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## THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF THE *LYRICAL BALLADS*

BY ROBERT MAYO

A FRUITFUL but unfrequented approach to the *Lyrical Ballads* is through the poetry of the magazines. The volume unquestionably belongs to 1798, and seen in relation to the popular verse of that day, its contemporaneous features are very striking. We have been asked to consider too exclusively the revolutionary aspects of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Revolutionary they unquestionably were, but not in every respect. Except that they were much better than other poems published in 1798, the *Ballads* were not such a "complete change" as some writers would have us believe.<sup>1</sup> Even their eccentricity has been exaggerated. Actually, there is a conventional side to the *Lyrical Ballads*, although it is usually overlooked. It is by way of the general taste for poetry in the 1790's that this essay will approach the poems, and it will attempt to show that they not only conformed in numerous ways to the modes of 1798, and reflected popular tastes and attitudes, but enjoyed a certain popularity in the magazines themselves.

The general interest in poetry during the last decades of the eighteenth century, also, is a phenomenon which is largely ignored, although it is relevant in a number of ways to the new poetry of Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, and Scott. Something is known of the popularity of such writers as Helen Maria Williams, Anna Seward, Erasmus Darwin, W. L. Bowles, "Peter Pindar," Charlotte Smith, Henry James Pye, Mary Robinson, and Mrs. West; but except for Bowles they are usually dealt with summarily as a deservedly forgotten generation. For most historians they are the "modern writers" whose "gaudiness and inane phraseology" were repudiated by the Advertisement and the Preface of the *Lyrical Ballads*. But critical as Wordsworth was of his contemporaries, he cannot be completely dissociated from them. He belonged to their generation, and he addressed himself to their audience. Moreover, he

<sup>1</sup> "The volume [of 1798] undoubtedly was a puzzle, for it marked a complete change from anything that had appeared before" (Elsie Smith, *An Estimate of William Wordsworth by His Contemporaries*, Oxford, 1932, p. 33). The phrase is T. J. Wise's: "... the *Ballads* marked a complete change from the style and character of poetical composition then regarded as classic" (*A Bibliography of the Writings in Prose and Verse of William Wordsworth*, London, 1916, p. 31). But the opinion has been widely expressed. Cf. Oliver Elton: "They [the *Ballads*] are mostly reflective narratives, of a great variety of forms . . . There had been nothing of the sort before; the very faults were new" (*A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*, 4th imp., London, 1933, II, 64). Also Littledale: "The Volume of *Lyrical Ballads* made its appeal in 1798 to a small and unprepared public; it had to create the taste by which it was enjoyed" (*Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads, 1798*, ed. H. Littledale, London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1931, p. vii).

was not insensitive to popular favor. He repeatedly asserted in 1798–99 that he had published the *Lyrical Ballads* to make money; *The Ancient Mariner*, with its “old words” and “strangeness,” had hurt the sale of the volume, and in the second edition he “would put in its place some little things which would be more likely to suit the common taste.”<sup>2</sup> This is a fairly appropriate description of some of the contents of the second edition.

The student who wishes to consider the coinage of “the common taste” will find in the magazines of the late eighteenth century the richest and most accessible repository. There poetry enjoyed a more honored place than any other form of imaginative writing, and poetry departments were an inevitable feature of such serials as the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, the *Monthly Magazine*, the *Scol’s Magazine*, the *European Magazine*, and the *Lady’s Magazine*—to name only a few of the more popular. Together these five magazines alone published about five hundred poems a year; and their total monthly circulation in 1798 must have exceeded 25,000. At the same time a great number of lesser miscellanies in London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, and the provincial towns, sought to satisfy in the same way the general taste for verse. It was, in more than one sense, a period of poetic inflation. Seemingly, anything was acceptable for publication, provided it was not too long, and did not offend the proprieties. The average poetry department was a hodgepodge, which by and large provides a very effective measure of popular taste. Its effectiveness is owing to several factors: the great abundance and immediacy of the poetry printed; the flexible combination of both new and reprinted verse; and the prevailing reader-writer situation, in which amateurs wrote the kind of “original” verse in which they were interested.

As a result of the accepted interpretation of the Parliamentary Act of 1710, magazines lay outside the usual restrictions of the copyright laws, and the poetry departments of most miscellanies like the *Lady’s Magazine* and the *Universal Magazine* are therefore likely to contain a large number of reprinted poems, collected from new books of verse, reviews of such volumes, newspapers, poetical miscellanies, and other magazines. Such poems were read by—or at least exposed to—thousands of readers, and their influence should be measured accordingly. Pieces like Bürger’s *Lenore* and M. G. Lewis’ *Alonzo the Brave* enjoyed a tremendous popularity in the magazine world, being caught up and carried from miscellany to miscellany until their total circulation must have reached many thousands. “Because of the trash which infests the magazines,” Wordsworth proposed that *The Philanthropist* (The “Monthly Miscellany”

<sup>2</sup> *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, 1787–1805*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford, 1935), pp. 225–227.

which he projected in 1794) offer *reprinted* poetry exclusively, "from new poetical publications of merit, and such *old* ones as are not generally known."<sup>3</sup> The *Lyrical Ballads*, we shall find, were promptly raided in this manner by half a dozen magazines, so that the general acquaintance with *Goody Blake*, *We are Seven*, and other poems in the volume cannot be gauged by the number of copies of the original publication in circulation.

At the same time that they helped themselves from outside sources, the magazines also printed quantities of what was termed "original poetry"—that is, new poems written by the editor or his acquaintances, by readers, or by professionals. Some of the more substantial miscellanies like the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *European Magazine*, and the *Monthly Magazine*, published "original poetry" almost exclusively, and were willing to pay for it. *The Ancient Mariner*, for example, was first planned by the two poets as a joint contribution to the new *Monthly Magazine*, for which it was hoped that five pounds might be obtained. But many miscellanies were unwilling to remunerate writers, and sought rather to obtain contributions gratis from their army of readers. The number of amateur scribblers in the 1790's is legion, and they are mostly anonymous. They are also inveterate plagiarists, so that the first appearance of any poem in the magazines, no matter how it is signed, is always a matter of conjecture. The distinction between "original," adapted, and reprinted verses is never sure. The only certainty is that there is a confused and eddying flood of popular poetry flowing through the magazines from the middle of one century to the next—some old, some new, some written by hacks, much more written by amateurs, who endlessly copied the accepted masterpieces of the past and rang changes on the approved models of the day. The vast proportion of this verse literature is hopelessly mediocre, and deservedly forgotten, except that it provides the best available chart for the shifting currents of popular taste. Through it we can partly understand the ground swell of popular favor which helped to raise the *Lyrical Ballads* to eminence in spite of hostile criticism from the Edinburgh reviewer and others.

The student who approaches the *Lyrical Ballads* by way of the magazines may be struck first by differences rather than by resemblances. To most of the verse of the poetry departments the *Ballads* seem to have little relation, except to represent a kind of recoil. It is easy to see what the poets were reacting against in the Advertisement. The "common taste" of the miscellanies not only approved the "gaudy" and "inane"; it was in most respects extremely conservative, if not antique. There is in much of the magazine verse of the 1790's a literary lag of at least half a century. In his attacks on Pope, Gray, Prior, and Dr. John-

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

son in the 1802 Appendix Wordsworth was not exactly beating dead horses. These poets, together with Gay, Parnell, Thomson, Akenside, and Thomas Warton, were still the accepted masters for many verse-writers, amateur and professional alike; and most of the hackneyed elegies, odes, occasional poems, and so on which flooded the poetry departments of the miscellanies can only be described as the backwash of the Augustan era.

The insipidity of magazine poetry, however, is deceptive. It is not uniformly antique, and it is far from being homogeneous. Not all of the verses in the magazines are imitations of Gray's *Elegy*, Pope's *Pastorals*, and *The Pleasures of Melancholy*. A persistent minority—original and reprinted alike—are occupied with new subjects of poetry and written in the new modes of the late eighteenth century. *The Monthly Magazine* in particular, after 1796, was the resort of many of the new poets, but actually their writings, and imitations of them, are likely to be encountered anywhere. With the poems of this minority the *Lyrical Ballads* have a great deal in common, and although the resemblances are often superficial, they are numerous enough to show that Wordsworth and Coleridge were not out of touch with contemporary modes. A great deal of effort has been admirably expended in the last twenty years in developing the background of the poets' thought, and in showing the organic relation of the ideas and attitudes expressed in the *Lyrical Ballads* to the larger movements of eighteenth-century thought and taste. It remains still to suggest the many ways in which they also conform to the literary fashions of the 1790's. These we may attempt to describe roughly with respect first to "content," and second, to "form," although such a separation, of course, is quite artificial.

There are twenty-three poems in the first edition, and viewed in the light of what we now know of their authorship and composition, the volume no doubt seems, as Legouis says, "a somewhat random and incongruous assemblage."<sup>4</sup> But the incongruities were certainly less likely to "puzzle and disconcert" contemporaries than they do modern historians. None of the writers of the notices for the 1798 edition, at least, was sufficiently struck with this feature of the volume to remark upon it. They all presumed, without any visible effort, that the poems were of single authorship, and by and large seemed to feel that the collection was not greatly out of line with contemporary practice. It was a period of

<sup>4</sup> Emile Legouis, "Some Remarks on the Composition of the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798," *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Studies in Honor of George McLean Harper* (Princeton, 1939), pp. 3, 7. Cf. also C. H. Herford: "So singular a medley, touching, sometimes on adjoining pages, the grotesque and the exquisite, the pathetic and the sublime, was likely to divide or bewilder criticism when it came to be seriously judged at all" (*Wordsworth*, London: Routledge, 1930, p. 100).

feverish poetical activity and mawkish experimentalism, and a good deal of the lack of unity which Legouis and others have found in the *Lyrical Ballads* is obviously the heterogeneity of the literary fashion. In fact, compared with Southey's *Poems* of 1797, the *Ballads* are anything but extraordinary in unevenness of style and miscellaneousness of contents. Southey's volume moves with amateurish abruptness from one manner and one subject to another, whereas the movement of the *Lyrical Ballads*, on the surface at least, is fairly simple. Once the Ancient Mariner has gone his way, the other verses in the volume follow a more or less familiar course for 1798. In general, the drift is in several directions only—towards "nature" and "simplicity," and towards humanitarianism and sentimental morality. Without discriminating too precisely between these categories, the reader of that day would tend to construe most of the contents of the *Lyrical Ballads* in terms of these modes of popular poetry, with which he was already familiar.

He would, for example, if the poetry departments of the magazines are any index, regard as perfectly normal a miscellany of ballads on pastoral subjects (treated both sentimentally and jocularly), moral and philosophic poems inspired by physical nature, and lyrical pieces in a variety of kinds describing rural scenes, the pleasures of the seasons, flora and fauna, and a simple life in the out-of-doors. Subjects drawn from "nature," including both landscape and rural life, as many writers have pointed out, were commonplace in the minor verse of the last years of the eighteenth century. Viewed in relation to this considerable body of writing, poems like *Lines Written in Early Spring*, *Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree*, *Lines Written near Richmond*, and *The Nightingale* are obviously not experimental in subject; nor in *form* either, as a matter of fact. Considered as a species of poetry, the "nature" poems of the *Lyrical Ballads* were anything but surprising in 1798.<sup>5</sup> Novelty, of course, is a very complex and ephemeral quality in any poem or collection of

<sup>5</sup> A representative list of "Wordsworthian" titles from the magazines of 1788–98 is as follows: *The Delights of a Still Evening*, *Stanzas on a Withered Leaf*, *A Thought on the Vicissitudes of the Seasons*, *On the Singing of a Red-Breast Late in Autumn*, *Inscription for a Rural Arbour*, *Sonnet to the River Arun*, *Inscription for a Coppice near Elsfield*, *Sonnet Written during a Morning's Walk*, *To a Tuft of Violets*, *On the Month of May*, *On the Return to the Country*, *An Autumn Thought*, *The Lake of Wyndemere*, *Description of a Morning in May*, *Contemplation by Moonlight*, *To the Daisy*, *To the Primrose*, *Ode to the Cuckoo*. The exact citations will not be given, since there are literally hundreds of such poems. Underneath many of the "nature" poems of the magazines is the familiar conviction that nature is beautiful and full of joy; that man is corrupted by civilization; that God may be found in nature; and that the study of nature not only brings pleasure, therefore, but generates moral goodness. The nature poetry of the *Christian's Magazine* (1760–67), for example, has numerous "Wordsworthian" features.

poems, extremely difficult to isolate. It depends upon a thousand particulars, now vanished, which were once an unmistakable part of the literary climate. But the more one reads the popular poetry of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the more he is likely to feel that the really surprising feature of these poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* (as well as of many of the others)—apart from sheer literary excellence—is their intense fulfillment of an already stale convention, and not their discovery of an interest in rivers, valleys, groves, lakes, and mountains, flowers and budding trees, the changing seasons, sunsets, the freshness of the morning, and the songs of birds. This fact is a commonplace. Yet it is astonishing how often responsible Wordsworthians go astray in this respect, and tend to view Wordsworth and Coleridge as reacting with a kind of totality against contemporary fashions in verse. The question is not whether the *Ballads* were altogether conventional, which no one would attempt to affirm, but whether they were completely out of touch with popular taste. This was certainly the nineteenth-century conception of Wordsworth, who was viewed as a kind of prophet writing in the wilderness; and it is evidently still the view of some present-day critics and historians, who, struck by the phenomenal literary quality of the *Ballads*, tend to confuse one kind of change with another.<sup>6</sup> They have perhaps been misled by the ambiguities of the Advertisement of 1798, which seems to claim more than it actually does.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Catherine M. Maclean: “[Wordsworth] created new interests. But some of these have now become so much part and parcel of most people’s mentality that they have ceased to interest. These too have become hackneyed. Appreciation of the externals of Nature is now a commonplace” (*Dorothy and William Wordsworth*, Cambridge, 1927, p. 118). J. R. Sutherland: “[Wordsworth] himself ‘created the taste by which he is to be enjoyed.’ But I am not sure that he has not induced some of his disciples to lose their sense of proportion about Nature, and he is largely responsible, along with his fellow romantics, for that dreariest of all cults, the cult of scenery” (“Wordsworth and Pope,” *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, xxx [1944], 49). Derek Patmore: “Readers still under the influence of the eighteenth-century tradition and its stiff formality were not ready for Wordsworth with his cult of Nature and his poems about the humble of this world” (“Wordsworth and His Contemporaries,” *Tribute to Wordsworth*, London, 1950, p. 229). George Mallaby: “It is . . . a plain fact that in the world of literature Wordsworth ignored the fashion of the age and marched boldly forward along his own chosen path amongst the jeers of the idle and ignorant scoffers, until he had succeeded in creating the taste by which he desired to be judged. It is evident enough that the objects of his poetry . . . and the style . . . do not belong to the eighteenth century . . .” (*Wordsworth, a Tribute*, Oxford, 1950, pp. 27–28). See also some of the opinions cited in n. 21.

