of vanity which he has deeply examined in "A Silvia", but he provides us with a composition which recalls Wordsworth's "We Are Seven" (1798).

Here, as is often the case, the differences between Wordsworth and Leopardi are readily traceable. Unlike Wordsworth, who accepts the concept of divinity and the innocence of childhood, Leopardi believes that, even in the mind of a child, feelings of a universal sorrow are present. In "We Are Seven", Wordsworth addresses himself to an eight year old girl, whose sister and brother have just died. Questioning the child directly about death, Wordsworth discovers that death is actually a non-existent issue in the child's mind:

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[11] I have in mind Jacopo Ortis and not "I Sepolcri", in which Foscolo presents an optimistic alternative and believes in the spiritual intercourse between the living and the dead.

A simple Child
That lightly draws its breath
And feels its life in every limb
What should it know of death?

In Leopardi's "Le rimembranze", Micone, the father who reminisces the death of his child, Filino, laments that one year after Filino's death, he still feels agitated and sorrowful. Moreover, when Leopardi brings into focus the figure of the child Dameta, Filino's brother, he makes sure that the reader understands that Dameta is initially willing to believe the story about Filino, who, he is told, cannot be molested because he is sleeping. Yet, soon afterwards, the poet obliterates Dameta's credulity by having him come back home from playing without his brother and by confronting him with the evidence that Filino is dead. Aware of his brother's death, Dameta cries:

Oh Dio! Tu non mi vedi più . . .
Che far giammai
Potrò senza di te?[13]

Thus, whereas the girl interviewed by Wordsworth believes that her sister and brother are still keeping some form of interaction with her through elements which she cannot explain, in Dameta, the memory of Filino's death leaves in his mind deep feelings of an irrecuperable loss.

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[12]Wordsworth, "We Are Seven", in Wordsworth: Poetical Works.

[13]Leopardi, "Le rimembranze", in Tutte le Opere: I, ll. 107-109.

In "Le rimembranze" Leopardi's remembrance of the premature death of a young person is depicted with the same pathetic elements as in "A Silvia". In both poems, the poet presents poetical episodes, focusing on the death of a person who is young and has not yet fulfilled his hopes.

If in Wordsworth memory has the permanent quality of an emotional catalyst in that, in tempering the poet's emotion, it also helps him to restore his poetical mind, in the case of Leopardi, this quality is only effectual for a brief time. Overwhelmed by his dialectic, Leopardi attributes to memory therapeutic but also negative qualities, and, in so doing, emphasizes his state of depression.

In Leopardi's recollections, the regret of having lived in vain constitutes the most important refrain of his entire production. Apart from the pleasure which the poet derives from the recollections of his childhood, for Leopardi there is also sorrow, not only when these memories bring back to him specific tragic events of human life (as, for instance, the death of Filino or that of Silvia), but also when he recollects the happy episodes of his past life, which he can still contrast with the unhappy experiences of the present but which he cannot relive. For this reason, the process of the poet's imagination is deeply characterized by the recurrence of one powerful image: the image of death. However, the poet often vacillates, first recognizing the positive value of his illusions and then rejecting them as mere phantoms of his mind.

Using the same dramatic technique present in "A Silvia" and "Le rimembranze", Leopardi moves on to compose "Le ricordanze", a celebration of childhood which is consistently obliterated by the introduction of another image of death.

Addressing himself to astral objects, as in "Alla luna", Leopardi looks to the sky for self-deliverance. Aspiring to Heaven, where he thinks he belongs, the poet longs to reach a dimension of life beyond the natural: "Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa, io non credea . . ." [14] Like the moon in "Alla luna", here too the poet elevates himself to the sky and makes the constellation of the Great Bear another of his interlocutors.

The very beginning of "Le ricordanze" recalls Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey". In the opening lines of "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth too remembers his past and, overwhelmed by specific recollections, celebrates the function of memory. Five years have passed since the poet has first beheld the waters rolling from their mountain-springs and the steep cliffs which impress "thoughts of more deep seclusion" upon his mind. (Ta, 84). In "Le ricordanze" some time has also elapsed before the poet is allowed to revisit his father's garden, and to converse with the objects of the house in which he lived as a boy. In both poems the descriptive openings are quite similar.

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[14] Leopardi, "Le ricordanze", in Tutte le Opere: I, l. 1. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Ler, l.

Yet, although they start in a correspondent fas on, their conclusions are remarkably different. Wordsworth considers that now, after so many years of absence from Tintern Abbey, he has learned to look to nature, from which he is able to hear "the still sad music of humanity (Ta, 84). To the poet, Nature can inform the mind, impress it with quietness and beauty, and feed it with lofty thought. With this in mind, we can say that here Wordsworth is clearly formulating his belief in Nature as his moral guide.

In "Le recordanze" Leopardi never arrives at the optimistic conclusion of Wordsworth. The memories of his walks in his father's garden and those of his past conversations with the stars are mixed with nostalgia and deep feelings of loss. Looking at the sky, Leopardi attempts to gratify himself with the memory of what he used to do when he was still a child. Yet, after a brief moment of pleasant forgetfulness, he is suddenly forced to deal with his present condition of sorrow. Obscuring the seductive picture of his recollections, Leopardi concludes that, even as a child, he was aware of the ephemeral qualities of his hopes ("Di questo albergo ove abitai fanciullo, / E delle gioie mie vidi la fine. "[Ler, 5-6]).

However, at this particular lyric moment the poet's attitude is not yet completely nihilistic. Leopardi admits that his illusions and every other product of his imagination are mere phantoms, yet he welcomes these phantoms because he realizes that they make his life worth living. In 1828, he writes in Zibaldone :

> All'uomo sensibile e immaginoso, che viva, come io sono vissuto gran tempo, sentendo di continuo ed immaginando, il mondo e gli oggetti sono in un certo modo doppi. Egli vedrà cogli occhi una torre, una campana, udrà cogli orecchi un suono d'una campana; e nel tempo stesso coll'immaginazione vedrà un'altra torre, un'altra campana, udrà un altro suono. In questo secondo genere di obbietti sta tutto il bello e il piacevole delle cose. Trista quella vita (ed è pur tale comunemente), che non vede, non ode, non sente se non che oggetti semplici, quelli soli di cui gli occhi, gli orecchi e gli altri sentimenti ricevono la sensazione.[15]

Apart from the repercussions which the concept just expressed will have on nineteenth-century literary movements and later in particular on surrealism, such a quotation is also important when we consider that it expresses Wordsworth's idea of the mind as partially creating what it perceives.

In fact, if for Wordsworth imagination alters the perception of external reality, for Leopardi it enhances the range of human experiences and subjectivizes the external world according to the particular mood of the poet. For Wordsworth as well as for Leopardi, the alteration of sensory perceptions according to the dictates of the imagination is the source of all the beautiful and pleasant aspects of life.

Specifically in recollecting childhood, Leopardi sets out to employ his poetic imagination to alter the early experiences of his life according to his particular poetical mood. He can do so because his childhood is both distant and vague and, for this reason,

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[15] Leopardi, "Frammento, 30 novembre 1828", in Tutte le Opere: IV, p. 1245.

it can lure the poet when he feels alone and sad:

> Quante immagini un tempo e quante fole
> Creommi nel pensier l'aspetto vostro
> E delle luci a voi compagne! Allora
> Che, tacito, seduto in verde zolla,
> Delle sere io solea passar gran parte
> Mirando il cielo, ed ascoltando il canto
> Della rana rimota alla campagna! [Ler, 7-13].

In colouring his memories with nostalgia, Leopardi attempts to enhance the appeal of his poem by encompassing the infinity of time and space. The poet associates his childhood with sweet recollected visions: the appealing call of the distant sea, the blue mountains discerned from far away, vast thoughts inventing for himself an unknown world and unknown happiness:

> E che pensieri immensi,
> Che dolci sogni mi spirò la vista
> Di quel lontano mar, quei monti azzurri,
> Che di qua scopro, e che varcare un giorno
> Io mi pensava, arcani mondi, arcana
> Felicità fingendo al viver mio! [Ler, 19-24].

It is this same aspiration to the infinite which Leopardi expresses in "L'infinito". In this regard, what is applicable to Ortis and to Faustus is also applicable to Wordsworth and Leopardi. If the domain of Ortis is his "Colli Euganei" and that of Faustus is an experience which transcends the boundary of ordinary life, those of Wordsworth and Leopardi are respectively "a mind / That feeds upon infinity . . . " (Pre, XIV, 70-21) and mountains on which Leopardi can withdraw to experience eternal feelings of [illegible].

