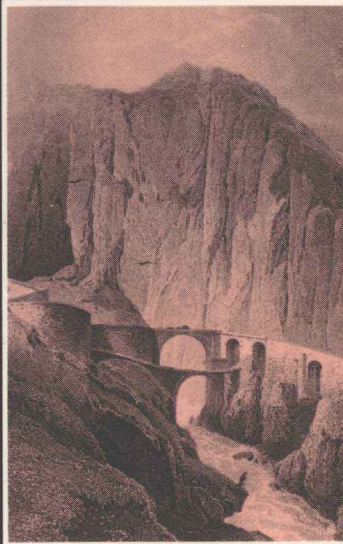
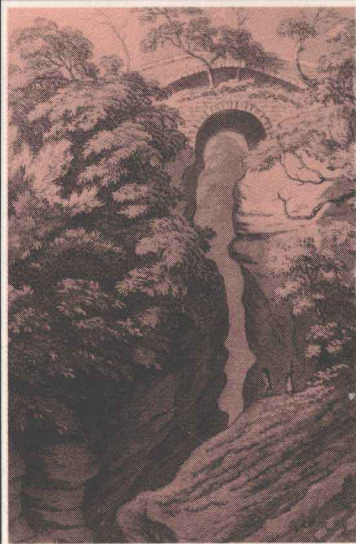
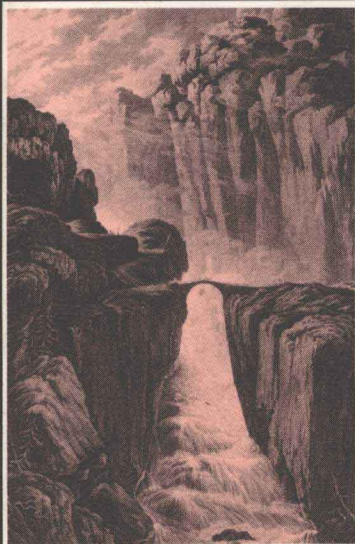


**GEOFFREY  
H. HARTMAN**



**THE  
UNREMARKABLE  
WORDSWORTH**

**PREFACE BY DONALD G. MARSHALL**  
Theory and History of Literature, volume 34

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# The Unremarkable Wordsworth

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Geoffrey H. Hartman

Foreword by Donald G. Marshall

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Theory and History of Literature, Volume 34

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# Foreword

## Wordsworth and Post-Enlightenment Culture

*Donald G. Marshall*

The appearance twenty-five years ago of *Wordsworth's Poetry* marked an epoch in the study of that poet and of romanticism generally. It was perhaps the last moment at which a reputation in literary study could be made solely by commentary on a single canonical poet. Hartman's essays on Wordsworth written in the intervening quarter century and gathered here are once again revolutionary, though their character and importance are much less likely to be perceived and absorbed. This difference tells us a great deal about the evolution of criticism, about Hartman's own career, and perhaps something also about Wordsworth.

Above all, it was the conclusions of Hartman's earlier study which were thought to be innovative. According to the common view, in Wordsworth the synthetic, creative and sympathetic power of imagination, nourished on a popular tradition of ballad and romance with roots in the great poetry pre-dating the Enlightenment, asserted itself against an instrumentalist reason, which in poetry took the form of a masquerade in the robes of conscious and merely willed classicism. Wordsworth found the true source of imagination: in nature and particularly in the poet's experience of nature during childhood, when he was most open to its varied and spirited influence. The language in which this recollected experience was transformed into the guide of later life and feeling derived from the ordinary language of men, particularly rural men, whose lives preserved the great rhythms of pastoral and agricultural life, recorded in and mediated by the Bible, anonymous folk poetry, and related literary forms. Hartman demonstrated instead an antagonism or dialectic between nature and imagination in Wordsworth. Imagination's power to draw the self into an autonomous,

“apocalyptic” transcendence terrified Wordsworth. Against its risks, he set the healing continuities and mediations of nature.