<sup>7</sup> How much is embraced by the “experiments” of the *Lyrical Ballads*? Is it the *language* alone? Or the *style* in a larger sense? Or does it involve also the *materials* of poetry—“human passions, human characters, and human incidents”? In Hazlitt’s account (in “My First Acquaintance with Poets”) the *Lyrical Ballads* are explicitly described as an experiment in language alone; and this is the burden of the *Biographia* as well.

For most modern readers, certainly, the most extraordinary poems in the first edition of the *Ballads* are the first and the last in the volume: *The Ancient Mariner* and *Tintern Abbey*. With respect to the first, there is no doubt about the literary unorthodoxy of the poem. Even though readers of 1798 would be well acquainted with traditional ballads, and modern imitations were common, some with "antiqued" language and orthography, *The Ancient Mariner* was definitely anomalous. Opinion was confused as by no other poem in the volume. But *Tintern Abbey* was quite another story. Although this poem, with its particular set of values and methods of expression, must surely be recognized as a seminal poem in the literary revolution which is traced to 1798, it must have seemed in its day far from revolutionary. Only two of the nine notices of the first edition mentioned it at all (whereas seven of them remarked on *The Ancient Mariner*). Southey in the *Critical* and Dr. Burney in the *Monthly Review* mingled praise of the poems with blame. Both found *The Ancient Mariner* "unintelligible"; but at *Tintern Abbey* there was no sign of surprise or bewilderment. To Southey the poem seemed supremely normal, and he quoted a passage of 46 lines. Dr. Burney described it as "The reflections of no common mind; poetical, beautiful, and philosophical." He objected, it is true, to the pernicious primitivism of the poem. But this was no novelty in 1798, and there is no indication that he regarded the poem as otherwise aberrant. With good reason—for, as we know, "poetical, beautiful, and philosophical" verses written in connection with particular regions and landscapes were one of the commonest species of poetry, in the magazines and outside. For more than half a century popular poets had been evoking in a wide variety of metrical forms, roughly equivalent "wild green landscapes" and "secluded scenes," and then reflecting upon them in the philosophic manner of *Tintern Abbey*. Many of these lyrical meditations are rhapsodic in character, purporting to have been written immediately after the experience, or (like *Tintern Abbey*) on the very spot where the poet was moved to a spontaneous overflow of thought and feeling.<sup>8</sup> Regarded solely in terms of the modes of

<sup>8</sup> Cf. "Sonnet on Revisiting ———," *Edinburgh Mag.*, viii (1788), 297; "Verses Written on Visiting the Ruins of Dunkeswell-Abbey, in Devonshire, by Miss Hunt," *ibid.*, n.s. ii (1793), 234; "Ode, Written on the Banks of the Avon," *ibid.*, xiii (1791), 509; "Sonnet, Written on the Seashore," *European Mag.*, xvii (1790), 70; "Verses Written Extempore, on a Fair Winter Night at D——y," *ibid.*, xviii (1790), 70; "Sonnet, Written on the Banks of the River Eden," *ibid.*, xxix (1796), 275; "Sonnet Written in Tintern Abbey, Monmouthshire," *ibid.*, xxx (1796), 119; "Sonnet, Written under a Lofty Cliff, on the Banks of the Severn, upon a Summer's Evening," *ibid.*, xxxii (1797), 342; "Reflections on the Ruins of a Monastery, near the Sea, at ———," *Gentleman's Mag.*, lxiv (1794), 937; "Sonnet, Written on the Cliffs near Margate," *ibid.*, lxiv (1794), 940; "Evening, a Descriptive Ode," *Hibernian Mag.*, Sept. 1792, p. 279; "Lines (Written at Old Sarum, in



eighteenth-century topographical poetry, surely *Tintern Abbey* is one of the most conventional poems in the whole volume.<sup>9</sup> Yet one of the best of Wordsworth's present-day critics can still write, in 1950, that "it is hard to see in the *Lyrical Ballads* any literary influence at all except that of the ballads [that is to say, of Percy's *Reliques*]."<sup>10</sup> The real novelty of *Tintern Abbey* lay where it still lies in all of Wordsworth's "nature" poems—not in subject matter and forms, but in sheer poetic excellence—in their vastly superior technical mastery, their fullness of thought and intensity of feeling, the air of spontaneity which they breathe, and their

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Wiltshire, in 1790," *Lady's Mag.*, xxiv (1793), 495; "Verses Written among the Ruins of an Ancient Castle," *ibid.*, xxvi (1795), 192; "An Evening's Reflection on the Universe, in a Walk on the Seashore," *Literary Mag. and British Rev.*, iv (1790), 459–460; "A Summer Evening's Meditation," *ibid.*, vii (1791), 145; "A Hymn, Composed in a Morning's Walk near Congleton," *Monthly Mag.*, ii (1796), 567–568; "Lines, Occasioned by the Recollection of Once Seeing Avondale, in the County of Wicklow," *Sentimental and Masonic Mag.*, iv (1794), 545; "Verses Composed in the Prospect of Ross, in Herefordshire," *Town and Country Mag.*, xxiii (1791), 330; "Ode to the River Coly,—1789 by Mr. Polwhele," *ibid.*, xxvi (1794), 264; "Netley Abbey, an Ode," *Universal Mag.*, lxxxix (1791), 389.

NOTE: Only a single citation will be given for each poem in the bibliographies, although some of them were widely reprinted, and in general not more than 20 poems of each kind will be named. In the bibliographies, titles of poems will be put in quotation marks to distinguish them sharply from titles of magazines; but in the text, titles of poems have been italicized for legibility. I am greatly indebted to the staffs of the Newberry Library and the Rare Book Room of the Library of Congress for many courtesies shown me in the gathering of this material.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Robert A. Aubin: "In the here-I-am-again motif, the retirement theme, the intensely personal tone which is friendly without being obtrusive, the decorative hermit, the incidental meditation which for once is not banal, the early recollections theme which admits fresh values, the apostrophe to the river, and the address to a person near to the poet, one recognizes [in *Tintern Abbey*] old friends in shining raiment" (*Topographical Poetry in XVIII-Century England*, New York: MLA, 1936, p. 238). Cf. Oliver Elton: In the *Lyrical Ballads* "the contributions of Wordsworth are signal, not only for the new scene of life he disclosed, and the new manner of language which he critically defended, but for his invention and execution of fresh species of poetry, the 'lyrical ballad' being one, and the meditation, like *Tintern Abbey*, another" (*A Survey of English Literature, 1780–1830*, ii, 52).

<sup>10</sup> Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford, 1950), p. 46. Cf. also Walter Raleigh: "It is the interest of Wordsworth's career, studied as an episode of literary history, that it takes us at once to the root of the matter, and shows us the genesis of poetry from its living material, without literary intermediary . . . . The dominant passion of Wordsworth's life owed nothing to books" (*Wordsworth*, New York, 1903, pp. 44–45). H. Littledale: ". . . they [the readers of the time] were hardly prepared for lyric poems that treated the simplest themes with a new emotional interest, which seemed to derive no inspiration either from the poetry of literary convention or from the ballads of quasi-popular origin" (op. cit., p. ix) See also the account of Cazamian (pp. 1004–09) where everything in the *Ballads* tends to be seen as a fresh poetical effort by the "innovators," and the only literary models which figure are those of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and the *Reliques*.

attention to significant details which seem to the reader to have been observed for the first time.

The movement of many of the poems in the volume is likewise towards "simplicity"—that is (in the words of a reviewer of the *Lyrical Ballads*) towards "sentiments of feeling and sensibility, expressed without affectation, and in the language of nature."<sup>11</sup> This was no less the vogue in 1798. The new poets of the day were everywhere striving for artless expressions of sensibility. Both Southey and Coleridge were well-known magazine poets in 1797, and recognized masters of "simplicity." *The Nightingale*, written by Coleridge for the *Lyrical Ballads* on one of the most approved subjects of popular poetry,<sup>12</sup> is in many ways a perfect expression of "simplicity"—in its mingled joyousness and melancholy, its appreciative pictures of "nature," and its air of complete sincerity. This poem, together with many of the songs and ballads of the volume, would be recognized by readers, and *were* recognized by reviewers, as essays in this literary manner.<sup>13</sup> Conversational informality and freedom from

<sup>11</sup> *Monthly Mirror*, vi (1798), 224.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. "An Evening Address to a Nightingale, by Mr. Shaw," *Aberdeen Mag.*, iii (1798), 248; "On the Nightingale," *The Bee*, vi (1791), 266; "Ode to the Nightingale, by Mrs. Robinson," *Edinburgh Mag.*, xiv (1791), 247–248; "To the Nightingale, a Pastoral," *European Mag.*, xxi (1792), 476–477; "To the Nightingale," *General Mag.*, iv (1790), 514; "Sonnet to the Nightingale," *Gentleman's Mag.*, lx (1790), 74; "Address to the Nightingale, on Hearing Her in a Walk in the Fields in the Night of April 25, 1790," *ibid.*, lx (1790), 554; "Address to the Nightingale, on Hearing Her in a Tree Adjoining a Church-yard," *ibid.*, lx (1790), 937–938; "Sonnet, to the Nightingale, by Miss Locke," *ibid.*, lxxiv (1794), 842–843; "To the Nightingale," *Monthly Mirror*, i (1796), 305; "Ode to May, or the Nightingale," *New Lady's Mag.*, i (1796), 219–220. This list is greatly abbreviated. There were scores of such poems.

Coleridge called his poem "A Conversational Poem"—which led the reviewer in the *British Critic* to declare: ". . . we do not perceive it to be more conversational than Cowper's Task, which is the best poem in that style our language possesses" (xiv [1799] 366). Compare the style of *The Nightingale* with that of the popular *Moon-light* (*Gentleman's Mag.*, lxx [1789], 448), which begins:

Here on this bank, while shine the stars so clear,  
Come, Lucy, let us sit: how tranquil seems  
All Nature! with what mildness from above,  
Yon regent of the night looks down on earth,  
And gives to every herb, tree, plant, and field,  
Of softer green . . . .

<sup>13</sup> "There is something sensible in these remarks [of the Advertisement], and they certainly serve as a very pertinent introduction to the studied simplicity, which pervades many of the poems" (*Analytical Rev.*, xxviii [1798], 583). "Many of the ballads are distinguished by great simplicity and tenderness" (*New Annual Register*, 1798, 1799, p. 310). "The endeavour of the author is to recall our poetry from the fantastical excess of refinement, to simplicity and nature" (*British Critic*, xiv [1799], 364). The opinion of the re-

artificiality or affectation were hallmarks of “simplicity”—so that the bald style of the ballads and, to some extent, the theory of diction advanced in the Advertisement would be likely to be taken as more or less aggressive attempts to achieve “simplicity.” Dr. Burney in the *Monthly Review* questioned whether verses so unembellished as some of the *Lyrical Ballads* could properly be ranked as poetry. But these poems were merely the fulfillment of a tendency which a great number of contemporary poets, without the benefit of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s esthetic and psychological theories, were already showing. To most readers this feature of the volume would seem less a revolution, therefore, than the excess of a new orthodoxy.