Like Alfieri, who used to lay on the beach of Marsiglia, contemplating the immensity of the sea and the sky, in "L'infinito" Leopardi too transcends the physical world and, by employing the

power of his imagination, succeeds in elevating himself to a reality beyond the limits of space and time:

> E come il vento
> Odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello
> Infinito silenzio a questa voce
> Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,
> E le morte stagioni, e la presente
> E viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa
> Immensità s'annega il pensier mio:
> E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.[16]

In "L'infinito" the poet's effort to aspire to the transcendental is, therefore, like the one expressed in "Le ricordanze".

But in "Le ricordanze" the appeal of the imaginative flight of the poet does not last long. As soon as Leopardi has reached the apex of his bewilderment, he shifts his attention to the present condition of his life and, confronted with his sorrow, lets himself be overwhelmed by melancholy considerations.

Moments of alienation follow. Disgusted by the boorish conduct of his townsmen, Leopardi condemns them and calls his town "selvagio", barbarous (Ler, 30). Moreover, thinking that his townsmen hold educated people in no repute, the poet reflects that they pride themselves on their ignorance and thereby finds further reason for hating them:

> . . . intra una gente
> Zotica, vil, cui nomi strani, e spesso
> Argomento di riso e di trastullo,
> Son dottrina e saper. [Ler, 30-33].

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[16] Leopardi, "L'infinito", in Tutte le Opere: I, ll. 8-15.

Thus, alienated, Leopardi spends his time in Recanti, neither comforted by love nor by any form of human intercourse: "Qui passo gli anni, abbandonato, occulto, / Senz'amor, senza vita." (Ler, 38-39). Just as Ortis cuts himself off from any form of social intercourse with the human environment, Leopardi too rejects society and decides to live the rest of his life aloof:

> Qui di pietà mi spoglio . . .
> E sprezzator degli uomini mi rendo,
> Per la greggia ch'ho appresso. [Ler, 41-43].

Living in isolation, the poet intensifies his reflections on life and considers that, separated from every human being, he will never fulfill his ideals and enjoy his youth. Thus, becoming more and more despondent, Leopardi thinks once more of his youth, and realizes that even this gift of nature is already withering away:

> Ti perdo
> Senza un diletto, inutilmente, in questo
> Soggiorno disumano, intra gli affani,
> O dell'arida vita unico fiore. [Ler, 46-49].

With the idea of youth in mind, Leopardi continues the theme of memory, developing it now in the light of these pessimistic considerations. Wandering in the garden of his father, he is caressed by a sweet breeze which carries along with it the sound of the tower clock.

At the perception of this sound, the recollection of the poet's youth begins. Leopardi remembers the time when he used to lie in his dark room beset by terrors and longing for dawn:

Quando fanciullo, nella buia stanza,
Per assidui terrori io vigilava,
Sospirando il mattin. [Ler, 53-55].

The immediate parallel is to Wordsworth's recollection of the sight of a murderer's initials in a place of exposition and to that of a girl labouring against the wind in The Prelude. Like Wordsworth, Leopardi considers his recollections as feeling coming in aid of feeling. But, in continuing his composition, Leopardi carries in the description a mood of pessimism which is unfamiliar to Wordsworth.

Although in "Alla luna" the poet states that it is pleasant to remember painful experiences, especially when pain still continues in the present ("il rimembrar delle passate cose, / Ancor che triste, e che l'affanno duri!" [A, 15-16]), and in Zibaldone he reinforces the concept of the poetical effectiveness of sorrowful memories ("ci è piacevole nella vita anche la ricordanza dolorosa, e quando pure la ricordanza lo cagioni o l'accresca ecc."[17]), it is in a vein akin to Poe rather than to Wordsworth that Leopardi employs his recollections of painful episodes.

Revisiting the house of his parents, Leopardi is overwhelmed by these memories. There is no object in this house which does not bring some image back again to him: the gallery which faces the last gleams of the daylight, the paintings situated in the living-

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[17] Leopardi, "Frammento, 25 ottobre 1821", in Tutte le Opere: III, p. 1244.

rooms and representing figures of flocks bathed in the delicate light of the sun, a vision of the countryside. All of these memories combine to capture the poet's mind in the manner in which the steep and lofty cliffs and the sounding cataracts capture Wordsworth's in "Tintern Abbey". But when the poet moves on to describe the mystery of life and to talk about the vanity of the illusions nourished in youth, he makes use of the image of death, evincing a strong lyrical appeal and, in so doing, intensifying his description with elements characteristic of Poe, without sharing his erotic obsession with tombs and decaying corpses.

Facing his condition of life, the poet knows that all of his illusions are vain and, frustrated, he assumes the attitude of a cheated man. Growing old with his unfulfilled dreams, Leopardi feels his heart turning cold and senses that he is advancing towards death: "Chè la morte è quello / Che di cotanta speme oggi m'avanza." (Ler, 91-92). Thus, with his mind set on death, the poet decides to evoke his unfulfilled dreams of youth and provides the reader with the image of death which has destroyed his hopes:

> . . . e quell'imago ancora
> Sospirar mi farà . . .
> . . . e la dolcezza
> del dì fatal temperera d'affanno. [Ler, 100-103].

However, at this stage in our investigation we must point out that in "Le ricordanze" the poet does not yet see death as an act of liberation achieved through suicide. Developing his composition into a dramatic monologue, Leopardi wishes to elaborate the image of death in order to juxtapose to it that of life, for the specific purpose of creating dramatic tension. This tension is also present

in two prose fragments in which the poet first denies life, and then moves on to celebrate it.[18] From this tension the poet derives his best poetic effects. By alternating his regret of youth with the celebration of his illusions nourished as a boy, Leopardi is able, therefore, to colour his evocations with nostalgia mixed with feelings of inconsolable sorrow:

> Chi rimembrar vi può senza sospiri,
> O primo entrar di giovinezza, o giorni
> Vezzosi, inenarrabili, allor quando
> Al rapito mortal primieramente
> Sorridon le donzelle. [Ler, 119-23].

And in this specific mood, at the thought of young girls smiling at him, and at the idea of the pleasant errors of youth which the world acclaims as lord of all existence, Leopardi passes on to introduce another beautiful and fragile image of youth as personified in Nerina.

With the elaboration of the figure of Nerina, Leopardi makes use of a technique which he has already explored in "A Silvia". Like the female character in "A Silvia", in "Le ricordanze" too the poet employs the picture of a girl to evoke the first awakening of his sexual drives. In Leopardi, these sexual drives remain unfulfilled. Hence, the poet looks back at his symbolic figure of woman with a sense of frustration:

> Dove sei gita,
> Che qui solo di te la ricordanza
> trovo, dolcezza mia? [Ler, 138-40].

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[18] Leopardi, "Frammento, 26 giugno 1820", in Tutte le Opere: III, pp. 156-57, and "Frammento, 10 febbraio 1823", in Tutte le Opere: IV, p. 35.

Thus disappointed, the poet of Silvia and Nerina looks at the environment in which he has cultivated his dreams of love and, finding it unattractive because he is now disillusioned, sees no close interrelation between himself, nature and the objects which had seduced him as an adolescent:

> Più non ti vede
> Questa terra natal: quella finestra
> Ond'eri usata favellarmi, ed onde
> Mesto riluce delle stelle il raggio
> È deserta. [Ler, 140-45].

Since the poet now sees his fantasies of youth as vanished, he changes his outlook to conclude that everything in the world is bound to inevitable laws of necessity. To him, youth remains only as a pathetic motif useful in poetry:

> I giorni tuoi
> Furo, mio dolce amor. Passasti
> .....
> . . .e come un sogno
> Fu la tua vita. [Ler, 148-49, 152-53].

Using youth strictly as a poetic image, Leopardi knows that he is illuding himself by reminiscing on the attractiveness of a world which is gone forever. Aware of his artifice, he feels despondent and calls his evocation "acerba", both bitter and sad (Ler, 173).

In the last part of this analysis, I have largely avoided using long parallels between Wordsworth and Leopardi, because in the poetry of Wordsworth it is rare to find him prostrate in front of a reality in which death is paramount. The more pessimistic aspect of Leopardi's poetry is much closer to the orientation of

Edgar Allan Poe than to that of Wordsworth.

Yet, although Wordsworth and Leopardi often differ in their poetry, both stand out in the same, essentially Promethean fashion when, aware of their capabilities, they create a higher reality by means of their poetical powers. In attempting to embrace a reality which transcends the boundaries of ordinary life, both Wordsworth and Leopardi share the same aspirations towards the eternal and the immutable.

At this particular stage of their developments, both poets recall the literary characteristics of the Faustus and Ortis figures. Like these heroes, they also reveal strong imaginative virtues and, most important of all, they also aspire to penetrate and recreate life through poetic excellence. To return to Thorslev's The Byronic Hero, therefore, we state that, even though Wordsworth and Leopardi can never obliterate the mundanity of their external realities completely, they too can ignore it and search for happiness, which they believe can be found in a superior realm of experience. Thirsting after infinite knowledge, and deeply concerned about their individual liberties, they create a world of personal poetical images and recollections. Yet, as they both come to realize, their attempts are too personal and peripheral. Wordsworth is led to a revival and thereby a restudy of his own earlier despondent stage. Leopardi moves from his initial realization that the very act of recollection is frustrating to a state of complete despondency.