In this reception, the question of Hartman’s method in reaching these conclusions was overlooked or assimilated to a familiar model. Despite a few references to continental thinkers, he appeared simply to have read Wordsworth more closely and carefully and thus by a power of attentive sympathy to have escaped the clichéd and overhasty interpretation which imposed on Wordsworth the categories of a general view of English romanticism drawn chiefly from the history of ideas. Close reading again proved its validity against “high priori” historicism. But Hartman’s achievement was taken as a tribute to his critical gifts, to his sympathetic and intense attention to the poetry itself, not as the product of a self-conscious and philosophically grounded method. The intervening quarter century has dramatically changed the nature of literary study, and now nothing will be widely read that cannot claim a place in the spreading polemics of “literary theory.” Hartman has been a leader in this ivory palace revolution, and these essays intervene in a wide range of contemporary theoretical approaches, from psychoanalysis to structuralism, from deconstruction to phenomenology. Yet Wordsworth remains so much the focus of the book that “critical method” is strangely transmuted. It is not that Hartman measures theory by its usefulness for interpretation, nor even that he “tests” it against poems. Rather, he opens an interchange between contemporary currents and Wordsworth which has the reciprocal and dialogical character of genuine thought. It is questionable whether either the experts on Wordsworth or the experts on theory are prepared to enter such a dialogue.

Hartman’s watchword has always been “beyond formalism.” A doctoral student at Yale in the early ‘50’s, he stood at the confluence of the two great streams in modern literary study: German philology, incarnated in Erich Auerbach, and Anglo-American formalism, practiced by Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and W. K. Wimsatt. His earlier work—represented here by the essays on inscriptions and romantic nature poetry, on Wordsworth and Goethe, and on “False Themes and Gentle Minds”—brilliantly synthesized the two, anchoring formalist analysis in the poet’s concrete situation in literary and general history and animating historical scholarship with an acute sensitivity to poetic values and possibilities. In the general cultural upheaval of the late ‘60’s and after, many literary critics found formalism bankrupt or repressive and reached out for fresh ideas to other disciplines—psychoanalysis, anthropology, marxism, linguistics, structuralism, and the philosophical movement of deconstruction. But for Hartman, “beyond formalism” never meant, as it did for many others, abandoning the disciplines of close reading and rhetorical analysis or replacing them with the deconstructive art of tangling and untangling “textuality.” His book *Criticism*

*in the Wilderness* (1980) showed his acute sensitivity to this contemporary situation, which he characteristically presents not simply as an abstract clash of critical positions, but as concretely woven into the fabric of American and academic cultural life. The more recent essays in this volume repeatedly position Hartman “beyond formalism” in the Nietzschean sense of “jenseits,” where formalist reading encounters alien modes of thought, neither to repel nor submit to them, but to raise the voltage of reading by sustaining a polar tension. It is precisely from such confrontations that Hartman clarifies the autonomy of the poem and its language, not only as what escapes the terms of alien systems, but as a special quality those alien terms take on in the specific context of criticism. Through Wordsworth, we can read Hegel’s *Aufhebung* as “elation,” and perhaps even “English” Heidegger’s strange German.

What characterizes Hartman’s “method”—though it cannot really be called that—is that when he takes up his major concerns, like time in “Timely Utterance” or “the subject” in “A Touching Compulsion,” he cannot be said to take them either as simply thematic or formal categories. They are qualities of a peculiar kind which inhabit the poetry like the power of thought itself. Instead of calling what Hartman does a “method,” one simply wants to say he is *thinking* with and about the poem. Reading and thinking are here one and inseparable. Hartman’s feeling for language, his uncanny ear for sounds, evident even in the title of “Words, Wish, Worth,” provides the ground for connecting them, just as it does for a poet like Wordsworth. Such a ground has a perplexingly shadowy materiality, not due to any putative universal abstractness of language, but due rather to a strangely physical grasp of every utterance’s openness to and resonance with other utterances, present and—above all—past. Hartman’s gift is the power to hear echoes and to write a criticism as echo-chamber. This is not quite what is called “intertextuality,” for what is at stake is not the disseminated play of signifiers, but having “ears to hear.” This is evident in Hartman’s repeated concern in these essays for the kind of *act* an utterance is, and his combination of a precise grammar for naming these acts and his skill at rooting them in human situations and feelings carry him far beyond speech-act theory on the one hand and psychoanalysis on the other. Hartman shows also that the integration of the sound and force of language into a poem is a work of form. In his critique of structuralism and elsewhere, he keeps alive the historical reality genre has for the composing poet. But at no level of formal analysis are we dealing with a “method,” for any separation of the critic from the poet being read will interrupt and still the reverberations which animate the reading. Not that Hartman “becomes one” with the poet he is reading. Instead, he makes of his consciousness, paradoxically, a self-consciousness for another, and hence, a self-consciousness impossible to the poet studied. Self-consciousness is, of course, not



a method, but an intensification of consciousness itself. Consequently, when Hartman feels obliged to reflect on his own approach, he suffers the elusiveness and “embarrassment” (in its etymological sense, an “obstacle” or “blockage”) of his subject, instead of lapsing into the impersonality of a discourse on method.