The strains of “nature” and “simplicity” in the *Lyrical Ballads* deeply blend with those of humanitarianism and sentimental morality, as they did in a great deal of popular verse. This aspect of the *Lyrical Ballads*, of course, has long been recognized, and has been fully explored in points of doctrine. What is striking about the volume, however, in relation to popular poetry, is not merely the climate of thought and feeling, but the landscape and the figures—the extent to which conventional imagery and detail have been employed by the poets. However much they may be rendered fresh and new by poetic treatment, it must be recognized that most of the objects of sympathy in the volume belong to an order of beings familiar to every reader of magazine poetry—namely, bereaved mothers and deserted females, mad women and distracted creatures, beggars, convicts and prisoners, and old people of the depressed classes, particularly peasants. For nearly every character, portrait, or figure, there is some seasoned counterpart in contemporary poetry. It is true that there were other species of unfortunates and social outcasts being similarly favored in the literature of the 1790’s—namely, negro slaves, blind men, prostitutes, exiles, foundlings, and natural children. Nevertheless, although the two poets avoid some, they do not avoid all of the way-worn paths of literary convention.

It has sometimes been recognized, for example, but more often forgotten, that Wordsworth’s lonely and forsaken women are in some degree stereotypes. To say this is not to deny that such figures may likewise have had some personal meaning for the author. Nevertheless it must be ob-

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viewer in the *Monthly Mirror* for 1798 has already been quoted (n. 11). In 1801, he found “Energy of thought, pathos of sentiment, and exquisite discrimination in selecting whatever is picturesque in imagery, or interesting in nature,” together with “a romantic search after simplicity” (xi, 389). The reviewer in the *New London Review* (I [1799], 33–35) regarded the remarks of the Advertisement as a misguided theory which confused a vulgar *simple style* with true *simplicity*. The *Port Folio* (Philadelphia), in noticing the *Ballads* on 17 Jan. 1801, referred to them as “a collection remarkable for originality, simplicity, and nature” (I, 24).

served that they were perfectly in line with contemporary taste, and did not receive in the *Lyrical Ballads* a disproportionate amount of attention. Bereaved mothers and deserted females were almost a rage in the poetry departments of the 1790's, and Wordsworth's counterparts, although unquestionably more interesting and endowed with some freshness, conform in numerous particulars to the literary fashion. Some of the women in this numerous class of magazine poems have been seduced (like Martha Ray in *The Thorn*); some have been abandoned by their lovers or husbands (like Wordsworth's Mad Mother and Indian Woman); others (like his Female Vagrant) have been rendered destitute by death, war, exile, and other kinds of misfortune. Some are homeless wanderers with babes in arms; others haunt the places where their loved ones died, or expire where their hopes lie buried. The poems which they frequent are described variously as "songs" "complaints," "fragments," "ballads," "plaintive tales," and so on (more will be said later about the forms of the *Lyrical Ballads*); the permutations run their full course within the approved conventions. But the subjects are all miserable, grief-stricken, and unhappy women, they are objects of sympathy and (very commonly) of humanitarian feeling, and their suffering is frequently rendered with great "simplicity" of manner and sentiment.<sup>14</sup> Southey's *Hannah, a Plaintive Tale*, from the *Monthly Magazine* of October 1797, will illustrate this class of poems and show their close relation to *The Thorn* and *The Mad Mother*. In this blank-verse poem of 51 lines, the speaker (who like the narrator in *The Thorn* has a kind of character of his own) sees a coffin being borne to the grave in a country village, and learns the sad story of Hannah. It is "a very plain and simple tale" of "a village girl," who

<sup>14</sup> Cf. "Eliza, an Elegaic Ballad, by Mr. S. Collins," *British Mag. and Rev.*, III (1787), 457; "Verses Written near the Grave of an Unfortunate Fair One, Who Fell a Sacrifice to Perfidy," *Gentleman's and London Mag.* (1794), p. 664; "Pastoral Ballad, by Miss Locke," *Gentleman's Mag.*, LXI (1791), 1144; "Edwin and Colla, a Tale," *ibid.*, LXVIII (1798), 609; "The Distressed Mother," *Hibernian Mag.* (1792), p. 88; "The Ruined Girl's Tale," *Lady's Mag.*, XX (1789), 492-493; "The Fugitive, a Poem," *ibid.*, XXVIII (1797), 326; "Julia, an Ancient Ballad," *ibid.*, XXVIII (1797), 619; "The Penitent Mother, by a Young Lady," *ibid.*, XXIX (1798), 38; "Ballad from Rannie's Poems," *Literary Mag.*, VI (1791), 465; "Cascarilla, an American Ballad," *ibid.*, XI (1793), 397; "On an Unfortunate Female, Abandoned, and Found Dead," *Monthly Register of Literature*, I (1792), 448; "The Lass of Fair Wone, from the German of Burger," *Monthly Mag.*, I (1796), 223-224; "Maria," *ibid.*, I (1796), 315-316; "Annabella," *ibid.*, III (1797), 52; "The Penitent Mother," *ibid.*, III (1797), 142; "Hannah, a Plaintive Tale, by Robert Southey," *ibid.*, IV (1797), 287; "Lamentation of an African Maid," *Pocket Mag.*, I (1794), 343-344; "The Penitent Prostitute," *Scots Mag.*, I (1788), 345-346; "The Forsaken Fair," *Weekly Mag.*, XXXIX (1778), 281. Southey's "Hannah" was endlessly reprinted in the magazines.

bore, unhusbanded, a mother's name,  
 And he who should have cherish'd her, far off  
 Sail'd on the seas, self-exil'd from his home;  
 For he was poor.

Alone, like Martha Ray, she bore the scorn of the country town. Her heartless lover neglected her; she pined away, and finally expired "on the sick bed of poverty," unloved even by her child to whom she had been too weak to express her love. As in Wordsworth's poems of this species also, the grief and anguish of the story is laid against a background of tranquil nature—in this case, the "cool freshness" of a country evening, and "that discolouring shade that makes the eye turn inward."

Not all the poems of this order are English in setting. Exotic backgrounds are one of the recognized variations, as in Bürger's *Lenore* (in part a poem of desertion as a result of war), the *Lamentations of an African Maid*, and *Cascarilla, an American Ballad*. American subjects in popular verse were usually treated romantically, but Wordsworth's *Forsaken Indian Woman*, although documented from "Hearne's Journey," is not completely devoid of exotic feeling. The poem was greatly admired by some readers in its day—partly for this reason, no doubt, partly for its popular subject ingeniously modified, partly for its modish "complaint" form, and partly because it seemed to present "a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents." In comparison with Wordsworth's, most magazine poems of this class seem hopelessly sentimental and derivative, but they are not so much different in kind as in degree. In both, for example, the suffering is rendered in terms of a kind of generalized human nature. On the other hand some of the new interest of *The Thorn* and *The Mad Mother* lies in the local and accidental. Bürger's *Lass of Fair Wone*, which enjoyed a tremendous popularity in the magazines in 1796–98—owing partly to its ballad "simplicity" and partly to the novel manner in which it presented the stereotype of the forsaken woman—is very general in feeling. The poem is reckoned one of the sources of *The Thorn*, and readers may have been expected to recognize Wordsworth's tale as a native product. Martha Ray is a kind of West-Country "Lass of Fair Wone," just as the Mad Mother is a sunburnt vagrant who knows the lore of the English woodlands. The sense of particularity in *The Thorn* is heightened by "the character of the loquacious narrator," and by the finely etched portrait of the thorn which begins the story. But other writers of verse tales and pastorals had begun to call attention to particular localities in which events were supposed to occur. Like dialect, local color was an approved feature of the new pastoral poetry.

One of the recognized consequences of desertion or of separation from a lover or husband, according to the conventions of popular poetry, was child-murder, as in *The Lass of Fair Wone* and *The Thorn*; others were death (as in the *Forsaken Indian Woman*), prostitution, loneliness, and poverty (as in *The Female Vagrant*); still another was madness. Wordsworth's *Mad Mother* was not the first of her kind in the 1790's. Demented mothers and distracted sweethearts were a spectacle likely to be encountered any time in the columns of the popular miscellanies. In Dibdin's *Poor Peg*, the subject, "Mad as the waves, wild as the wind," laments her lost lover, whose body is cast up by the waves at her very feet. In Southey's *Mary the Maid of the Inn*, a romantic ballad founded upon "a fact, which had happened in the North of England," the mind of the once-lovely and confident maiden has been unhinged by the discovery that her "idle and worthless" lover is a murderous brigand. In *Ellen, or the Fair Insane*, as in *The Mad Mother*, the interest of the reader is centered in the mental aberrations of the broken-hearted speaker. The ill-fated Ellen wanders in search of her lost lover who has taken his life in an envious fit. She vacillates wildly between the fear that he is lost to her forever and the illusion that he will come again. The poem is outrageously sentimental, whereas Wordsworth's is not; but it may surely be said of Pitt's as well as Wordsworth's (in the words of the Preface of 1800) that it "has a worthy *purpose*"—that it, also, attempts "to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature." The special novelty of *The Mad Mother* for late eighteenth-century readers would lie not in its general intention, nor in its subject, nor in its narrative method, but in its far greater degree of subtlety and its imaginative use of concrete detail, which give the poem some of its feeling of intensity. Poems about insanity and the plight of madmen, and poems illustrative of the mental processes of rude, simple, or defective minds, were having a slight run in the 1790's.<sup>15</sup> *The Idiot*

<sup>15</sup> Cf. "Mad Peg, from Dibdin's Will of the Wisp," *Britannic Mag.*, iv (1796), 377; "Crazy Kate, by William Cowper, Esq., of the Inner Temple," *County Mag.*, i (1786), 13; "The Maniac" (from Mrs. Robinson's Poems), "*Edinburgh Mag.*, n.s. iii (1794), 388; "Poor Mary, the Maid of the Inn," *ibid.*, n.s. ix (1797), 144-145; "Alwyn, or the Suicide," *European Mag.*, xviii (1790), 387; "Mental Sickness, a Sonnet," *ibid.*, xxii (1792), 307; "Madness, an Elegy, by Dr. Perfect," *Freemason's Mag.*, iii (1794), 437-440; "The Suicide," *General Mag.*, i (1797), 271-273; "A Mind Diseased," *ibid.*, vi (1792), 69; "Crazy Luke," *Gentleman's Mag.*, lxxviii (1798), 242-243; "Bess of Bedlam," *Hibernian Mag.*, (1790), pp. 471-472; "On Madness," *Monthly Miscellany*, iii (1775), 318-319; "Ellen, or the Fair Insane, by Mr. C. J. Pitt," *Scots Mag.*, lvii (1795), 96; "Moll Pott, the Mad Woman of Gloucester-Street," *Sentimental and Masonic Mag.*, iv (1794), 549; "The Maniac, by Mr. Charters," *ibid.*, vi (1795), 263; "The Idiot," *Sporting Mag.*, xiii (1798), 58-59; "The Maniac, a Dramatic Poem," *Town and Country Mag.*, xvi (1784), 383; "The

*Boy, We Are Seven*, and *Anecdote for Fathers* are related to this class of poems, some of which are in ballad meters and present a simple moral. Wordsworth's poems of this category, therefore, are not so much original in kind, as they are distinguished by a mature theory of psychology and a serious interest in "manners and passions."

*The Idiot Boy*, for example, is usually considered one of the extraordinary poems in the 1798 volume. There is considerable truth in this view. The poem, which is one of the showpieces of the collection, was somewhat daring, and it did not go unremarked by the reviewers. Five of the nine gave it particular mention. Opinion on the poem was sharply divided. Southey and Dr. Burney, of course, were hostile. But neither treated the poem as a complete anomaly. Both associated it with other "rustic delineations of low life," like *The Thorn* and *The Mad Mother*, whose subjects though humble can be shown to be somewhat conventional. *The Idiot Boy* was unquestionably a surprising poem, but less so perhaps in 1798 than it seems to students today who move directly from the major "pre-romantic" poets to Wordsworth and Coleridge. This fact is suggested by an analogue entitled *The Idiot* which appeared almost simultaneously with the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, in the *Sporting Magazine* for October 1798. This ballad, like *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, purports to be founded on fact.<sup>16</sup> In the poem, "Poor Ned, a thing of idiot mind," was the only child of an aging and doting mother:

Old Sarah lov'd her helpless child,  
Whom helplessness made dear,  
And life was happiness to him,  
Who had no hope nor fear.

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Habitation of Insanity, from the Pains of Memory, a Poem, by Robert Merry, A.M.," *Universal Mag.*, xcix (1796), 430; "The Horrors of a Guilty Mind," *Universal Mag. and Rev.*, vi (1791), 178-179. Some of these poems were extremely popular. Eight reprintings of Southey's "Mary" were observed, and there probably are many more.

Some poems involving children are: "A Father's Instructions to His Son," *Biographical and Imperial Mag.*, ii (1789), 231-232; "Upon a Child of Two Years Old, Crying," *Town and Country Mag.*, xx (1788), 335; "A Child to His Sick Grandfather," *English Rev.*, xviii (1791), 17 ff. In the last-named ballad (reprinted from *Poems, Wherein It Is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of Nature and of Rustic Manners*, 1790) the speaker is unable to understand his grandfather's approaching death.