3. The Tragedy of Isolation

In this section, with the study of Book III of The Excursion and Leopardi's "Bruto Minore", I hope to counter a modern trend in literary criticism, evidenced mainly in Thorslev's The Byronic Hero and Kroeber's The Artifice of Reality, which tends to exclude Wordsworth from the realm of the despondent poets, and to minimize the agonistic characteristics of Leopardi. Although in his study Thorslev provides the reader with significant definitions of the alienated Romantic hero-types, he becomes rather tendencious when, in concentrating on the Byronic prototypes, he fails to discern rebellious elements in Wordsworth, whom he excludes from his analysis.[1]

In The Artifice of Reality, Kroeber attributes to these two poets merely pastoral scopes -- the celebration of nature and of the life of ordinary people --and, in so doing, he makes the same mistake as Thorslev.[2] Thus, to confute what according to Thorslev and Kroeber is the only peculiar characteristic of Wordsworth's and Leopardi's poetry -- a characteristic which, in the opinion of these two critics is always bound to ordinary human feelings and situations -- I emphasize the individual qualities of Wordsworth and Leopardi. By means of a comparison which is intended first to picture their characters as typical suidical heroes, and then to place these two poets in the European milieu of their own times, I hope to provide a new understanding of their pessimistic orientations.

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[1] Thorslev, The Byronic Hero, pp. 14-24.

[2] Kroeber, The Artifice of Reality, p. 65.

This comparison acquires a very specific meaning when we observe that, in dealing with the theme of isolation, both Wordsworth and Leopardi introduce correspondent motifs, ranging from that of unfulfilled liberty to that of mistrust in religion and human virtue. Specifically in Book III of The Excursion, Wordsworth employs the figure of the Solitary in order to debate the problem of freedom jeopardized by the despotic turn of the French Revolution. Through this same figure, the poet also questions the validity of Christianity and the importance of virtue in man. In "Bruto Minore", Leopardi also deals with the same motifs. Not only does he depict the unsuccessful struggle of Brutus against Caesar -- a struggle which is referred to by the Solitary in his speech to his friends -- , but, in indicating that despotism triumphs over freedom, he dwells on the depression of Brutus' mind in order to stress his disbelief in religious truth as well as his want of confidence in the virtue of mankind.

A link between these literary characters and their makers is also established. In both the Solitary and Brutus the apostacy of religious belief and virtue is an act which acquires true meaning only when it is seen in connection with the vacillation and rejection of all former hopes and illusions nourished by both poets in their past lives. Continuing the theme of despondency already introduced in The Prelude (Bks. X and XI), in Book III of The Excursion Wordsworth reveals his darker side by creating the character of the Solitary, who dwells on such pessimistic considerations as the uselessness of any positive action in a life which has neither meaning nor purpose. In order to emphasize his Titanic animus, Leopardi first identifies himself with Brutus -- identification which he himself confirms in a letter to

De Sinner (May 24, 1832), and then in "Comparazione delle Sentenze di Bruto Minore e di Teofasto vicini a morire", he reinforces his cynical outlook on life by admitting with Brutus that virtue is an inconsistent phantom: "O virtù miserabile, eri una parola nuda e io ti seguiva come tu fossi una cosa: ma tu sottostavi alla fortuna . . ."[2] With no firm belief, Leopardi laments the vanity of human life in a society in which corruption and mere scientific progress act as hostile agents upon the individual liberty. Moreover, doubting that imagination can rescue man's life, Leopardi portrays himself as an inconsolable hero and wishes to commit suicide.

When we consider Wordsworth, it must be recognized that the pessimism of the Solitary in The Excursion is not the poem's final word. The characters of the Poet, the Wanderer, and the Preacher provide the reader with ample positive moral advice, and the Solitary has been understood by critics as a portrait of the disillusioned nationalist and advocatus diaboli. Unlike Leopardi in "Bruto", Wordsworth has a strong belief, the firmness of which he is struggling to maintain. However, The Excursion can be read as a dramatization of the internal debate, a debate which is not fully resolved within the poem. Thus although Wordsworth is not as closely identified with the Solitary as Leopardi is with Bruto, in creating the character, the English poet can be said to be restudying his recurrent tendency towards despondency.

In the poems which concern us here, it is evident that the tragedy of isolation of both the Solitary and Brutus rests fundamentally

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[2] Leopardi, "Comparazione delle Sentenze di Bruto Minore", in Tutte le Opere: I, p. 1037.

on their former delusions regarding human stability. Thinking about his past life, the Solitary confesses that there was a time when, urged by love of truth and fascinated by poetry, he saw both harmony and order in the world: "What dignity, what beauty, in this change / From mild to merry, and from sad to gay, / Alternate and revolving."[3] But after seven years of happiness, his two children die. Soon afterwards his beloved wife also dies. Reminiscing in a manner akin to Leopardi's recollections of Silvia in his poem, the Solitary calls on dreams and visions to constrain the ghost of his wife to appear to him; consumed by grief, he asks the Heavens "If fixed or wandering star could tidings yield / Of the departed spirit" (Ex, 692-93).

The Solitary is aroused from his inconsolable sorrow by the French Revolution. Perceiving the transformation of the entire world in this political event, not only is he converted momentarily to the world, but, singing the praises of liberty with renewed energies, he becomes the defender of all beneficial social institutions: "I sang Saturnian rule / Returned, -- a progeny of golden years / Permitted to descent, and bless mankind" (Ex, 756-58).

Yet, apart from the suffering which death imparts to man, the Solitary must also experience the instability of human beliefs when at the imperialistic turn of the French Revolution, he finds out that liberty is overrun and suffocated by tyranny. Overwhelmed by confusion, he first alludes to the historical personage of Brutus,

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[3] Wordsworth, The Excursion, in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ll. 314-16. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Ex, 314-16.

and then, using the same expression employed by Leopardi in "Comparazione delle Sentenze di Bruto Minore . . . ", identifies himself with this disillusioned classic hero, and exclaims: "Liberty, / I worshipped thee, and find thee but a shade!" (Ex, 776-77). The fact that both Wordsworth and Leopardi use the same classic example does not necessarily provide an evidence of direct influence, but rather indicates that both are deeply concerned with the problem of unfulfilled liberty resulting in despondency.

In the course of Leopardi's poem, suicidal feelings occur constantly. As in Book III of The Excursion, in "Bruto Minore" Brutus' despondency springs from the same delusion of human stability. Like the Solitary, Brutus looks to the sky and blames supernatural forces for the inconstancy of earthly welfare. Leopardi clarifies this point carefully: after the brief allusion to the battle of Philippi, in which the party of Caesar has defeated the republicans guided by Brutus, the poet introduces his alienated hero, facing a hostile fate, and cursing both Heaven and Hell.

Feelings of disillusion are described. Brutus rejects his former belief in positive action since, to the despondent hero, what the virtuous man can create has no durability. With his ideals frustrated, not only does Brutus mistrust the beneficient influence of Heaven upon the business of the world, but he rejects the gods because in his opinion they are indifferent to the condition of man.

Such an indifference seen in both the gods and the univers constitutes the central theme in the monologue of this Titanic hero.

Believing that, if the gods exist and if they have created the world, they have done so only to enjoy the spectacle of human misery on earth, Brutus treats the religious subject with irony. Everything in the world is chaotic and justice is a mere phantom. Considering the divine influence of Jove on the human lot, Brutus feels that Jove strikes all those people who are pious and just in order to protect the criminal: "E quando esulta / Per l'aere il nembo, e quando / Il tuon rapido spingi, / Ne'giusti e pii la sacra fiamma stringi?"[4] Thus investing the religious problem with irony, Brutus recalls the cynicism of the Solitary.

In his monologue, the Solitary also questions whether there is justice and order in life. Like Brutus, he doubts that there is a Superior Being looking after human events. Seeing only confusion around him, the Solitary believes that on earth cowardice is rewarded whereas punishment befalls the brave and the courageous: "In Britain, ruled a panic dread of change; / The weak were praised, rewarded, and advanced." (Ex, 827-28). Left with no contentment, the Solitary turns away from religious belief: ". . . within the cabin stood / That volume . . . / . . . I implored its guidance but the infallible support / Of faith was wanting." (Ex, 861-65). Moreover, refusing to pray to God, he withdraws into himself and indulges in the pessimistic belief that life is ruled by mechanical and in

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[4] Leopardi, "Bruto Minore", in Tutte le Opere: I, ll. 27-30. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Br, 27-30.

penetrable forces.