The “speculative” relation between critic and poet I have suggested invites reflection on the particularity of Wordsworth for Hartman. One could say that for Hartman, Wordsworth is characteristically the poet of ghostly middles. His narrators are not quite personal, not quite impersonal: Wordsworth is a shadowy subject, neither the definite ego Keats complained about, nor the disappearing subjectivity of Mallarmé, and yet despite its shadowiness, we are in the poet’s mind, the main region of his song. Referentiality in Wordsworth has the same ghostly quality. He does not quite refer definitely, so that his “descriptive” poetry peculiarly blends “the fallen sublimity of classicizing or poetic diction . . . with the naturalism of elemental speech-acts of wishing, blessing, naming.” And yet any tendency to take leave of the real world for a transcendent or apocalyptic realm is chastized, and natural mediators are re-inserted. Temporality likewise is middle: we get stopping or fixation (and all the sound devices and rhetorical turns which arrest progress), and yet there is a struggling move forward, a sort of quasi- or emptied-out narrative gesture, the anticipation of a possible narrative. Wordsworth scrupulously tells stories about the dead, he fictionalizes very reluctantly; but the scruple and the reluctance testify to a hidden force or attraction. The style similarly works a borderland between ordinary language and extraordinary language. One cannot decide whether the characteristic “there is . . .” introduces unemphatic description or the aura of sacral attentiveness.

One reason to occupy and stress this borderland is not just its critique of positivism, which has few defenders anyway, but its more implicit critique of deconstruction or of what we might think of as its methodological definiteness. Hartman wants not to decide on all those separations—spoken/written; inside/outside; metaphorical/literal; and so on—which must be asserted to give deconstructive analysis its purchase. Hartman thinks about this issue not only in terms of consciousness and self-consciousness: for him the quest to limit self-consciousness has always been definitive of romanticism. Even more, it is an issue of the sacred and the secular. Is deconstruction a thoroughly secular mode of thinking? Derrida would not say so, but would, undoubtedly, undo the opposition of secular to sacred: certainly, the secular takes its meaning from its opposition to the sacred, so that “thoroughly secular” is a contradiction in terms. Derrida has entertained the possibility that deconstruction may turn out to be a sort of negative theology, and he has been willing to hear and even encourage the explorations of those who see in deconstruction a necessary cleansing of every idolatry. But even where negative theology devours not only metaphysical, but ecclesiastical and institutional presuppositions (as in Kierkegaard), it makes clear its maieutic or propaedeutic position. Derrida has not said what deconstruction

in his view leads to. De Man is perhaps even more austere. It is true that we might speculate that for him deconstruction unsettles every possibility of fixing a legitimated claim in language, a claim that could be translated into political, social, or even intellectual coercion. Yet de Man never actually said so, and in his last essays, he was already rebuking skeptics who seemed quite certain of what they did not know. His real dedication was rather to the reading of particular texts—or, rather, corpses of texts, oeuvres—that, as he with surprisingly cheerful naivete remarked, “interested” him. Deconstruction poses less a critique of the sacred from the perspective of the secular than the question of what the experience and understanding of the sacred could possibly be, or more accurately what experience and understanding of the sacred could become possible only in a “secularized” world.