<sup>16</sup> Compare "The circumstances related in the following ballad happened some years since in Herefordshire" (*The Idiot*), with Wordsworth's statement in the Advertisement, "The tale of Goody Blake and Harry Gill is founded on a well-authenticated fact which happened in Warwickshire." Many of the narrative poems of the day claimed to be "founded on fact." Three from the *New Lady's Magazine* are: "A Ballad, Founded on Fact" (1786); "Theron and Nancy, a Ballad, Founded on Facts" (1787); "Henry and Drusilla, a Ballad, Founded on Fact" (1788).

She knew his wants, she understood  
 Each half artic'late call,  
 And he was ev'rything to her,  
 And she to him was all.

When death finally took Old Sarah, Ned tried vainly to awaken her, and then stood "wond'ring by" as they wrapped the old woman in a shawl and carried her to the grave. After the funeral party departed, Ned lingered behind, dug up the coffin, and carried it back to the cottage. He placed the corpse in the old chair, eagerly built a blazing fire, felt her hand, scrutinized her face, and cried:

"Why, mother, do you look so pale,  
 And why are you so cold?"

What *The Idiot* crudely attempts to express is the pathetic inability of the child to understand death (compare with *We are Seven*, written, incidentally, in the same meter). But there is also much that recalls *The Idiot Boy*: the background of village life; the relation between mother and child; the interest in mental processes; and the incongruous mixture of the grotesque and the pathetic.

Wordsworth's Female Vagrant, as we have noted, is a kind of forsaken woman. But her real place is in another category. Whatever the causes for her change of fortune may be, in her wandering life, her abject poverty, her anguish of soul, and her friendlessness she is one of a familiar class of outcasts, the female beggar; and through that class she is associated with the long procession of mendicants who infested the poetry departments of the *Lady's Magazine*, the *Edinburgh Magazine*, and other popular miscellanies in the last years of the eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Some of the mendicant poems are merely portraits, which make blunt appeals

<sup>17</sup> Cf. "The Female Beggar, from Wordsworth's Evening Walk," *Edinburgh Mag.*, n.s. III (1794), 386-387; "The Blind Beggar" (by Peter Pindar, Esq.), *ibid.*, n.s. v (1795), 384-385; "The Soldier, a Fragment, by Mr. Anderson of Carlisle," "The Beggar Girl, a Song, by the Same," *ibid.*, n.s. XII (1798), 61-63; "The Beggar's Petition," *Gentleman's Mag.*, LXI (1791), 852; "The Beggar Boy," *ibid.*, LXIV (1794), 365; "The Beggar," *Hibernian Mag.* (1792), p. 560; "The Poor Blind Girl," *ibid.* (1795), p. 280; "Sonnet to a Poor Boy, by R. Anderson," *ibid.* (1798), p. 723; "Lines Written Extempore on Seeing a Poor Object Turned in an Unfeeling Manner from a Great House," *Lady's Mag.*, XXVI (1795), 384; "The Beggar Girl" (by T. Lacey), *ibid.*, XXVIII (1797), 567; "The Dying Soldier," *ibid.*, XXIX (1798), 378; "To a Wretch Shivering in the Street," *Monthly Mag.*, II (1796), 889; "Lines Written on Seeing a Negro Boy Begging in Great Distress," *Monthly Mirror*, II (1796), 498; "Elegy, the Dead Beggar, by Charlotte Smith," *Scots Mag.*, LIV (1792), 610; "The Beggars, a Tale, by E. S. J.," *ibid.*, LX (1798), 469; "Stanzas Written at Pisa . . . on Seeing an Infirm Old Man Treated with Contempt," *Scottish Register*, III (1794), 302; "Sonnet, Written on Viewing an Object of Distress in a Stormy Night, in London," *Weekly Entertainer* (Sherbourne), XXXI (1798), 19-20.



to sympathy for the poor, the aged, and the unhappy (as does Wordsworth's *Old Man Travelling*—more subtly); but others are narrative poems, sometimes, like *The Female Vagrant*, told in the first person and emphasizing the contrast between past joy and present sorrow, the horrors of war and its consequences, man's treatment of man, and the indifference of society. *The Beggar Girl* by "T. Lacey," in the *Lady's Magazine* for December 1797, is representative of this large class of poems, although it is a mere trifle. It describes in four ballad stanzas how Maria, "Misfortune's child," trudged barefoot from door to door, "deserted, friendless, and forgot," until winter "ended all her woes." The poem, by implication, accuses the indifference of society, as do almost all the beggar poems. *The Soldier, a Fragment, by Mr. Anderson of Carlisle*, a blank-verse poem of 94 lines, associates the misery of the subject with human perfidy, modern luxury, and war. The former soldier, now a "houseless wand'rer," once lived, like Wordsworth's Vagrant, in "rural Innocence and Peace" in a cottage, with a few fields and flocks; but betrayed in love, he "left his native meads," and found his way into the army, where he became a victim of war. Except for its technical mediocrity Anderson's poem would not be out of place in the *Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>18</sup> The story of *The Soldier* is told by the poet, but *The Beggar Girl*, written by the same author and printed in the same number of the *Edinburgh Magazine*, is a narrative in the first person. The subject of this poem has likewise tasted the horrors of war and seen the selfish luxury of "the rich." Some of these poems recall *The Last of the Flock. The Dead Beggar* of Charlotte Smith, which was widely reprinted, is a victim of "sickness, age, and poverty," as well as "cold, reluctant parish charity"; here the poet puts the blame squarely upon "the rich and great" and the "insulted rights of man."

Many of the pariahs of the magazine poets are pathetically old and sick, and some of them are soldiers and sailors who have fallen on evil times. In various ways this class of poems makes contact with other verses in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth's *Old Man Travelling* is not a mendicant figure, but he is poor. He would be viewed by contemporary readers as a study partly of old age, and partly of the effects of war,

<sup>18</sup> "The Soldier, a Fragment," begins:

Under an aged thorn,  
Whose wither'd branches Time had stripp'd of leaves,  
Save just enough to show it yet had life,  
And vied with him in years, he shiv'ring stood,  
Half shelter'd from the cold and beating rain;  
But from keen want and all its wretchedness,  
The taunt of Pride, and Poverty's rude storms,  
He seem'd, alas! no shelter to expect.

which were very much the literary fashion in the 1790's. In their suffering old age, both Simon Lee and Goody Blake in some degree would also be familiar objects of sympathy; and, as in many of the mendicant poems, the pathos is heightened in the former by contrast with earlier felicity, in the latter by contrast with unfeeling prosperity. The Ancient Mariner, of course, is a figure of a vastly different cut, but even he is not completely unrelated to the anguished and homeless old sailors of the poetry departments. No doubt some of the difficulties readers had with this poem resulted from their trying to view it in terms of this stereotype.

Goody Blake's crime against the property of Harry Gill is extenuated by her unfortunate circumstances. It was this which offended Dr. Burney in the *Monthly Review* as much as the poem's tacit acceptance of the supernatural. But such was the enlightened attitude towards crime which a definite minority of magazine poets had already adopted. This poem, therefore, together with the two poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* about prisons and prisoners, was quite in conformity with contemporary taste and interest. Coleridge's *The Dungeon* and Wordsworth's *The Convict* are both closely associated with those poems in the magazines which were viewing prisoners as special objects of sympathy and expressing the need for reform.<sup>19</sup> In Coleridge's and Wordsworth's poems the wretched darkness, stagnation, and spiritual poison of prison life are contrasted with the "soft influences" of mountain, wood, and water, and the "benignant touch of love and beauty" in the life out of doors. The ameliorative effects of nature are precisely the theme of several of

<sup>19</sup> Cf. "The Poor Debtor's Lamentation," *Argus, or General Observer* (1796), p. 132; "The Bastille, an Ode, by Mr. Thelwall," *Biographical and Imperial Mag.*, II (1789), 313-315; "The Prisoner's Lamentation," *Britannic Mag.*, II (1795), 335; "Verses written in a Prison," *ibid.*, IV (1796), 218; "The Female Convict, from Southey's Botany Bay Eclogues," *Cabinet Mag.*, I (1797), 418-420; "Lines Lately Written at Portsmouth, by a Botany Bay Convict," *Diary, or Woodfall's Register* (6 August 1789), p. 4; "The Debtor, by the Late Sir John Henry Moore, Bart.," *Freemason's Mag.*, I (1793), 74-75; "Verses on the State of English and Foreign Prisons," *Gentleman's Mag.*, LVIII (1788), 638; "The Complaint of a Transport in Botany Bay," *ibid.*, LXII (1792), 559-560; "Eulogy on Mr. Howard," *Hibernian Mag.* (1792), p. 88; "Lines Written by a Gentleman during a Long Confinement in Paris," *Lady's Mag.*, XXVII (1796), 374; "Idyllium, the Prison, by Dr. Darwin," *Monthly Mag.*, I (1796), 54; "Botany Bay Eclogue, Edward and Susan, by W. T. [Southey], Oxford," *ibid.*, V (1798), 41-42; "A Tribute to Howard, Written for the Use of a School," *New Lady's Mag.*, VI (1791), 93-94; "Lines on the Foregoing, Addressed to Mrs. G. W. Willson," *ibid.*, VI (1791), 94; "On the Necessity of Solitary Confinement in Gaols," *Scots Mag.*, LIV (1792), 76; "Lines, Written in a French Prison, in 1794," *ibid.*, LX (1798), 195; "On the Death of the late Benevolent Mr. Howard," *Town and Country Mag.*, XXII (1790), 379; "The Bastille, a Vision . . . by H. M. Williams," *Universal Mag.*, LXXXVI (1790), 151; "A Prison," *ibid.*, XCIV (1794), 368. The last-named poem draws a contrast between the "cool grot on verdant mead" and the "soul-appalling" prospect of the prison, with the languishing captives "left to perish" there.

Southey's *Botany Bay Eclogues*, published in 1797–98. The first of these, for example, printed in the *Poems* of 1797, and reprinted by the next year in at least eight magazines and reviews as *Elinor* or *The Female Convict*, is a dramatic monologue in blank verse, spoken by “an outcast, unbeloved and unbewailed,” wearing “the livery of shame” on the “savag[e] shore” of New South Wales. Like so many of the mendicants she is haunted by memories of past felicity in her father's cottage in rural England (there is a great deal in *The Female Convict* which recalls Wordsworth's *Female Vagrant*) and also by the degradation which she subsequently suffered in a life of prostitution and crime. But this is her consolation: that in this “barbarous clime,” with its “wild plains unbroken by the plough,” she may escape “the comforts and the crimes of polished life” and find a refuge where the healing ministrations of nature may regenerate her soul. The death of John Howard, the English reformer, in 1790 had brought a rash of poems about the conditions of prison life. Wordsworth's *Convict*, in its first version, was printed in the *Morning Post* for 14 December 1797, only a few months after Southey's *Female Convict* had begun to enjoy a great vogue. It was a topical poem.

For Legouis “the chief inner novelty” of the *Lyrical Ballads* lies in the “philosophical undercurrent” of the volume—its “protest against the out-and-out rationalism of the day,” as represented by Godwin's *Political Justice*. “The woes,” he writes, “that Godwin tries to cure by appealing to the intellect, Wordsworth strives to alleviate by refining the sense of pity. Sensibility stands with him in the place of mere logic. He fights for the same cause as Godwin, but his weapons are feeling and ‘the language of the senses.’”<sup>20</sup> But surely the sentimental humanitarian poems of the magazines had been fighting for the same cause for a number of years, using the same weapons. Moreover, if the *Lyrical Ballads* were a “democratic manifesto,” as Grierson and others have declared, they were one which had already begun to be somewhat dulled by repetition.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> “Remarks on the Composition of the *Lyrical Ballads*,” pp. 8, 10.