At this stage of their speculations, both the Solitary and Brutus are overwhelmed by melancholy feelings and, believing themselves to be alone in a hostile environment, they prepare to face their death. Moreover in order to affirm their individual liberties against the obscure forces of natural necessity both heroes decide to suffocate their instincts of self-preservation with an act of rebellion against nature. With disdain and pride, they set out to deliver themselves to death in a fashion which reminds us of Jacopo Ortis.

The analogy with Ortis emphasizes the rebellious characteristics of both the Solitary and Brutus. In Foscolo's novel not only does Ortis alienate himself from Heaven, but, proud of his act of rebellion, this hero goes a step further and celebrates his victory over an unknown supernatural force with a heroic act of self-destruction. In both the Solitary and Brutus the same celebration of heroic death occurs. Reflecting on the incomprehensibility and mystery of life, the Solitary prefers an unnatural death to a meaningless life. Brutus also persuades himself that the best response to a world ruled by mere necessity is a heroic death.

A process of rationalization characterizes this moment of alienation. Brutus knows that on the earth destiny is invincible and death is paramount; yet the hero also believes that a person who holds no hopes nor illusions in life cannot be hurt by death: "Men duro è il male / Che riparo non ha? Dolor non sente / Chi

di speranza è nudo?" (Br, 35-37). Thus, rejecting any belief in man's virtue, glory, or divinity, Brutus challenges the tyranny of fate and sets out to make his death a victory: "Indomito scrollando si pompeggia, / Quando nell'alto lato / L'amaro ferro intride / E maligno alle nere ombre sorride" (Br, 42-45).

Rationalizing his desire for death, Brutus looks to the sky in defiance, to show everyone that he is more courageous and worthier than the gods in Heaven. Asserting his superiority in this way, not only does Brutus exemplify his arrogance in the fashion of Jacopo Ortis, but, in the context of the English literature of the time, he also reminds us of Byron's Prometheus, since like the latter, Brutus also protests against the gods and vehemently questions their worthiness.

Like Byron's Prometheus, in fact, Brutus doubts that Jove can triumph over his hostile fate -- the fate which will force him to withdraw from Heaven and to do battle with the same firmness of mind with which Brutus reacts against his own destiny. Brutus ridicules Jove: "Non fora / Tanto valor ne' molli eterni petti" (Br, 47-48).

In pondering the religious problem involved in the decision to commit suicide, the hero ends his frantic rationalization with a puzzling aphorism. Brutus does not understand why his act of suicide should be called unnatural, if nature is corrupted and the universe without order. If the beasts were to decide to kill themselves, no divine law could forbid them to do so. But as to man, such a law

exists: "A voi, fra quante / Stirpi il cielo avvivò, soli fra tutte, / Figli di Prometeo, la vita increbbe" (Br, 70-72). Brutus' aphorism is, of course, a paradox; yet by asking himself why man hesitates to commit suicide, Brutus singles out a problem of conscience which can be better understood in the light of another work by Leopardi.

In the "Dialogo di Plotino" Leopardi deals with the origin of all the religious beliefs in organized societies. He observes that both man's religious creed and his feeling of guilt caused by thoughts of acts of violence practised against himself have been cunningly inculcated in man by Plato. Hoping to restrain man from committing injustice and violence against himself, Plato had decided to have him doubt the state of his after-life, and, with this in mind, had included religious precepts in his writings. In criticizing Plato, Leopardi emphasizes the artificiality of this philosopher's belief, and rejects it because he feels that Plato has made man inferior even to the beasts by denying him his freedom of will and by forcing him to endure a life which is usually unworthy.

Hence in the poem, by heroizing Brutus' death, Leopardi is careful to indicate the courage of a man who, having discovered that the gods are mere phantoms of his mind, negates their existence to become the only master of his destiny.

The same negation occurs when the poet deals with the role which nature plays for man. Refusing to idealize nature, Leopardi accentuates the intellectual superiority of Brutus and, in presenting

him as being dubious of the comfort which he might obtain from the spectacle of the natural world, the poet proceeds to describe his hero's isolation in the universe, thus further stressing his tragedy.

At this stage of his despondency, Brutus sees nature not as a sympathetic but as an indifferent landscape. Juxtaposing the remoteness and impersonality of nature to the desperate state of mind into which he has fallen after the tragedy of Philippi, Brutus takes a look around him and observes that whereas the sea is full of blood, the candid moon is placidly arising to illuminate the battlefield of Philippi ("Sorgi / E l'inquieta notte e la funesta / All'ausc[illegible] valor campagna esplori . . . Tu placida sei" [Br, 77-79, 83]).

Developing the motif of the indifference of nature, Leopardi also presents Brutus as reflecting that the animals on the earth and the rest of the universe are completely unaware of the tragedy befallen him. The glory of Republican Rome is over; yet, in spite of this catastrophe, both plants and birds continue to exercise their activities as if nothing has happened on the earth. Furthermore, passing on to look at the rest of the universe, Brutus finds out that man's suffering makes no impression on the world around him. On the one hand, man is desperate because he has no hopes, no illusions, and no liberty of which he might avail himself; on the other hand the moon and the rest of the firmament above are detached and shine undisturbed: "Oh casi! Oh gener vano! Abbietta parte / Siam delle cose; e non le tinte glebe, / Non gli ululati spechi / Turbo

nostra sciagura, / Ne scoloro le stelle umana cura." (Br, 101-105).

The motif of the indifference of nature is also central to Book III of The Excursion. Examples are provided throughout this book. For instance, at its opening the Solitary remains completely removed when, in the company of the poet and the Wanderer, he is pictured entering by chance a recess which stirs feelings of merriment in his friends. Unable to cope with their enthusiasm and also refusing to share the joy of a fair-faced cottage-boy who is a "young apprentice" of nature, the Solitary explains that there was a time when he had achieved oneness with his natural world. But now, afflicted by family and social disasters, he has rejected the comfort of any moral belief and, looking at nature, he has discovered that it has ceased to appeal both to his heart and to his mind. Furthermore, entertaining the example of the cottage-boy, the forlorn man doubts that this child will be the pupil of nature for the rest of his life: "'Far happiest' . . . / 'If, such as now he is, he might remain!'" (Ex, 207-208). With such a bitter statement Wordsworth not only insists on the despondent attitude of the Solitary, but deeply contrasts the pessimistic tone of this character with the optimistic one of such a composition as "Intimations of Immortality".

In this ode, beholding the child as father of man, Wordsworth finds strong moral support in the divinity of childhood. However, in Book III of The Excursion, the poet makes use of the figure of the child only to create dramatic tension between the happiness of the cottage-boy and the aggravated state of mind of the

Solitary. When the poet has described this tension, he dismisses the fair-faced boy in order to concentrate his analysis on the figure of the alienated hero. As a result, the picture of despondency becomes increasingly dominant in Book III of The Excursion and constitutes an interesting aspect of the rebellious qualities in Wordsworth especially when we contrast it with "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" the positive moral values of which are usually taken to exemplify the predominant moral stance of this poet.

To develop the problem of the indifference of nature Wordsworth supports the Solitary's alienation from his natural environment with further examples of conflict. Not only is nature passive to the condition of sorrow of the Solitary, but the latter, acknowledging its passiveness, responds to it in the same fashion. Negating the influence of the natural scenery upon him, the Solitary points out that he too is unwilling to let his imagination be affected by nature. Here, to understand better the implications of the Solitary's statement, we should briefly consider The Prelude. In Book XII Wordsworth shows that nature stimulates his mind to soar as far as it can go beyond time and space. However, in Book III of The Excursion the poet qualifies his former optimism and deals with the same subject from a hopeless point of view. Although the mind stimulated by nature can create an artificial reality which may momentarily transcend the boundary of ordinary life, at the end of its process of activity, it may leave one disturbed, fearing that all is ephemeral, that the past is irretrievable and the future is

unattainable:

> . . . far as she can go
> Through time or space -- if neither in the one
> Nor in the other region . . .
> Words of assurance can be heard; . . .
> . . . a better scenery
> From doubt and sorrow, than the senseless grave? [Ex, 215-16, 223-24].

In commenting on the Solitary's denial of any form of interaction between nature and imagination, it is perhaps not redundant to make another analogy between Foscolo, Wordsworth, and Leopardi. The motif of nature's indifference and of the artificiality of imaginative activity occurs in all three poets, although in Wordsworth's case in a less definitive way. On the one hand, Wordsworth finds the cause of the Solitary's mistrust of the power of his mind in the realization that "Mutability is Nature's bane" (Ex, 458). On the other hand, Foscolo and Leopardi arrive at the same despondent conclusions by observing that nature is apathetic and that the products of their minds are phantoms which mean nothing to them.