For Hartman, as for Walter Benjamin, poetic forms emerge from the life-forms of human beings before the French and Industrial Revolutions. The whole burden of the Enlightenment and its ambiguous outcome—the triumph and catastrophe of the French Revolution; the economic advance coupled with the diurnal oppression of the Industrial Revolution—weighs on these forms, as it weighs on the life they bring to speech. One can scarcely ignore science and the new questionableness of all institutions. Jean-François Lyotard has spoken of the breakdown of the “grand narratives,” and indeed narrative itself, as a way of understanding human life, has been brought into question by theorists, just as practitioners have exposed its devices and by obstructing its conventional forms resisted its thoughtless consumption. In positive terms, these new experiences of human existence, so corrosive to traditional modes of thought and representation, demand their own responsive expression. Did not Wordsworth himself imagine a poetry which would have fully assimilated science? One could exemplify the opposition by Freud’s *Future of an Illusion* and Buber’s *I and Thou*. The central question for Freud is whether science can become ethos, can organize the conduct of human life, providing us with the assurance and the collective power of decision which enable fruitful individual work. He wants to answer that it can, but his language is so traversed with irony, with litotic double negatives, with futures merely imagined, instead of grasped with firm concreteness, that one can scarcely avoid the impression of a liberalism rather nostalgic for Voltaire than ready confidently to seize its destined place in history. Buber, on the other hand, can lucidly denounce the dried-out hollowness of modern life, prolonging a critique which reaches back by way of Nietzsche to romanticism itself. Yet he suffers his own evasions before a contemporary world all too susceptible to religious revival, to appeals to the immediacy of transcendence. Buber must insist repeatedly on transcendence’s “in-dwelling,” on its presence only through a glittering shard of mica, a tree, the love of one’s spouse. The relation of encountered object to ineffable meaning is not merely allegorical: we are to be impelled to action, not just contemplation. But can this



encounter be made difficult enough, demanding enough to escape resourceful self-delusion? The question here is the renewal of the symbol. For Freud, symbols are the mere instruments of purposive communication: if relation contains moral insights, why cloak reasonable claims in the fantastic imagery of outmoded superstition? Buber seems to attribute to the symbol intrinsic value, but even if the incarnation of meaning can escape the corrosive critique of the I-it, is our relation to an I-thou encounter solely one of obedience devoid of critique?

In Wordsworth, the elusive interplay between the sacred and the secular takes some exemplary concrete forms. We may focus, for example, as Hartman does, on the “subject” or self. The Enlightenment apparently replaced a religious conception of the creation of the subject with a secular idea, *Bildung*. Gordon Craig quotes the novelist Berthold Auerbach: “formerly the religious spirit proceeded from revelation, the present starts with *Bildung*,” which aims to bring the “inner liberation and deliverance of man, his true rebirth.” The contrast is between an abrupt and decisive foundational experience according to a single, teleological model (“conversion,” followed by an *imitatio Christi*) and the natural and steady formation of an open and unique character. But *Bildung* retained the sense of a mysterious and transcendent force in individual development, as in the rituals orchestrated by a hidden Masonic order in *The Magic Flute* and *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*. Yet this force was normally translated from a divine providence into the hovering presence of cultural tradition. The self’s foundation is abrupt, as in Christian “conversion,” but Wordsworth feels immensely the dangers of that abrupt and discontinuous self: its solipsism, its temptation to an arrogant belief that it is self-created, its emergence at the price of the loss of nurturing love-objects (perhaps the mother, perhaps whatever lies behind all sense of being “mothered”). In tension with this experience, Wordsworth does not so much describe as forge—in every sense—the development of his own mind. This is, paradoxically, Wordsworth’s tribute to the Enlightenment: imagination is set against tradition or history, just, strangely, as “science” was, and in both cases the formal idea of “progress” endows critique with a positive shape.

We can certainly put this in terms closer to poetic issues. In the Enlightenment, we find a tension between acknowledging any of the fantastic and enthusiastic strains of earlier poetry and the severe demands of a rational standard which required that poetic meaning be discursive or presented in firmly limned allegories immediately translatable into familiar ideas. The chief poetic virtue was not metaphor or imagery, but the capacity to convey with utmost economy a meaning that was complex, yet clear and condensed. The “classical” assumed its chief value as a means to this shorthand communication, this poetry through abbreviation. To put it this way is to claim that “neo-classicism” is less a living tradition than an assumed part of the audience’s socialization, a merely cultural fact, so that the audience is immediately limited and focused (“gentlemen”). Poetry’s

(and culture's) asserted claim to universality is exposed as a refusal to acknowledge any audience wider than a socially determinate class. Concomitantly, history itself is emptied out. It becomes absorbed into science, something with which it is ultimately profoundly at odds: history becomes a matter of fact, instead of a matter of meaning, namely, a great collection of stories we would not willingly let die. The echoes of tradition in eighteenth-century poetry are conscious devices of communication, that is, decorous conventions sustained by an act of will between poet and (narrow) audience, but surrounded by the steadily encroaching territory of immediate matter of scientific fact.