<sup>21</sup> H. J. C. Grierson: “. . . in a deeper sense these ballads were a democratic manifesto . . . he [Wordsworth] will try what poetry can do to change people's hearts and enlarge their sympathy for man as man. He will not write heroics for the amusement of a corrupt Society; he will write of simple folk in simple language . . . Therefore Wordsworth seeks his subjects not among Godwinian intellectuals, but among forsaken women, old men in distress, children, and crazy persons, in whom these instincts and emotions show themselves in their simplest and most recognizable forms” (*A Critical History of English Poetry*, London, 1947, p. 314). S. F. Gingerich: “No one can doubt the sincerity and the courage of Wordsworth in selecting such a group of characters [in the *Ballads*]. The account of how he came to make so remarkable a selection is not fully given in the advertisement . . . or in the prefaces . . .” (*Essays in the Romantic Poets*, New York, 1924, p. 121). H. V. D. Dyson and John Butt: “The chief interest of *Lyrical Ballads* is of course not in language but in subject. For the first time, not common ordinary people

The weeping shepherd of *The Last of the Flock* is not yet a beggar or a thief, although desperate poverty is suggested at the next stage of his decline. For eighteenth-century readers he would be associated with unhappy or destitute rustics, who are not infrequently encountered in magazine poetry. A great many of the pastoral poems of the 1790's, of course, treat their subjects in conventional Theocritean terms; others, following the native tradition in pastoral poetry, are more or less English in feeling. Some are indeterminate. In any case, country charm and "rural felicity" are the commonest notes sounded, although a few poems of this class make an attempt to approach pastoral life with some awareness of its limitations and its incongruities. In these poems we are sometimes reminded of the personages, incidents, situations, and themes of Wordsworth's poems of rustic life. For example, the peasant of Peter Pindar's popular *Old Oliver, or the Dying Shepherd*, "grown white with years," and "weigh'd down by winter's snow," who bids farewell to his bleating flocks may be a progenitor of Wordsworth's weeping rustic. *The Unfortunate Cottager* of the *Lady's Magazine* sets forth the miseries of the country poor. ("In poverty he liv'd, in misery he died.") And of course many of the mendicants of the magazines were men who had earlier known rural felicity and lost it. In *The Beggar's Petition* (endlessly reprinted in the 1790's), the old man who totters to the door with "trembling limbs" and "grief worn cheek" is a dispossessed cottager whom ill fortune has stripped of farm and family. Like Anderson's Soldier he once tasted rural felicity:

A little farm was my paternal lot;  
Then, like the lark, I sprightly hail 'd the morn!—  
But ah! Oppression forc'd me from my cot;  
My cattle died, and blighted was my corn.<sup>22</sup>

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merely—the eighteenth century had dealt well enough with them—but people of total insignificance, the outcast, the maimed, the betrayed, the solitary, the defective are fully enfranchised" (*Augustans and Romantics 1689–1830*, London, 1946, p. 89). Helen Darbishire: "Wordsworth's discovery of a new poetic world and the revolution he brought about in revealing it are taken now as a matter of course . . . He emancipated the poetic subject; and he brought back poetic language to its source in the living tongue. Thanks to Wordsworth, Browning could take as subject Mr. Sludge the medium no less than Fra Lippo Lippi. Tennyson could develop a rustic theme with even a banal simplicity . . ." (*The Poet Wordsworth*, Oxford, 1950, p. 56). Douglas Bush: "It was Wordsworth who, in that [the 1798 edition] and later volumes, showed that poetry could be written in simple language about ordinary humble life" (*Wordsworth Centenary Studies*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1951, p. 4).

<sup>22</sup> "Old Oliver, or the Dying Shepherd, by Peter Pindar, Esq.," *Scots Mag.*, LVIII (1796), 207; "The Unfortunate Cottager," *Lady's Mag.*, xxii (1791), 437–438; "The Beggar's Petition," *Gentleman's Mag.*, LXI (1791), 852.

His daughter (like Martha Ray in *The Thorn*) was then seduced by a villain and abandoned; his wife died in despair. Similarly, the two convicts of Southey's second *Botany Bay Eclogue* had both formerly been happy cottagers in rural England. The first had been ruined by a "testy squire" for shooting the birds which devoured his corn; the second had made an ill-fated enlistment in the army. Wordsworth's *Last of the Flock* seems to have been written to point out injustice in the administration of the poor law. Occasionally one of the unhappy rustics of the magazines is likewise seen in relation to some specific social abuse.<sup>23</sup> Poems like these helped to prepare the way for Wordsworth's peasants.

Nevertheless, although *The Last of the Flock*, *Simon Lee*, and *Goody Blake and Harry Gill* were not the first poems to represent unhappy and suffering rural folk, these three poems—especially the last two—seem to represent significant novelties in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. In their bald and homespun style, but more particularly in their sympathetic fidelity to everyday rural life, there is "nature and simplicity" of a different kind and intensity from that which is met with in the endless pastorals of the magazines. Their relation to these popular poems of country life is somewhat like the relation of the early Waverley Novels to the sentimental adventure stories of the Gothic school. Both Wordsworth and Scott professed a serious interest in "manners and passions." For the melodramatic clichés of the novels of terror, Scott was to provide effective equivalents in terms of Scotch life and history. Similarly, Wordsworth, for the stereotyped pathos and generalized poverty, hardship, and old age of magazine pastorals like *Old Oliver* and *The Unfortunate Cottager*, offered Simon Lee with his blind eye and swollen ankles, and the "canty dame" in *Goody Blake*, with her "wither'd hand," stealthily filling her apron with twigs. There was little precedent for this "sentimental naturalism" (so to speak) in magazine poetry, and it seems to have been these poems, as well as *The Idiot Boy*, which Wordsworth

<sup>23</sup> For example, "Elegy, Occasioned by the Present Frequent Pernicious Custom of Monopolizing Farms," *Edinburgh Mag.*, n.s. ix (1797), 217–220. In this poem the peasant introduced inhabited, in a happier day, the "neat small farm in yonder vale," but he lost his birthright of decency and happy humanity as a result of the encroachment of "monopoly." Like the family of the *The Female Vagrant* he was driven from his farm by the rich land-owner, whose "new fash'd mansion" has displaced the "simple cottage." See also "The Emigrant, an Eclogue, Occasioned by the Late Numerous Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland," *Weekly Mag.*, xxx (1776), pp. 399–400. In this poem the broken-hearted speaker bids farewell to his friends and neighbors and his flocks and herds. He once knew "sweet content" in the Highlands, but has now been driven from the land by the "avaricious [and absentee] tyrant of the plain." The same evil is attacked in "The Peasant's Lamentation on the Exportation of Corn" in *Pig's Meat, or Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*, iii (1795), 259–261.

was defending in the Advertisement when he begged the reader to consider whether they did not afford "a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents." The feeling of particularity in these two poems is likewise very strong. It is true that Wordsworth's rustics have important links with the peasants of Cowper, Crabbe, Burns, and Fergusson, and with the humble subjects of the jocular and sentimental verse of popular poets like Charles Dibdin, Thomas Holcroft, and "Peter Pindar,"<sup>24</sup> but in relation to the vast majority of magazine poems, *Goody Blake* and *Simon Lee* represent a modest innovation.<sup>25</sup>

So much for the *contents* of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Considered strictly in terms of subjects and sentiments, most of the poems in the 1798 edition, it is clear, would not seem anomalous or outlandish to contemporary readers. It is precisely in the direction of "nature," "simplicity," and sentimental humanitarianism that a minority of popular contemporary poets had already moved. And, in general, it may be asserted that what is true of the contents of the *Lyrical Ballads*, is true also of the *forms*. Except for the language and style of a few poems, supported by the theory of diction advanced in the Advertisement, and a few limited experiments with meter, the *manner* of the volume cannot be regarded as extraordinary (disregarding, of course, all considerations of merit). It was a period of great confusion with respect to traditional literary genres—a period which was witnessing widespread dislocations in literary taste, and a corresponding shift in opinion concerning the true nature of poetry and of poetic excellence. Among magazine poets, as has been

<sup>24</sup> Cf. "The Squire and the Countryman," *Aberdeen Mag.*, I (1788), 51–52; "The Irish Wake, a Song, from Dibdin's Will of the Wisp," *Britannic Mag.*, IV (1796), 57; "Paddy O'Blarney (from the same)," *ibid.*, IV (1796), 121; "Home is Home, However Homely," *Edinburgh Mag.*, X (1789), 144; "Gaffer Gray, from Holcroft's Adventures of Hugh Trevor," *ibid.*, n.s. IV (1794), 141–142; "The Duke of Richmond's Dog Thunder, and the Widow's Pigs, by Peter Pindar, Esq.," *Genius of Kent* (1794), pp. 39–40; "A Gypsy Ballad, by Peter Pindar," *Scots Mag.*, LV (1793), 243; "The Pedlar, by Mr. Dibdin," *Sporting Mag.*, IX (1797), 350.

<sup>25</sup> This difference should not be exaggerated; e.g., see "Joseph, An Attempt at Simplicity" (*Monthly Mirror*, VII [March 1799], 175–176), and the later discussion of the poem (*ibid.*, X [1800], 84–86). In this parody, which is one of several "imitations of our most fashionable poetry," it is impossible to tell whether the author is glancing at Wordsworth's "Simon Lee," or poems like Southey's "Hannah" and Charles Lloyd's sentimental tale in *Blank Verse* (London, 1798, pp. 40–47). The emphasis upon blank verse suggests the latter pair. The specific object of the ridicule is less important, perhaps, than the fact that it could have been all three poems. Clearly, before March of 1799 more than one writer of "fashionable poetry" had been combining a "minute observation" of rustic life with "exquisite sensibility." By this token both "Goody Blake" and "Simon Lee," as well as "Michael" (about to be written—in blank verse), belong to a recognized class of poems.

said, many of the minor neo-classical kinds were still popular—the ode, the elegy, the eclogue, the hymn, the epigram, the monody, the pastoral, and so on. At the same time, in keeping with the vital new interest in lyrical expression, there was a good deal of experimentation with short poetical forms of other kinds, of which the *ballad* was one of the most popular. (The *sonnet*, adopted by Wordsworth in 1802, was another.) On the whole the words *lyrical* and *ballad* in the title of the new volume of verse—whatever they may have meant when used in conjunction with one another—and even the word *experiments* in the Advertisement would be likely to invite rather than repel readers. And beyond, the *forms* which they found inside would represent a rupture only with what was antique in contemporary taste. Although they might find it difficult to define or differentiate all the various lyrical and narrative kinds which they were offered there, on the whole they would tend to view the collection as a recognizable assortment of poetical species. Ballads, complaints and plaintive tales, fragments, fables and anecdotes, songs and pastorals, sketches, effusions and reflective poems, and occasional pieces of various kinds—these were common coin in the poetry departments in the years previous to 1798.

Let us consider first the *ballads* of the volume. They represent one of the ubiquitous species of magazine verse. Self-styled ballads are everywhere in the last years of the century. The term is used by itself and in such combinations as “pastoral ballad,” “antique ballad,” “new ballad,” “Scotch ballad,” “American ballad,” “legendary ballad,” and “gypsy ballad.” We shall be disappointed, however, if we expect the poets of the magazines to help us to a clear understanding of the term “lyrical ballad.” By 1798 almost anything might be called a “ballad,” and very often it was. The word, of course, suggested traditional balladry—the folk ballad, the poetry of the non-literary classes, the celebrated verses of Bishop Percy’s *Reliques*. But it suggested also the broadside ballad—i.e., any verses of several stanzas which might be sung to a popular tune, or be sold in the streets—and, by extension, any song on a popular subject. In the magazines, therefore, any *narrative poem* in stanzas, or any *lyric* which hoped to appeal to a large circle of readers, or any combination of both, was likely to be termed a ballad. Half of the so-called “ballads” which appeared in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, the *Lady’s Magazine*, and the *Edinburgh Magazine* in the last years of the eighteenth century have no resemblance to the traditional balladry of the non-literary classes, nor do they even tell a story.

For example, in August and September 1797 the *Gentleman’s Magazine* published four poems which are described as ballads: (1) *The Ballad of James Hamilton*; (2) *Contentment, a New Ballad, to the Tune of ‘Gra-*

*machree,*' by Andrew Elliot of Greenwells, Esq.; (3) *Pastoral Ballad*; and (4) *A Ballad*, by Robert Burns.<sup>26</sup> Only the first of these resembles folk poetry. It seems to be a modern imitation of "historical" ballads like *Otterburn* and *Johnie Armstrong*. The story, which is set forth in ballad stanza and with language and orthography faintly archaized, describes the stirring action of the Scottish chieftain in defense of his queen, and the manner in which he avenged himself against the tyrant Murray. But the other three poems, though likewise designated as "ballads," are clearly not the same species of poem at all. *Contentment*, though written in traditional ballad stanza, is not a narrative poem. It expresses directly (i.e., "subjectively") the speaker's perfect satisfaction with the landscape of Greenwells; with his farm, his cattle, his horse, and his servants; with "Good Willy Brown" who stands "by the fire / To skim the boiling pot"; and with his wife who sits "smiling at her wheel." "If Happiness is not our lot," declares the poet, "'Tis sure the lot of few."

This is the gist of the whole poem. There is no action whatsoever—only the direct expression of an attitude on the part of the poet, who speaks (evidently) in his own person. Burns's *Ballad*, on the other hand, is a love poem; so also is *Pastoral Ballad*, written in the popular eight-line stanzas of Wordsworth's *Goody Blake*. But neither is essentially different from *Contentment*. If these poems are "ballads" so are Wordsworth's "Lucy Poems" of the 1800 edition. They are all essentially "subjective."

The two kinds of ballads, "objective" and "subjective," narrative and lyrical, are found in profusion, often in adjoining columns, in British magazines of the eighteenth century; they are found side by side in Percy's *Reliques*; and they are found together in the *Lyrical Ballads*—in the poems with a definite narrative element like *The Ancient Mariner*, *Goody Blake*, and *The Idiot Boy*, and in the lyrics like *Expostulation and Reply* and *Lines Written in Early Spring*, which are written in traditional ballad stanza (or something very close to it) and which affect a "simple" popular style. Which poems are the "lyrical ballads" proper, and which belong to the "few other poems" of the title page? For Wordsworth and for most of his reviewers the ballads seem to have been the narrative poems of the volume, of which there are about nine. A "lyrical ballad" (we infer from Wordsworth's remarks in the 1800 *Preface*) was a tale like *Goody Blake* "told in a more impressive Meter than is used in Ballads"—presumably in his five, eight, and ten-line stanzas. But he was only one of many verse-writers in 1798 who were using lyrical meters with ballad stories; and actually readers would be prepared to regard as ballads a number of other poems in the volume, particularly since they were in-

<sup>26</sup> *Gentleman's Mag.*, LXVII, 694–695, 692, 783.



vited to expect ballads of a *lyrical* order. For one thing, there might be “songs” in ballad meters. Viewed in terms of the practice of popular poets, consequently, the title of the *Lyrical Ballads* is ambiguous and confusing. Significantly, in the final classification of his poems, Wordsworth abandoned the category “lyrical ballad.”