As a result, like Ortis and Brutus, the Solitary too turns against nature and refuses to take it as his moral guide. In finding moral interests contemptible, the Solitary rejects both the creative might of his imagination and the varied functions of civil action (Ex, 822-24). Moreover, discovering that nature leaves man unfulfilled, he curses it and calls it "fostering nature" -- an expression which closely echoes Leopardi's bitter statement of "natura matrigna". And there is more. In his vexed state of mind, although the Solitary realizes that the sun is bright and the breeze is soft,

he denies their appeal; he wishes to emphasize the mutual indifference of nature towards him and of him towards nature: "What are these / To me, or I to them?" (Ex, 855-86). Thus alienated, the Solitary convinces himself that "all which bears the name of action . . . ends in servitude" (Ex, 893-95) and, in believing that his business is to observe and not to act, remains gloomy and aloof.

In such an isolation, both the Solitary's and Brutus' despondency presents a tragic alternative. Alone in the middle of an indifferent universe and with no comfort of either religion or imagination, the Solitary and Brutus feel that they cannot regain their confidence in themselves, and, in negating their virtues, look languidly upon the world and upon their lives. In an attempt at comparing his confused vision of life to the inverted image of the trees reflected in the water of a brook, the Solitary associates his life with the brook ending in the ocean and states that he too will soon reach his end, "The unfathomable gulf, where all is still." (Ex, 991). After coming to the conclusion that, lamentably, geniuses are never recognized during their lives, Brutus refuses to deliver his body to a grave and, needing no tears from the living, wishes to fall dead in the open, prey to the destructive fury of the elements:

> A me d'intorno
> Le penne il bruno augello avido roti;
> Prema la fera, e il nembo
> Tratti l'ignota spoglia;
> E l'aura il nome e la memoria accoglia. [Br, 116-20].

As it stands, this analysis of the despondent attitudes in

both the Solitary and Brutus stresses the similarities rather than the differences between the poems of Wordsworth and Leopardi, mainly to show the common theme of despondency, which, central to the Titanism of the epoch, is also deeply focused in the poetry of Wordsworth and Leopardi. Thus, within the context of my attempt to confute Kroeber and Thorslev and to acknowledge the heroic animus in these two poets, I call attention to what Russo has stated on the subject:

> Qui addirittura dovremmo parlare di titanismo e di spirito prometeico. In virginee e gracili forme, il Leopardi fu uno dei bellissimi titani del primo '800 europeo.[5]

What Russo attributes to Leopardi can be attributed to at least a poetical moment in Wordsworth. Partially identified with his character in Book III of The Excursion, Wordsworth presents himself as affected by the instability of human happiness in the world. Deeply afflicted by the tenor of discontinuity in his life, he projects an aspect of himself into the attitude of a Satanic figure.

At this point in their speculations, both poets employ the Satan and Prometheus prototypes mainly to complain about their insignificant position on the immensity of the universe and their difficulty in comprehending the complexity of life. Yet, since poetry can exert a therapeutic function for them, after their identifications with the Solitary and Brutus, they overcome their fears of absolute despondency.

They channel their energies towards the accomplishment

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[5] Luigi Russo, I Classici Italiani: III, p. 684.

of positive action, and derive moral example from enduring objects in nature and from common man, in order to accept their lots and to start a new life, looking at it with renewed optimism in the case of Wordsworth, and with greater serenity in the case of Leopardi.

CHAPTER III

FROM ALIENATION TO RECONCILIATION

In passing from a position of self-love and despondency to a position of self-negation and of positive interaction with people, Wordsworth and Leopardi reconcile themselves with life in a conscious and prophetic way. It should immediately be acknowledged that Wordsworth's transition from a phase of alienation to one of reconciliation does not occur suddenly nor according to a uniform and continuous pattern. The poet's development first began in the period from 1802 to 1805. But the limited state of despondency which Wordsworth was countering persisted and was revived in the figure of the Solitary in 1814. After 1814, believing that from earth man can aspire to heaven, from human to divine, Wordsworth assumes the role of a prophet and envisions all men uniting to realize an earthly Paradise in which man can behave in a simple manner and nourish wise desires.[1]

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[1]Evidence of the poet's prophetic mission as a Christian is directly provided in the "Preface to the Edition of 1814" of The Excursion. However, Wordsworth also draws on the important relationship between religion and poetry in the compositions of his later years. In his essay, "Wordsworth's Final Phase: Glimpses of Eternity" (Studies in English Literature, I[1961], pp. 63-80), Seymour Lainoff stresses two of Wordsworth's works -- "The Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815", and "On the Power of Sound"(1835) --mainly to indicate that Wordsworth, both as a poet and as a religious man, accepts the creed of Christianity along with the imperfections of human life, and resolves that passions must be guided by judgement and faith.

However, indications of this spiritual rebirth are readily discernible in the lyrics composed between 1801 and 1807, and in The Prelude when, after his moments of deep frustration, he withdraws into himself, resolves to face life with renewed energies, and humanizes nature, from which he derives important moral standards for the spiritual support of man. (Pre, XIII, 105-106, 265-312).

In the final stage of his development, Leopardi also advocates a new harmonious existence. Moving from the premise that the goal of man's life is happiness, and considering that when man fails to achieve happiness he is morally dead, Leopardi, like Wordsworth, sees his role as relating to man for the specific purpose of edifying him with moral instruction. According to Leopardi, it is possible for man to overcome fits of despondency and to face life with firmness and resolution of mind only if he acknowledges that the best way of employing himself during his lifetime is to live for the benefit of other human beings. At this point, Leopardi emphasizes his conviction that love is the only redeeming force in life:

> L'animo dell'uomo che mancatogli lo scopo della felicità, è moralmente morto, risorge a una nuova languida vita, ma tuttavia risorge e vive in altrui, cioè nello scopo della altrui felicità, divenuto lo scopo suo . . . L'uomo . . . il quale senza odiarsi, solamente considera se stesso e la vita sua come inutile, prova una compiacenza e soddisfazione, una (ma leggerissima) consolazione, nel trovar dove adoperar se stesso . . .
> Vedendosi esclusi dalla vita, cercano di vivere in certo modo in altrui.[2]

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[2]Leopardi, Zibaldone, in Tutte le Opere: III, pp. 457-58. This idea of a universal brotherhood first occurs in Leopardi about fifteen years before he wrote "La Ginestra". Like Wordsworth (and to an even greater degree), Leopardi has moments of hesitation and vacillation. For instance, in a letter to De Sinner in reference to "Bruto Minore" dated May 24, 1832, he thus emphasizes his suicidal

Thus, believing in the positive power of love, Leopardi addresses himself to man in the hope of defeating the human tendency towards evil.

Leopardi's appeal to mankind to unite in the struggle against Nature and Fate, and Wordsworth's efforts to exhort man to spend his life within the boundaries of human solidarity, colour the productions of these two poets with the heroic characteristics typical of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound. Unlike Alfieri's, Foscolo's, and Byron's rebellious heroes who, complaining about their sorrowful conditions, stand proudly in defiance of Heaven, Wordsworth and Leopardi, in the late phases of their developments, advocate a positive alternative in the name of a universal brotherhood. Like Shelley's Promethean hero, they seek wisdom and solidarity and, in considering themselves the spokesmen of the divine will of man himself, they enthrone good in the place of evil and thereby set out to create man's life anew by following those models of humility and wisdom which they can find in the world in which they live.

Bearing in mind the constructive Promethean [illegible]ts of these two poets, let us consider "Resolution and Independence" (1802), which is perhaps the best example of Wordsworth's new stability of mind, and which is closely correspondent to Leopardi's "La Ginestra" (1836). My intention is to bring into full focus the similarities as well as

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tendencies: "Mes sentiments envers la destinée ont été et sont toujours ceux que j'ai exprimes dans 'Bruto Minore'." (Tutte le Opere: V, p. 1033). However, after 1832, in "La Ginestra", his vision of life becomes more serene, with the poet more elevated, in positive interaction with the world, admonishing and instructing mankind.

the differences between Wordsworth and Leopardi during this phase in their development. For this reason, I shall deal with the two poems separately, mainly to show that, at the start of their investigations for a meaningful solution to the problem of life, Wordsworth and Leopardi have different perspectives. Wordsworth's revival of belief in the natural goodness of man leads him to invest rustic people and nature with a moral message. Leopardi not only recognizes the presence of evil forces in man, but, in realizing that nature is hostile and indifferent to his condition, he stands against ignorant man and indifferent nature. However, Leopardi's cynicism is not paramount. In believing that man can be happier if he follows examples of wisdom and fortitude, Leopardi, at the end of his quest for happiness, shares Wordsworth's optimistic feelings about positive human interaction. In such an enthusiastic frame of mind, both Wordsworth and Leopardi externalize their inner, positive beliefs by availing themselve of some objectified examples of endurance. In "Resolution and Independence", Wordsworth sees these examples in nature and ordinary people; in "La Ginestra", Leopardi personifies a flower, the broom, and concludes that if man can be as firm as this flower, he can start to look at other people differently and experience a truly meaningful life in love.