Wordsworth could see this much (as could some Enlightenment writers as well—Edward Young and William Collins, for example). And it is not quite true that his response was merely to reject all tradition. Scholars have stressed Wordsworth's consciousness of an underlying popular tradition, alive in the country far from London, and absorbing into its essential orality even such written works as the Bible and Milton. But it is the orality which matters most: Coleridge simply missed the point by claiming that whatever poetic merits can be found in ordinary rural language derive from the Bible read in church. Moreover, it is not just that this underground "tradition" dwells only behind the poetry as a ghostly resonance, it is that even this tradition is forced to pass through the archimedean point of the poet's subjectivity. As a consequence, it is difficult to argue that one must attend to anything traditional in Wordsworth: was there ever a poet whose work was less illuminated by knowledge of any or all of the history of Western culture? Such a knowledge simply gives us no foothold on what seems actually important here. That so much poetic power could be achieved without any cultural "backing," so to speak, remains astonishing. Nor, despite and in fact because of its "subjectivity," does his poetry rest on his biography, or at least not on the researches of biographers. Even when they uncover a sensation like Wordsworth's affair with Annette Vallon and the illegitimate daughter she bore him; or the painful losses he suffered from the untimely deaths of family members or the madness of Dorothy: even on these matters, the muted discretion of his poetry forces a recognition that Wordsworth's subjectivity is not confessional, but a mythic or more accurately epic creation.

We can therefore recognize in Wordsworth something characteristic of culture since the Enlightenment: the liquidation of the public sphere, to invoke the terms of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*. It is by now difficult even to imagine that sphere, still less to find a language that is plausible and concrete in which to speak of it. To say that the public sphere is the realm of politics is to invite the illusion of understanding, for the "political" here is something different from the particular and always transitory issues in which it presents itself to contemporary men and women. When politics and history return in the later Wordsworth, they are, as Hartman suggests, parochial—narrow and local, revealing

a lack of reflection and experience in any wider cultural or public sphere. In the quite terrible *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* and *Sonnets on Capital Punishment*, but also in *The Excursion*, one sees Wordsworth struggling to break out of his older style, reaching for large cultural topoi, and failing, lapsing repeatedly back into his mere self. The learning in these poems is as frigid as anything eighteenth-century poetry has to offer, and the poet's mind keeps drifting from the topic at hand to worry over what it all means to a poet young or old.

This sort of direct political or pretentiously moralizing poetry is itself testimony to the loss of the public realm. The displacement of the public by the private is visible in the sense that subject matter is unimportant, that there need be no agreement within a culture about what ideas, what symbols, what stories matter in an enduring way (and I repeat my assertion that the “neo-classical” agreement about these matters was merely contingent and quite rightly invalidated by the French Revolution). Too much of the claim on public attention depends on the poet's mere personality. That the mythic form of that personality we know as *The Prelude* remained unpublished is not the issue: publishing it would not have helped, for insight into the public affairs of human beings cannot be authorized by recollections of childhood. For the first time in history, so far as I know, a poet actually thinks his best work will be done when he is young, instead of imagining a career that moves toward its climax in an intelligence and craft acquired through long experience. The prominence given to youth, to insights whose value is claimed to lie precisely in their lack of reflection and experience, which are thought not to validate, but to dim or block insight, marks decisively the loss of the public realm. To get a sense of what engagement with the largest possibilities of the human enterprise in an era might mean we have to recall how Aeschylus struggles with the full dimensions of justice, how Vergil wrestles with the idea of the Roman imperium, how even Catullus incarnates the displacement of the aristocrat from history into a new world of eroticism. After Wordsworth, poetry has persisted in obtruding private and arbitrary experiences into the place where it itself feels it ought to encounter a public discourse, which is nevertheless lacking. Even Orwell had the greatest difficulty re-opening that sphere, though I think in his essays he succeeded in doing so.

Unquestionably, the source of Wordsworth's power lies elsewhere, and I think the only way to characterize that source is to say that it is religious. I am of course thinking of Augustinian Christianity's challenge to the obviously decayed remains of Roman public life. In place of the rhetor, who takes control of a situation by powerfully deploying a freely-invented discourse, Augustine puts the preacher, whose task is to find a mediating exposition between an audience closed within historical contingency and a canonically fixed text to whose letter and spirit he is bound to remain faithful (consequently dissolving the criteria which relate

hierarchies of subject matter and style). In place of the citizen or “legal person,” Augustine puts the individual self before God. And so on. I do not mean to discount the persisting power of Rome as a sort of determining after image, not only in the very organization of the *ecclesia*, but even in the counterformulation of a “City of God.” But the core of Augustine’s *Confessions* is its relocation of what had been a public religiosity of observances at once cultic and civic into a problematic and dynamic self, seeking its relation to its transcendent source and to the world it inhabits.