It is customary to consider the “lyrical ballad” as a kind of literary hybrid, invented by the poets for a somewhat special purpose, which modified significantly the traditional features of the ballad species. In the eyes of many historians it represents one of the significant experimental features of the 1798 volume. “The poems were to be ballads,” C. H. Herford has written, with the air of explaining an ingenious innovation, “telling their stories in the simple, seemingly artless way which both poets admired in the *Reliques*, and in *Lenore*; but they were to claim rank as poetry, as song, and thus the volume received the title *Lyrical Ballads*.”<sup>27</sup> Other critics have followed the same lead.<sup>28</sup> But in addition to the error of construing the term *ballad* far too narrowly, this view of the intention of the poets overlooks the practice of a host of late eighteenth-century ballad writers, among them the author of *Lenore*, who sought to claim for their poems “rank as poetry, as song,” while “telling their stories.” In some of these poems the narrative element is reduced to a mere scaffolding in which the “lyrical” passage is, as it were, suspended—as, for example, in *Julia, an Ancient Ballad of the Lady’s Magazine* for 1797. In this poem, written in the eight-line stanzas of *Goody Blake*, the “hapless Julia” makes her way in the first stanza to her lover’s grave; in the five succeeding stanzas she laments her loss directly in the familiar “complaint” form; in the seventh we are told that she expires in grief. Technically, therefore, *Julia* is a narrative poem; in however elementary a form, it exhibits character in relation to action. But the real intention of the poem is obviously “lyrical,” however ineptly carried out. The poem is a “lyrical ballad,” although the term itself seems to have been invented by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

<sup>27</sup> Wordsworth, p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Littledale: “Nor was the diction the only new thing about these *Lyrical Ballads*, although it was the difference most dwelt upon in the Advertisement prefixed to the collection. They were distinguished no less by a special choice of subject matter and a special mode of treatment” (*Wordsworth and Coleridge*, p. viii). Oliver Elton: “He [Wordsworth] was the greatest inventor, between Gray and Shelley, of poetical forms; a service which his campaign for a simpler diction has too much obscured . . . the short ‘lyrical ballad,’ the blank verse tale of middle length, the long psychological poem in epic guise, were discoveries . . .” (*A Survey of English Literature*, II, 63). Helen Darbishire: “Ballads had a vogue in the 18th century. Collectors published anthologies of traditional ballads, and threw in modern lyrics . . . Wordsworth, with no antiquarian interest, created a new form of his own, and in so doing achieved poetry of highest value both in its intrinsic power and in its far-reaching influence” (*The Poet Wordsworth*, p. 44).

A less extreme example than *Julia*, but one closer in its blending of narrative and lyrical elements to some of Wordsworth's ballads, is *Laura, a Ballad, by a Young Lady of Fifteen*, from the same magazine a few months earlier. This poem describes an edifying episode in the life of the "youthful, rich, and fair" heroine. She was accosted in "a beauteous bow'r" of flowers by a distressed cottager seeking aid for her sick husband and dying children. The "haughty Laura" spurned these entreaties. But when she witnessed the charity of "a rustic miller," she felt shame for her harshness, and begged forgiveness of the woman she had scorned.

Take, then, this purse; give me no thanks—  
 I grieve I have no more;  
 That gen'rous rustic taught me now,  
 What ne'er I knew before:

That riches are but lent to us,  
 To lib'rally be given;  
 And, when in charity employ'd,  
 It paves our way to heav'n.<sup>29</sup>

The moral of this fable, and the manner in which the incident is represented, recall Wordsworth's *Simon Lee*, and some of the other *Lyrical Ballads*, though it is far more naive in every respect. In the first place, the poem tends constantly to linger on the "lyrical" possibilities of the moment: the "beauteous bow'r" of Laura (14 lines), the complaint of the cottager (10 lines), Laura's feeling of remorse (12 lines), and so on. Secondly, the action itself turns on a trivial event which has significance only in climate of sensibility. It is Laura's emotion, her sudden insight into her selfishness, which is intended to distinguish a situation otherwise commonplace. When Wordsworth writes, in the 1800 *Preface*, "Another circumstance . . . distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling," he is probably thinking of *Alonzo the Brave, Osric the Lion*, and other "idle and extravagant stories in verse." For many years, certainly, among writers of sensibility, in prose and verse alike, it had been a fundamental tenet that feeling alone was what gave importance to action and situation. It is certainly true of poems like *Laura*, *Hannah*, and *The Female Convict*. The only essential difference is that *Simon Lee* succeeds, whereas these poems fail. Perhaps that is what Wordsworth meant; or merely that *he* "looked more steadily at his subject."

The more one reads the minor poetry of the magazines from 1788 to

<sup>29</sup> "Julia, an Ancient Ballad," *Lady's Mag.*, xxviii (1797), 619; "Laura, a Ballad, by a Young Lady of Fifteen," *ibid.*, xxvii (1796), 566-567.

1798, the more it is impossible to escape the impression that the concept of the “lyrical ballad” does not represent a significant innovation in 1798, nor as a term is it particularly appropriate to the contents of this volume of poems. Perhaps the title was chosen casually. Perhaps it was designed to be nondescript—uniting poems of diverse subjects and kinds. Perhaps it was meant to suggest that the poems might be popular, and promised that they would eschew the *recherché* and the ultra-refined. Certainly as titles went in the years before 1798, this one was likely to surprise nobody.<sup>30</sup>

The “ballad” *Julia* of the *Lady’s Magazine* described above might with equal appropriateness have been called a “complaint,” another lyrical kind employed in the *Ballads*. The “complaint” is a lyrical poem which directly expresses grief, and melancholy, or resentment on the part of some imaginary character who has been disappointed in love, deserted by a lover or friend, bereft of a husband, lover, or child, or otherwise rendered miserable by circumstances.<sup>31</sup> A variety of meters were typically used in complaints; but the appeal to the reader’s sympathies was always made in the first person, and there was some implied narrative situation. For example, in *The Wretched Sailor’s Complaint* in the *Literary Magazine*

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Lyric Odes for the Year 1785*, by Peter Pindar, Esq., 1785; *Sonnets, with Other Poems*, by W. L. Bowles, 3rd ed., 1794; *Miscellaneous Poems*, 1794; *Poems, Lyric and Pastoral*, by Edward Williams, 1794; *Sonnets and Other Poems*, by S. E. Brydges, 1795; *Elegaic Sonnets and Other Poems*, 1795; *Poems, Chiefly Dramatic and Lyric*, Dublin, 1796; *Elegaic Stanzas*, by the Rev. W. L. Bowles, 1796; *Sonnets, and Other Small Poems*, 1797; *Lyric Poems*, by James Mercer, 1797; *English Lyrics*, 1797. “Lyric odes,” “lyric effusions,” and “lyric stanzas” were fairly common in the magazines.

The terms used by reviewers to describe some of these volumes of poetry in the 1790’s often make them seem startling prefigurations of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. “Complaint of a Negro Man, Deserted by his Master,” *Attic Miscellany*, I (1790), 416; “The Poor Negro Beggar’s Petition and Complaint,” *The Bee*, III (1791), 65; “Matilda’s Complaint, a Love Elegy,” *European Mag.*, XXIX (1796), 274–275; “A Shepherd’s Complaint to his Lamb, in the Manner of Shenstone,” *ibid.*, XXXI (1797), 37; “The Cadet’s Complaint,” *ibid.*, XXXII (1797), 342–344; “The African’s Complaint on-board a Slave Ship,” *Gentleman’s Mag.*, LXIII (1793), 749; “The Captive’s Complaint,” *Hibernian Mag.* (1798), p. 184; “Damon’s Complaint, a Pastoral,” *Lady’s Mag.*, XIX (1788), 541–542; “Nellie’s Complaint, a Ballad, by J. Thelwall,” *ibid.*, XXVI (1795), 47; “The Complaint,” *ibid.*, XXVI (1795), 336; “The Complaint,” *Literary Mag.*, I (1788), 388; “The Wretched Sailor’s Complaint,” *ibid.*, II (1789), 137–138; “The Negro’s Complaint, by Mr. Cowper,” *ibid.*, III (1789), 378; “The Negro’s Complaint,” by “R.B.,” *Town and Country Mag.*, XXIV (1792), 184; “Thalia’s Complaint,” *Universal Mag.*, LXXXIII (1788), 98; “The Complaint,” *ibid.*, LXXXIV (1789), 153; “Marian’s Complaint, by Peter Pindar,” *ibid.*, XCV (1794), 376; “Anna’s Complaint, or the Miseries of War, Written in the Isle of Thanet, 1794, by Mrs. Moody, a Ballad,” *ibid.*, XCVI (1795), 205–206; “The Complaint of a Piano-Forte for the Absence of Its Mistress,” *ibid.*, XCVIII (1796), 215; “Elegy, the Complaint of a Circassian Slave, Confined in the Ottoman Seraglio,” *ibid.*, XCIX (1796), 55–56.

of 1789 the speaker who invokes the sympathy of the reader is a "wretched tar," oppressed by want, maimed and friendless, wandering as a beggar from door to door. He contrasts the "better days" of his youth and the glorious actions in which he once engaged against the French, with his present distress, and begs that "heaven will make his misery short." Though far inferior in interest, this poem is basically the same species as Wordsworth's *Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman*, which represents a native American, deserted by her husband and her tribe, bereft of her child, and left to die in the wilderness. In her loneliness, her despair, her resentment, her grief at the loss of her child, and her yearning for a hasty death she runs true to form. In response to the humanitarian urges of the day, complaints were very often designed to serve some edifying purpose, as *Anna's Complaint, or the Miseries of War* or *The Complaint of a Transport in Botany Bay*. There is little difference between these poems and the other humanitarian poems which have already been discussed, except that the social abuse or offending institution is seen through the eyes of the suffering victim, who appeals directly to the reader. Many of the complainers were beggars; and consequently, although it is not so designated, Wordsworth's *Female Vagrant* is a kind of complaint. So likewise are *The Mad Mother* and *The Last of the Flock*. These poems readers would tend to construe in these familiar terms. The "complaint" is the lyrical equivalent of the "plaintive tale"—any pathetic story told in a simple, unaffected manner, such as Southey's *Hannah, a Plaintive Tale*, Wordsworth's *Thorn*, or Coleridge's *Foster Mother's Tale*.

The last-named, however, is more properly classified as a "fragment." "Fragments" of one kind or another were extremely popular in the magazines for a number of years previous to 1798, both in prose and in verse.<sup>32</sup> Strictly speaking a fragment was a scene or episode detached from some larger work, usually imaginary. There was a good deal of variety in

<sup>32</sup> Cf. "The Soldier's Funeral, a Fragment," *Britannic Mag.*, vi (1798), 409-410; "The Curate, a Fragment," *Edinburgh Mag.*, viii (1788), 289; "The Soldier, a Fragment, by Mr. Anderson of Carlisle," *ibid.*, n.s. xii (1798), 61-62; "The Bedesman on Nith-side, a Fragment," *ibid.*, vii (1788), 67-68; "An Elegaic Fragment upon a Country Pastor," *Gentleman's Mag.*, lxiv (1794), 165; "The Blind Man, a Fragment [in dialogue], from Poetical Sketches, by Anne B——," *ibid.*, lxxv (1795), 325; "A Fragment," *ibid.*, lxxviii (1798), 519-520; "A Fragment," *Hibernian Mag.*, (1792), p. 183; "The Mother, a Fragment," *ibid.* (1798), 725; "A Pathetic Fragment, by the Late Unfortunate Miss Whitman," *Literary Mag.*, xi (1793), 155-156; "Sir Hubert and Elfrida, a Fragment, in Imitation of the German, by I. T. Hughes," *Monthly Mirror*, v (1798), 235-239; "Maria, a Sentimental Fragment" [in prose dialogue], *Pocket Mag.*, ii (1795), 112; "Night, or the Hermit's Tale, a Fragment," *ibid.*, iii (1795), 196-198; "Written in London, a Fragment, by Sir John Ramsay," *ibid.*, iii (1795), 339-340; "Autumn, a Fragment, Written in Novemb.," *Town and Country Mag.*, xxv (1793), 39.

subject and manner, but the type was fairly well defined. Fragments were always brief, and very often incomplete in some way. Sometimes they pretended to be the single leaf of some ancient manuscript, affording a mere glimpse into the life of a darker and more barbarous age. (Many fragments were Ossianic in manner.) Other times they passed for a shred of some implied longer work, unfinished for some unexplained reason, but hinting at some great mystery, some terrible or very moving story, or some strange and inexplicable situation. The aim of most fragments in the magazines was to explain little, but to suggest much. Many of them begin *in medias res* and end abruptly at some moment of violence or shocking revelation; others merely draw the curtain when the situation has been barely sketched, leaving the mind intrigued by the possibilities which have been opened up. For example, *Night, or the Hermit's Tale, a Fragment*, by "T. Z." in the *Pocket Magazine* for September 1795, begins with a soliloquy in blank verse:

— 'Tis night;  
And o'er the wilds, where storms the chilling blast,  
My dreary journey lies.