1. "Resolution and Independence"

The reasons which bring Wordsworth to compose "Resolution and Independence" spring from very deep psychological and moral changes rather than merely from external circumstances. It is true that, when the poet writes this poem, he wishes to provide evidence of the authenticity of the figure of the old Leech Gatherer:

> This old man I met . . .; and the account of him is taken from his own mouth. I was in the state of feeling described in the beginning of the poem, while crossing over Barton from Mr. Clarkson's, at the foot of Ullswater, towards Askam . . .[3]

Yet, in presenting his character, Wordsworth depicts him according to his own state of mind, and, in so doing, transforms an otherwise minor event into a splendid example of the spiritual realization which inevitably leads him into the realm of Christian religion. In a letter accompanying a copy of "Resolution and Independence", Wordsworth writes:

> I will explain to you in prose my feelings in writing that poem . . . I describe myself as having been exalted to the highest pitch of delight by the joyousness and beauty of nature; and then as depressed, even in the midst of those beautiful objects, to the lowest dejection and despair. A young poet in the midst of the happiness of nature is described as overwhelmed by the thoughts of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of men, viz. poets. I think of this till I am so deeply impressed with it, that I consider the manner in which I was rescued from my dejection and despair almost as an interposition of Providence.[4]

This feeling of spirituality or "supernaturalness" is seen by Wordsworth as the strong internal force which motivates "Resolution and Independence".

The poem opens with descriptive lines:

> There was a roaring in the wind all night;
> The rain came heavily and fell in floods;

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[3]William Wordsworth, "Note to 'Resolution and Independence'", in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, p. 701.

[4]ibid.

But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
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 filled with pleasant noise of waters.[5]

Wordsworth recounts the inherently vital qualities of nature. The singing birds, the jay which "makes answer" to the magpie, the air filled with the "pleasant noise of waters" and, in the second stanza, the hare "running races with her mirth", all indicate that nature is not lifeless, but has its own language and its own appeal. Yet, although the poet is aware of the voice of nature, he remains withdrawn, refusing to participate in the life of the environment around him:

I was a traveller then upon the moor;
I saw the hare that raced with joy;
I heard the woods and distant waters roar;
Or heard them not . . .[Res, 5-18].

Opposing to the appeal of nature the beauty which he finds in the recollection of his childhood, when he could instinctively follow the voice of nature, Wordsworth attempts to delude himself. However, the poet's recollections of his childhood have now ceased to gratify him.

In this context, we might compare Wordsworth to Carducci.

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[5]Wordsworth, "Resolution and Independence", in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ll. 1-7. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Res, 1-7.

In the face of unalterable nature, Carducci's remembrances of youth in "Davanti San Guido" and "Traversando la Maremma Toscana" excite in him a sentiment of sorrow for his changed state of mind. Both Wordsworth and Carducci see nature with a questioning attitude, since they find in themselves signs of decay and, in nature, evidence of an eternal immutability. Such an attitude, present in the "Elegiac Stanzas" and in the poem "Ode to Duty", informs the pensive orientation of Wordsworth in "Resolution and Independence".

When he attempts to recollect his childhood, the poet is aware that he cannot fall into absolute oblivion, for such an attitude would imply carelessness and apathy towards the natural world and towards the people who live in communion with nature. Pondering his attitude towards the world, Wordsworth considers that an apathetic person can expect neither love nor care from anyone, if he himself shows inadequate concern: "But how can he expect that others should / Build for him, sow for him, and at his call / Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all?" (Res, 39-42).

Such an incapability of relating to other human beings is seen by the poet as an act of pride which might ultimately lead to a tragic dea... Wordsworth provides the examples of Thomas Chatterton, who poisoned himself at the age of seventeen, and Robert Burns, who also died young and despondent (Res, 43-49), mainly to ponder tragic death and to reject it as an act of folly.

Thus, whereas in the first seven stanzas of the poem Wordsworth considers two specific moments of his development--apathy to-

wards the natural surrounding and despondency; in the eighth stanza he focuses his attention on the figure of the old Leech Gatherer to provide an example of moral endurance which might redeem the poet's life.

To emphasize his spiritual and Promethean concerns, Wordsworth employs the character of the Leech Gatherer for the specific purpose of externalizing his desire for moral strength. What Hartman says in regard to the poem "Michael" ("Wordsworth establishes . . . a strange identity between himself and his main character."[6]) can also be applied to the character of the old Leech Gatherer in "Resolution and Independence". In "Michael", Wordsworth's portrait of the old man is not simply one of suffering or muted despair, "but of natural resiliance and the habit of fortitude".[7] In "Resolution and Independence", the character of the Leech Gatherer expresses the poet's inclination towards reacting to the hostile forces of life, not with despair but with resigned fortitude.

For Wordsworth, the old Leech Gatherer is much more than a character study: rather, the poet employs this figure mainly to personify and humanize nature. In the ninth stanza, by comparing him to external natural objects, Wordsworth stresses the interaction and reciprocity between nature and the Leech Gatherer. Thus, the

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[6]Geoffrey H. Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 262.

[7]Ibid., p. 265.

Leech Gatherer is as ageless as nature, "not all alive nor dead, / Nor all asleep" (Res, 64-65); he is like "a sea beast crawled forth, that on a shelf / Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself" (Res, 62-63); he stands "motionless as a cloud / That heareth not the loud winds when they call; / And moveth all together, if it move at all" (Res, 75-77).

In Wordsworth's own analysis of the passage, he states:

> . . . the stone is endowed with something of the power of life . . . the sea beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone . . . The aged man . . . divested of . . . life and motion so as to bring him to the point where the two objects unite and coalesce in just comparison.[8]

Thus, the poet sees in the Leech Gatherer not a poor old man, but an extension of nature--a humanized nature to whom the poet can relate and with whom he can establish a human rapport.

Addressing himself to the old man, Wordsworth is now willing to inquire about his human condition. He is sympathetic towards this character: he wishes to know the old man's occupation, and he expresses his interest in deriving moral instruction from him. At this point in the poem, Wordsworth subjectivizes the whole description, mainly to show his personal progression from a position of indifference and apathy to one of interest in life and in other human beings (Res, 106-12).

Wishing to derive benefit from the Leech Gatherer who lives

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[8]William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Edition of 1815", in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, p. 754.

in accord with the laws of God and nature, Wordsworth undergoes a progressive development. Although he finds the picture of nature humanized in the figure of the Leech Gatherer still vague and difficult to comprehend, the poet can distinctly hear the voice of nature, as personified in the character of the Leech Gatherer. The body of this character may appear vague, as in a dream, yet the poet can now acknowle e his presence more fully. He discovers that this old man has been sent to him "from some far region . . . / To give me human strength, by apt admonishment" (Res, 111-12).

Thus, considering his former thoughts of despondency, the poet is perplexed and longs for enlightenment. He finds his example in the Leech Gatherer, who admonishes him that the only way of being comforted in life is to accept one's human lot and to endure with firm resignation. Moved by the Leech Gatherer's firmness of mind, the poet exhibits an attitude reminiscent of Leopardi, who in "La Ginestra" sees man not merely submitting to the inexorable laws of nature, but comforted by hope and faith in mankind. Appealing to God, Wordsworth exclaims: "God . . . be my help and stay secure; / I'll think of the Leech Gather on the lonely moor!" (Res, 140-41).

In "Ode to Duty" (1804), Wordsworth formulates a philosophy which incorporates the teachings of the Leech Gatherer. The moral idea of this poem represents Wordsworth's reversion from his youthful reliance on natural impulse to a more orthodox, ethical tradition. The poem makes no reference to that "Nature" which, for Wordsworth, earlier constituted both law and impulse, and which had been called

"the guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being" (Ia, 110-11). As Abrams states:

> The Duty, "Stern Daughter of the voice of God", to which Wordsworth now commends himself, is the same concept as Milton's "right reason" God's representative in man, which Christian humanists had developed by combining the stern morality of the pagan stoic with the concept of the inner voice of the Christian "conscience".[9]

Thus, the "Ode to Duty" is founded in Wordsworth's Christian goal of surrender to God's will. Anticipating this Christian belief, in "Resolution and Independence" Wordsworth recovers from despondency, reconciles himself with his external reality, and finds his mission in the world both as a poet and as a moralist.

2. "La Ginestra"

Leopardi's transition from a life and a poetry fed by imagination to a life and poetry of feeling occurs as a result of his awareness of the pitiful state of humanity in the world. This Italian poet becomes sentimental only when he realizes that the rich life of his imagination is dominated by the life of his intellect. When he acknowledges the importance of his intellect, not only does he take on the habit of a philosopher entirely devoted to reason and truth, but, in discovering that man can live more intensely by joining his fellow beings in love, he becomes apparently insensitive to the

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[9] M. H. Abrams, ed., The Norton Anthology of English Literature (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1962), p. 998, n. 1.

appeal of pure imagination and nature and writes didactic poems mainly for the purpose of teaching mankind. Early in July, 1820, he writes: "Ed io infatti non divenni sentimentale, se non quando perduta la fantasia divenni insensibile alla natura, e tutto dedito alla ragione e al vero, insomma filosofo."[10] Yet, if the new poetical orientation of Leopardi is mainly social rather than private, in "La Ginestra" the poet includes important passages of personal commitment, thereby intermingling all the values of this inspiration into a unified and subjective vision of life.