Wordsworth’s sense of his own situation is surprisingly parallel. While the *Prelude* traces imagination to its sources in childhood, it is the French Revolution which emerges as the focus of the poet’s own spirit when he returns home even before that event. In Britain, he finds himself out of sympathy with his government and even with his fellow citizens—severed like an “alien” from the prayers for British victory offered up in rural churches. This experience, Wordsworth remarks, was the first “shock” to his moral nature “that might be named/A revolution”:

All else was progress on a self-same path  
On which with a diversity of pace  
I had been travelling; this, a stride at once  
Into another region.

(*Prelude*, 1805, X, 238-41)

Yet the division here introduced between an attachment to his country rooted in childhood and a present conviction of the Revolution’s rightness does not produce blockage and despair. In fact, his political awareness rises above the immediate political circumstances, good or ill, and leads him to general reflections on the “management/Of Nations.” It is in this mood that he breaks into the great lines, “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,/But to be young was very heaven!” (1805, X, 692-93) Using a word of exceptional importance for him, “spots,” Wordsworth connects this political consciousness with a newly universal appreciation of nature: “Not favored spots alone, but the whole earth, /The beauty wore of promise.” (1805, X, 701-02) The passage concludes with another great expression of an essentially political faith: dreamers nurtured in the sublimity and beauty of nature could now “exercise their skill” at schemes of reform not on utopian insubstantialities,

But in the very world which is the world  
Of all of us, the place in which, in the end,  
We find our happiness, or not at all.

(1805, X, 725-27)

Wordsworth then looked at the earth, he says, as does an heir first visiting his estates, delighted at the prospect of improving and perfecting them. This fusion of an aroused political consciousness with his persisting feeling for nature is destroyed by Britain's declaration of war and France's launching of an ultimately imperialist and acquisitive counterattack against all Europe. Only in the wake of this political disappointment does Wordsworth elaborate a different frame for his experience, the opposition of "reason" to "imagination." And it is in the course of that elaboration that the fundamental element in his conception of personal development reaches self-conscious formulation:

There are in our existence spots of time,  
Which with distinct preeminence retain  
A renovating virtue, whence, depressed  
By false opinion and contentious thought,  
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight  
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.  
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks  
Among those passages of life in which  
We have had deepest feeling that the mind  
Is lord and master, and that outward sense  
Is but the obedient servant of her will.  
Such moments, worthy of all gratitude,  
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date  
From our first childhood—in our childhood even  
Perhaps are most conspicuous. Life with me,  
As far as memory can look back, is full  
Of this beneficent influence.

(1805, XI, 257-78)

There follow two exceptionally bizarre episodes, that of stumbling at the age of six onto an ancient and long-disused place of execution and that of waiting on a hillside among a single sheep, a blasted tree, and a stone wall for the horses being brought to bear him home from school at Christmastime. These moments are so obviously endowed with a sacred aura that I think one can set in Wordsworth the lure of a self essentially founded in a late adolescent or adult awakening to public, political life against the final assertion of a self whose source and development, it is claimed retroactively, are rooted in deeply cryptic religious en-

counters, dating almost exclusively from childhood. This opposition between the political and the sacred, interpreted in personal dimensions as an opposition between reason and imagination, constitutes Wordsworth's response to the Enlightenment. Since the challenge of the Enlightenment remains the core of subsequent culture, Wordsworth's response also founds his claim to continuing exemplary status.