A Gothic scene develops, involving terrible darkness, mysterious sounds, a glimmering light, and a tolling bell. The speaker (whose identity is never revealed) is led by a hermit to his cell, and learns his pathetic history—"the fatal errors of a youth ill-spent," which led to his remorseful retirement

Beneath this rugged cavern's peaceful shade,  
To sigh, to languish, and to weep alone!—

At this point the poem breaks off, and everything else is left to the imagination. Writers of Gothic fiction were devoted to the fragment as a form, since it allowed them to introduce marvels and mysteries without accounting for them. But the form attracted writers of other kinds of sentimental literature also, since it permitted them to explore the delicious possibilities of a single moment of experience without a clumsy apparatus of character, motivation, plot, exposition, and the rest. Not all of the poems and short stories which are called fragments, however, are technically fragmentary; some are fugitive pieces, intended merely to linger briefly on some single aspect of a total situation.

*The Foster Mother's Tale, a Fragment*, of the *Lyrical Ballads*, conforms strictly to type although it is subtler and more sophisticated than the fragments of the magazines, combining as it does sensibility, sentimental primitivism, and Gothic mystery. It is perhaps the most modish poem in the whole collection. The Foster Mother unfolds to Maria the "perilous tale" of a "poor mad youth" who read too much, had "unlawful thoughts

of many things," was imprisoned, made a cunning escape, and went to live among naked savages. But who is the "strange man" who has just spoken to Maria and left her "troubled with wild fancies?" What is Alfred's real identity in this half-told tale, and what is his real relation to Maria and to Lord Velez? These and other unanswered questions in *The Foster Mother's Tale* are hallmarks of the "fragment." Coleridge's poem, as it happens, is a real fragment of the verse drama *Osorio*, where these mysteries are all explained, but the readers of the *Tale* would find it impossible to distinguish it from the fragments of imaginary histories, poems, plays, and novels, which flooded the magazines of this period. The use of dialogue to tell a story of this kind is less usual, but not extraordinary.

The other forms of the *Lyrical Ballads* may be dealt with more briefly, since they tend to be indeterminate, and overlap with those which have already been described. In a few cases the terms employed are really labels rather than poetical kinds—like "An Evening Scene" of *The Tables Turned* and "A True Story" of *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*. Wordsworth's *Old Man Travelling*, for example, is described as "A Sketch"; but the term promises nothing more definite than a brief scene or episode, or a landscape with some memorable figure or group of figures that might serve as the subject of a drawing. "Sketches" both in prose and verse were common in a period when the fine arts enjoyed a considerable prestige.<sup>33</sup> For most magazine readers an interest in drawing was a mark of gentility, and "poetical sketches" were very much in fashion.

*Anecdote* likewise was a familiar label. The period was abundantly anecdotal. Magazines like the *Universal Magazine* published scores of anecdotes, which were regularly indexed in the semi-annual volumes. Many of these, of course, were stories illustrative of the characters of famous men, like Voltaire, Frederick the Great, and Dr. Johnson; but others were not, as, for example, "Anecdotes of a Miser . . . of a Father

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Sketches of Beauty, Natural and Moral, Sacred to Love and Virtue*, London, 1788; *Bagatelles, or Poetical Sketches*, by E. Walsh, M.D., Dublin, 1793; *Descriptive Sketches in Verse . . .* By W. Wordsworth, B.A., London, 1794; *A Sketch from the Landscape, Addressed to R. P. Knight, Esquire*, London, 1794; *Poetical Sketches*, by Ann Batten Cristall, London, 1794; *Sketches in Verse*, by Thomas Robinson, London, 1796. Examples from the magazines are: "The Soldier That Has Seen Service, a Sketch from Nature," *County Mag.*, II (1788), 98; "Sir Hildebrand, or the Patriot's Progress, a Poetical Sketch," *Hibernian Mag.* (1784), pp. 453-455, 528-530; "Sketches in Verse, Sentimental and Descriptive," *Lady's Mag.*, XVII (1786), 202-204, 351-353; "Sketches from Two Characters, Drawn from Life," *Monthly Mag.*, I (1796), 134; A Poetical Sketch, Tributary to the Beauties of Preston-Court, *New Lady's Mag.*, VI (1791), 478-479; "March, a Pastoral Sketch, by Dr. Perfect," *Pocket Mag.*, II (1795), 185-188; "A Descriptive Sketch," *Sentimental and Masonic Mag.*, IV (1794), 164-165.

. . . of a Parliamentary Question . . . of a Duel . . . of a Malefactor . . . of a Martyr," and so on.<sup>34</sup> This latter species was usually an episode, fable, or brief story illustrative of some general truth or typical mode of behavior, in the same way that Wordsworth's *Anecdote for Fathers* exhibits the mental processes of "a boy of five years." Although it is not so labelled, many persons would read the following poem in the volume, *We Are Seven*, as an "anecdote" also, and perhaps *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned*. The last two poems, however, would be more likely to be viewed as members of another species, "expostulatory" poems, or hortatory verses with or without "replies," which were recognized minor modes in popular poetry.<sup>35</sup> In *Reason's Expostulation* printed in the *Edinburgh Magazine* for 1788 (and elsewhere) "Reason" chides "Love" for his irrational and unpromising behavior; in his *Answer to Reason* "Love" rebukes "Reason" for his cold and joyless attitude of mind. The contrast between the two adumbrates that of Wordsworth's pair of speakers; and the four-line stanza employed is nearly identical with his. These resemblances are further evidence of the numerous points of a contact between the *Lyrical Ballads* and the literary fashions of the day.

Other poems in the volume, though difficult to categorize, would be variously construed as songs, "effusions," reflective poems, and occa-

<sup>34</sup> *Universal Mag.*, LXXIII (1793), 477. Examples of anecdotes in verse are: "Poetical Anecdote of Henry the Fourth of France," *Lady's Mag.*, XXI (1790), 46; "Anecdote," *ibid.*, XXII (1791), 326; "The Great Eater, a Swedish Anecdote," *Town and Country Mag.*, XVII (1785), 72; "Cymon, a Real Anecdote Versified," *Universal Mag.*, LXXXVI (1790), 100; "Anecdote," *Weekly Mag.*, XL (1778), 160.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. "Truth's Answer to a Man's Inquiry," *Aberdeen Mag.*, I (1788), 160; "The Reply to Vivacious Charlotte," *Berkshire Repository*, I (1797), 8-9; "Sonnet, the Perfect Beauty," "Sonnet to Melinda, in Reply to the Perfect Beauty," *Biographical and Imperial Mag.*, III (1790), 60; "Sonnet, on Damon's Labouring under a Depression of Spirits," "Sonnet, the Answer," *ibid.*, III (1790), 187-188; "Expostulatory Ode, by Peter Pindar, Esq.," *County Mag.*, III (1789), 251; "Reason's Expostulation with Love," "Love's Answer to Reason," *Edinburgh Mag.*, VIII (1788), 151-152; "From Peter Pindar, on Seeing a Recent Musical Production by Dr. Harrington, of Bath," "The Retort Courteous, or Innocence Defended, by Dr. Harrington," *European Mag.*, XIX (1791), 229-230; "Childhood Regretted," "Answer to the Foregoing," *Literary Mag.*, VIII (1792), 226; "The Expostulation, to Delia, by Lord G.," "The Reply, by Lady Mary S.," *London Mag.*, LXXXIX (1770), 379-380; "The Farewell, to Henry, in Imitation of the Scotch Ballad *Donald*," "The Answer," *Sentimental and Masonic Mag.*, I (1792), 570; "Stanzas, by R. B. Sheridan, Esq.," "The Reply, by Mrs. Sheridan," *Town and Country Mag.*, XXII (1790), 379; "What Is Pleasure?," "An Answer," *ibid.*, XXIII (1791), 42, 139; "An Invocation to the Nymph of the Spring, at Tunbridge-Wells . . . by Lady Burrell," "Answer to the Same, by a Gentleman," *Universal Mag.*, CI (1797), 131-132; "The Wish, by a Bachelor," "The Reply to the Bachelor's Wish, by a Husband," *Weekly Mag.*, XXV (1774), 18, 50; "The Expostulation, by an Unhappy Lady," *ibid.*, XXVI (1774), 178.

sional verses, a good many of which, at first view, at least, are on the beaten track. Certainly the titles, as well as a good deal of the manner, of such poems as *Lines written at a small distance from my House, and sent by my little Boy to the Person to whom they are addressed*, seem quite conventional, however extraordinary these poems may be in other respects.<sup>36</sup> Writers everywhere in the magazines, as we have said, had been seeking to give their works an air of spontaneity by emphasizing their casual, extemporaneous qualities, an effort in which Wordsworth was to be eminently more successful. Many such poems are sonnets, which were the rage in the 1790's; but others are written, like Wordsworth's, in blank verse, in four-line stanzas of various kinds and in the regular eight-line stanzas of *Lines Written near Richmond*. A full metrical analysis of the *Ballads* in terms of popular versification is not contemplated here, since it would unnecessarily prolong this study, but by and large it may be affirmed that whatever the claims which have since been made for them, the *Lyrical Ballads*, on the surface at any rate, do not exhibit revolutionary or even surprising prosodic tendencies. On the whole the two poets appear to have been satisfied to adopt meters which were current in their own day. Only half a dozen of the twenty-three poems in the first edition could be considered experimental in this respect. In a few of the narrative poems, chiefly those written in ten-line stanzas, Wordsworth seems to have been trying to work out stanzaic patterns which would allow him to achieve more sustained effects than were possible in the four-line stanzas of *We are Seven* and *Anecdote for Fathers*.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. "Inscription for a Rural Arbour," *The Bee*, v (1791), 65; "Verses Made at Sea in a Heavy Gale," *Gentleman's Mag.*, LVIII (1788), 638; "Lines Suggested by Walking in a Grove One Moonlight Evening," *ibid.*, LVIII (1788), 1107; "Inscription on a Seat in Netherton Vale, near Hufborn Tarrant, Hants.," *ibid.*, LXIII (1793), 847; "Verses Found under a Yew-Tree at Penshurst," *ibid.*, LXV (1795), 863; "Lines Written Extemporaneously, on the Ordination of a Young Clergyman," *Hibernian Mag.*, (1797), pp. 558-559; "Verses Written in the Winter on a Tree by the Side of a Rivulet," *Lady's Mag.*, XXI (1790), 269; "Verses Left in a Summer-house," *ibid.*, XXIV (1793), 383; "Verses Written among the Ruins of an Ancient Castle," *ibid.*, XXVI (1795), 192; "Lines on the River Derwent, Written in a Romantic Valley near Its Source," *Monthly Mirror*, v (1798), 174; "Inscription for a Coppice," *Town and Country Mag.*, XXVI (1794), 130-131; "Verses Written on Visiting the Ruins of Dunkeswell-Abbey in Devonshire, by Miss Hunt," *ibid.*, XXVI (1794), 131; "Verses, Occasioned by the Flight of a Linnet, Which Had Been Singing on the Top of a Beech, at the Foot of Which the Author Was Reclined," *Universal Mag.*, XCVI (1795), 370; "Lines, Written by Sir Richard Hill, Bart. at Hawkestone, His Elegant Seat in Shropshire, When Contemplating the Scenes around Him, in His Own Park; and to Be Seen in a Natural Cavern of a Vast Rock, from the Top of Which Is a Very Diversified and Romantic Prospect," *ibid.*, XCIX (1796), 55. With the fourth, fifth, and last items above, compare Wordsworth's "Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite, on a desolate part of the Shore, yet commanding a beautiful Prospect."



This may, in fact, be partly what he meant by “lyrical ballad.” But it could hardly be represented as more than a very limited kind of prosodic experiment. Not a single reviewer of the first edition seems to have been struck with the metrical novelties of the volume.

In short, whatever aspect of the *Lyrical Ballads* we examine, whether it be the meters, the lyrical and narrative kinds, the subjects, attitudes, and themes of individual poems or groups of poems, we are struck by the great number of particulars in which the volume conforms to the taste and interests of some segments of the literary world in 1798. This is not to deny that the merit of the work was phenomenal, that it was “original” in various respects (as reviewers said it was), and that it was to be a leavening force of extraordinary power in the years to come. From one point of view the *Lyrical Ballads* stand at the beginning of a new orientation of literary, social, ethical, and religious values; and they are unquestionably a pivotal work in the transition from one century to the next. But from another point of view, equally valid, they come at the end of a long and complicated process of development, according to which a great deal in the volume must have seemed to many readers both right and inevitable. Wayward as the two poets were in some respects, in others they must have seemed to be moving briskly with various currents of the day, and thus assuring themselves of some kind of following among the reading audience.

