set out to write a history of the origins and development of the human mind--his own and that of the human race. At the core of Wordsworth's poetry is an anthropological vision, explicit in the notion of The Recluse as a "philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society," a concern with how human beings, individually and as a species, made the transition from a state of nature to society. At once our first and greatest anthropological poet, Wordsworth found in enlightenment anthropology a new kind of narrative on human origins, and as he explored its possibilities and limitations, he found his own distinctive voice and style. In the shorter poetry and narratives originally intended for The Recluse, Wordsworth took up the "experimental" language of eighteenth-century moral philosophical enquiry, with its explicit focus on the observation of marginal individuals--idiots, children, villagers, and women, the blind, the deaf, and the mute--and "savage races" described by missionaries, colonial administrators, and travelers, and made it a primary vehicle of self-representation and self-understanding:

I breathed (for tis I better recollect)  
Among wild appetites and blind desires,  
Motions of savage instinct, my delight  
And exaltation.  

[Home at Grasmere, MS. B, lines 912-15]

Wordsworth saw himself as a poet speaking from the margins of English society--from an outpost of culture whose way of life was threatened; the methods and stance of Enlightenment anthropology could thus be applied to his own situation, as a "native" of the Lake District, and to his own intellectual development. Anthropological inquiry provided him with a pattern and justification for autobiography, for an account of the origin and progress of his mind.

The working thesis of this study is that Wordsworth's major objective as a poet was to write a series of poems that together would constitute a general history of the imagination, of the forms that it has taken over the course of human history and the role that it has played in the genesis and development of social institutions such as language, poetry, religion, property, and civil government. The different fields that comprised Enlightenment anthropology provided him with a model for how such a history might proceed. In eighteenth-century ethnography, geology, environmental theory, and biblical studies, in philosophical inquiries into the genesis of myths, the supernatural, and the idea of death, and in the speculative use of marginal individuals and cultures, Wordsworth found discursive models for talking about human origins.

Rather than applying modern anthropological approaches to Wordsworth's poetry, I have attempted to provide a historical reconstruction of the various concerns and rhetorical forms that shaped eighteenth-century anthropological thought.
Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry more. by Don Bialostosky. At the core of Wordsworth's poetry is an anthropological vision, explicit in the notion of The Recluse as a "philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society," a concern with how more. Burke and the Bakhtin School both proposed sociological approaches to poetry. Both start from an unsituated word for which they construe a situation. For Burke, the poet responds dramatistically to the scene of writing; for the Bakhtin School, the poem's speaker responds enthymematically to assumed social values and understandings. Research Interests