What needs to be registered is that at this point in his career Wordsworth is not simply rejecting the Enlightenment and reasserting religious orthodoxy in the reactionary way widespread after the Revolution and documented in H.J. Schenk's *The Mind of European Romanticism*. His real interest is that he entirely accepts the spirit of Enlightenment critique of all organized religion. Indeed, "Nature," it seems to me, is invoked precisely to relocate the "religious" outside any sphere of "culture." What Wordsworth lives through is that experience of the sacred which can only be laid bare and made available after not just sects, but virtually everything that goes under the name "religion," has been stripped away. (Consequently, his later poetry seems to betray not just the Enlightenment or the French Revolution, but Wordsworth's own profound earlier intuition of the sacred.) If anything remains after such a purgation, it will be almost literally unspeakable. At once primitive and sophisticated, pre- and post-Enlightenment, it will evade thematic or doctrinal presentation. These intense and ghostly experiences will emerge only to a consciousness whose "culture" is held scrupulously in check. A plain style, purged of everything "poetic" and assured in its referentiality, made up equally of ordinary and indefinite language, will inexplicably yield descriptions possessing uncanny and hallucinatory power. Such a poetry baffles the ordinary resources of scholarly reading. A learned historicism will assimilate it precisely to the cultural topics and traditions it scrupulously evades. "Close reading" will seek in vain the precisely concrete linguistic structures for whose analysis it is alone suited. What is needed is a wholly different approach, one capable of focusing on the structures of experience and on language insofar as it is both the medium and itself an intentional object of experience. It is Hartman's phenomenological approach, which has known so well how to profit from students of religion like Gerardus van der Leeuw and Mircea Eliade, that, in my view, is most adequate to the historical and cultural significance of Wordsworth.

To see the force of Hartman's approach, we can examine some readings of a perhaps overread poem:

A slumber did my spirit seal;  
 I had no human fears:  
 She seemed a thing that could not feel  
 The touch of earthly years.



No motion has she now, no force;  
 She neither hears nor sees;  
 Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,  
 With rocks, and stones, and trees.

In "Irony as a Principle of Structure," Cleanth Brooks approaches the poem with an explicit generalization about poetic language and an implicit generalization about human feelings. The "lover's agonized shock" at Lucy's death is focused in the word "thing," to which the course of events has given a bitterly ironic sense. Replying to Brooks, F.W. Bateson stresses rather the loose or vague character of Wordsworth's language, which simply never becomes sufficiently rigid to sustain irony. The poem presents not contrasting moods, but "a single mood mounting to a climax in the pantheistic magnificence of the last two lines." E.D. Hirsch comments, I think rightly, that Bateson asserts a historically more concrete interpretation of what Wordsworth would actually have felt in such a situation. Nevertheless, the very word "pantheism" seems to me to insert far too sophisticated a cultural mediation into a poem which is perplexing precisely because its plain descriptive language directs us to no explanatory context.

In his celebrated essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality," Paul de Man uses the same poem to illustrate a large contrast between the temporal structure of irony and allegory. Lucy's death has demystified a prior consciousness, which now appears as "a flight into the inauthenticity" of repressing or forgetting human temporality. But the word "thing" was not ironic within that earlier consciousness: on the contrary, it "could almost be a galant compliment" to the woman. Its transformation into literal truth occasions only a "very Wordsworthian 'shock of mild surprise.'" The emergent consciousness is not ironic either: we have a "unified self that fully recognizes a past condition as one of error and stands in a present that, however painful, sees things as they actually are." His "insight is no longer in doubt," his consciousness "no longer vulnerable to irony." What is important, however, is that this change is represented as a temporal sequence, an incipient narrative pivoting on the blank space between the stanzas in which Lucy's death is contained and unexpressed. This "spreading out along the axis of an imaginary time" aims to "give duration to what is, in fact, simultaneous within the subject." De Man's critique of an analysis of romantic poetry based on the categories of subject/object relations and focused on the symbol is coupled with an analysis based on more fundamental, that is, constitutive categories of consciousness, including temporality and "forgetting" (Heideggerian *Vergessenheit*), and it is focused on the rhetorical figures of irony and allegory. Consequently, it feels better grounded than interpretation which moves immediately to the sophisticated and debatable realm of the feelings with which human beings do and can respond even to fundamental

experiences like death. Yet I think it is vulnerable to objections parallel to Bateson's, though correspondingly more complicated.