The lack of rapport between the *Lyrical Ballads* and the general audience, which so many writers have thoughtlessly accepted, has been grossly exaggerated, as it must be if the myth of “complete change” is to be maintained. Of course, not all readers would like the same things. Contemporary taste was not completely homogeneous. But a considerable degree of rapport with some part of the general audience must be presumed if we are to account for Wordsworth’s remarkable rise to popularity. His was not merely a *succès d’estime*. The first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* sold well enough that the publisher was willing in less than two years to undertake a contract for two augmented editions. This quiet progress was not entirely the result of Coleridge’s generous efforts in Wordsworth’s behalf. The fact is that the *Lyrical Ballads* did not drop hardly noticed into an indifferent and uncomprehending world. Even Wordsworth’s hostile critics were willing to admit his early popularity.<sup>37</sup> The first edition, it is true, numbered only 500 copies; the second,

<sup>37</sup> “The *Lyrical Ballads* were unquestionably popular; and, we have no hesitation in saying, deservedly popular . . .” (Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Rev.*, xi [1807], 214). A critic writing in Philadelphia in Feb. 1804 began: “I know few performances which have assumed the name of poetry and which have obtained a considerable share of celebrity,

of 1800, numbered 750 more of the first volume, 1,000 of the new poems of Volume II. But there were two other agencies at work, providing in their own ways a more extensive circulation for the poems, and helping the emergent Wordsworth to early recognition: the literary *reviews* and the *magazines*. The record of the *Lyrical Ballads* in both lends support to the impression that the work was in fairly close touch with its contemporary audience.

Far from being neglected by the critics, the 1798 volume was widely noticed, and in the larger reviews—the *Critical*, the *Monthly*, the *Analytical*, and the *British Critic* (with circulations totalling about 12,000)—it was given the attention usually accorded to major poetical productions. The judgments made were not all favorable, but they were more sympathetic than otherwise. Several writers signalized the appearance of a "genius"; and, more important perhaps, all of them reprinted poems in part or in full. It is easy to overlook the practice in the eighteenth century of printing long excerpts from works under review, since the custom today is somewhat different. But there is no question that it then served to give books a kind of supplementary circulation. Writers had good reason to complain of such piracy, yet they indirectly benefited too, for it helped to acquaint a wide circle of readers with their names and, in part, their writings. The *Critical* reprinted long extracts from three or four of the *Ballads*; the *Monthly* printed in full *The Nightingale* and *Expostulation and Reply*; the *Analytical*, the first two paragraphs of the Advertisement, seventeen lines of *The Nightingale*, and all of *Goody Blake*; the *British Critic*, *The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman* in full, and most of the Advertisement. Other reviews of the first two editions followed suit, with the result that in the three years from 1798–1801 eight different poems were thus reprinted in their entirety, and excerpts of 25 lines or more from six others.<sup>38</sup>

The record in the miscellanies is even more formidable, and certainly

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so truly worthless as Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* . . . Mr. Wordsworth's writings have had some influence in establishing perverted principles of taste. His works have been admired in London, and in this city . . ." *The Literary Magazine, and American Register* (Philadelphia), I (1804), 336.

<sup>38</sup> Poems reprinted in the reviews in full, or in excerpts of 25 lines or more, between Oct. 1798 and June 1801 are as follows: "The Idiot Boy" (80 lines), "The Female Vagrant" (90), "Tintern Abbey" (46), *Critical Rev.*, Oct. 1798; "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree," *Monthly Mirror*, Oct., 1798; "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," *Analytical Rev.*, Dec. 1798; "The Nightingale," "Expostulation and Reply," *Monthly Rev.*, June 1799; "The Ancient Mariner" (25 lines), "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman," *British Critic*, Oct. 1799; "Strange Fits of Passion," "She Dwelt among th' Untrodden Ways," *ibid.*, Feb., 1801; "The Old Cumberland Beggar" (25 lines), "We Are Seven," *Monthly Mirror*, June 1801.

more instrumental in building the reputation of the *Lyrical Ballads*, once the volume came within the purview of magazine publishers. In the month after their publication, in November 1798, the *Monthly Epitome and Catalogue of New Publications* listed the contents of the *Lyrical Ballads*, quoted the Advertisement in full, and reprinted *Lines Left upon a Yew-tree Seat* and *The Convict*. The following month the *Edinburgh Magazine* likewise printed *The Convict* among its "Poetry" for December, and the next year offered *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*. There were three other reprintings of *Goody Blake* in 1799—in the *New Annual Register for 1798* (1799; circulation 7,500), the *Ipswich Magazine*, and the *Universal Magazine* (circulation 1,750). In the same year the *Scol's Magazine* offered *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned*. In 1800 the *Microscope* (Belfast) reprinted *The Dungeon*; and the *Lady's Magazine* (circulation at least 10,000) printed among its "Poetical Essays" between April and the end of the year *We Are Seven*, *Lines Written near Richmond*, *The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman*, and *The Female Vagrant*. The last-named poem of 30 stanzas constituted the whole poetic offering of the *Lady's Magazine's* "Supplement for 1800."

Thus in the period 1798–1800 ten of the twenty-three poems in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* were reprinted in full in eight different magazines—some poems more than once; and if we extend our list to cover all the observed reprintings in British magazines in the four years between 1798 and 1802, we can cite a total of 23 from the first two editions (including 15 different poems), 20 of which were specifically identified as coming from the *Lyrical Ballads* or (after 1800) "Wordsworth's Poems."<sup>99</sup> The list is certainly not complete, and if we add to

<sup>99</sup> During the four years between Oct. 1798 and Aug. 1802, the following poems were printed in magazines:

*From the Edition of 1798*

(1) "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree," *Monthly Epitome, and Catalogue of New Publications*, II (Nov. 1798), 432–433.

(2) "The Female Vagrant," *Lady's Mag.*, xxxi (Supplement for 1800), 721–724.

(3) "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," *New Annual Register, 1798* (1799), pp. 200–203; *Ipswich Mag.* (Ipswich), April 1799, pp. 118–119; *Universal Mag.*, cv (Oct. 1799), 270–271; *Edinburgh Mag.*, n.s. xiv (Nov. 1799), 387–389.

(4) "We Are Seven," *Lady's Mag.*, xxxi (April 1800), 214.

(5) "The Dungeon," *The Microscope, or Minute Observer* (Belfast), II (Sept. 1800), 423; *Lady's Mag.*, xxxii (Dec. 1801), 663.

(6) "Lines Written near Richmond," *Lady's Mag.*, xxxi (Nov. 1800), 558.

(7) "Expostulation and Reply," *Scol's Mag.*, lxi (Dec. 1799), 843.

(8) "The Tables Turned; an Evening Scene," *ibid.*, lxi (Dec. 1799), 843.

(9) "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman," *Lady's Mag.*, xxxi (Dec. 1800), 669.

it the poems in the same period reprinted in the reviews, and those known to have been published in poetical miscellanies and the American press,<sup>40</sup> we have an audience of very considerable proportions which dwarfs by many thousands the 1,250 to 1,500 purchasers of the first two editions. It seems likely that Wordsworth's reputation in these first years owes far more to the semi-piratical printers of reviews and magazines than to his legitimate publishers.

Of all the poems in the first edition, as the record shows, *Goody Blake and Harry Gill* was unquestionably the most popular. What Saintsbury called the "silly sooth" of *We Are Seven* and the *Anecdote for Fathers* attracted the attention and aroused the derision of later critics, but at first it was in rustic rudeness that the *Lyrical Ballads* seemed most original. That this is true is indicated by a travesty which appeared in the *European Magazine* for September 1801 (XL, 201–202): *Barnham Downs, or Goody Grizzle and Her Ass, a Lyrical Ballad, in the Present Fashionable Stile*. This is perhaps one of those "parodies and pretended imitations" to which Coleridge alluded in the *Biographia*, in which he defended the *Ballads* against the charge of "vulgarity of style, subject, and conception." Such is certainly the satirical intention of *Barnham Downs*. On this "lyrical ballad" by "Rusticus" two observations may be made in passing: first, that it is written "in the Present Fashionable Stile," indicating a general acquaintance with the alleged manner of the

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(10) "The Convict," *Monthly Epitome, and Catalogue of New Publications*, II (Nov. 1798), 433; *Edinburgh Mag.*, n.s. XII (Dec. 1798), 466–467.

*From the 2nd Edition of 1800*

(11) "Lucy Gray," *Lady's Mag.*, XXXII (April 1801), 212.

(12) "Poor Susan," *Universal Mag.*, CVIII (Feb. 1801), 133; *Miscellanea Perthensis* (Perth), April 1801, p. 82.

(13) "Ruth," *Entertaining Mag.*, I (May 1802), 187–189; *Weekly Entertainer* (Sherbourne), XI (16 Aug. 1802), 138–140.

(14) "Written in Germany on One of the Coldest Days," *Universal Mag.*, CVIII (Feb. 1801), 133–134; *Miscellanea Perthensis* (Perth), April 1801, pp. 82–83.

(15) "The Old Cumberland Beggar," *Entertaining Mag.*, I (March 1802), 89–90.

<sup>40</sup> "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" was printed in *Beauties of British Poetry, Selected by Sidney Melmoth, Esq.* (Huddersfield, 1801), pp. 306–309. "The Dungeon" and "Ellen Irwin or the Braes of Kirtle" were printed in *Select and Fugitive Poetry, a Compilation with Notes Biographical and Historical, by Richard Dinsmore* (Washington City, 1802). "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" was printed in the *Farmer's Museum, or Lay Preacher's Gazette*, Walpole, N. H., for 2 Sept. 1799; and between 18 Jan. 1801 and 19 Dec. 1801, the *Port Folio*, Philadelphia, published the following: "Simon Lee," "The Thorn," "The Last of the Flock," "Anecdote for Fathers," "The Mad Mother," "Ellen Irwin," "Strange Fits of Passion," "The Waterfall and the Eglantine," "Lucy Gray," and "Andrew Jones." (Most of these are cited in Leon Howard, "Wordsworth in America," *MLN*, XLVIII [1933], 359–365; and Lewis Loury's "Addenda," *ibid.*, LVIII [1943], 391 ff.)

*Lyrical Ballads* within only three years of their first publication; second, that the primary object of the satire is *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, a poem which had already been widely reprinted in British reviews and miscellanies. Ironically, if novelty is to be made a measure of the *Lyrical Ballads*' importance, then Goody Blake must be rescued from her present obscurity and restored to favor among Wordsworthians. Certainly in the eyes of the general reading audience this was the poet's ballad of ballads during the early years of his popularity.

It is well to observe, in terminating this study, that those commentators who have emphasized the "originality" of the *Lyrical Ballads* to the exclusion of their many signs of contemporaneity, or who see the volume as a daring "manifesto" in total defiance of the general taste, overlook Coleridge's explicit statements to the contrary in the *Biographia Literaria*. Writing in 1815–16, at a time removed yet close enough to the event itself, he denied categorically that the *Lyrical Ballads* were "the original occasion of this fiction of a new school of poetry," or even that he and Southey had been the initiators of a tendency which extended back at least to Bowles and Cowper, among modern poets "the first who reconciled the heart with the head." In fact, he appears to support the literary orthodoxy of the *Ballads* in both subject and manner by insisting upon their overwhelming acceptability to the reading public of their time, saying that in his studied opinion at least two-thirds of the poems would have pleased the average reader, and that "the omission of less than a hundred lines [from the 437 pages of the 1800 edition] would have precluded nine-tenths of the criticism on this work"—supposing, of course, "that the reader has taken it up, *as he would have done any other collection of poems* [italics ours] purporting to derive their subjects or interests from the incidents of domestic or ordinary life, intermingled with higher strains of meditation which the poet utters in his own person and character." It was not the subjects or the manner which offended in the volume, according to Coleridge, but "the critical remarks" which were "prefixed and annexed" to it—remarks which were in part erroneous, which were greatly misunderstood, and which invited by their "supposed heresy" attacks from readers who otherwise would have accepted without question the greater part of the work itself.

Viewed casually, in other words, the *Lyrical Ballads* would tend to merge with familiar features of the literary landscape; read carefully, they would give suddenly a tremendous impression of clarity, freshness, and depth. Wordsworth's true genius was "the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and

the dewdrops." Coleridge is probably speaking here of the "forms, incidents, and situations" of *real* life, rather than of literature; but not necessarily so. It could be both. Certainly the poetry of the magazines was lusterless and stale. The "modifying colors" of Wordsworth's "imagination" could play over the "forms, incidents, and situations" reflected in contemporary verse, as well as those in the life behind it, and the record shows that they unquestionably did. Wordsworth's forte was not producing novelties, but operating in a new dimension where "original" combinations of "fixities and definites" were largely irrelevant. To claim more for his poetry, as some have done, would be for Coleridge to claim less. It would be to throw emphasis upon the *subjects* of his poetry, rather than its *substance*. It would be to confuse the "drapery" of poetic genius with its "soul." It would be to confound the superior powers of imagination with the inferior powers of the fancy.

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