Frequently shifting from lines of mainly didactic value to lines of subjective and desolate lyric, the poet addresses himself to the broom, and in the first thirty-six lines of the poem celebrates this flower of the desert as a symbol of fortitude. From line thirty-seven to line one hundred and fifty-seven, Leopardi continues the polemic of "Palinodia" and ridicules man's presumption and pride. Then the tone of the poem becomes lyrical again both in the vision of the desolation of life under the hostile forces of nature, and in the consideration of the weakness of human life. In the second-last stanza, he describes mankind as a tribe of ants crushed by a ll apple falling from a tree, and juxtaposes ever-fresh nature o the instability of man's life. In the last stanza, the poet introduces the image of the broom again and moralizes on the future of mankind.

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[10] Leopardi, Zibaldone, III (July 2, 1820), p. 163.

"La Ginestra" opens with a descriptive passage which seems totally antithetical to the one at the beginning of Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence". The environment around Vesuvius is a waste-land covered by lava already turned into stone. However, in this desert, the poet presents the fragrant broom, beautifying the lonely land and giving testimony of generations passed long ago. In "Resolution and Independence" a roaring was in the wind, the rain came heavily and falling in floods, the sun is rising calm and bright, the hare is running races in her mirth, when suddenly Wordsworth beholds the figure of the aged leech gatherer beside a bare pool, in a very lonely place. Having thus introduced his figure, Wordsworth stresses Christian virtues, and in this way moves from description to meditation.

In "La Ginestra" Leopardi does the same. Addressing himself to the flower of the desert, the poet personifies it and, in making it the comrade of his own afflicted state of mind he invites the people of his own time to test their power against the destructive elements of nature which ironically he calls "amante", loving, and "dura nutrice", harsh nurse.[11]

In referring to nature with irony, Leopardi differentiates his temper from Wordsworth's. The English poet humanizes nature in

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11 Giacomo Leopardi, "La Ginestra", in Tutte le Opere, I, ll. 41, 44. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Gin, 41, 44.

the Leech Gatherer, because he believes that he can find models of fortitude in a natural condition of life. In arriving at his moral conclusion, the Italian poet takes on a different orientation. To reach the philosophical consideration of man's loneliness in a hostile environment and also to confront man with the vanity of his worldly desires for success and fame, Leopardi takes into account the hostile forces exercised by nature upon man.

Thus, considering that nature is indifferent and can easily destroy man, the poet goes on to impart a moral lesson. Wishing to chastise the arrogance of his century, he first ridicules a statement made by Terenzio Mamiami who, in his religious hymns, had nourished the hope that the Italians might become, through superficial Catholic reforms mixed with half-digested doctrines of liberalism, the Christian guides for nineteenth-century Europe: "Dipinte in queste rive / Son dell'umana gente / Le magnifiche sorti e progressive" (Gin, 49-51). Then, in a Swiftian vein, entertaining the possibility of man's happiness by means of scientific progress, he turns against the optimism of his age--optimism which the poet also rejects in "Palinodia" (1833) -- and chastizes the scientists' dream of great times to come through technological advancement.

In "Palinodia" the poet grants that modern man can invent new objects, new machines and ships to facilitate communication between one place and another; yet he also observes that these inventions cannot make man any happier, since nature is like a capricious child and can strike him when it seems that everything

is functioning smoothly: "La natura crudel, fanciullo invitto, / Il suo capriccio adempie, e senza posa / Distruggendo e formando si trastulla."[12] Like Swift, Leopardi is cynical about the belief that man can attain happiness through external changes. He is convinced that change must come from within: only if man decides to apply his intelligence to fight the evil which is hidden within his own nature can he hope to attain some form of spiritual progress and achieve happiness.

Therefore, in "La Ginestra", before arriving at the alternative of a universal brotherhood, Leopardi dwells on the presumption of his age and condemns it. Vilifying contemporary scientists and progressives, the poet affirms his belief that man can attain happiness only if he realizes that his purpose in life is to share his mortal lot with all the other creatures of the world. But, realizing that man is proud, the poet first castigates human foolishness:

> Così ti spiacque il vero
> Dell'aspra sorte e del depresso loco
> Che natura ci diè. Per questo il tergo
> Vigliaccamente rivelgesti al lume
> Che il fe palese: e, fuggitivo, appelli
> Vil chi lui segue . . . [Gin, 78-83].

Then, by means of more subdued rhetorical devices, he tries to convince man to accept his human destiny with no protests.

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[12] Giacomo Leopardi, "Palinodia" in Tutte le Opere: I, 11. 174-76. All future references to this poem will be incorporated in the body of the thesis as Pal, 174-76.

Here, for moral edification, the poet juxtaposes the figure of the proud man to the example of wisdom and endurance as represented by the broom. To the poet, this flower of the desert symbolizes a noble and wise man who, in accepting the low state assigned to him by fate, embraces all the people of the earth in love, and finds happiness in helping them and in expecting valiant aid from them, amid the anguish and danger of human life:

> . . . e tutti abbraccia
> Con vero amor, porgendo
> Valida e pronta aspettando aita
> Negli alterni perigli e nelle angosce
> Della guerra comune. [Gin, 131-35].

Thus, believing that even on earth it is possible to find salvation, the poet further expands upon the attributes of the virtuous man.

Stating that it is possible to be happy even without nourishing faith in conventional religion, Leopardi considers the business of the world for what it is, and explains that, since man is a human being and not a god, he should not expect high destinies of felicity in some world other than the earth. According to the poet, modern man can no longer derive comfort from God or nature, because God is dead and nature is fickle. Moreover, realizing that life is positive action, the poet rejects Machiavellian artfulness in favor of the belief in a Utopian community, created by virtuous people who, deeply conscious of the evil forces of life, interrelate with enthusiasm, generosity, and sympathy, both for the specific purpose of fighting the malevolent forces of life and in order to enjoy a state of superior happiness on earth. He writes to Jacopssen:

> Si tous les hommes croyaient et voulaient être verteux, s'ils étaient compatissants, bienfaisants, généreux, magnanimes, pleins d'enthousiasme; . . . n'en serait-on pas plus heureux? Chaque individu ne trouverait-il pas mille ressources dans la société?[13]

When thoughts of universal brotherhood arise in the poet's mind, Leopardi persuades himself that greater felicity can definitely be the product of contemporary times, only if man is aware ("verace sapere" [Gin, 151]) of his loneliness in the universe and only if he realizes that he must unite with his fellow beings in order to share the same sorrow and the same joy. Furthermore, in conceiving this better world of the future, Leopardi does not forebode any return to a natural and primitive state of life. Acknowledging the advantages of civilized countries, he believes that this universal brotherhood can be a reality only in modern societies, where it can be honoured by justice, and anchored to humane principles of piety: "Contra l'empia natura / Strinse i mortali in social catena" (Gin, 148-49).

Leopardi's conviction is in many ways akin to Wordsworth's belief, formulated in "Ode to Duty", that ". . .happy will our nature be, / When love is an unerring light / And joy its own security".[14] Nonetheless, in the explication of his ideal community, Leopardi, unlike Wordsworth, emphasizes that in modern times the wise man need not look to Heaven for moral support. For this reason, in external-

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[13] Leopardi, "Lettera a A. Jacopssen [June 23, 1823]", in Tutte le Opere: V, p. 438.

[14] Wordsworth, "Ode to Duty", in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ll. 18-20.

lizing his concept of fortitude, unlike Wordsworth, Leopardi relies on man's self-sufficiency, and, in employing the figure of the broom, he conceals no metaphysical verities within it but, like Shelley, celebrates the moral strength of a man who has found himself isolated but not defeated in the universe. However, just before the poet solemnizes the moral strength of the broom, he accomplishes a very important rhetorical modification.

In order to prepare himself for the final contemplation of his brotherly community of the future, Leopardi transforms the tone of his poem from satiric to contemplative and, by means of such a device, intensifies the lyrical appeal of his vision. Wishing to humble man, in a polemic vein, the poet compares the world to a tribe of ants crushed by a small apple. Like this nest of ants, the world too, the poet continues, could be destroyed by clouds of cinder, pumice stone, and rocks exploding from Vesuvius. Yet, after this analogy, having made clear that nature has no more value for mankind than for the ants, Leopardi assumes an exhortative tone, and attempts to persuade man that he can find comfort only in an act of solidarity. (Gin, 202-30).