Hartman has commented on this poem a number of times. In *Wordsworth's Poetry*, he characterized its mode as "lying between ritual mourning and personal reminiscence." Lucy is a "boundary being," a human in whom we take a personal interest, and yet more, the harbinger of a realm of spirit. But she is seen so entirely "from within the poet," that she becomes "an intermediate modality of consciousness rather than an intermediate being": she is a muse-like figure closely associated with the movements of the poet's imagination. She hauntingly represents an "elision of the human as a mode of being." The illusion that she is a "thing" human time cannot touch is "rigorously betrayed" when death fulfills an anticipation which even retrospectively remains more incipient in this poem than a prophecy, a wish, or even a fear. Yet the poet expresses no shock: "The poem may have its structural irony, but the poet's mood is meditative beyond irony." We have instead "a new 'sealing' of the wounded consciousness," one which, for Wordsworth, has always "already taken place." In the title essay for the volume *Beyond Formalism*, Hartman takes up the exchange between Brooks and Bateson. He avoids Bateson's immediate leap to a category of systematic philosophy, but tries to give the stylistic and formal analysis of Brooks a concrete historical reorientation. He briefly sketches the history of the "pointed" style which infected even elegy and against which Wordsworth reacted strongly. It is again the poet's consciousness, but in this case his consciousness of poetic form and language within his historical situation which guides formal analysis. In the essay on Wordsworth and Hegel in this volume, Hartman uses the subtle relation between the first and second stanzas of the poem to elucidate the connection between "Aufhebung" and the "aesthetic" he captures in the term "elation." "A Touching Compulsion" finely names this same relation as one of "image to afterimage" rather than "illusion to the shock of disillusion." This perceptual and half-bodily category burrows beneath de Man's analysis of consciousness and its ruses. Once again, Hartman invokes the idea of a "seal" and of a "wound" which founds the self. What is new is the auditory speculation, if the synesthesia is allowable, in the suggestion that between the stanzas "an image of 'gravitation' elides the grave." This felicitously obtrusive verbal play certainly evokes the psychoanalytic criticism which is Hartman's subject in this essay and elsewhere in the volume. But while he remains in the orbit of Freud, even the categories of sexuality are treated phenomenologically, not biologically. Phenomenology here appropriates psychoanalysis for the sake of its power to liberate the ear and thus to free structures of language fully adequate to represent the structures of an incarnated self. Hartman's most comprehensive reading of the poem (in "The Interpreter's Freud," reprinted in *Easy Pieces* [1985] but not here) is also inspired by this complex relation to psychoanalysis. By "reading Freud

through Wordsworth,” Hartman again appropriates psychoanalysis for criticism proper but also arrives at “a critique of Freud” that sets poetry’s sense of language as virtually alive against Freud’s dream of a purified scientific language for interpreting dreams and neurotic symptoms.

Nevertheless, it may seem strange to say that the measure of adequacy of Hartman’s approach is its capacity to lay bare in Wordsworth fundamentally religious phenomena. It is evident that Hartman directs his attention to categories which are at once those of language and of consciousness. In “Words, Wish, Worth” in this volume, Hartman aims to reveal the structure or phenomenology of the “word-wish” in the form of fiat, of blessing, of curse. We may be prepared to see in these simply psychological modes. Where we find in Wordsworth what can be described as an attempt to convert a divine or willful imperative into a responsive or timely utterance, this may seem, insofar as the word “divine” is unavoidable, to belong to what is merely historically contingent, dead and gone, in Wordsworth. Hartman’s wager, however, is that, as he says, “A reading which recovers the strange interplay of cultic feeling and modern self-consciousness will also recover the precarious subjectivity of the poet.” This interplay circles around the pole of religion, but with a hesitancy and scrupulous diffidence that do not merely evade every lure of enthusiasm, ecstasy, and delusion of grandeur, but ultimately dislocate the temporality of human experience itself. It is difficult to know what to call this experience. As Hartman says, interpretation here tries to transcend the dichotomizing of religious and non-religious modes of understanding and of earlier (that is, prophetic) and later (that is, poetic-visionary) texts. Nevertheless, I want to insist on the claim that what we must call, lacking any less misleading word, the religious in the *text* of Wordsworth’s poetry maintains an indefeasible legitimacy and autonomy vis-à-vis the political in all subsequent culture. To test this claim, I want to turn to a writer who knew nothing of Wordsworth, and yet shows in a central modernist text another version of the symptomatic interplay between politics (conceived at its most fundamental) and a religious mode of thought incapable of articulating itself in any of its traditional forms, precisely because it could emerge only in the wake of an Enlightenment critique of religion, which the writer himself has fully assimilated.

The text I have in mind is Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s “Letter of Lord Chandos” (1902). To recall its well-known premise, Chandos is an Elizabethan aristocrat whose brilliant youthful works brought into language the whole of traditional culture by expressing his own self-conscious and unified sensibility. Yet he has ceased to write, having “lost completely the ability to think or to speak of anything coherently.” One might imagine that Divine Providence was thereby chastening the overweening ambition of his youthful projects, but he insists that all such religious ideas have no power over him. Chandos describes the gradual