At this stage of his analysis, setting out to show that mankind has always been the victim of natural cataclysms, and believing that, united, man can recover from the sorrow which nature imparts to him, Leopardi strengthens his ideal of universal love with the example of the eruption of Vesuvius eighteen centuries earlier. For dramatic purposes, the poet first introduces a poor farmer who, tending his vines, directs suspicious glances toward the fatal summit of

the volcano standing full of terror in the sky. Then he intensifies the picture of nature's hostility by means of an apocalyptic description. After a sleepless night, the farmer rises to be confronted with the flow of lava shining upon the shores about Capri, Mergellina, and the Bay of Naples. Snatching up whatever he can seize, he awakens his children and his wife and dashes off, leaving far behind his home and his little field. At this point, following the picture of the farmer's plight, the poet describes the catastrophe of Pompeii and, in this description, he includes the idea of vicissitude and change as further reasons for human sorrow. When nature acts blindly against man, entire empires collapse and people and languages fall into oblivion. In view of such events, the poet wonders why man should claim for himself heavenly rights: "Caggiono regni intanto, / Passan genti e linguaggi: ella non vede: / E l'uom d'eternità s'arroga il vanto" (Gin, 294-96). Intending to affect man's behavior with valid moral advice, the poet continues to look to the world for spiritual edification.

Leopardi's desire to instill in man the enthusiasm which he himself has acquired through a very intense process of philosophical speculation now becomes paramount. In "Palinodia", at the thought of the coming new golden age, he exclaims in rapture: "O salve, o regno salutare, o prima / Luce della famosa età che sorge" (Pal, 265-66). In "La Ginestra", considering the prospects which might arise from man's fortitude of mind and love, the poet expresses a similar belief.

Thus, nourishing great anticipation as in the first stanza of the poem, in the last stanza the poet again employs the figure of the

Bay of Naples. Snatching up whatever he can seize, he awakens children and his wife and dashes off, leaving far behind his and his little field. At this point, following the picture of farmer's plight, the poet describes the catastrophe of Pompeii in this description, he includes the idea of vicissitude and ge as further reasons for human sorrow. When nature acts blindly nst man, entire empires collapse and people and languages fall oblivion. In view of such events, the poet wonders why man ld claim for himself heavenly rights: "Caggiono regni intanto, / an genti e linguaggi: ella non vede: / E l'uom d'eternità s'arro- l vanto" (Gin, 294-96). Intending to affect man's behavior with d moral advice, the poet continues to look to the world for spi- al edification.

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CONCLUSION

In this study of the poetic affinities of Wordsworth and Leopardi, I have attempted to emphasize the heroic characteristics in these two poets while tracing a progressive development from a position of alienation to one of reconciliation.

Yet within this general pattern, the specific progressions of both poets are different. Wordsworth's poetic career is characterized by repeated reconsiderations of both personal and moral problems, a discontinuous progression in which the two initial poles of memory and hope are gradually depolarized. Wordsworth sympathizes extensively with the French Revolution; yet, when confronted with the atrocities of the demagogues, he withdraws from political action, and turns to the extreme rationalism of Godwin. Equally disappointed with Godwin's political ideology, Wordsworth becomes desolate and despondent.

His first attempt at revival involves the naturalization of his imagination, a withdrawal from political and social activity into a more rural isolation and the solace offered by Dorothy, Coleridge, Nature and Memory, as recounted in the later books of The Prelude. But his despondency is never fully conquered, as his reexamination of it in the figure of the Solitary in The Excursion testifies.

Facing the fact of death and thereby recognizing the deficiencies of his untempered nature ethic, in the attempt at

strengthening his moral position in the world, he is led to the reformulation of his belief in the goodness of man and to the humanization of Nature. He formulates a philosophy of duty based on the creed of Christian humanitarianism. The poems written between 1800 and 1805 trace this reformulation; as Hartman has said: "Wordsworth's greatest lyrics are acts of a living mind, open to the terror of discontinuity."[1]

In direct contrast, the poetry of Leopardi is the product of an aristocratic and reflective mind, deeply grounded in the classics and seemingly opposed to the experiential approach of Wordsworth. Accordingly, the works of Leopardi never display inconstant or abrupt development; rather, his poetry is characterized by a constant internal dialectic which causes him to vacillate between a position of cynicism and despondency and one of hope and consolation.

Yet, although Leopardi follows a different path than Wordsworth, a parallel progression can be effectively traced in both poets. In "La Ginestra", when Leopardi arrives at the realization that evil is universal, he moves from a position of isolation to the belief that man can defend himself against the hostile forces of nature by a reliance on universal brotherhood. As Walter Binni states: "il Titanismo, isolamento superbo e ribelle, diventa eroismo attivo, amore per il prossimo."[2] Although the specifically Titanic character-

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[1]Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814, p. 268.

[2]Walter Binni, "La poesia eroica di Giacomo Leopardi", Il Ponte (17 decembre, 1960), p. 1749. Clarifying the concept of Titanism which Umberto Bosco attributes to Leopardi in Il Titanismo e Pietà in Giacomo Leopardi (Firenze: Casa Editrice F. Le Monnier, 1957), and cor-

istics of Leopardi's poetry are absent in Wordsworth, nonetheless the overall result of Leopardi's final orientation is the same heroic humanitarianism which forms the basis of the later poetry of the English poet. Thus, bearing in mind the definitions of the Satanic and Promethean types which Thorslev includes in The Byronic Hero,[3] we can conclude that, at progressive stages in their development, Wordsworth and Leopardi reveal characteristics of both these literary prototypes, although in specific ways and to a different degree.

At the beginning of their careers, mistrusting the validity of political movements, both Wordsworth and Leopardi reject their society and, like the Foscolian hero-type, withdraw into isolation. Yet, nourishing faith in their poetical missions, they struggle to overcome their despondency by creating a reality sustained by the power of their imaginations. At first, because their attempts are too personal and peripheral, neither poet feels gratified. Yet, at a later period in their lives, continuing their search for hap-

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recting the positions of De Sanctis and Croce, who see in the poetry of Leopardi merely idyllic qualities, Binni emphasizes the heroic aspects of Leopardi's compositions, and reflects that such a Titanic attitude is the central constant of Leopardi's production: "Questo atteggiamento eroico si manifesta politicamente come ribellione contro l'ordinamento politico dell'Italia, idealmente come aspirazione a una realtà transcendente e sublime, e moralmente come nobile invito agli uomini di sfuggire alle ineluttabili leggi della natura mediante un patto universale di amore." (Binni, "La poesia eroica di Giacomo Leopardi", p. 1730).

[3] Thorslev, The Byronic Hero, p. 108.

piness, both Wordsworth and Leopardi discover a positive alternative in life by returning to it as apostles of the common man.

Disappointed by political action, they place their hopes in a revolution through poetry and within the individual, and, in so doing, reveal traits which are correspondent to those of the protagonist in Prometheus Unbound: they recover their lost integrity by means of a spiritual conversion from self-love to self-negation.

Like Shelley's Prometheus (although, in the case of Leopardi, without his specifically neoplatonic frame of reference), Wordsworth and Leopardi see exterior evil as existing in society and in institutions, and, in addressing themselves to mankind, they emphasize the positive potentialities of man and nourish hope that he can achieve a victory over evil by means of an act of love.

Thus, as exemplified in the later poetry of Wordsworth and Leopardi, the Promethean theme focuses on the belief that happiness can be achieved in the world if man learns to endure his destiny with humility and fortitude of mind. The thirst of Shelley's Prometheus for a happier moral condition among mankind is immediately comparable to that of Leopardi, who, in "La Ginestra", seeks to kindle in the minds of his readers a faith in the progress of mankind, brought about by love -- the only redeeming force in the world.

Likewise, in the poetry of Wordsworth, the spirit of love is expressed in intensely humanistic terms: he wishes to teach man to regain heaven by adherence to a philosophy of duty. Leopardi does not necessarily defend the principle of man's divinity, yet, like Wordsworth, he encourages man to fulfill the good aspects of his

personality here on earth. Admittedly, the humanism of Leopardi differs from that of Wordsworth to a discernible degree: what Wordsworth ultimately attributes to God, Leopardi gives to man; what Wordsworth finally sees as supernatural, to Leopardi becomes natural and capable of realization within the realms of human existence. Still, both poets have a common ground in their humanitarianism, in their ethical orientation to human development and social evolution, and in the pattern of their poetical development: from rebellion through despondency to a wise passivity and compassion for mankind.

Thus, although this analysis has only treated selected aspects of the poetry of Wordsworth and Leopardi, we can conclude that even these Romantic poets who are far apart in language and tradition exhibit significant parallels in themes and motifs. Although the differences are also substantial, they do not seem to be of such a nature as to profoundly counteract the concept of an international Romantic movement, as understood in this study and advocated, among many other scholars, by Peckham, Wellek and Remak.

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